

Building The Trellis
Program Policies and Procedures
Steve Alley



"Shade-giving garden structures, from a simple canvas awning to a delicate gazebo to a leafy arbor, can give welcome, refreshing protection to tender, shade-loving plants and people alike."

Western Gardening Book

The importance of child safety was brought home to me one Sunday evening. We worked hard to create a new children's ministry (CM) Sunday evening program. When we launched it, it was a fantastic success. We had planned for somewhere around 80 children. We had planned our whole program around that number. We got our first hint that this program was going to be well-attended when the parents and children began lining up 30 minutes before the program was scheduled to begin. We were overwhelmed with the attendance! We had 217 children and 57 adults for a total of 274 people! Everyone was thrilled and the children enjoyed all we had planned for them.

Everything went well. We were all pleased that we were able to successfully launch this new program. When the parents came to pick up their children, we thought every child was present and accounted for. We were surprised when a frantic mother came to pick her children up, and they weren't there! This successful program that had produced so many compliments from the parents was suddenly a "tragedy" for this one mother. In an instant, the mother's attitude shifted from, "Thank you," to "What have you done with my children?" We found her children in another building. They had gotten mixed up with another age group. They were reunited with their mother, and they all went home "happy."

This story illustrates the importance of child safety and security during events. You can create the most amazing program and spend millions of dollars on special effects or equipment; but if the children's safety or security is not protected, your program is a miserable failure! Nothing else can have this kind of effect on the "success" of a program. If your refreshments are not good, or you run out of glue, that's fine. If your lesson is boring, or you run out of time, no problem. If you lose a child, or a child is injured by your neglect, you're in deep trouble!

Paranoia, Naïve, or Wise?

If you let yourself, you can become very worried about "doing anything wrong" with children. We serve in a very "lawsuit happy" world. Parents are more sensitive to what happens to their children than ever before. The challenge to us all is to find the "middle ground" between paranoia and naiveté regarding child safety.

If you are too afraid of being sued, you probably won't want to touch a child, or even be in the same room with children. Your paranoia can actually stop ministry from happening. In order to minister to children, we must touch them, and definitely be in the same room with them. On the other extreme, if you think that nothing bad ever happens to good people who are serving God, you might be a little naïve, and you might be in danger of not being careful enough.

The Balance Between Being Paranoid and Being Naïve



The goal is to set the CM in the center "safe zone" area. God has promised to be present with us when we ask Him. He has promised to take care of our needs when we seek Him first. He cautions us to be "wise as snakes, and gentle as doves," and He said that He sends us out as "sheep among wolves." We need to beg Him to protect the children and our ministry but do all we can to be wise. Wisdom means that you are aware of the dangers, you take steps to protect yourself, and then move forward in faith.

The policies covered here are about the safety of the children. That includes health issues and procedures, event security, adult / child ratios, emergency preparedness, and facility safety. Here is a list of the nine categories of safety policies we will cover:

Nine Categories of Program Safety Policies

1. **Health Concerns:**
How should we deal with cleanliness and bodily fluids?
2. **Sick Children:**
How should we deal with sick children and their parents?
3. **Child Protection On Campus:**
How to check children in and out of programs?
4. **Adult / Child Ratios**
How many adults do we need to be safe?
5. **Program Development**
How are programs organized to protect the children?
6. **Event Development**
How are events planned to protect the children?
7. **Emergency Procedures**
What should be done during emergencies?
8. **Child Abuse**
How to recognize and report possible signs of child abuse?
9. **Communication With Parents**
How should we communicate with parents?

Here is a five-step process of writing your own program policies:

Five-steps to Writing a Policy

1. **Define** the policy.
2. Understand the **rationale** for the policy.
3. **Evaluate** your current policy.
4. **Consult** sample policies from other churches.
5. Work through the "Policy Template" as you tailor the necessary **components** of each policy to your own church.

Category 1: The "Health Concerns Policy"

Definition

A policy for the correct handling of sick children, and blood or bodily fluids.

Rationale

No matter what we do, children will get sick. This policy clarifies the procedure for protecting the other children or the team members from infection through exposure to blood or bodily fluids.

Evaluation

Does your policy regarding **health concerns** protect the children and team members from contracting sickness or disease from others? Does the policy clearly state the process for dealing with blood or bodily fluids? Does the policy protect you, the children's ministry team, or the church from accusations of negligence?



Sample "Health Concerns Policy"

It is our intention to protect children from all harm while they are in our care. This includes protection from sick children, sick adults, or dirty surfaces and toys.

All surfaces and toys in the nursery/toddler classrooms will be disinfected at the end of every use period. Those who serve during that use period are responsible for this cleaning. Duplicate toy supplies will be provided for convenience during check-in / out periods. Linens and bedding used in the nursery will be changed after each use and washed prior to being used again.

All those who serve in the nursery / toddler areas will use latex gloves when changing diapers or handling soiled clothing, sheets, or bedding which may contain bodily fluids.

All used latex gloves, dirty diapers, dirty sheets, dirty bedding, or children's dirty clothing items must be disposed of, or stored in protective containers **away from the children**. Children's dirty clothing must be returned to the parent(s) in plastic trash bags.

Every children's ministry (CM) team member must use caution when exposed to children's blood or bodily fluids. Whenever possible, latex gloves must be used in these situations. **Hands must be washed with disinfectant soap immediately after changing diapers, assisting children with the toilet, or handling clothes or other materials containing blood or bodily fluids.**

Latex gloves must be changed after every diaper change, or after handling blood or bodily fluids.

General Policies / Guidelines

After a thorough review of current medical research and in consultation with health professionals, and legal advisors, we have established the following policy guidelines.

1. All contact with bodily fluids or blood must be treated as potentially dangerous. All children's ministry team members who change diapers, or come in contact with blood or bodily fluids must use latex gloves, dispose of dirty gloves and diapers correctly, wash hands thoroughly afterward, and disinfect all related surfaces immediately after a diaper change or exposure to blood or bodily fluids.
2. The parent(s) of children who are exposed to another child's blood or bodily fluids must be advised of such an exposure when they come to pick up their children. An Incident Report must be filled out for each child exposed. The parent(s) of the child whose blood or bodily fluid contacted other children must be asked if that child has any communicable disease or virus. If a communicable disease is present, the parents of the exposed children must be advised to contact their family physicians immediately.
3. Gloves must be changed after each diaper change or exposure to blood or bodily fluids.
4. Hands must be washed with disinfectant soap after the removal of gloves before touching another child or surface.
5. All used latex gloves, dirty diapers, dirty sheets, dirty bedding, or children's dirty clothing items must be disposed of, or stored, in protective containers immediately away from the children. Children's dirty clothing must be returned to the parent(s) in plastic trash bags.
6. No children's ministry team member who has an exudative or weeping skin sore shall be permitted to serve in the children's ministry unless the sore is covered completely. The children's pastor may request that the team member refrain from service until the sore is healed.
7. Those who assist children with using the toilet must use latex gloves and wash their hands with disinfectant soap after removing the gloves.

HIV / AIDS

It is not our intention to discriminate against any person with HIV/AIDS. We desire to avoid reactions based on exaggerated fears and prejudice. We do, however, have the responsibility to be wise and protect the health and safety of the children who attend our classes and events, our children's ministry team, and all who attend our church.

We believe education is the greatest "tool" to use in not only protecting those who are not infected with HIV, but also in making sure the "doors of ministry" are open to those who are infected with HIV. To this end, we will include HIV awareness sessions as part of our on-going children's ministry training process.

If a child, who has the HIV virus, expels bodily fluid or blood, this situation must be dealt with seriously, **as with all exposures to blood or bodily fluids**. The presence of the HIV virus should not change how we treat such a situation. **All exposures to blood or bodily fluids must be treated as potentially dangerous for all involved.**

Children with the HIV virus, who do not have open skin lesions, should be permitted to participate in children's ministry events or classes. Any child with open skin lesions should be restricted from such participation until the lesions have healed or are adequately covered to prevent exposure to others.

Adults with the HIV virus, who do not have open skin lesions, should be permitted to participate in children's ministry events or classes. Any adult with open skin lesions should be restricted from such participation until the lesions have healed or are adequately covered to prevent exposure to others. Any restrictions to participation suggested by the children's ministry team may only be in the best interest of the infected person (to prevent contact with other illnesses).



NOTE: COVID Guidelines – Your church must decide whether to require masks for all CM team members or not. If a child or CM team member exhibits symptoms like those of COVID, those children or CM team members must be isolated from the others. This policy is the same for any child or CM team member with the same symptoms, even if he/she has tested negative for COVID. The basis for this policy is to protect children and other team members from ANY sickness or virus.

The "Health Concerns Policy" Template

General Belief Statement:

We believe that there is no such thing as a "germ-free" environment. We believe we can take some active steps toward slowing down the spread of germs or preventing other children to contract a sickness. We know we are required, by law, to present a clean environment to children and their parents.

1. How should the surfaces in your nursery / toddler areas be cleaned? How often?
2. How should the soiled diapers, gloves, or bedding be dealt with?
3. How often should your team members wash their hands in the nursery?
4. What should be done if a child or adult is exposed to blood or bodily fluids?
5. How are the parents told about their child's exposure to another child's sickness?
6. How will your team members be trained in these procedures?

Now, write your policy:

It is our policy that we do all we can to prevent the spread of illnesses from one child to another, or from child to adult. We will take the following steps to protect healthy children and adults from sickness: (now, simply add all the requirements that you listed above).

Category 2: The "Sick Children Policy"

Definition

A policy to protect healthy children from exposure to sickness brought in by other children.

Rationale

Sick children need to be home with loving parents. They shouldn't be at church where other children can catch their sickness. This policy defines the procedure for keeping sick children out of our ministry environments.

Evaluation

Does your policy regarding **sick children** protect other children and team members from contracting sickness from other children? Does your policy clearly state the process for dealing with sick children, and their parents, before, during, and after the class or event? Does the policy protect you, the children's ministry team, or the church from accusations of negligence?

Sample "Sick Children Policy"

No sick children will be accepted into any children's ministry (CM) event. It is the responsibility of the CM team member checking in the child to recognize the sickness symptoms and graciously ask the parent to care for his/her child elsewhere until the child is well. If the parent desires to discuss the policy further, the CM team member will refer the parent to the coordinator, supervisor, or children's pastor. It is not appropriate to "debate" the policy or the decision during check-in in front of other parents.



If a child's sickness is discovered, or he/she becomes sick, after check-in, the CM team member will consult with another team member in the classroom, and they will decide on one of the following options:

1. Page/text the parent to come and check the child out immediately.
2. Isolate the child from the other children.
3. If possible, send one team member to get the parent.
4. Let the child remain, give the parent a We're Sorry Your Child Is Sick flyer explaining our sick child policy.

The "Sick Children Policy" Template

General Belief Statement:

We believe that children who are sick need to be home with the parent(s). We also believe that parents of "healthy" children do not appreciate their child getting sick while in our care.

1. What can you do to stop sick children from entering your ministry environments?
2. What is your team's response if a child is discovered to be sick while inside the ministry environment?
3. What are the indications of the various sicknesses, and how will you treat those that are communicable?
4. How do you communicate with the parents regarding a sick child?

Now, write your policy:

It is our policy that sick children need to be home with loving parents. It is our policy to do all we can to prevent the spread of sickness by: (now, simply add all the requirements that you listed above).

Category 3: The "Child Protection On Campus Policy"

Definition

A policy to protect the children from abuse, neglect, or abduction while in our care.

Rationale

If we protect our system of check-in and check-out, we will guarantee that only those adults who dropped the children off will pick the children up.

Evaluation

Does your policy regarding **child protection on the church campus** protect the children from harm? Does the policy clearly state the process for guaranteeing that the approved adults pick the children up from class or an event? Does the policy protect you, the children's ministry (CM) team, or the church from accusations of negligence?



Sample "Child Protection On Campus Policy"

All children must be checked-in to their classroom by an adult. Adults who check-in children will be given a check-out label whose number matches the number on the child's label. No adult will be permitted to check-out a child without a check-out label with a matching number on the child's label. **No child will be permitted to leave a classroom without being "checked out" or picked up by an adult with the matching check-out label number.**

The "Child Protection On Campus Policy" Template

General Belief Statement:

We believe that we are responsible to protect the safety of the children that are in our care during ministry times. We believe we must protect the safety of children at all costs.

1. What system of protection do you have to guarantee that children are not abducted?
2. What will you do to guarantee that the adult who picks up the child doesn't have a restraining order preventing him or her from doing so?
3. Where will you conduct your check-in process? (At a central location? At the classroom?)

Now, write your policy:

It is our policy that the same adult who checks in a child should be the one to check the child out. We understand that some parents "take turns" picking up the children, so we will protect the safety of the children by: (now, simply add all the requirements that you listed above).

Category 4: The "Adult / Child Ratios Policy"

Definition

A policy to regulate the number of children per adults in a ministry environment in order to protect the quality of ministry as well as the safety of children.

Rationale

It doesn't matter how great a teacher is if he or she is alone. Being alone is dangerous and draining. When a teacher is alone, there is no "defense" for any accusation. The more adults you have in a ministry environment, the more enjoyable the ministry is for both the children and the adults. More adults means more fruit!

Evaluation

Does your policy regarding **adult / child ratios** protect the children from any harm due to overpopulation or neglect? Does the policy protect you, the children's ministry, or the church from harm or accusations of negligence? Are your ratios set correctly to guarantee a productive ministry environment?



Sample "Adult / Child Ratios Policy"

The "Never Alone" – At no time, will anyone who serves in the children's ministry be alone with children. All who serve in the children's ministry will serve as part of a team of at least two adults. It is our desire, whenever possible, to create teams of three or more. The addition of a youth volunteer to a classroom does not equal the addition of an adult. One adult with one youth volunteer is still considered an adult "alone" with the children. This situation must be corrected.

"Approved" adult/child ratios for children's ministry classes and events will change with each setting. In addition to the "Never Alone" policy stated above, the CM will work toward the following adult/child ratios:

- Nursery - 3/1
- Toddlers - 4/1
- Preschool - 7/1
- Elementary - 10/1



If, due to unforeseen circumstances, a team of at least two adults cannot be guaranteed for a CM event or program, the coordinator or supervisor for that event will decide which of the following options are best for the situation, and then act on that situation. The options are:

1. Join the children in two classes or areas to guarantee a team of two or more adults.*
2. "Borrow" adults from the teams in other classes or areas.*
3. Do not accept children for this class or area until at least two adults can be recruited.*

* All of these "options," by their nature, may not be the best choice for either the church or the children. If options 1 or 2 above cannot be done without raising the adult/child ratios beyond our "approved" limits, then the only option is to close the class. Considerations must also be given to the maximum occupancy of the room being used. Child safety and church liability must take priority over convenience or programming.

NOTE: Married couples will be permitted to serve together **ONLY** when they are joined by a third adult.

The "Adult / Child Ratios Policy" Template

General Belief Statement:

We believe that a healthy children's ministry (CM) environment is one in which two or more adults are serving in a team. We believe the adult / child ratios must be guarded to prevent overcrowding and loss of ministry effectiveness. We believe the protection of the adult / child ratios will prevent the children and CM team from harm.

1. Does the local building and safety code describe acceptable adult / child ratios?
2. If you set adult / child ratios, what happens when those ratios are not met? Do you "close" the class?
3. What does your pastor and board think about setting adult / child ratios?
4. Are the ratios applicable for all children's ministry events (on and off campus)?

Now, write your policy:

It is our policy that the adult / child ratios for all CM events will be: (now, simply add all the requirements that you listed above).

Category 5: The "Program Development Policy"

Definition

A policy regarding the procedures for creating, planning, and executing a "program" safely. A "program" is defined as a reoccurring (weekly, monthly, etc.) ministry experience.

Rationale

If a program is planned carefully, it will be safe. If a program is planned carelessly, or quickly, it can be a "high risk event" with regards to child safety. The tighter the guidelines on program development, the more secure the parents will be for this, and other, CM programs.

Evaluation

Does your policy regarding **program development** protect the children from any harm due to poor planning? Does the policy protect you, the CM, or the church from harm or accusations of negligence due to poor planning?



Sample "Program Development Policy"

Programs are ways to accomplish our ministry vision. A program will be approved for development only after the following process has been carried out, and the program is by the CM leadership team.

Program Evaluation Process

1. The program idea is presented using the "Program Presentation Form"
2. The program's connection to the ministry vision is evaluated
3. The program's "cost" (financial, personnel, time, curriculum) is considered
4. The program's relation with other programs and ministries is considered
5. The program's potential "fruit" is considered
6. The program is approved for development or rejected

The program must be given at least two months for development. **No program will be approved with a development period shorter than two months.**

The adult team members who will serve in the program must be recruited and trained at least one month prior to the program's launch. **No program will be permitted to launch with fewer adults than the approved adult / child ratio dictates, or without those adults being trained one month prior to launch.**

Advertisement for the program must be readied at least one month prior to the program's launch. **No program will be permitted to launch without adequate advertising begun at least one month prior to the launch.**

Child protection and safety considerations must be finalized at least one month prior to the program's launch. **No program will be permitted to launch without adequate child protection and safety considerations being finalized one month prior to launch.**

Program curriculum must be decided upon at least one month prior to launch, and prior to the start of advertising. **No program will be permitted to launch without curriculum being decided upon one month prior to launch.**

The "Program Development Policy" Template

General Belief Statement:

We believe that a well-designed and well-staffed program can literally be an event that changes a child's life forever. We also believe that a poorly designed, and poorly staffed program can stumble children, or offend parents who will refuse to bring their children to us for ministry. Program planning is critical to the fulfillment of the Great Commission and our ministry vision.

1. What do you believe about the timing of program development prior to the launch?
2. What steps do you want to require in the program approval process?
3. What do you think makes a "successful" program?
4. What do you think makes a "failed" program?
5. Who supervises the program development process?
6. When is a program "approved"?
7. When is a program "ready" to launch?
8. What happens if a program's development is too late, or not adequate?

Now, write your policy:

It is our policy that the development of programs is a critical step in leading children to the Lord. Therefore, we require the following process for developing programs: (now, simply add all the requirements that you listed above).

Category 6: The "Event Development Policy"

Definition

A policy regarding the procedures for creating, planning, and executing an "event" safely. An "event" is defined as a one-time occurrence.

Rationale

Events are much like programs, but more intense. If a program's failure can be bad for the children or your ministry team, an event's failure can be disastrous for all of those and your church's reputation in the city as well. An event usually involves more children, and more first-time visitors. An event captures more attention (good and bad). Therefore, the safe development and planning of an event is vitally important!

Evaluation

Does your policy regarding **event development** protect the children from any harm due to poor planning? Does the policy protect you, the children's ministry (CM), or the church from harm or accusations of negligence due to poor planning?



Sample "Event Development Policy"

It is the policy of the children's ministry that we offer a variety of events for the children and families to enjoy. We believe that communication, teamwork, and advanced planning are essentials to a safe, successful event. **All events must be approved at least 2 months prior to being advertised.** This approval process includes clearing the date(s) on the church calendar. The earlier the clearance, the more likely the date will be approved. **If printing is involved, 2 months advance notice is required!** No letters, phone calls, or notes will be sent out prior to the event without being approved by the children's pastor. The Event Planning Guide will be followed by the event planner. Any variance from this guide must be approved by the children's pastor.

All those who serve in any event involving children must be approved by the CM through the application process. No one may serve in the event, or come in contact with children as a volunteer, without being approved through the application process.

All those who drive children must be approved through the CM application process. In addition to the CM application process, those who wish to transport children in private vehicles must fill out the Children's Ministry Driver Application Form. Background checks will be conducted through the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) for all those who wish to drive children. Anyone who has had an accident or moving citation within a year prior to the event must give the details of the accident or citation to the children's pastor prior to being approved to drive. The children's pastor may, based on the details, refuse to permit the person to drive children. **Transportation via a bus leasing company will be used as often as possible.**

All children, under the age of 18, who attend an event must have submitted an Event Release form for that specific event and have an Emergency Release form on file with the CM office. Both forms must be signed by a parent or legal guardian. No child will be permitted to attend an event without both forms being submitted and signed by a parent or legal guardian. Copies of both forms must be carried by a CM team member who attends the event with the children. Complete rosters of the children attending the event, must also be carried by the CM team member who carries the copies of the "Event" and "Emergency" forms. If the children are divided into groups, a CM team member who stays with a group of children must carry the copies of the "Event" and "Emergency" forms for the children in that group. If the groups rejoin, all forms must be returned to a single CM team member who will carry the forms for all the children.

After the event has been approved, and prior to that event, an event Scoop Sheet will be created by the event director. The Scoop Sheet will be distributed to the parents prior to the event as well as to all the CM team members who serve on the event. Copies of the Scoop Sheet will also be given to the church staff and senior associate pastor. The Scoop Sheet will contain the following information:

1. Date of event
2. Ages/grades of children involved
3. Location of event with map in relation to church
4. Event times
 - a. Child drop-off time (at church?)
 - b. Departure time from the church
 - c. Actual event times
 - d. Departure time from the event location
 - e. Arrival time back at the church
 - f. Child pick-up time (from church?)
5. Emergency contact information
 - a. Phone number for church-based person
 - b. Phone number for person at event location with children



The "Event Development Policy" Template

General Belief Statement:

We believe that an event captures more attention than a program. We believe that the large number of children and the potential for significant numbers of first-time visitors demands that every precaution be taken to guarantee a safe event. We believe that there cannot be too much planning and forethought given to an event.

1. What does your pastor believe about the seriousness of an event's safety?
2. How far in advance do you want to force the planners of the event to work?
3. How far in advance do you need to plan the advertising?
4. How far in advance do you need to plan the security / safety measures?
5. How far in advance do you need to recruit and train your team members?
6. What could go wrong? How can you counteract those possibilities in advance?

Now, write your policy:

It is our policy that an event's success depends on adequate time in the preparation and planning of the event. We, therefore, require the following process for event planning: (now, simply add all the requirements that you listed above).

Category 7: The "Emergency Procedures Policy"

Definition

A policy that contains basic procedures for dealing with emergencies safely.

Rationale

Emergencies are not planned, but the responses to those emergencies can be rehearsed. "Negligence" can be described as not doing what should have been done. The parents and courts will determine if we are negligent based on what was done. People don't think clearly in emergency situations. Training and repetition can help in emergency situations. Policies and procedures are a starting point. Practice is the "final touch" in preparation.

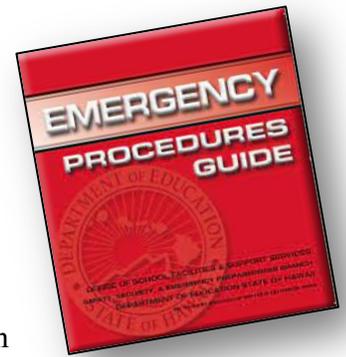
Evaluation

Do your policies regarding **emergency procedures** protect the children from harm as much as possible during the various emergencies listed? Does the policy clearly state the procedures that should be followed by team members to protect them, you, or the church from accusations of negligence? Does the policy clearly define the process for communicating with the parents after an emergency?



Sample "Emergency Procedures Policy"

The policies for emergency procedures are too long to quote here. Here is a list of things that emergency procedures need to include:



1. A brief description of the emergency
2. A clear "first response" behavior recommended for all team members
3. Recommendations for dealing with the immediate needs of the children
4. Recommendations for contacting help
5. What to do while waiting for help
6. What to do when help arrives
7. How to assist the paramedics, fire, or police personnel in caring for the children
8. How to help others
9. How to communicate with the parents
10. What forms or reports should be filed and stored?

The "Emergency Procedures Policy" Template

General Belief Statement:

We believe that emergency situations can be worsened by adults who are unprepared. Being prepared means that there is some process or behavior that has been taught and practiced. We believe that the welfare of the children is the primary concern. Every emergency is unique. Training and adults acting in the wisdom of the Lord will help protect the children.

1. What sorts of "emergencies" might your children experience at church? (natural disasters, weather-caused, people-caused, facility-caused, etc.)
2. Does your city offer any printed preparedness booklets or training?
3. For each emergency, what is the best way to protect the safety of the children?
4. What forms of communication will you have available during the emergencies?
5. Who is in charge during each emergency?
6. What are the team members' rights in making decisions during emergencies?
7. Who calls for professional help (fire, police, medical personnel)?
8. How are the parents contacted?
9. What happens when the professional help arrives?
10. How are the parents united with the children?
11. Are there emergency release forms for the children?

Now, write your policy:

It is our policy that the welfare of the children is the primary concern during emergencies. Adult team members will be trained to follow these procedures: (now, simply add all the requirements that you listed above).

Category 8: The "Child Abuse Policy"

Definition

A policy that describes the legal procedures for recognizing and reporting suspected child abuse to the local child protective agency.

Rationale

We are bound by law to report any suspected signs of child abuse. This law is designed to protect the children. It is not created to be an evil law to harm the families. Those who serve in the agencies that deal with child abuse want to partner with us to do all we can to stop children from being abused. The law describes every step in the process. We abide by the law.

Evaluation

Does your policy regarding the recognition and reporting of **child abuse** protect the children from harm? Does your policy clearly the process for reporting any signs of abuse? Does the policy protect you, the children's ministry team, or the church from accusations of negligence?



Sample "Child Abuse Policy"

It is the desire of the children's ministry (CM) to create an environment which is safe and secure for all children. We must be prepared to take an active role in recognizing and reporting possible signs of child abuse if we should encounter them. We also realize that we are bound by the law to report suspected child abuse within a limited time. We will operate within the reporting standards set forth for our county as stated in the Child Abuse & Neglect Reporting Law handbook. The required time for reporting is immediate (or as soon as practically possible) by phone, with a written report forwarded within 36 hours of receiving information about, or observing, the alleged abuse (*adjust for your own county or state*).

In conjunction with the above state law, the children's ministry has the following policies regarding the procedures for reporting suspected child abuse:

1. **No one may report a suspected child abuse situation without first notifying the children's pastor.** This is for communication purposes only, and to prevent unwarranted "reports" to Child Protective Services. **The children's pastor cannot deny anyone's access to Child Protective Services.**
2. The person who first "observes" the suspected abuse, or sign of abuse, must contact the service supervisor or department coordinator immediately. The service supervisor must contact the department coordinator who will then contact the children's pastor. Details of the suspected abuse must only be shared with these people who are directly responsible under the children's pastor. **No information about the suspected abuse may be shared with any other members of the children's ministry team.**
3. It is the responsibility of the person observing the suspected abuse, or stories of abuse, to report such observations to Child Protective Services. This reporting will be made with the use of the Suspected Child Abuse Report provided by the County Social Services Department. We are bound by state and county law to make a phone report of the observation or suspicion to Child Protective Services immediately (as is practical), and to file a written Suspected Child Abuse Report within 36 hours of observing or receiving information about the suspected abuse (*adjust for your own county or state*). If the person observing or receiving information about a suspected abuse refuses to file the report within the time limit, it is the responsibility of those church officials who are aware of the matter to file such a report. In the event that a teen volunteer observes or receives information about a suspected abuse, he or she must also abide by these procedures. The children's pastor should be contacted prior to a report being filed.

4. Prior to filing the Suspected Child Abuse Report, the following process must be followed:
 - a. Immediate discussion regarding the situation between the team member who observed or received the information, the service supervisor, the department coordinator, the children's pastor, and the senior associate pastor. Not all the above people must be present at the meeting, but all must be briefed and consulted prior to reporting. The senior pastor may also be invited at the senior associate pastor's discretion.
 - b. Phone consultation with Child Protective Services will be considered for clarification or counsel regarding our observations, procedures, etc.
 - c. Detailed records of observations, conversations, and meetings will be made using the Sensitive Situation Report. These forms will all be kept locked in the CM office. Access to these reports will be restricted to only those directly involved in the situation (as listed in 4a above).
5. The parent or guardian of the child "victim" **will not** be notified or consulted with prior to reporting unless we are otherwise counseled by Child Protective Services.
6. Relatives, or friends of the child "victim" **will not** be notified or consulted with prior to reporting unless we are otherwise counseled by Child Protective Services.
7. Other church pastors or staff **will not** be notified or consulted with prior to reporting unless we are otherwise counseled by Child Protective Services, or unless those other ministries or positions are directly affected by the suspected abuse or abusers.
8. The identity of the person making the report to Child Protective Services is protected. At no time will that identity be made known to the alleged abuser unless instructed to do so by Child Protective Services or other prosecuting agencies.
9. Someone from the CM may remain in close contact with the child and famil(ies) connected with the abuse throughout the process unless otherwise advised by Child Protective Services.

The "Child Abuse Policy" Template

General Belief Statement:

We believe that child abuse is an offense that needs immediate, professional help for the sake of the children involved. We believe the trained personnel employed by Child Protective Services must be involved for the children to be protected. We believe that the spiritual protection and support for the children and families comes through us.

1. What are the local laws regarding reporting suspected child abuse?
2. What are your pastor's views on the laws, and how does he suggest abiding by them?
3. Who oversees the reporting process?
4. At what point does your church board become involved?
5. What forms and records are kept, by whom, and where?

Now, write your policy:

It is our policy to abide by the local and state laws pertaining to the reporting of child abuse. We have created this policy and these procedures to fulfill those laws: (now, simply add all the requirements that you listed above).

Category 9: The "Parent Communication Policy"

Definition

A policy to protect the vital partnership between the parents and the children's ministry through planned and purposeful communication.

Rationale

Parents are vital to the children's ministry because they can either choose to involve their children in our ministry, or not. Our support of the parents through clear communication with them will keep them "on our side" no matter what.

Evaluation

Does your policy regarding **communicating with parents** support the vital unity between church and home? Does the policy clearly describe the process in dealing with upset parents? Does the policy protect you, the children's ministry, and the church from accusations of negligence?



Sample "Parent Communication Policy"

We will make every effort to keep the parents informed about events and programs, as well as provide them with support in their ministry to their own children. We view the parents as partners in ministry with us. Therefore, we will fulfill the following commitment to communicate with the parents:

1. We will provide the parents with weekly communication regarding their children's lessons.
2. We will provide the parents with communication about monthly events through our monthly newsletter.
3. We will provide the parents with communication about any injuries their children received while in our care with the Incident Report forms.
4. We will provide the parents with communication about any serious injuries their children received while in our care with the Serious Injury forms.
5. We will provide the parents with communication about an event or field trip in the Event Scoop Sheet.

The "Parent Communication Policy" Template

General Belief Statement:

We believe that parents want to support our ministry. We believe that the parents can't support what they don't know about. We believe that most parents will be supportive if they feel their needs have been considered through communication.

1. What do you think your parents need to know about the children's ministry (CM)?
2. What do you think your parents need to know about events?
3. What do you think your parents need to know about injuries or their child's safety?
4. What do you think your parents need to know about monthly plans?
5. What do you think your parents need to know about the curriculum you use?
6. What do you think your parents need to know about emergency situations?

Now, write your policy:

It is our policy to communicate with the parents as often as needed to show our support and desire for their partnership. We will communicate according to this procedure: (now, simply add all the requirements that you listed above).

Communicate The Policies

Once you have written the policies pertaining to your team members and child safety, you need to publish them. Policies are only as valuable as their distribution! If nobody knows about your policies, you haven't really accomplished anything by creating them. There are three great ways to communicate your policies: hallway posters that illustrate your passion for protecting the children, the “Children’s Ministry Team Handbook,” and the “Parent Handbook.”



Children's Ministry Team Handbook

This is a great tool for training and team development. Nothing demoralizes a team faster than feeling unprepared or unqualified. Producing and distributing a Team Handbook gives your team a sense of security. Training them to apply all that is in the handbook is another goal.

The Children's Ministry Team Handbook

This booklet should include the following sections:

1. The ministry vision
2. Goals for the ministry
3. The value of the team
4. The application / screening process
5. The apprenticeship / training process
6. The value of the parents
7. Protecting the children through the check-in / check-out process
8. Protecting the children through adult / child ratios
9. Protecting the children through sanitary classrooms
10. Protecting the children through refusing sick children
11. Protecting the children through the "Never Alone" rule
12. Protecting the children through well-planned programs
13. Protecting the children through well-planned events
14. Protecting the children through careful touching
15. Protecting the children through positive discipline techniques
16. Protecting the children through child abuse recognition and reporting
17. Protecting the children through emergency plans
18. Removal of team members from the ministry
19. The appeals process
20. Reinstating team members to the ministry
21. Advancement in the team

Children's Ministry Parent Handbook

This Booklet should include the following sections:

1. Our children's ministry vision
2. Our respect for parents
3. An overview of our team members
4. A review of what we offer to you and your children
5. Our plans for this year
6. We're protecting your children through our team member screening process
7. We're protecting your children through our check-in / check-out process
8. We're protecting your children through our adult / child ratios
9. We're protecting your children through our sanitary classrooms
10. We're protecting your children through our concern for sick children
11. We're protecting your children through our "never alone" rule
12. We're protecting your children through our well-planned programs
13. We're protecting your children through our well-planned events
14. We're protecting your children through careful touching
15. We're protecting your children through our positive discipline techniques
16. We're protecting your children through our emergency plans
17. A map to your child's classroom