

# The Nine-Layer Wall of Volunteer Personnel Screening

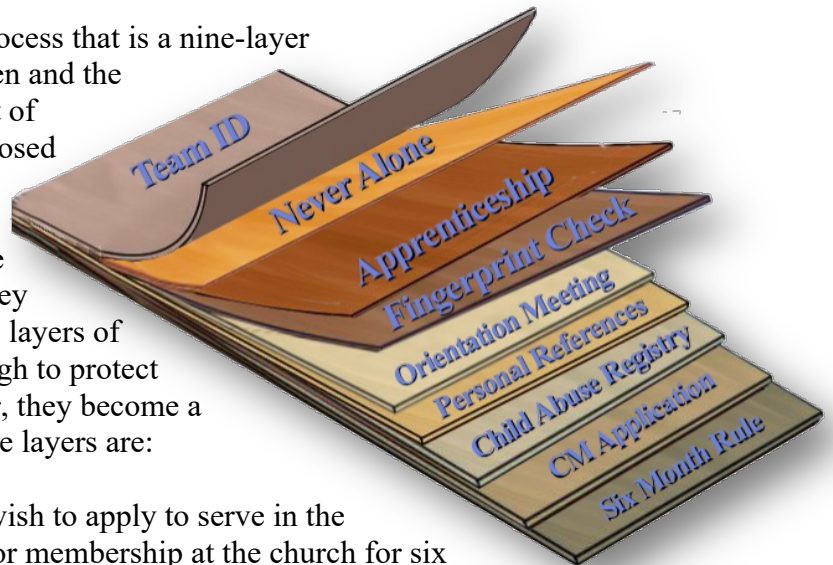
Steve Alley

The process of screening volunteer personnel in children's ministry (CM) is a critical step in fulfilling the Great Commission. Without a sense of security and safety, today's parents won't bring their children to our ministry programs, and more-than-likely, won't be open to our partnership in their own spiritual development of their children.

Those who minister to children are cautioned in the scriptures to not "stumble" those children to whom they minister (Luke 17: 2; James 3: 1). This is a spiritual caution with physical, eternal consequences. There are thousands of stories of children whose spiritual and emotional lives were thwarted for years because of a "church" person who "stumbled" a child. The word "stumble" means to stop, slow, or impede. God despises anything we do, from words to actions, that slows or impedes a child's spiritual connection or trust to God.

Aside from the spiritual importance placed on screening those who minister to children, we must also consider the financial and corporate consequences of not screening our volunteers. If a volunteer is accused of abusing a child while in our "employ," all those who supervise that person, including the Senior Pastor, may be held liable. Once the accusation is made public, the entire community will know that we are "the church that permits abuse." The financial and reputation costs are destructive to future ministry.

You should develop a screening process that is a nine-layer shield of protection for both the children and the church. This shield is similar to a sheet of plywood. A sheet of plywood is composed of several thin layers of wood glued together to make a very solid sheet of wood. Separately, those thin layers are not strong, but when glued together, they become impenetrable. Each of the nine layers of screening, by themselves, are not enough to protect your children and church; but, together, they become a powerful shield of protection! The nine layers are:



- A. **Six Month Rule** – All those who wish to apply to serve in the CM must have been in fellowship or membership at the church for six months. This is a nation-wide, accepted standard to deter child predators from joining our team too quickly.
- B. **Children's Ministry Application** – All those who wish to apply to serve in the CM must fill out a Ministry Application. This application asks for: information about church background, relationship with God, reasons for wanting to serve in the CM, theology beliefs, etc.

- C. **Child Abuse Registry** – Check the applicant’s name and social security number through the Child Abuse Registry. No applicant is EVER permitted to be with children if they have ever been arrested or convicted for child abuse.
- D. **Personal References** – In the CM application, ask for at least two personal references of people who would affirm the applicant’s ability to be with children. Call all references and ask questions about the applicant’s character and feelings about children.
- E. **A Mandatory Orientation Meeting** – Require all who apply to serve in the CM to attend a mandatory orientation meeting. At this meeting, review the ministry vision, discuss basic policies, take the applicants on a tour of the ministry to “see” what they will do, take identification photos, distribute approved team wear and ask them to fill out a personality test. Also, take fingerprints of all applicants.
- F. **Check Fingerprints Through An Independent Agency** – All applicants’ fingerprints are taken and backgrounds checked through an independent agency. No applicant, with a criminal record of felony convictions, will be permitted to serve in the children’s ministry. We reserve the right to deny applications from those who have been accused of child molestation or sexual offenses, regardless of convictions. **DO NOT** use the free fingerprint check through the Department of Justice. Those checks only access the records for the state, and not for the entire country.
- G. **Apprenticeship** – All newly accepted volunteer team members are placed into the ministry beside an approved “mentor” who will supervise them and apprentice them for a period of four to six weeks.
- H. **“Never Alone” Policy** – A universal, set-in-stone rule that governs all CM functions! Adults are never alone with children! When needed, shift adults around within the ministry to satisfy this policy to protect both the team members and the children.
- I. **Team Identification** – All those who are “cleared” and have passed through the screening process are given two items of identification which they are required to wear at all times while with children: A photo ID badge, and color-coded team wear. Anyone who is with the children without both of these items will be viewed as “a risk” to the children’s security.

