

PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM ABUSE
Establishing a Safe and Caring Ministry for Children
(Presenter's Notes)

Slide 1 The Bible makes it very clear that children are very special to God. If you examine what the Bible says about children, you will notice a great number of perspectives:

1) *Children are a gift from God.* He gives children to parents as a special sign of love and personal fulfillment (Deut. 7:13; Ps. 127:3).

2) *Children are desirable.* From Creation, God has instructed us to bear children (Gen. 9:7; Deut. 6:3).

3) *Children bring joy and blessings to adults.* God provides many benefits to parents through parenting their children (Num. 5:28; Deut. 28:4, 11).

4) *Children are so valuable to God that He commands us to protect them.* Parents are to ensure the spiritual and physical security of their children (1 Sam. 20:42; Ezra 8:21).

Slide 2 **Our Most Valuable Assets**

Children are our most valuable assets. They are the leaders of today and tomorrow. They may be active participants in our Sabbath Schools,, Vacation Bible Schools, or Adventurers Clubs during their early years, but before we know it, they will be the pillars of our church. Hence, the church needs to recognize this and place importance in protecting them from any physical, emotional, social and sexual harm. Moreover, children are vulnerable to many dangers and risks and thus need adult care.

Slide 3 **Jesus Said...**

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus took time to minister to the children. Both the Scripture and the pen of inspiration indicated very clearly the value He placed on children. When mothers brought their little ones to Jesus, the disciples tried to drive them away. However, Jesus rebuked them instead. Then He placed His hands on the children, blessed them, and prayed for them (Matthew 19:14).

He also affirmed the children. Jesus declared affirmatively that the kingdom of heaven belongs to children, too. In fact, anyone who does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it (Mark

10:15). Here He identifies an important criterion for entering God's kingdom as being trusting and humble as a child. Then Jesus made a very strong statement about accepting children. He said, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me..." (Mark 9:37).

Slide 4 Protection of Precious Resources; A Caring Ministry

Jesus placed a very high value on the protection of children (Matthew 18:1-6), therefore child protection is an essential element in all children's ministries and adults will be expected to conduct themselves at all time in accordance with Biblical principles in their dealings with children in our church. It is vital that our churches take every step possible to protect all children from harm as they participate in church or school activities.

Slide 5 Care of Children

If governments of many countries require that adults provide proper care or children, can the church do any less? The church is accountable to parents who send their children to our programs and activities. Parents have the right to expect that the Church will provide proper care for their children which ensures that::

- 1) Children will be supervised by adults at all times.
- 2) Children's programming will be conducted on an abuse free no-harassment tolerated basis at all times

Slide 6 Establishing a Local Action Plan

Every local church should establish a local action plan for child protection. It is our duty to exercise reasonable care in staffing that will include:

- 1) Careful Selection of Employees and Volunteers
- 2) Appropriate Training of staff members and volunteers
- 3) Proper Supervision of staff members and volunteers
- 4) Appropriate Action when it is necessary to remove staff members
- 5) Duty to Report all incidents of suspected child abuse in accordance with the law

Slide 7 Challenges

While it is important that every local church set up guidelines and procedures for child protection, not every church is enthusiastic about getting it done. Some of the challenges facing many churches include:

- 1) The conservative nature of the Adventists who believe that Adventist leaders and believers don't hurt children. If abuse is discovered, the leaders usually do not believe it or disclose it.
- 2) It is already difficult to recruit volunteers to work for children, and to

try to establish a strict procedure to screen volunteers may end up with no volunteers at all.

3) Children's leaders do not have enough authority and power to enforce requirements if not backed by the church board.

4) Children's leaders may have no say in screening volunteers when Nominating Committees elect volunteers without consultation with leaders.

Slide 8 New Opportunities for Best Practices

It is important that the Church Boards and Nominating Committees follow the guidelines given in the *Church Manual* when selecting volunteers to work with children.

“The local church should take reasonable steps to safeguard children engaged in church-sponsored activities by choosing individuals with high spiritual and moral backgrounds as leaders and participants in programs for children.”

Church Manual Revision – 2000

Slide 9 Churches Are Vulnerable

In areas of child abuse, particularly child sexual abuse, churches are most vulnerable, yet they are unaware of it. This can be attributed to the following reasons:

1) Community of Trust – the church trusts every brother and sister within the same faith for they have been “born again” in Jesus Christ. They will live a new life. They won't hurt children.

2) Ignorance of Facts – the church is ignorant of the facts about sexual abuse. It does not recognize signs and symptoms of sexual abuse in children, nor can it identify characteristics of perpetrators.

3) Lack of Safeguards – because of its trusting nature, the church does not put in place any safeguards to prevent potential abusers.

4) Lots of Opportunities – there are many children within the church and they participate in lots of programs and activities planned for them.

5) Easy Access – the church welcomes anyone and everyone who wants to accept Jesus and His salvation.

6) Need for Volunteers – the church is a place that has a constant need for volunteers to help with children and youth in all kinds of activities. So volunteers are welcomed with open arms.

There is no doubt that child abusers are aware of these vulnerabilities and they would search out churches as their place to gain access to children and youth.

Slide 10 Facts About Child Sexual Abuse

It is our objective to prevent any form of child abuse, physical, emotional or sexual and to protect volunteers from false allegations of such acts. Look at some of the staggering facts and figures about child sexual abuse:

- Child age victims—1 in 3 girls by age 18; 1 in 8 boys by age 18
- Over 80% of the time the abuser is known by the victim
- 75% of all crimes committed against children is sexual in nature

Slide 11 More Facts

- If abuse occurs in a church, a respected member will most likely be the molester
- Sexual abuse occurs in all races, socioeconomic and religious groups
- The average age of victims is 8-11 year old
- Sexual abuse is rarely a one time offense
- Children seldom lie about sexual abuse – less than 8%

Slide 12 Personal Ministry

- Respect and concern – Personal Ministry personnel should respect children, volunteers and employees of the church. They should take an interest and be concerned over their well being.
- Proper screening – Personal Ministry leaders should require all volunteers to fill in the Volunteer Form and implement the six-month rule for all new members whether by baptism or profession of faith.
- Education and training -- They should also organize regular training program for volunteers and educate them as well as the church members on the importance of protecting our children.

Slide 13 Strategic Ministry

Our mission is to provide a safe, spiritual and abuse-free environment for every child who attends programs and activities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is our objective to prevent any form of child abuse, physical, emotional or sexual and to protect volunteers from false allegations of such acts. Therefore, the strategic plans of the church should include:

- * Child abuse awareness and prevention training for leaders and children's volunteers
- * There should be proper screening of employees and volunteers
- * Develop a plan to report abuse cases when warranted

Slide 14 Developing Best Practices

It is absolutely vital that every church develops child protection guidelines before allowing anyone to start work with children in church-

related programs. These guidelines should include procedures for screening individuals who wants to work with children and youth. To avoid the suspicion of adults involved in supervision through the use of the following protective measures:

- 1) The Six-month rule will be used to get acquainted with new volunteers
- 2) Two-Adult rule will be practiced at all church sponsored activities..

Slide 15 Church Leadership Support

In order for the effective implementation of child protection policies within the church, it is vital that church board members get involved in the writing and implementation of these policies. It is also critical to the success of your policy when we involve various groups of individuals such as, Children's Ministries leaders, professionals, pastor or pastoral team, parents, and youth leaders.

Please remember that it is not the pastor's job; it is the job of the entire church.

Slide 16 Key Policy Elements

- Simple and understandable
- Establish rules of conduct
- Screening measures will be employed, such as Volunteer Forms
- Establish a six-month rule
- Establish a two-adult rule
- Church board approval of all off-site and overnight activities

Slide 17 Six Month Rule

Adopt the practice that no adult will be considered for a volunteer leadership role in a church sponsored children's ministry program until they have been a member of the congregation for a minimum of six (6) months. This allows children's leaders to observe the newcomers and see how they serious and genuine are they in working with children.

Slide 18 Volunteer Forms

When volunteers are required to fill in forms before they are allowed to work with children, it is a plus for the ministry. It is important to remember the following points:

- 1) Volunteers who are willing to fill in forms to provide information about themselves are demonstrating the seriousness of wanting to serve the church and the children.

2) All information received and the Volunteer Service Information Form will be maintained by the local church on a confidential basis and kept in a locked file

3) Personal reference checks by the Volunteer Service Review Committee should be conducted.

4) If additional level of screening is warranted for the volunteer position it should be completed before the adult is allowed to work in the program

5) The Volunteer Service Review Committee will notify the appropriate leader and the adult volunteer when their application for volunteer service has been approved

6) Be consistent in implementing this requirement.

Slide 19 Screening Personnel

Every church should require participation in the screening process, but care should be exercised in:

Every church should require participation in the screening process, but care should be exercised in:

- Respecting the volunteer who is willing to fill in forms
- Encouraging volunteers to participate
- Taking the time to explain the reason for your screening program.
- Protecting children
- Protecting the adults who filled in the forms
- Ensuring confidentiality of all information provided for the church.

It may be a good idea to set the example by having all children's ministries leaders participate in the screening program even if they have been a volunteer for many years at your church

Levels of Screening for Volunteer Service

Basic – this is required of All Volunteers

A basic level of screening for all adult volunteers that would include the following elements:

1) Personal interview of the volunteer applicant by the leader of the children's ministry department i.e. Sabbath School department leader, Pathfinder Director, Adventurer's Director etc...

2) Completion of the required Volunteer Service Information Form in full and signed by the adult volunteer

3) Personal reference checks by the Volunteer Service Review Committee

Intermediate – Volunteers with high level of interaction with children including the involvement of off-site activities

- 1) All of the element of Basic screening plus
- 2) Home visit and Observation
- 3) State Criminal History check and State Sex Offender Registry check – this may require finger printing and the written permission of the applicant to obtain access to this information from law enforcement agencies

Comprehensive – Volunteers with direct one-on-one personal interaction with children i.e. Big brothers, In-home or over night care etc...

- 1) All of the elements of Basic & Intermediate screening plus
- 2) FBI Criminal History check
- 3) National Child Abuse Registry check
- 4) Psychological Evaluation

Slide 20 A Sacred Trust...
One Strike and You're Out ...

A constellation of factors are converging at the close of the 20th century that raise the legitimate question whether the minister or counselor who sexually violates children should ever continue in professional ministry...

- * First of all, apart from castration, recidivism rates for all forms of intervention are unacceptably high.
- * Second, legal trends – the growing liability for abuse, canceled insurance when pedophile restoration is attempted and the crushing cost of legal defense and damages for abusers in ministry.
- * Finally, the resistance of church parents is fatal to restoration. As one parent of a young child told us emphatically, “Whether or not a pedophile can be restored, I am not going to allow my children to be the guinea pigs that prove the success of the church’s restoration experiment.” *Sexual Misconduct in Counseling & Ministry*
 – Pg. 125

Slide 21 Keep Focused on the MISSION...

Invite adults to apply for the privilege of volunteering in your children’s ministry program and conduct an orientation program to acquaint interested individuals in your ministry. While we focus on sharing the love of Jesus with our children, we must not forget that we need to protect them from harm. If they suffer abuse and harm at the hands of adults in our programs, they lose their trust in us who are the channels through which they learn about God’s love. Moreover, the church may also end up wasting a great deal of their resources in terms of time and money to deal with court cases.

Slide 22 Monitoring Your Program

Key Elements in Training and Monitoring Your Program

- 1) Educating everyone on the Mission of your Children's Ministry program
- 2) Understanding of the expectations, code of conduct and rules that will be followed in your program in relating to and interacting with children
- 3) Providing Awareness education on child abuse (physical and sexual) and what steps your church has taken to prevent the occurrence of child abuse incidents in your program
- 4) Training and educating children on "Good Touch – Bad Touch" and how to affirm children in an appropriate manner
- 5) Determining the appropriate level of supervision to conduct your program in a safe manner at all times
- 6) Making it clear that failure to comply with the established code of conduct and rules may result in the volunteer being asked to no longer participate in your program
- 7) Using professional members (teachers, physicians, attorneys, social workers etc...) of your church family and invite them to help you conduct the training of volunteers in order to bring creditability and support for your child protection efforts

Slide 23 Universal Ministry

Parents, leaders, and volunteers in the church share in the responsibility of protecting our children from physical, emotional, social, and sexual harm by ensuring there is a safe environment for them to participate in church-related activities. It is our moral and legal duty as Christians to love our children, guide them and lead them in the right path. But above all, it is a privilege to serve and mold the young minds for eternity.

Slide 24 It Takes Commitment...

Our Adventist Community will be a safe environment where children are loved and valued; where children are able to appreciate their own worth and importance; and where children can grow and develop the character to be accountable for themselves and act responsibly towards others.

