



THREE STEPS FOR ABUSE PREVENTION, RESPONSE, & CARE

THREE STEPS FOR ABUSE PREVENTION, RESPONSE, & CARE



Oklahoma Baptists "Abuse Prevention and Response Guide"

STEP 1: PROVIDE EDUCATION ON PREVENTING ABUSE

► TRAIN ALL STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

It is imperative that all church employees and volunteers be required to attend periodic training on how to prevent and identify sexual abuse. The safety and protection of the children and vulnerable members of your congregation are well worth every penny and hour devoted to equipping your staff and volunteers.

► PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL PERSONAL SAFETY TRAINING FOR THE ENTIRE CONGREGATION, INCLUDING CHILDREN & TEENAGERS

Children's safety and protection should never rest on their shoulders. It is up to parents and adults in authority to protect them. However, it is wise to give children tools to empower them in their own safety. Personal safety training is not sex education. Instead, it teaches people what is appropriate and inappropriate touching and behavior, and when and how they should report inappropriate behavior if it occurs, no matter the setting - church, home, school, or work.

► BE AWARE OF GROOMING PRACTICES

Offenders can use relationships, positions of authority, and the trust of parents and organizations to groom children and those who care for them and to find opportunities to be isolated with their victims. Here are several grooming practices to watch for:

- Gifts or special attention given to a specific child
- Attempts to get a child alone
- Inappropriate communication with a child in person, by phone, or online

STEP 2: CRISIS RESPONSE & CARE

► DO NOT INVESTIGATE THE ALLEGATIONS; REPORT TO CIVIL AUTHORITIES

Every staff member or leader who has reason to believe, has observed, or has been told that a child or vulnerable adult has been abused is mandated by law to report suspected abuse. It is not the church leader's responsibility to determine the validity of the claims. A report of suspected abuse is only a request for an investigation.

► CARING FOR THE VICTIM(S) OF ABUSE IN THE MOMENT OF CRISIS

- Always believe the victim. Affirm the victim's choice to tell you about the abuse.
- Let the victim know you are required to share with someone who can help.
- Do not prod or investigate further
- A report must be made in all cases involving a minor or vulnerable adult. If an able-bodied adult makes the disclosure, encourage them to file the report themselves or offer to do it together.
- A report can be made anonymously
- Assure the victim that it is not necessary to remember every detail or to provide proof or to file a report

► SELECT A CHURCH LIAISON FOR THE VICTIM AND THE VICTIM'S FAMILY

Consistent and transparent communication between the church leadership, response team, the victim, the abuse liaison, and the authorities (if applicable) is essential. Church leadership should select a trustworthy member of their body, preferably one trained in victim advocacy and ministry safety, to be the primary contact for the victim and family of the victim. This victim's liaison should not be a spokesperson for the victim, but a source of communication to and from the church leadership.

► WHEN POSSIBLE, MEET WITH THE ALLEGED ABUSER TO COMMUNICATE CLEAR RULES & EXPECTATIONS FOR ATTENDANCE, PARTICIPATION, AND COMMUNICATION

Churches should consider immediate action to set strict and immediate boundaries when dealing with accusations of child sexual abuse, including:

- Restricting access to church property and events during the deliberative process. Standard of access should be at least as strict as a school's standard would be during this period.
- Assigning the accused a church leader to act as their liaison to the church.
- Encouraging the accused to listen to sermons online and send prayer requests through their liaison.
- It is wise to have law enforcement and other local experts help you make these types of decisions.

NOTE: When a victim of domestic violence has a Victim Protective Order (VPO) in place, it is inappropriate for the alleged abuser to be at church or church-related events.

STEP 3: ASSESSMENT & ACCOUNTABILITY

► MAINTAIN THE SAFETY & CARE OF THE VICTIM(S) & FAMILY

Continue to consider and care for the needs of the survivor. Be diligent to protect the survivor's confidentiality. It is important to communicate with the congregation when abuse occurs (see below), but it is not necessary to identify the survivor or break their trust by divulging their trauma.

► ENSURE THE SAFETY & CARE OF THE CHURCH BODY

Abusers are master manipulators and are often able to abuse many victims before getting caught. Because of this, there may be other victims in your church body who have not reported their abuse. Action steps to take:

- Examine the list of roles held by the alleged abuser and determine if he or she had access to any other potential victims. If they had access to any other children, have members of the response team with at least one church leader present to facilitate communication with the parents of other children in the church.
- Address the congregation to give an overview of what happened without mentioning names and explain the response plan of the church.
- If other abuse victims come forward, initiate safety planning and care alongside the response team.
- Continue to follow up with the victim and provide long-term ministry to survivors
- Continue to provide education and maintain protection protocols

REMEMBER: The goal of the church's response to abuse is to care well for the victim(s) and ultimately, to integrate the victim(s) into the church body for continued healing, growth, and the glory of God.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Oklahoma Baptists
Abuse Prevention &
Response Guide



Profile of a Victim



Profile of an Abuser



GRACE:
Godly Response to
Abuse in the Christian
Environment