

Child Safety

Any policy and procedure for children and youth ministry should be checked by a competent attorney within the area of jurisdiction, to ensure compliance with all statutes and overall procedural viability. After developing policies and procedures, local churches and districts are advised to diligently follow and carefully adhere to them.

Guidelines

Steps to Develop Child Safety Protection Guidelines:

- I. Establish Proper Child Safety Policies and Procedures for the Local Church Have an attorney review these for compliance with local and state laws. Check with your insurance company for policy guidelines.
- II. Implement Screening Procedures of All Volunteers Who May Come in Contact with Children or Youth. This includes volunteers, pastors, office staff, janitors, and any persons consistently in the building where children meet. Screening may include such steps as:
 - An employment or volunteer application
 - Use of a screening form
 - Reference Checks
 - A criminal records check
 - Photo identification of the person (i.e. driver's license)
 - Six-Month Waiting Period Rule (Individuals should attend a church for at least six months before applying to work with children.)
 - Personal Interview
- III. Develop Guidelines for Volunteer Supervision
 - Establish proper policies and procedures for volunteers. (Consider policies and procedures for both onsite and offsite the church property. Ask volunteers to agree to follow these policies and procedures.)
 - Provide current training for all volunteers and leaders.
 - Provide adequate supervision at all times.
 - Enforce the Two-Adult rule and buddy system (recommend at least one over the age of 21).
 - Provide windows in all classrooms or doors.
 - Workers are not to spank, shake, hit, grab, or otherwise physically discipline a child.
- IV. Develop Proper Reporting Policies and Procedures and Understand Reporting Obligations in Your State

Designate one person as the church reporter. This person should be knowledgeable about all types of abuse, reporting policies, and procedures.

- V. Consult These and Other Available Resources

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Legal Issues

It was a day that began like any other day. One filled with appointments and projects to be completed. I had a luncheon appointment with a couple that had children involved in our children's and youth ministries. Little did I know how life would be changed by that meeting.

It was during that time that I learned of the sexual abuse committed against this precious couple's children by a former volunteer. He was a man who had been active in the ministry of my predecessor. Why was I the one to learn about this? I became so sick I could not eat. Then I heard the parent's question, "What do we do now, Pastor Kathy?"

This was the question I had hoped never to have to answer. My heart ached for the children and their family. My pulse was racing with the nervousness of knowing I could not hide from this issue. Thoughts for the children, the families, and the church were overwhelming. Were there more victims? My prayer was, "God help me because this is too big for me."

Nineteen months later, the volunteer was given a 21 year sentence for the sexual abuse of children. Our church survived the abuse case with many "worse case scenarios" played out. No one involved with children or teens wants to hear that even one has been abused in any manner. From personal experience, I can now state that even though I would not want to walk through another legal case, it can be done.

Perspective

First, perspective must be gained. Over reacting does not guarantee your ministry or program will never face legal issues. Looking at every person as an abuser or each field trip as a potential lawsuit causes one to lose sleep and age quickly. On the other hand, under reacting will not keep you from dealing with legal issues. The lack of professional knowledge about legal issues does not release one from legal obligations.

A proper balance and perspective must be held by both the leadership and personnel. This perspective includes an emphasis on prevention and an understanding of the need for preparation. The prevention includes screening volunteers, receiving proper licensing, and enacting appropriate policies and procedures. It also includes a commitment to network with people who know the law.

Volunteers

Church-based programs are susceptible to legal issues for two reasons: churches tend to be trusting and unsuspecting, and churches tend always to be in need of volunteers. All volunteers who come in contact with the children or youth must be screened. This includes pastors, office staff, janitors, and any person who is consistently in the building where the children or youth

meet. Screening includes the selection process and the supervision once the person holds a place of leadership in the ministry program.

Volunteer screening and supervision protects the children, the leadership, and the volunteers. It not only reduces the risk of incidents, but addresses the first two questions asked in case of an incident: Tell me who was with the children and how were they supervised.

Volunteer Screening

Volunteer screening should include the following:

- An employment application
- Use of a screening form
- A personal interview
- Reference checks
- A criminal records check
- Identity of the person confirmed by requiring a photo identity (i.e., driver's license)

From my experience, a few other key issues concerning volunteer screening were discovered. First, keep all personnel and volunteer records from the past. My access to these records proved that a criminal record check and reference checks were made in reference to our case's offender. Second, all sensitive records should be kept in a fireproof safe. We had a fire in our building and almost lost all records. Our lawyer also recommended a duplicate copy be kept in another safe location, in case of a natural disaster or in case of misplaced files.

It is important to update these records yearly. This includes reviewing applications, references, and reinterviewing personnel. It is also advisable to periodically run new criminal record checks. Sometimes, offenses occur after the initial check has been made. Finally, remember that even if a records check comes back clean, proper policies and procedures are necessary for the protection of the children and the personnel.

With our legal case, I later learned that child abuse charges had previously been made against the offender, but had been dropped when the parents of the victim chose not to have the victim testify in court. This accusation did not show up on a fingerprint check or criminal records check due to the fact that a formal arrest had not been made and the charges never became a conviction. Prevention is connected to policies and procedures being developed and being implemented.

Volunteer Supervision

Volunteer supervision is also vital. It should include the following:

- Establish proper policies and procedures.
- Ask volunteers and leaders to agree to follow these policies and procedures.
- Provide training to current volunteers and leaders.
- Provide adequate supervision at all times.

- Enforce the Two-Adult rule and buddy system (70 percent of noncustodial abuse occurs in the rest room).
- Correctly enforce the policy on the transfer of custody. (Most states hold a program responsible for the child through junior high age until the child is transferred to the custody of the parent or guardian.)
- Keep parental/guardian permission forms on file for all programs and events. Make a second copy to carry with you to all off site activity.

When a Problem Occurs

The two remaining critical areas include reporting obligations and responding to allegations. From personal experience, these areas cannot be left to the attitude of "I will learn about these only if I have to." If you reach the point of needing to report an incident or respond to an allegation, it is already too late. There is not the time or the emotional energy available to explore these two areas after the fact. This preparation must be done prior to the establishment of the ministry or the program.

Reporting

Reporting obligations vary from state to state. It is of vital importance that the ministry leader obtains the state's specific guidelines by contacting the Department of Social and Health Services or appropriate government agency. Most states have a brochure explaining the specific mandatory laws on reporting abuse. All leaders and volunteers are held responsible for this knowledge and should have a copy of it. Reporting obligations include the following:

- Know the definition of abuse in your state.
- An example is "Child abuse or neglect shall mean the injury, sexual abuse, or negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child by any person under circumstances which indicate that the children's health, welfare and safety is harmed thereby." (Washington, RCW 26.44.020)
- The state could further define neglect as "Negligent treatment or maltreatment shall mean an act or omission which evinces a serious disregard of consequences of such magnitude as to constitute a clear and present danger to the child's health, welfare and safety." (Washington, RCW 26.44.020)
- Establish a reporting procedure.
- This includes an understanding of possible indicators and symptoms of abuse; knowing the basis for making a report; documenting and journaling all concerns; and appointing one person to make all reports to the proper authorities when necessary.

One person should be designated as the reporter for the church or program. This person should be knowledgeable of the types of abuse: physical injury, mental injury, sexual abuse, neglect, and death. Also, abuse perpetrated by a custodial person is to be reported to the Department of Social and Health Services. Abuse perpetrated by a noncustodial person is to be reported to the local law enforcement agency. If in doubt, contact Department of Social and Health Services, and they will provide assistance.

Responding to Allegations

A plan for responding to allegations is the fourth critical area. Many lawsuits against churches are related not to the actual abuse occurrence, but rather to the church's response to the abuse allegation. Many churches have no plan and then find themselves frustrated and not able to recover. Instead, be prepared in advance and then pray that the preparation is not needed. There are resource people who are available to assist in preparing to respond to an allegation.

Networking with available resources is an aspect of responding to allegations. Prepare a list of qualified Christian counselors in the area. Learn what is available through local and state agencies. Our counties' Sexual Assault Center was one of the greatest resources in dealing with our church's legal case. Become acquainted with a lawyer in case professional legal advice is needed. Law enforcement agencies have a community relations officer or a public information officer. Meet with this person and make use of the agencies' resources. Select a spokesperson that has good people skills and is detail oriented to deal with media. Then prepare this person to speak under pressure, on camera, and to a reporter.

Know what is included in the church's insurance policy. Does the new ministry program require additional coverage? Is there coverage for highrisk events, such as water activities, archery, mountain climbing, repelling? What is the coverage for the leaders and volunteers in case of an accident, abuse allegations, or law suit? What is the coverage for use of church vehicles or personal vehicles used to transport children or teens? Is a driving records check required or is there an age requirement for the drivers? Lack of knowledge is not an admissible defense if something does occur.

Finally, develop a stepbystep plan for responding to an allegation. The lawyer who assisted our church gave the following recommendations:

- Refrain from engaging in denial, minimization, or blame.
- Document all efforts in handling the incident. This must be done on a daily basis since many times the investigation and the court case may continue for months or years.
- Immediately report the incident to the authorities, your insurance company, church attorney, and denominational officials. Our insurance company gave us a claim number upon placing the initial call. However, due to handling the case well and the grace of God, the claim number was never used.
- Leave the investigation to the proper authorities. The role of the church is to provide spiritual care and comfort. Provide pastoral care for the victim and the family. Do not try to be a detective or investigator.
- If the accused is a leader or volunteer, remove the accused from the position until allegations are cleared or substantiated. Respect the rights of the accused.
- Utilize one person to serve as the spokesperson to the authorities and the media. When dealing with the media, tell only facts and refrain from opinions. Keep statements brief and to the point so that misquoting may be kept minimal.

Who is included on the list of mandatory reporters? States vary regarding this issue. Make sure you are aware of who is responsible to report abuse or neglect. They include medical

practitioners, professional school personnel, social services counselor, coroners, pharmacists, childcare providers and their employees, employees of DSHS, juvenile probation officers, law enforcement, and any adult who resides with a child suspected to have been abused. Beyond being a mandatory reporter, there is a moral mandate to report.

Licensing Issues

When is it necessary for a churchbased ministry or program to be licensed? The answer to this question varies from state to state. Before establishing a new program, learn the answer to this question by calling your state agency. It is not sufficient to guess that the program does not need to be licensed. If licensing is required, be aware this is not a quick process or an inexpensive one.

The Department of Social and Health Services web site gives clear information. These guidelines will assist you in discerning whether or not your program qualifies for licensing or is exempt. If in doubt, ask the DSHS.

Notice

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This article is from The Touch-a-Life Handbook. Touch-a-Life, a creative, compassionate ministry for children and youth, is a joint effort by Children's Ministries, Nazarene Compassionate Ministries USA/Canada, and Nazarene Youth International.

Screening Workers

Critical safety policies to protect your church and the children in it.

On Palm Sunday in 1998, a 12-year-old girl disappeared from Memorial United Methodist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. It was 11 a.m. when someone noticed that the girl was missing, and a few adults searched for her as the worship service began.

Ned Owens, the pastor of the 903-member church, instructed his ushers to go quickly throughout their building to find the child. A few moments later, a child said, "She went with a man to get some flowers."

Indeed, 41-year-old Robin Wayne Martin allegedly entered the second- floor education area, pretended to need help from children, and lured the girl to his van. Throughout the afternoon, church members prayed, passed out fliers, and searched for the child. Seven hours after the abduction, a motorist found her on the side of the road, her hands bound by duct tape. She was alive.

Martin, it turns out, had been a member of Memorial, had grown up in this church, married there, and even raised his two children in it. Martin's mother is still active in the church.

Seven months earlier, Martin had allegedly molested an 8-year-old in another community. That case was pending. In this abduction case, Martin has been charged with 13 counts including kidnapping, sexual assault, and rape.

Think this could never happen at your church? Think again.

Safety issues-not only those like this situation are the top critical concern for children's ministries today. And for good reason. God is all-trustworthy but people and situations aren't always to be trusted.

Church safety is something for which the wise prepare. To wait until a crisis happens to create safety plans is too late. To believe that "this will never happen to us" is risky.

Churches are sued every year. Lawsuits arise for several reasons including accusations of negligence in the areas of screening and training staff, supervision, event planning, and emergency preparedness. Church Mutual Insurance Company, the leading insurer of churches in America, averages four to five new sexual molestation and misconduct claims each week.

Consider these statistics from James Cobble, the executive director of Christian Ministry Resources in Matthews, North Carolina:

- In the past five years, one out of 25 churches has responded to an allegation of sexual molestation in children's ministry. One percent have actually gone to court.
- Less than half of all churches screen their paid children's ministry workers.
- The frequency of court cases involving injury to children is directly proportionate to the size of the church. Urban churches are at a higher risk of being accused. Suburban churches with more than 500 members have the highest risk of being sued.
- During the past three years, 52 percent of churches reported having accidents that required medical attention. That percentage increased to 68 percent for churches with a worship attendance between 250 to 1,000 and 84 percent for churches over 1,000.

Safety Policies

Churches need to be prepared! This is the legal reason for creating safety policies, but there's a deeper, more significant reason-to protect the children. Policies are only printed expressions of the value placed on children. If the only reason for safety policies is to protect the corporation, the church has missed Jesus' passion for children. A policy is simply a statement of the church's plan for caring for children and preventing a legal problem

To better understand the value of safety policies, think in terms of fire blocks in the walls of your home. Construction and fire codes require short blocks of wood to be built into the walls. These fire blocks are designed to slow the progress of the fire as it burns up the wall toward the roof. Fires start low and burn upward. The fire blocks give the firefighters more time to put out the fire.

Most court cases or "fires" start low in children's ministry and can "burn" all the way up the church structure to the "roof"-the senior pastor or church corporate charter. With safety policies in place, the progress of any legal fire is slowed as it burns up the administrative "wall" of the church.

The process of creating policies is not as complex as it may seem. You can take fairly simple steps that require little or no previous experience. These steps are all deeply significant and valuable in protecting children's lives, your children's ministry, and your entire church. The steps in creating safety policies:

1. Clarify the areas of risk.
2. Ask critical questions about each area.
3. Gather information from other churches or child-serving organizations regarding their policies and procedures.
4. Formulate procedures based on the answers to your questions.
5. Ask others to critique the policies and their wording.
6. Consult your senior pastor, church attorney, and church insurance agent for final wording.

Policies are no more than standards of operation with plans for carrying out or supporting those standards. A policy states what you believe and how you plan to fulfill that belief in action. A policy must also include plans of action to take if the policy is broken. Specific action plans must be spelled out to cover all contingency plans and procedures. Think through all the "what if?" variables for each policy or situation. Employee rights and due process must also be considered for each policy.

The following are critical risk areas to consider while creating safety policies. As a starting place, consider the topics for each risk area.

Screening and Training Staff

The process of recruiting, screening, and training staff is fast becoming a critical area of safety. I expect that those who serve in children's ministry must be Christians who are growing in their relationship with Jesus. Beyond the spiritual maturity of these people, though, the church is also required to do all it can to run background checks and protect the children from abusive adults. The church may be accused of being negligent if no policies exist for the screening and training of people who work with children.

A church in Corona, California, was faced with a risky situation when one of its volunteers, who had not been screened correctly, was discovered as a listed sex offender. Fortunately, no charges were made, and he was removed from service safely. If he had made advances toward a child, the church could've been held liable.

Here's a sample policy statement about screening personnel that'll get you started: "It is the desire of (name of church) that all who serve in the children's ministry be examples of Christlikeness to the children in their words and deeds. All who serve in the children's ministry

must be (prerequisite qualities) and pass through the application process that includes (components of the process)."

Areas to consider:

- **Basic qualifications** - Each church should determine the qualifications for applying to serve in the children's ministry. Some considerations for an applicant might include a minimum-age requirement, spiritual maturity, or church membership status.
- **Application process** - Do you have an application form? Do people apply via bulletin inserts, in person, over the phone, or through a written form? Does your application process include more than an application form? Are there personal interviews, classes, references, or background checks included in the process?
- **Background checks** - What sort of background checks will be conducted and by whom? Will you have assistance in this process from church members in law enforcement? Will you check fingerprints, driving records, and criminal records?
- **Approval standards** - What effects will a person's theological beliefs, character references, background checks, and spiritual strength have on the approval of his or her application to serve in children's ministry? Does the applicant understand these standards? What happens to people who aren't approved? Are they referred to other ministries, called on the phone, or personally thanked? Are their applications kept on file?
- **Access to the applicant's data** - It's important to identify and limit the people who have access to personnel files. Make a list of these people and agree on the list with your pastor and attorney. The people who have access might include your ministry directors, ministry area coordinators, and church pastors.
- **Appeals process** - Many churches have been sued for wrongful dismissal. Having an employee or volunteer sign a clearly written appeals-process policy, which involves the pastoral staff or the church board, is vital. Who oversees the appeals process? The church should decide whether the children's pastor, the senior pastor, a board member, or a church staff member is going to oversee the appeals process.
- **Staff handbook** - Will your policies be compiled into a handbook? If so, the handbook should contain all policies, procedures, standards, and mission statements pertinent to the ministry. Having new recruits sign acceptance statements regarding ministry policies at the start of their service will prevent many damaging disagreements. Decide which policies will be part of this acceptance process, when they'll be signed, and where the agreement originals will be stored.
- **Training** - Adequate training is crucial. An untrained team member can claim ignorance or blame the church regarding an abuse or negligence issue. Will your training include an orientation, training meetings, video training, on-the-job training, or ministry conferences? As part of the training process, is there an apprenticeship period? How long are the new volunteers in an apprenticeship and with whom? What's the purpose of the apprenticeship? What are the steps before, during, and after the apprenticeship?
- **Who oversees the training process?** - The training process is critical enough to warrant a single overseer. Is this person the children's pastor, an area coordinator, or an age-level "master" teacher? What does the training process cover? The training process should

include training in ministry policies, the mission of the children's ministry, child characteristics, curriculum use, classroom management, parent relations, discipline, creativity, learning philosophy, child abuse awareness, and emergency procedures.

Supervision

Two ministry friends of mine recently told me of a new situation they faced in the nursery at their church. A baby began crying and one of the female volunteers, driven by compassion, took the child to a rocker and started nursing him. The ministry handbook said nothing about nursery volunteers nursing other mothers' children, so this lady didn't do anything wrong. Or did she? If the parents of the child had pressed charges, the church could've been accused of being negligent in supervision. Needless to say, the ministry handbook for that church now includes a policy statement about nursing children in the nursery.

Areas to Consider

- **Personnel supervisor** - Have a specific supervisor in each department and classroom. A single supervisor over the entire ministry may be adequate for a ministry of less than 100 children, but any ministry with 100 or more children needs multiple levels of supervision.
- **Adult-to-child ratios** - The size of the room and the age of the children affect the ratio. The church should set the ratios so there's an adequate number of adults. Most educators recommend these ratios:
 - Infants: 1 adult to 3 children
 - Toddlers: 1 adult to 6 children
 - Preschool: 1 adult to 10 children
 - Elementary: 1 adult to 12 children
- **Child supervision** - Are children ever alone with only one adult? Your answer to this question must be NO, NEVER! And children should never ever be unsupervised. How will children be released from classrooms? Are they allowed to meet their parents, or must a parent pick up the child? Who is allowed in your children's ministry area? Must these people have special name tags to gain clearance into your area? Who is stationed at church exits to ensure that children do not leave the building unsupervised?

According to Ned Owens, the pastor of Memorial United Methodist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, his church has instituted these policies as a result of the Palm Sunday abduction:

- Every exit is monitored in a friendly, welcoming way.
- Greeters are trained to identify out-of-place people.
- Parents must pick up children 12 and younger.
- Someone monitors the hallways during Sunday school to ensure that children are where they should be.
- **Restroom procedures** - The issue of adults taking children to the restroom is a sensitive one. Children must use the restroom, yet adults being alone with children in the restroom violates the "never-alone-with-children" policy. Two adults in the restroom may leave the classroom without adequate adults. Leaving the restroom door open with a female hall

monitor outside has merit. You must train your volunteers specifically about leaving stall doors open and how to assist children with their clothing and cleanup if necessary

- **Teenagers in ministry** - Welcome and encourage teenagers to serve alongside adults. Age requirements and roles for teenagers vary from church to church. Remember that teenagers must be screened, supervised, and trained just as adults are.
- **Diaper changing** - Can males change diapers at any time? Can teenagers? You may want to take the safest stance-at the risk of offending males or teenagers-by answering no to this question.
- **Playground supervision** - Do the adult-to-child ratios set for the classroom apply to the playground as well? The specific playground structures and environment may require greater adult supervision.
- **Staff evaluation** - How do we determine the quality and effectiveness of the children's ministry staff? What determines an effective children's ministry team member? Who observes and evaluates the team members? The children's pastor or area coordinators may be the best evaluators.
- **Removing staff from the ministry** - Wrongful dismissal is a common allegation in today's world. The only way to properly remove someone is to connect poor performance to a signed agreement or policy. At the time of recruitment, the volunteer should sign an agreement to serve and abide by the policies. The process of evaluation and reporting must be clearly written out. If a team member's performance or attitude is evaluated and the verbal review of the evaluation is recorded and signed, the team member has been adequately warned. The team member agreed to the process for removal at the time of enlistment and has little recourse if he or she continues the offensive behavior.

Who on staff is involved in this process? How are the records kept? What is the appeals process? If the person is an employee, the law dictates that the employee must be notified of the process and must be given adequate time to appeal the decision. The people involved and the steps of the process may include the senior pastor or church board.

Once a person has been removed, can he or she ever reapply to serve in the children's ministry? What about other church ministries? The reinstatement process must include a step-by-step procedure during which the original offensive behavior is dealt with and evidence given regarding the correction of the behavior or attitude. The reinstatement process includes interviews, references, personal writings, and a probation period.

Event Planning

A parent of an elementary child once said, "I'm not letting my child go to camp this year because I don't believe the camp is well-planned." It would be sad to miss the opportunity to minister to a child simply because of poor planning. Pre-planning and communication are critical for safety reasons, but they're also vital for good parent relations.

Many churches are reducing the number of events that involve the children simply because they're afraid of the legal risk involving child safety. Many churches believe the only protection from legal risk is to do away with events. This decision may express a flawed perspective. Today's media-saturated children need experiences. Children need events that are planned

carefully and staffed with caring, confident adult role models.

Areas to Consider

- **Event overseer** - Is the ministry designed so that several people may plan events involving the children's ministry? Can the children's pastor, coordinator, teacher, aide, or parent plan events?
- **Event-planning steps** - Regardless of who plans the event, what steps are required in the planning? The steps should include understanding the need for the event, establishing the goal, considering the location, setting the date, delegating the preparation, developing deadlines, making plans for communication with parents and children, recruiting and training leaders, designing advertising and registration materials, reviewing event procedures and emergency plans, dealing with transportation and food needs, and designing follow-up afterward.
- **Event approval** - Are all events approved by the same person using the same standards? That person must consider church, family, and child needs in the approval process.
- **Staffing requirements** - Are the requirements similar to the classroom requirements? Are the adult-to-child ratios the same? The events activities should affect the ratios and the requirements. Are the screening steps the same for all who serve in any area of children's ministry? Who oversees that process?
- **Staff training** - There's no better training than that which is conducted at the site of the event prior to the event. Can this be done? Apart from basic training in ministering to children, what event-specific training is necessary? What happens with people who can't attend the training?
- **Church insurance coverage** - Does your insurance coverage require you to check with your agent prior to each event? Are any waiver forms necessary?
- **Parent forms** - There are two forms involved with each event. Parents can sign an emergency release form to be filed for future events. The other form is an event permission form, and it's signed for a single event only.
- **Parent information** - Communication is the greatest protector of poor parent relations. An event "scoop sheet" should include all information about the event such as the event location complete with a map, departure and return times, the items needed for the event, the event goal, and emergency contact phone numbers and pager numbers for the event leaders.

Emergency Plans of Action

A few weeks ago, my need for a safety plan and procedure became obviously clear to me. I found one of our special needs children on the bathroom floor recovering from a seizure. Thankfully another teacher was there with me, and the child was conscious and breathing. The question "What should I do?" kept racing through my mind.

One of God's recurring themes throughout the Bible is "be ready!" God consistently encourages us to be ready before rather than after. Preparation for possible tragedy or action is a wise endeavor. It takes work, but it can also save lives and ministries.

If one of our children's ministry team members makes a poor judgment in an emergency situation, the whole church could be at risk as the "fire" burns up the administrative ladder.

Areas to consider:

- **Natural and other disasters** - Make plans for specific disasters such as earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, or snowstorms-and rehearse periodically. Also make and rehearse plans related to fire, building collapse, and electrical outages.
- **Emergency procedures** - Inside the classroom, will your plans include getting under furniture, getting away from the windows, going to the basement, crawling on the floor, or going to an agreed-upon meeting place? Outside the classroom, will your plans include getting away from the buildings, trees, or power poles; meeting at an agreed-upon meeting place; going to the basement; or staying still?
- Store first-aid supplies, communication equipment, food supplies, blankets, water, radios, and batteries at your church in case of an emergency.
- **Emergency procedure training** - Is there specific training for each type of emergency? Is this training repeated periodically? Is there a rehearsal with the children? Does the training include first aid, CPR, or other life-saving procedures?

Some people think their church is too small to worry about these safety problems. Remember it's much easier to make plans and develop safety policies while you're small and grow into them, rather than wait until your ministry is so large that any changes or adjustments are considered drastic.

Some churches tend to take the biblical concept of trusting God to an extreme. They think nothing bad can happen to Christians. Although Jesus does promise many things about his care and provision for us, we must not be unwise regarding children's safety. When Jesus sent his disciples out on their first missionary venture, he sent them out in pairs and told them that they were like sheep among wolves. He also told them that bad things would happen to them, but that he would be with them (Matthew 10:16-19).

There is no automatic protection from evil for Christians. We're to watch and be ready. Accidents will always happen. There will always be unforeseen circumstances that need to be handled. It's your job as the ministry leader to build sturdy safety-policy fire blocks into the walls of your ministry to protect children.

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