

BLUEPRINT FOR CREATING SAFETY & SECURITY POLICIES IN YOUR CHURCH¹

But Jesus said, “Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” - (Matthew 19:14)

IMPORTANT PREFACE:

Developing a safe and secure environment for minors in your church is essential in providing opportunities to present the Gospel to children, youth, and their families. Creating safety and security policies in your church should be a team effort between church leaders, parents, and teachers. Church leaders must not only take safety and security seriously, they must take necessary steps to memorialize their steps to keep children safe and secure.

Below you will find some suggested policies and practices for churches to use in creating a safety and security paradigm which works for your church. It is important to note, however, that the following suggestions **do not** establish the only way to handle protections issues. Nor is this information offered as the only way create a safe & secure church experience. Rather, these are simply some possible ways to accomplish the goal of safety and security. It is up to you and your leadership team to determine what works best in your context. Finally, the following is not legal advice nor is it a valid replacement for such advice. It is strongly recommended that church leaders seek out legal counsel when crafting and implementing a protection plan that will be effective in your context.



Florida Baptist
Convention

Right Beside You.

¹ This resource is comprised of information from a wide range of sources. While it is a unique document created by the Florida Baptist Convention, we would nevertheless like to thank the following entities for their assistance in providing information helpful to its creation: the Southern Baptist Convention, Lifeway Christian Resources, North Carolina Baptist Convention, Tennessee Baptist Convention, and the authors of the books listed in the “Resource” section that concludes this document.



SUGGESTED TOPICS TO BE ADDRESSED:

01 Define the “Why” of Creating a Written Policy:



- a. Creating a written policy benefits everyone involved: the minor, the parents, and those working with minors in your church.
- b. Creating a written policy provides a blueprint to ensure that opportunities for your church to share the Gospel with families will continue to exist.

02 Selecting Volunteers & Staff who Work with Minors:



- a. Institute a written application process.
- b. Check references. This means actually call/contact them **and** makes notes of the contact.
 - i. 3-character references are recommended.
 - ii. Feel free to ask for secondary references if you feel **any** doubt as to their knowledge of the candidate (or their truthfulness).
- c. Conduct an in-person interview with the volunteer candidate. Ask probing questions.
- d. Submit otherwise-vetted candidates to a criminal background check

03 Provide Training to all Volunteers & Staff who Work with Minors:



- a. Familiarize everyone in leadership with the church’s policies and procedures relating to children & youth
- b. Teach and emphasize age-appropriate interaction standards; including how to physically and verbally engage with a minor.
- c. Teach how to spot abuse that may be happening elsewhere.
- d. Be willing to enforce both participating in the training **and** conformity with the training.

04 Some Non-negotiables in Your Policies:



- a. Institute the Two-Adult Rule:
 - i. There must always be at least two adults in the room, in the car, in the van, or anywhere that minors are gathered. These two should **not** be husband and wife.
- b. Institute the six-month membership rule. Volunteers should be a member of the church—and have been so for no less than six months—before working with minors.
- c. Ensure clear sightlines into each classroom.
 - i. Put windows in all classroom doors.
 - ii. **Do not** allow anyone to cover those windows up...ever.
 - iii. Supervisory personnel need to be able to walk by classrooms and observe.
- d. Check-in and release procedures.
 - i. Collect information about child, parents or guardians and who has permission to pick up child.
 1. What is our required check-in and release procedure?
 2. What are the ages of the children who will be required to check-in and be released to a parent or guardian with approved tag, badge or sticker?



- ii. Develop practices that ensures children are picked up only by those with permission.
 - 1. Is there a procedure for parents who lose their release tag, badge or sticker?
 - 2. What is the procedure for someone coming to pick up a child without the required tag, badge or sticker?
- iii. Determine how to handle any breakdowns.
- e. Provide supervision of volunteers and staff: This is in addition to the two adults, for all events including classes, outings, trips, recreation, and other activities. Their assignment is to ensure conformation to policy and procedures.
- f. Always be willing to enforce the church's policies. **Do not** have policies in place, then simply allow them to be ignored and/or violated.
- g. Preparing an allegation response plan:
 - i. Take every allegation seriously.
 - ii. Remove the alleged perpetrator from the situation until a proper investigation has been conducted.
 - iii. Report allegations to the authorities as appropriate (and as required by law).
 - iv. Contact your church's legal counsel.
 - v. Contact insurance company where appropriate.
 - vi. Do not rush to judgement.
 - vii. Minister to the victim and the family.
 - viii. Share information only as appropriate and/or necessary.

05 Communication Between Adult Leaders & Minor Students:



- a. The church should have a written policy regarding appropriate means of communication between adult leaders/volunteers and children
- b. The best practice is to prohibit private, one-on-one electronic communication (email, social media, texting, etc.)
- c. An acceptable alternative is a group-chat/email list.
- d. Provide ongoing communication of your policies with your church body.

06 Develop a Security Plan for Picking up & Dropping Off:



- a. Make sure that the person who picks up the minor is the same that dropped off the minor or has some form of specific permission to pick up the minor (e.g., tag given to person dropping off).
- b. Secure hallways and classrooms so that unauthorized adults can NOT come in contact with minors.
- c. Require that leaders wear photo ID badges.





07 Engage Parents as Partners in Ministry:

- a. Conduct an all-parents meeting at least annually where you talk about the ministry and what parents can expect to happen during the year.
- b. Review the procedures, protocols, and documents used by the church to keep children safe.
- c. Engage parents to serve as volunteers where appropriate.

08 Avoid transportation in Private Vehicles if Possible:



If the church is to be responsible for transportation, use church-provided vehicles (whether owned, leased or rented). Among other reasons, this will better-enable you to minimize mechanical issues, as well as ensure that the two-adult rule is followed. Regardless, set standards for all drivers and conduct checks of driving records on all those who wish to be drivers for such church events.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER FOR INCLUSION IN YOUR POLICY:



Bathroom & Diapering Procedures:

- Will there be a gender restriction on assisting children toileting needs?
- Will there be a gender restriction on who may diaper a child?
- Will there be an age restriction for assisting children with toileting needs?
- Suggested policy is no one under that age of 18 should ever assist with diapering/toileting or escort children to the bathroom.
- What procedure will our volunteers follow when assisting children in the bathroom?
- Should you consider having a “children only” bathroom?



Bites & Injury Reporting:

- To whom should reports of bites or injuries be made?
- Is there a form to be completed that will document a bite or injury?



Appropriate Discipline:

- What are appropriate and inappropriate forms of discipline?

Typically Appropriate Discipline:

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| • redirection | • natural consequences | • contacting director |
| • praise | • age-appropriate time out in the classroom | • contacting parent |



Typically Inappropriate Discipline:

- shaming
 - yelling
 - blaming
 - the “silent treatment”
 - hitting
 - biting back
- Are there other forms of discipline (whether acceptable or unacceptable) that your policy will specify?

Appropriate Touch:

Appropriate:

- high-fives
- fist bumps
- shoulder touches
- side hugs
- hand-shakes

Inappropriate:

- frontal hugs
- men holding children on laps
- kissing on face or lips
- Back rubs
- Massages of any type
- shakes

- Are there other forms of touch that your policy will specify?

Teaching Ratios:

- What teaching ratios will your church strive to maintain?
- Suggested ratios that have been found to promote appropriate oversight and security:²

Age Grouping	Adult/Maximum Child Ratio	Group Size
Babies	1:2	12
Babies – Twos	1:3	12
Babies– Kindergarten	1:3	12
Ones – Twos	1:3	12
Threes – Pre-K	1:4	20
Threes – Kindergarten	1:4	15
Kindergarten	1:5	24
School-age Children	1:6	26

²It is important to note that, depending upon your context, these ratios may be too small or too large. Exceeding these ratios—or coming underneath them—must not be seen as necessarily inappropriate. Rather, churches must use these as merely a starting point, and then assess what specific ratios work best for you (either higher or lower).

Will you Allow the Same Teacher(s) to Teach the Same Group of Students Year-Upon-Year?

- This may not be possible in every context.
- However, not allowing teachers to move-up with students as they get promoted will hamper the ability of any predators who may wish to “groom” students for abuse.
- Even putting a two-year limit on teaching the same minor students would provide some level of protection against grooming.
- Another consideration is to establish a rotation policy whereby children & youth teachers get some “time-off” periodically. This will give them time to recharge and refresh.
- It will also give you a chance to see how things are operating in their classroom.

Photo, Video & Social Media Policy:

- What will your church policy be regarding the taking and use of digital images of children?
- It is highly suggested that, if the church intends to take and use photographs or videos of minors, that the church provide notice of such intent (and get permission).
- Best practice is to avoid close-ups of single children. Use of groups shots is recommended.
- If a parent or guardian objects to such digital images, all reasonable care should be taken to honor the parent’s/guardian’s wishes.

Overnight Trips:

- How will your church handle sleeping and other lodging arrangements?
- Churches should have a written policy for assigning rooms.
- No adults should sleep in the same bed as a minor.
- Preferably, adults should not sleep in the same room. Rather, they should sleep in an adjacent/nearby room.

Steps for Dealing with Non-Compliance to Policy:

- How, specifically, will your church deal with a situation where a leader has violated one or more of your policies (intentionally or not)?
- The church should make it clear, in writing, what steps will be taken if a volunteer/paid staff fail to adhere to, or enforce, written policies.
- The same applies for parents and students.





Age Restrictions for Youth Volunteers:

- Will your church allow teens/youth to volunteer in the children's ministry and/or nursery? If so:
 - The suggested policy is that no one under age 18 serve with children ages birth through age 2.
 - A good rule-of-thumb is there should be at least five (5) years' age difference between youth volunteers and the age group with whom they volunteer.
 - Even then, no minor should be permitted to serve, alone, with younger children. They should do so only under the direct supervision of a qualified adult.



Emergency Evacuation Plans:

- How will your church deal with emergencies (of various types)?
 - A plan should be created and explained clearly to volunteers, parents and the security team so that parents know where to pick up children in the event of an emergency without causing additional congestion inside children's areas. Possible emergencies could be:
 - Severe Weather
 - Fire/Flooding
 - Intruder on campus
 - Lost child
 - Medial emergency
- Questions to consider:
 - Who will assist with evacuation in the event it is needed?
 - What route should classes take?
 - What are the procedures for ensuring that all children are evacuated and then released to the appropriate parent/guardian?

RESOURCES TO ASSIST YOU IN CREATING A POLICY

Websites:

www.protectmyministry.com

Background checks, volunteer training

www.ministrysafe.com

Background checks, volunteer training

www.sbc.net/churchresources/sexabuseprevention.asp.

Recommended resources from the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Books:

Protect the Gift: Keeping Children and Teenagers Safe by Gavin DeBcker

The Child Safeguarding Policy for Churches and Ministries by Bosyle Tchividjian and Shira M. Berkovits

