

Crafting, Implementing, and Using a Child Protection Policy

Working with the children and young people in our congregations is a responsibility and a privilege. We are responsible for not only their spiritual growth, but also their physical and emotional safety. As such, it is highly recommended that congregations have a policy in place that will help determine who can work with the children of the congregation and regularly enforce it. This policy serves to not only protect the children, but also the adults who work with them.

From Church Mutual;

Policies and procedures serve as a deterrent. They demonstrate a recognition and awareness of the risk, which makes your organization a less attractive target for those with bad intentions. Having effective policies and procedures in place also shows there are levels of accountability and enforcement within your organization. Showing new hire candidates or potential volunteers your organization's policies and procedures reinforces your recognition and awareness of the risk, as well as the level of accountability and consequences.

You may be wondering what the difference is between effective and inadequate policies and procedures. Some helpful questions to ask include:

- ***Is everyone – including leadership, staff and volunteers – aware that the policies and procedures exist?***
- ***Do the policies and procedures fit your organization's needs and are they consistently followed?***
- ***Are your policies and procedures extensive or restrictive to the point that many simply disregard them?***

By answering these questions, you can determine whether you need to revisit your existing policies and procedures. However, it's also important to keep in mind that policies and procedures are not surefire solutions. Ultimately, a comprehensive system is needed to help reduce the risk.¹

Keeping all of that in mind, not only is it important to craft a policy, but also to implement it, and then continue using it.

Crafting the policy

While it is possible for one or two people to craft the policy, it is not recommended. Having multiple eyes to look over the drafts of documents is useful but not so many that it becomes cumbersome and never gets drafted.

¹ <https://www.churchmutual.com/169/Sexual-Abuse-Prevention>

As the group begins the work, it is good to take a look at other congregations and organizations policies (list of some available on resources page). There are also multiple templates for churches available and can be used as a guide. Some things to consider as you go forward:

- What are current practices?
- What might need to change?
 - How will you make these changes?
- What will be easiest for you to enforce or use without sacrificing children's safety?
- How long will someone be affiliated with the congregation and how (i.e. member or not) before they are allowed to work with children?
- Background checks are the first line of inquiry but not all encompassing. Often people who are skilled at abuse find ways of earning trust so they aren't caught. It's best to check references.
 - Who will do the reference checks?
 - How many will you require?
- How often do you require certain criteria to be met?
 - How often do people need to work with children before needing training? (An overnight/youth trip chaperone once a year may not be enough)
 - How often do you want to run a background check or require additional training?

Thinking through all of these things will inform how you write your policy.

Implementing the policy

Once your policy is written, it's time to think through how you will implement it. Who needs to approve it? How will it be presented to the congregation (hopefully you've at least told the congregation there is a policy being created)? But then specifically, some other things to think about:

- If you are requiring training for staff and volunteers, how will you provide that training? If it is a group, it might be best to have one or two sessions while also giving people who are not able to attend those sessions to do either an online training or a separate in person training they can sign up for on their own through a partner organization (see resources for training).
- Who will do the reference checks? In the implementation phase, there will be significantly more reference checks to do than once the policy has been around for a year or two. Make a plan for doing the checks and then do them.
- How will you track the status of each adult? Make a plan that will be easy to keep up and even better if you can get it to remind you of certain dates (i.e. new training or another background check). Who will be the person or people ensuring these records are tracked and kept confidential?
- If there are other organizations that use your building, will you also require them to follow your policy? If so, what is your plan for both informing them and how shall they be responsible for upholding the policy?

Using the Policy

After the initial implementation phase, the policy must continue to be used. When considering how that will happen, here are some things to consider:

- Who will continue to ensure the congregation uses the policy? Will there be an oversight committee or team?
- How will you make changes to the policy if needed? A lot of policies are good in theory but then through actual practice there are often things that need to be tweaked. Also, there may be new insights or other items that need to be added or modified later.
- Who will be the people who will do reference checks for any new adults? Will they change or remain the same from year to year?

For more, including an assessment and other resources, please see Church Mutual's website on Sexual Abuse Prevention: <https://www.churchmutual.com/169/Sexual-Abuse-Prevention>