

PROTECTING CHILDREN IN CHURCH AND MINISTRY SETTINGS

Cumberland Baptist Association

Clarksville, TN

Children are a gift from God. In Psalm 139:13-14 we are reminded that children are carefully made by God and have value. Aside from numerous scripture texts calling for people to live by Biblical sexual standards, Matthew portrays two passages where Jesus blesses children and shows their value (9:36-37 and 10:13-16). However, Matthew 9:42 reminds us of God's perspective of those who might harm children physically or spiritually. The Church must not only value and celebrate children, but also take every measure to protect them from any form of abusive or predatory behavior.

Given these values, we at the Cumberland Baptist Association strongly urge all member churches to ensure the protection of children. We do this by providing training and resources for all our churches that is easily available and accessible. We highly recommend that our churches take these steps:

- 1) Utilize background checks for all volunteers or paid staff working with children. Further, we encourage that those resources should be kept on file and updated regularly.
- 2) Critically evaluate building and facilities to keep children safe. Preferably, the facility should be evaluated by an outside consultant familiar with legal and wise practices for child safety.
- 3) Adequate adult supervision includes, but is not limited to, two unrelated teachers or adults in the room with children.
- 4) Immediately report all accusations and instances of child abuse of children to local law enforcement, since ministers are mandatory reporters by law. Law enforcement is the first line of investigation when a child's welfare is at stake.
- 5) Ensure that training regarding child safety and security is a regular part of worker training and development.
- 6) Enact policies and procedures for communication methods such as texting between adults and minors must be established.
- 7) Make sure that a background check and careful interview processes are part of ordination procedures. Though ordination decisions are a function of the local church in Southern Baptist life, this process often impacts ministry beyond the ordaining church.
- 8) Establish security plans for the whole church campus, which includes limiting access from outsiders and inappropriate individuals in child ministry areas.
- 9) Establish transportation policies with child safety as the highest priority. These plans should include practices of transportation in any vehicle for ministry purposes.
- 10) Ensure that policies and procedures regarding child protection, transportation, facilities and other related protocols have been communicated with parents and with the church at large.

Resources

- 1) The National Hotline for Domestic Violence 1-800-799-SAFE.
- 2) The National Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-422-4453.

- 3) The website for Brotherhood Mutual Insurance has a host of valuable resources regarding ministry safety. The link for child safety is:
<https://www.brotherhoodmutual.com/resources/child-safety/>.
- 4) The website for Church Mutual Insurance has numerous resources regarding ministry risks. The link for child safety is <https://www.churchmutual.com/169/Child-and-Youth-Sexual-Abuse>.
- 5) The website for Child Evangelism Fellowship offers further resources that can be used for training. See <https://www.cefonline.com/childprotection/>.
- 6) Tennessee Department of Children's Service hotline: 877-237-0004
- 7) Our local law enforcement agencies can provide capable training regarding child safety issues for your church.
- 8) One other resource that includes resources from every angle of these issues is <https://www.netgrace.org/>.

If at any time you have questions about how to prepare your church and ministry to protect children, please contact us. However, if you have knowledge of a report of child abuse or sexual abuse, contact your local law enforcement agency immediately. We believe a safe, secure, fun, and gospel centered ministry is the most effective way to reach and disciple the next generation for Christ.