



Child Abuse Prevention Month

Tips for Faith Organizations to Prevent Child Abuse

Faith congregations provide wonderful opportunities for children and families to develop spiritually and to be part of a larger, caring community. Close, caring, and appropriate relationships with adults are important to a child's healthy development. Families who are struggling often benefit from the friendship and informal mentoring opportunities provided by faith communities. Faith-based organizations play a critical role in preventing child abuse.

Speak out.

Shining a light on the subject protects children. Child sexual abuse thrives in an atmosphere of silence and denial. Therefore, openly addressing the potential risk of abuse taking place can protect both children and your community.

Know about those around you.

Criminal background checks: an important first step. Criminal background checks are an important tool. They make it clear to everyone that your organization takes seriously its commitment to keeping children safe and that it is taking action to prevent abusers from working or volunteering in the community.

Establish comprehensive policies and practices.

Don't wait for a child to be harmed; create policies and practices that reduce the risk. Comprehensive policies and practices protect against children being harmed in your faith community, and make it clear that your organization is committed to creating a safe environment free of abuse. Establish the practice of a "two adult rule" that prohibits one-on-one contact or meetings between an adult and a child.

Monitor behavior.

All employees/volunteers are responsible for monitoring behavior and interactions. Organizations need an appropriate balance between monitoring for potential risk and for appropriate behaviors. Acknowledge that some situations pose more risk for inappropriate or harmful behavior than others. For example, interactions during an overnight trip are harder to monitor than interactions in a classroom. It's equally important to acknowledge, praise, and encourage appropriate behaviors by rewarding and reinforcing positive interactions between employees/volunteers and youth.

Train all staff.

The best defense against child abuse is to prevent it from ever happening. To prevent child abuse employees/volunteers need to understand general information about child abuse and its prevalence. Defining the continuum of appropriate, inappropriate, and harmful behavior from your organization's perspective is critical. Your training should also describe risk and protective factors, forms of victimization and perpetration, and address common myths about offenders such as the myth that most people who abuse are strangers.