

Excerpts from *Preventing Child Abuse* by Beth Swagman

From Chapter 1 **General Prevention Policies**

Remember that if the policy is impractical or will not be used, the church's liability is increased unless/until the policy is modified or dropped.

Here are some options to consider:

- Two-person rule-during a session of any child or youth program, at least two volunteers or staff must be present with minors.
- Notify a parent *before* a planned one-to-one contact with a minor and ask his/her permission to meet alone.
- Require two volunteers/staff to transport children or youth in a church vehicle and/or in a volunteer/staff vehicle.
- Establish hall monitors to observe volunteer/staff activities in a child or youth program and to monitor the facility for any suspicious behavior.
- Require bus drivers or transporters to log every pick-up and drop-off of minors.
- Require a parent to sign a waiver that his/her child may be transported alone.
- In the church facility, require a volunteer/staff person to observe one-to-one contacts between a volunteer/staff person and a minor. Outside of the church facility, require that one-to-one contacts occur in a public place or require a volunteer/staff person to observe one-to-one contacts.

From Chapter 2 **Screening Procedures for Volunteers and Staff**

The impetus for congregations to develop screening policies comes from a variety of sources. First, having a screening policy in place tells church members that the church is serious about preventing abuse and reducing volunteer/staff liability to claims of abuse. In addition, screening policies may help reduce the incidence of child abuse within church programs and may reduce a congregation's legal liability. Insurance underwriters and attorneys may recommend to churches that they have a written screening policy. Furthermore, various laws may encourage or require screening policies. (See, for example, the "National Child Protection Act of 1993," Appendix A.)

The development of a screening policy can have a twofold effect on child abuse prevention. First, church officials who are responsible for assigning volunteers/staff to serve in church programs have more data to help them make an adequate match between a person's interests and skills and the available positions. The data may enable church officials to screen an individual out of a program or position in which the individual may pose a risk to children. Second, in some cases, the fact that a screening policy exists will deter an individual who poses a threat to children and does not want to risk exposure.

No screening policy can guarantee the prevention of abuse. As with prevention policies, the goals are to reduce the incidence of abuse and to reduce the liability of volunteers/staff. Church councils should adopt a screening policy that will accomplish those two goals.

The most effective screening process includes five steps: the application form, a personal interview, reference letters, a criminal record check, and fingerprinting to obtain broader information about the applicant's criminal record.

1. Application

The most basic step in any screening process is the position application form. This form serves the employer/church by requesting information about the applicant and his or her suitability for the position. Applicants for staff/volunteer positions should receive further consideration only after an application form has been completed. Volunteers who are already serving in a position will be required to complete an application when this policy is adopted. Thereafter, however, volunteers who continue to serve in the same or similar positions generally will not be asked to fill out additional applications.

Who should fill out an application form?

All adults and minors sixteen years old, seeking a volunteer or paid position with children or youth, should fill out an application. Whenever possible, the individual who will supervise the applicant should review the application and make selections with one other program leader. (See Sample A: Application Form, pp. 31-32.)