

Lesson #8: Be safe before you are sorry.

Develop a Child Protection Policy that protects both children and teachers. Develop it BEFORE you think you need it. It's never too early to put a policy in place. An incident of child abuse not only hurts little lives, but it can destroy your church and its gospel witness.

At our church, some parents of younger children choose to have their children in the worship service with them from their birth on up. Others have decided that the opportunity for them to have an undistracted worship and teaching time in God's Word at church helps them to better spiritually care for their family. As they are better equipped themselves, they have more to pour into their children.

So, our first goal is to provide safe, caring childcare for these parents, so that they are not worried about their children, but can focus on learning and worshipping God, themselves. This had led to the development of our child protection policy.

Some key points of this policy:

- Keeping to safe and effective teacher/student ratios, enlisting extra teachers or closing classes when the ratios are in danger of being exceeded.
- Enlisting team leaders for each group of children to help train less experienced workers.
- Assigning family numbers to each family which flash up on small display boards in the worship hall when a parent is needed during the service.
- Oversight of all childcare by our Pastor of Families, our Children's Ministry Administrator, and the Deacon of Children's Ministry.
- An interview process and background checks for all potential caregivers.
- Requiring child training classes and posting safety/evacuation procedures in all classrooms.
- Using numbered wrist bands and other sign-in/sign-out systems which identify both child and parent/s and make sure the children go home with the right adults.
- Enlisting volunteer hall monitors who are on alert for suspicious strangers and are available for emergency help within the classroom during Sunday School and church services.
- Requiring all teachers/caregivers to be a member at least six months before serving in direct contact ministry with the children. This gives us a chance to know them; and, gives them uninterrupted time getting to know people/the church before serving.
- Usually starting out new volunteers with basic nursery duty, then watching for signs of teaching ability (unless someone is already known to be a teacher, etc).
- Mentoring new teachers under the tutelage of experienced teachers who are teaching, whenever possible.

We consider ourselves successful if we have achieved just this goal...and we encourage our teachers with this fact, too. It is no small thing to help provide the children's primary spiritual caregivers (their parents) with a way to get a big, spiritually nutritious meal from God's Word and the encouragement of other believers. Kinda like a spiritual date-night. And yes, of course, we want our children to be well-taught in their classes while they are in our care. But, if everyone goes home happy, healthy and in one piece, with parents whose spiritual bellies are bulging out a little, that is a great accomplishment....and one with spiritual health benefits that can trickle down to even the youngest member of those families. Yes, safety is a job well done!

In Appendix F, in the back of this book, I have included:

- our Children's Ministry Care Training Session notes (we hold two training sessions a month on Sundays)
- a list of Children's Ministry Safety Resources
- a list of helpful safety tips
- our Application for Children's Ministry
- our Child Protection Policy

Some other tips we have used in helping teachers remember and keep to the child protection policy:

- Review one Children Protection Policy procedure each week with your teachers.
- Post regular used/commonly forgotten procedures in the classrooms.
- Quietly observe your teachers as they take the children to bathroom breaks, do check-in/check-out of children, or at other times when important policy procedures are used. If you notice they are not doing them, then find a chance to speak to them about it. Ask the teachers what you could do to help them follow through with the procedures more completely.

Some Helpful Resources:

- Children Desiring God workshops at their national conference (go to this conference or listen online)
- [On Guard: Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse at Church](#) by Deepak Reju (our Pastor to Families)
- Contact Children's Ministry staff at other churches who might be able to give you advice or let you come observe their procedures in action.

Lesson #8: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting:

1. What parameters guide your current safety procedures? (insurance, child protection policy, church leaders, other?)
2. What teacher-student ratios do you use, if any?
3. Do you have emergency evacuation routes and procedures marked? Do the teachers know what the procedures are?
4. What do you consider the biggest safety risks in your ministry situation? How can you safeguard against these?
5. Do you have a child protection policy? When was it made? Is it up to date with the size and needs of your church now?
6. How do you screen children's workers?
7. How do you check in-check out...infants, preschoolers, elementary school kids, middle schoolers?
8. What failures in carrying out your child protection policy are most likely to occur? (don't check out children properly, forget the bathroom policy, etc.)? How could you remedy these?
9. What do you do if only one teacher shows up to care for children?
10. What about your building makes safety difficult? How do you work with these difficulties?
11. What resources have you used to decide upon your child protection policy? Who have you consulted with? Is there any issue that you wish you could find more information on?
12. What would ideal child protection policy look like at your church? What steps could you take to get there? How much would it cost?
13. Do you train your teachers/caregivers in the child protection policy? How? When? Do you give them refreshers? How? When?
14. Do you teachers follow child protection policy procedures? Why or why not?
15. Do parents know your church's child protection policy? Are they willing to carry it out?
16. Do many children have food allergies at your church? How does your church deal with them?
17. What kinds of special needs require special access or facilities? Are you able to meet those needs? What would you need to do to meet them?