

# CHILD PROTECTION RESOURCE GUIDE FOR SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST PASTORS



## **Child Protection Resource Guide for Seventh-day Adventist Pastors**

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# Child Protection Resource Guide for Seventh-day Adventist Pastors

## Shepherd of the Flock

As a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, you have been called to be the chief shepherd of your congregation. With this calling comes much responsibility for the spiritual health and well-being of your church family. It also brings moral, ethical, and legal responsibilities within our society to be aware of child abuse that may occur in our congregations, schools, and community, and to be ready to act responsibly in protecting children from harm.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus set an example of the importance in protecting children from harm and the duties a spiritual shepherd has toward all within the flock. In Matthew 18, Jesus set a very high standard of care in working with children, noting the tremendous value children have in His kingdom and the consequences to those who would allow harm to befall them. The biblical counsel of 1 Peter 5:1-4 speaks of your responsibility to be a shepherd to the flock under your care. In the Parable of the Lost Sheep we are reminded of the importance of a shepherd's role in recovering and finding a lost member. These moral duties are part of your pastoral leadership.

You are the spiritual leader of the congregation. Your ministerial colleagues and lay ministry volunteers look to you for direction and guidance, especially in how to appropriately handle difficult situations—such as allegations that a child or teenager is being abused. Will you be prepared to give the necessary leadership in these critical moments? Are you ready to be called upon to act appropriately and responsibly? It is our prayer that this *Child Protection Resource Guide* will help prepare you in addressing the challenge of child abuse.

## All Churches are Vulnerable

All Seventh-day Adventist churches are vulnerable to situations in which allegations of child or teenager abuse could arise. Abuse can occur at the hands of a trusted adult, parent/family

member, another child/teenager, or a stranger. The cause for this vulnerability is usually due to the following:

- The church is a trusted place in your community.
- Churches often suffer from apathy or ignorance to the facts concerning the risk of child abuse.
- Churches provide numerous opportunities throughout the week for activities with children.
- The church often provides easy access to children with limited or no safeguards in place.
- The church has a constant need for volunteers.
- The local church represents the collective beliefs of our denomination and its reputation, leading to denial of the existence of things as shameful as abuse.
- Too often the church remains silent and fails to respond to abuse situations in a forthright, appropriate manner.

These vulnerabilities can have a direct impact on the life and vitality of your congregation:

- Harmed lives of the victim and family
- Destroyed reputation and possible criminal consequences to a wronged perpetrator of the abuse
- Financial loss to the church for indemnity and legal costs
- Potential loss of confidence in pastoral or church leadership (i.e., “How could this happen under my watch?”)
- Potential loss of trust in your community
- Potential loss in church membership
- Direct and negative impact on the achievement of the congregation’s mission and evangelism



## Child Protection as a Holistic Focus

All congregations need a Child Protection Plan to protect children, teenagers, and adults from harm when allegations of child abuse arise within a congregation or ministry. Allegations of child abuse directly affect the lives of the victim, the alleged perpetrator, families involved, your congregation, and the local community. These allegations even have a direct impact on the fulfillment of the mission of the Church.

In recent years we have witnessed increasing global awareness of child abuse and the impact it has had on society—especially the faith-based community. Pastors and congregations can no longer blindly assume that “it could never happen in my church” or that “the Lord will always protect our children from harm.” Child abuse does occur within our own families, congregations, schools, and ministries. In the past 20 years Adventist Risk Management has handled more than 500 incidents in the United States involving Adventist children or youth being harmed by abuse. These cases are a heartbreaking testimony that Satan, “as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8, KJV). The Church has incurred over \$30 million in costs to defend and settle these cases. In each situation, the whole of the church is impacted by damaged lives, stress, anxiety, destroyed reputations, loss of time, and financial resources.

A proactive Child Protection Plan encompasses five key elements.

### 1. Acknowledgment and Awareness

Pastors, ministry leaders, and parents must acknowledge that child abuse can unexpectedly arise within any congregation. There must be a written plan in place to proactively protect children from harm, adults from potential false allegations, and a willingness to report all suspected incidents to child protection or law enforcement authorities.


Apathy is your greatest obstacle. The faith-based community is hesitant to acknowledge that child abuse is a problem. As Christians we believe that “God will protect our children from harm.” Parents and the community believe the church is a safe place where their children and youth will be properly protected from harm. These thoughts only exacerbate this challenge.

Congregations must be willing to break the silence and acknowledge that child abuse does occur within the Seventh-day Adventist Church and in our families. This recognition can only be achieved if the congregation is willing to talk about the issue of child abuse publically and take proactive measures to create awareness within all aspects of ministry to the congregation and community.

Conduct a special “**enditnow**” Sabbath to create awareness for your congregation. The General Conference and North American Division have designated the fourth Sabbath in August to focus attention on the topic of abuse in all its forms—against children, domestic violence, elder abuse, and spousal abuse. Numerous materials are produced to help develop your emphasis on the value God places on human dignity and the right treatment of all His children. Visit these websites for helpful resources about abuse prevention: [www.enditnownorthamerica.org](http://www.enditnownorthamerica.org), [www.adventistrisk.org](http://www.adventistrisk.org).

### **Establishing a Child Protection Policy**

All Adventist churches should establish a Child Protection Policy for the congregation. This policy should be approved by the local church board. This will send a strong message to all ministry staff and volunteers to make them aware of the policies and procedures that will be required of them as they work with children and youth. Key resources to help develop a specific policy for your church are available under child protection at [www.adventistrisk.org](http://www.adventistrisk.org):

- *2010 Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* – Child protection statements
  - *North American Division Working Policy* (FB 20) – Child Protection & Volunteer Screening policy
  - Two sample Child Protection Plan Models (Word documents)\*
  - Protecting our Children – (Powerpoint)\*
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- “enditnow: Understanding and Preventing Child Abuse in the Adventist Church” – Loma Linda Health video

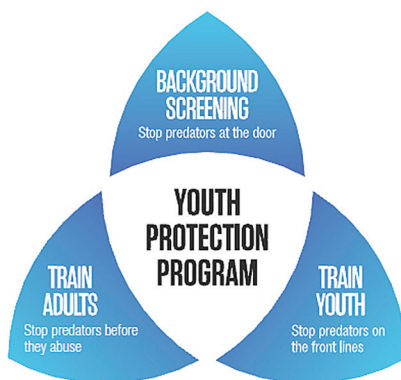
*\*Each of these documents can be edited for your congregation's particular needs.*

During his ministry, Jesus obviously valued children. Establishing a proactive child protection program also provides a strong message to parents and the community that your church values the safety of children in keeping with the biblical counsel, “Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 18:5-6, NKJV).

## 2. Training Staff and Volunteers

Proactive child protection requires training and a team effort among pastoral staff, ministry volunteers, and parents. This includes careful selection of individuals who work with children and youth, appropriate screening, training in expected conduct, and understanding of child abuse reporting laws.

### Proactive Gatekeeper




### Staff & Volunteer Training and Supervision

The careful selection and training of all adults (employed staff and volunteers) must be a critical part of all child protection programs. Finding qualified volunteers is a challenge to all congregations.

However, churches must avoid the risk of rushing new individuals into positions of trust and ministry leadership that involve children and youth. A key component is the use of the **Six-Month Rule**, which means an individual should be a person known to the congregation a minimum of six months before they are asked or elected to serve in a ministry involving children or youth at your church. This allows the pastor(s) and elected ministry leaders the opportunity to become acquainted with this new person and to observe how they interact with children, parents, and the congregation before they are given a position of trust. It also gives the interested volunteer the opportunity to learn the ministry's mission, culture, and expected code of conduct when working with children or youth.

Adventist congregations are comprised of members from all areas of the world, from all walks of life. In today's changing society it is dangerous to automatically assume that every adult understands how to appropriately interact with children and youth. Embracing the NAD Code of Conduct and conducting a careful annual review of the document with all ministry staff and volunteers will greatly help to align expectations with actual practice. When adults understand what is expected of them while conducting themselves in work with children and youth in Sabbath School, Adventurers, Pathfinders, Youth ministries, etc., the potential for allegations of inappropriate conduct can be greatly minimized. Adults also need to understand how to appropriately affirm and, when necessary, discipline children in the proper manner. This type of education requires time and effort on the part of the pastor(s) and ministry leaders so everyone has a clear understanding of the expectations and their responsibilities.

Training in the awareness and prevention of child abuse should also extend to children and teenagers on an age-appropriate basis. Ministry leaders should involve parents in these discussions





so children will understand appropriate personal conduct during church-sponsored ministries. They need to understand the church has a no-tolerance policy toward bullying, hazing, and inappropriate relationships. Awareness training will help instill confidence in the child, making sure they understand that they can safely report inappropriate behavior to a trusted adult at any time.

Ministry leaders should review the elements of the child protection plan with all staff members and volunteers on an annual basis. Key resources to help develop a training program for your church are under child protection at [www.adventistrisk.org](http://www.adventistrisk.org):

- North American Division Working Policy (FB 25) – Youth & Children’s Ministry Volunteer Code of Conduct
- *Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Within Youth Serving Organizations* (Handbook in PDF) – United States Department of Health & Human Services - CDC
- “Predator at the Door” – Adventist Risk Management awareness video

### 3. Watchful Supervision

Churches are a place of trust in the community. Parents send their children to enjoy Christ-centered Adventurers, Pathfinders, Sabbath School and youth ministry programs. There must always be an appropriate level of watchful adult supervision during all ministries involving children or teenagers.

During the past five years there has been an alarming rise in the number of incidents of child-on-child abuse. These incidents can involve children of similar age, teenagers abusing younger children, or inappropriate teenage relations. It is the duty of pastors, adult staff, and volunteers to make sure there is an appropriate level of adult supervision during all church-sponsored activities/ministries. When incidents of child-on-child abuse occur, your church and conference can be held liable for the actions of these children and/or teenagers due to negligent supervision on the part of the church.

There should always be a minimum of two adults supervising all children or youth activities. The amount of adult supervision will need to be adjusted according to the age level, number and type of activity being supervised. When transporting children

or youth, there should always be two adults in each vehicle. The driver's responsibility must be focused on the highway and traffic conditions. They cannot safely drive and provide vehicle supervision at the same time. If older teenagers are used as volunteers to help care for younger children they, too, must be trained in appropriate, expected conduct and how to affirm or discipline children under their care. However, these empowered teens must still be under the supervision of an adult staff member.

Well-trained adult supervision will greatly minimize the risk of inappropriate conduct during children and youth ministries. It will also minimize the potential of false accusations being brought against an adult staff member or volunteer.

Adults supervising children and teens must be constantly vigilant for signs of inappropriate behavior by other adults. When there is a breach of the code of conduct, this should be addressed immediately by the ministry's leader to protect the child and ministry. It is important to remind adult staff members on how to properly interact with children. Take note if a staff member is over-friendly or establishes a special relationship with a child that includes direct contact outside the ministry. Listen for indications from a child that they are uncomfortable, confused, or fearful. These may be indications that the child is reaching out for help. Remember, children seldom lie when they are caught in an abusive situation and the overall rate of false allegations is less than ten percent.

The apostle Peter reminds us of our duty: "Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you" (1 Peter 5:2, NLT).



## 12 Elements of Effective Supervision

- Always have a minimum of two adults supervising children and youth at all times.
- Have a record of the names and numbers of all children or youth participating in the ministry event and how to best contact parents or guardians in the event of an emergency.
- Have vision panels or windows which allow easy sight into all classrooms and office areas.
- Adults must be fully engaged in the responsibility of supervision and watchfulness at all times.
- Do not allow distractions (e.g. phone or personal conversations, texting, computer or tablet use) during assigned supervisory responsibilities.
- Keep track of the whereabouts of all children and youth throughout the event facilities.
- Be especially vigilant of time spent and the number of children or youth in restroom areas.
- Make sure areas not being used in the facility are properly locked, limiting access by unauthorized individuals.
- Make sure all exterior areas are properly illuminated during nighttime activities.
- Have roving adult supervision monitoring the facility and parking lot areas during the event.
- Never be alone with a child (if possible). In the event you are the last adult left with a child, call the parent or child's guardian. If they cannot be reached, call another trusted adult to notify them of your situation, the steps you are taking to contact the parents, and ask if they could return to assist.

#### 4. Proactive Gatekeeping

Implementing a child protection plan sends a loud and clear message that your church is placing the safety of children FIRST! Establishing a careful selection process for volunteers and knowing the whereabouts of your children between check-in/dismissal procedures will discourage those who may seek to harm a child.

Forty-one percent of Christian churches in North America conduct no child abuse prevention training, according to a recent survey of church administrators by *Christianity Today*. What type of message does this send to parents and the local community? Having a proactive child protection plan sends a message loud and clear that the Seventh-day Adventist Church and your congregation believes in the importance of keeping children safe. Beyond training and proper supervision, three additional steps can help guard access to ministries from individuals who may have a propensity to harm children:

- Personal reference screening
- Criminal background checks
- Required orientation and training of all new volunteers

Although the vast majority of volunteers who freely give of their time and talents will not have a criminal record, conducting personal reference and criminal background screening sends a strong message: This church believes in protecting its children. This is a best practice followed by most faith-based and youth-serving organizations.

As a pastor, you must be aware of the child protection and background screening practices being used in your conference. Many conferences in the United States are using Shield the Vulnerable for online registration, child abuse prevention education, and criminal background screening, as recommended



by the North America Division (to learn more about the Shield the Vulnerable program visit [www.shieldthevulnerable.org](http://www.shieldthevulnerable.org)). Some conferences use other service providers for their criminal background screening. Please check with your conference administration and support the use of these child safety resources in your congregation.

It is a fact that adult predators are seeking easy, unrestricted access into organizations where they can harm children. When they learn that your church has a strong child protection program that includes these elements of gatekeeping, they often will move on to find an easier target in the community.

## 5. Courage to Stand

When allegations of child abuse arise there must be an immediate willingness to address the situation and promptly report the incident to law enforcement authorities. Pastors must understand their legal duty to report incidents of abuse. Ultimately, having the courage to do the right thing is in the best interest of protecting a child or teenager from further harm, which translates into helping to protect the mission of the church.

As a Seventh-day Adventist pastor in most jurisdictions you are considered a “mandated reporter,” which requires you notify the appropriate law enforcement or child protection agency whenever you have a “reasonable suspicion” that a minor-aged child is being abused. These laws are applicable whether or not the act of abuse occurred during a church activity or not.

It is imperative as a pastor that you know and understand the child abuse reporting laws in your state, province or country. It is not your responsibility to “investigate” the alleged incident. Your duty is to report suspected cases and leave the investigation to child protection agencies and law enforcement. Ignorance of the law is not an excuse for failure to report. In 18 states, the law requires “any person” who suspects a child is being abused to report it to their local child protection agency. To learn the law in your conference or jurisdiction, you should build a relationship with your local child protection agency. In the United States, you can obtain more information at: [https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/manda.cfm](https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/manda.cfm).

Shield the Vulnerable will also provide direction and guidance on reporting requirements on a state-specific basis.


Whether you are a mandated reporter or not, everyone has the responsibility to protect children from the harm of abuse. Voluntary reporters, although they are not required by law to report, may do so as an ethically concerned citizen. Individuals (both mandatory and voluntary reporters) who in good faith report suspected incidents of a child being abused can do so under the protection of immunity from civil or criminal liability.

### **Holistic Focus**

Solely focusing on children in your child protection plan will not address all the challenges facing your church. By using a holistic focus, which encompasses protecting both children and adults, you will help keep the ministries within your congregation wholesome, safe, and vibrant. This must be the goal of all child protection programs.

### **Breaking the Silence**

What is the church's mission in providing ministry for children and youth? Is it not to provide opportunities for young people to discover the love of Jesus as they build relationships with Him and others throughout their young lives? As a pastor, to stand silently by when you have reason to believe a child or teenager is trapped in an abusive situation is a breach of your calling to be a shepherd of the flock of Christ. We must have the courage to stand for the right, no matter how horrific the situation may be or whom is involved. When child abuse occurs in a faith-based community, it often is one of the respected adult leaders who is accused of the inappropriate conduct. Should you just look the other way or hope that no one will find out the truth of what has occurred? The law says you cannot and our moral duty to protect God's children from harm must always be our first and highest duty. Consider these words in light of the biblical counsel from Matthew 18.



“Criminal acts against children—especially during church-sponsored activities—can destroy a child’s confidence about the church and, usually, about the God of the church. What wrath must justly await those who perpetrate such actions and those who protect the perpetrators? Christ and His message awaken confidence and trust. How dare any human organization compromise that childlike faith through lack of vigilance?”

—Dan Solis, “Discipling Children,” *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* (Jan. 22, 2014)

As a shepherd, ask yourself: What is my church doing not only to nurture the children and youth in our congregation but to make sure they are protected in every way possible? This is your calling and mission. May the Lord give you strength, courage, and wisdom as you provide spiritual leadership to your congregation in providing safe Christ-centered ministries for children and youth.

### Helpful Child Protection Resources

- Adventist Risk Management, Inc. – [www.adventistrisk.org](http://www.adventistrisk.org)
- North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists – [enditnownorthamerica.org](http://enditnownorthamerica.org)
- The Seven Campaign (ARM) – [www.thesevencampaign.com](http://www.thesevencampaign.com)
- Shield the Vulnerable – [www.shieldthevulnerable.org](http://www.shieldthevulnerable.org)
- Canadian Center for Child Protection – [www.protectchildren.ca](http://www.protectchildren.ca)
- What is Child Abuse (Bermuda Police) – [www.police.bm/content/what-child-abuse](http://www.police.bm/content/what-child-abuse)
- Child Welfare Information Gateway – U.S. Department of Health & Human Services [www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/programs/types/sexualabuse.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/programs/types/sexualabuse.cfm)
- Child Help USA – [www.childhelp.org](http://www.childhelp.org)
- FaithTrust Institute – [www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org)
- Nonprofit Risk Management Center – [www.nonprofitrisk.org](http://www.nonprofitrisk.org)
- Prevent Child Abuse, America – [www.preventchildabuse.org](http://www.preventchildabuse.org)
- Public Health Agency of Canada – [www.publichealth.gc.ca](http://www.publichealth.gc.ca)
- Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church (Christianity Today) [www.reducingtherisk.com](http://www.reducingtherisk.com)

Child abuse remains an issue we cannot ignore. It may be surprising that these horrific situations occur in what should be the safest of environments, but we mustn't let that cause us to drop our guard.

As each pastor knows, it is their duty to "protect the flock." This protection involves becoming acquainted with and updated regarding current child protection policies and resources.

This resource guide outlines the 5 key elements of an effective Child Protection Plan, seeking to safeguard each church and its ministries from the irreversible damage of child abuse. Implementing these elements will minimize the risk of inappropriate conduct and help identify warning signs of abusive behavior.

Above all, we as a Church are united in an effort to answer Jesus' call to "let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:14).



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