

Youth Protection

PROTECTING CHILDREN

The youth Worker's Role

Child abuse is an increasingly serious, widespread problem in society, affecting every ethnic group, socioeconomic level, and geographic area. The significance of this problem is revealed by the nearly 3 million cases of child abuse reported each year in the United States. Scottville Christian Church has developed Youth Protection training to prepare its leadership to help children who have been, or are being, abused.

The training program includes information for parents as well children to show what they should do to prevent sexual abuse from happening to them. In addition, Scottville Christian Church has adopted a comprehensive set of policies and procedures to help ensure our ministry to children is safe for all participants.

As a Youth Leader, you can help make the world safer for children in at least three ways:

1. Increase your knowledge about child abuse so that you will be in a better position to help protect the children in your life—your own sons and daughters, and children in your neighborhood, church, and community.
2. Help others learn the steps that help them to protect themselves. You can have a direct effect on the children in our ministry by helping them learn ways to protect themselves.
3. Implement the Youth Protection Policies and Procedures of Scottville Christian Church within your ministry area. By implementing these safety policies, you will help Scottville Christian Church to be a safe environment for children.

Scottville Christian Church will not tolerate any form of child abuse in its program and will take all necessary steps to protect our children, including law enforcement.

WHAT IS CHLD ABUSE?

Definitions of what constitutes child abuse vary, and state laws give the specific definition of child abuse for that state. (State definitions also establish the ages of children covered—generally those younger

than 18 years of age.) A common definition of child abuse might be “The physical or mental injury, sexual abuse or exploitation, negligent treatment, or maltreatment of a child that can cause injury or psychological damage.”

Four Types of Child Abuse

- Neglect
- Emotional Abuse
- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse

1. Neglect occurs when a caretaker fails to provide for a child's basic needs regarding, for instance, nutrition, nurturing, safety, education, and medical care.
2. Emotional abuse can include blaming, belittling, or rejecting a child; consistently treating brothers and sisters unequally; and a persistent lack of concern by a caretaker for a child's welfare.
3. Physical abuse is non-accidental injury caused by punching, beating, kicking, biting, burning, or otherwise harming a child. The injury might not have been intentional, but it was not accidental. An example of physical abuse is an injury caused by inappropriate discipline.
4. Sexual abuse occurs when the child is forced, manipulated, or tricked into sexual contact. Obscene telephone calls, fondling, intercourse, anal or oral sex, prostitution, and pornography to reduce a child's resistance to sexual abuse. Showing pornography in any form to a child or permitting a child to have access to pornography is abusive. There are no legitimate reasons to show children, or allow children to be shown, pornography. Most experts believe that sexual abuse is the most underreported form of abuse.

Often, when a child is abused or neglected, he or she might suffer from more than one kind of abuse; for example, a child who is being physically or sexually abused nearly always suffers from emotional abuse.

INDICATORS OF CHILD ABUSE

As a Youth Leader, you should be familiar with some of the indicators of child abuse. But also keep in mind that these indicators could have other meanings. If you detect these signs in a child, you should contact Brian IMMEDIATELY. You should not try to investigate yourself, but you must ensure that your suspicion is reported to the appropriate authorities.

Every child reacts to abuse differently. Some abused children show no signs of the abuse. Other children show only slight behavioral indications that they have been abused; some will have extreme reactions.

The following are some of the clues that a child might have been abused.

Indicators of Neglect and Emotional Abuse

Neglect and emotional abuse are the most difficult kinds of child maltreatment to detect. The clues are vague and uncertain. Neglected children might come to church inappropriately dressed, lacking in personal hygiene, or consistently hungry. Neglected or emotionally abused children might lag behind their peers in physical development and might demonstrate inappropriate behavior, such as rocking or thumb sucking. They might also show signs of childhood stress.

Childhood Stress

Growing up is a stressful process. New experiences are to some degree stressful. When unfortunate situations in a child's life exist, such as family turmoil or divorce, school problems, or even the death of a beloved pet, the stress can cause the child's behavior to change. Child abuse and neglect are clearly causes of stress that can also lead to changes in behavior. The following behaviors can indicate harmful levels of stress in a child's life:

- Bed-wetting
- Crying for no apparent reason
- Immature or regressive behavior
- Clinging behavior
- Aggressive behavior
- Withdrawal
- Substance abuse
- Inability to concentrate
- Unexplained aches and pains
- Running away
- Depression
- Talk of, or attempt at, committing suicide
- Sleep disturbances or nightmares
- Frequent illnesses

These signs could indicate stress and could be due to many different problems, including child abuse or neglect. If any of these behaviors is present for a prolonged period of time, you have reason to be concerned. You may express your concern to the child and offer your assistance.

Indicators of Physical Abuse

Most children accumulate their share of childhood cuts, scrapes, and bruises. The injuries caused by abuse are not the same as this normal "wear and tear." Indicators of physical abuse include unusual bruises, burns, broken bones, lacerations, and abrasions. The child might also exhibit signs of general childhood stress after the injuries of physical abuse heal.

Bruises. A physically abused child might have bruises on his or her abdomen or back—areas of the body not usually bruised during normal childhood activities. In cases of repeated abuse, the bruises might be different colors, indicating the stages of healing. Bruises might have distinctive shapes, indicating weapons used to attack a child.

Burns. An abused child might have unusual burns, such as cigarette or cigar burns on the soles of the feet, palms or the hands, the back, or the genital area.

Broken bones. Unexplained fractures are cause for concern. A child with multiple fractures in various stages of healing is almost certainly a victim of physical abuse. Other signs include swollen or tender arms and legs caused by forceful jerking of the arms.

Lacerations and abrasions. Normal play injuries generally affect the shins, knees, palms, and elbows. Lacerations and abrasions on the abdomen, back, backs of arms and legs, or genitalia are strong indicators of physical abuse. Human bite marks, especially if recurrent and appearing to be adult-sized, are also strong indicators of physical abuse.

Indicators of Sexual Abuse

Physical evidence of sexual abuse, if present at all, tends to be temporary. Such signs include difficulty in walking or sitting; torn, stained, or bloody underwear; pain or itching in the genital area; bruises or bleeding of the genitalia; and the presence of sexually transmitted diseases.

Behavior indicators can be present for a longer period of time and could be more apparent. Here are some specific behaviors that might be associated with sexual abuse:

- Age-inappropriate understanding of sex
- Reluctance to be left alone with a particular person
- Persistent and inappropriate sex play with peers or toys
- Wearing lots of clothing, especially to bed
- Drawings of genitalia
- Fear of touch
- Abuse of animals
- Masturbation in public
- Nightmares or night terrors
- Apprehension when the subject of sexual abuse is brought up
- Cross-dressing
- Prostitution

WHO ARE THE CHILD ABUSERS?

Child abusers tend to defy any kind of consistent profile that would enable their easy identification; however, some factors are associated with certain kinds of abuse.

Neglect. *Drug and alcohol abuse* by parents or caregivers is increasingly common in cases of child neglect. Other factors include *ignorance of children's needs and inadequate parenting practices*. The effects of poverty should not be confused with the neglect of children.

Emotional Abuse. Caregivers who emotionally abuse children often use inappropriate disciplinary techniques. They might have such overwhelming emotional needs of their own that they cannot cope with the needs of children in their care. Emotional abuse can be deeply rooted in a family's history of successive generations being subjected to the same kinds of parenting practices.

Physical Abuse. Adults who inflict physical injury to children tend to have low self-esteem. They might be experiencing stress when the child does something that triggers physical violence. Physical abuse also occurs when spanking or other physical punishment becomes extreme or exaggerated. Some children might be targeting children, perhaps children with disabilities, whose care becomes difficult and causes the caregiver to lash out in frustration.

Sexual Abuse. Individuals who sexually abuse children are called child molesters. Some common misconceptions about child molesters are that they are

“dirty old men” or “strangers.” A child molester could be anyone. Most are very ordinary in outward appearance. The fact that a child molester can occupy a position of respect in the community and is usually someone the victim knows—and is often someone close to the victim's family—makes it difficult to accept the idea that he or she could be a molester.

Most child molesters are male; however, females commit approximately 10 percent of sexual molestation. Children who report that they have been molested by a woman need to have the same attention given to their report as would be given if the alleged molester were a man.

Children also are known to molest other children. About 30 percent of sexual molestation is committed by adolescents on other children. Often, the significance of this abuse is minimized. Any time children are involved in sexual activity in which there is an unequal distribution of power, or in which force is involved, that activity must be viewed as potentially serious. It should be reported so that the molesting child can receive help, too.

RESPONDING TO AN ABUSED CHILD

Considering the prevalence of child abuse and the increase in children's awareness of abuse—especially sexual abuse—you might someday have a child tell you that someone has molested him or her. If this happens, it means that the child feels that you are a special individual—someone he or she trusts. The following guidelines should help you know how to respond:

1. **Do not panic or overreact** to the information the child discloses.
2. **Do not criticize** the child.
3. **Do respect the child's privacy.** Take the child to a private place away from other children (but within sight of others). Reassure the child that you are concerned about what has happened to him or her and that you would like to get him some help. You might want to ask him or her where he has talked with his parents about the abuse—if his parents are not the alleged abusers.
4. **Do not promise to keep his secret** because you will have to make a report to the Youth Minister, as well as to child protective services, and law enforcement authorities.
5. **Do encourage the child to tell the appropriate authorities.** Let him know that you understand he is not to blame for what

happened. You should not keep secrets that hurt him and that it is OK to talk with appropriate adults—they will not blame him for what happened.

6. **Do keep the disclosure of abuse strictly confidential**, telling only the Youth Minister and child protection authorities. Take your guidance from them. Discussing allegations of child abuse with others can damage the reputations of innocent people.
7. **Do listen to the child**, but avoid questioning him about what happened. Interviewing the child is best left to professionals who are trained in investigating allegations of abuse and determining what crimes, if any, have occurred.

Any time you suspect child abuse in our ministry, you are required to inform the Youth Minister.

SCC YOUTH PROTECTION POLICIES

Scottsville Christian Church Youth Protection Policies are based on strengthening the principles of Christian Living and avoiding situations that could lead to abuse.

Adherence to SCC Youth Protection policies not only strengthens the protection of our children, but also ensures that the basic values of a biblical witness are preserved.

Creating Barriers to Abuse

After selection of the best possible leaders, additional protection for children is built into the program. SCC has adopted the following policies to provide security for youth in our care. The policies also provide protection for adult leaders against false allegations of abuse.

Two-Deep Leadership. Two registered adult leaders or one registered adult leader and a parent of a participant, one of who must be 21 year of age, are required on all trips and outings.

No One-on-One Contact. One-on-one contact between adults and youth members is not permitted in any situation that requires a personal conference. The meeting should take place in view of other adults and youths.

Respect of Privacy. Adult leaders must respect the privacy of youth members in situations such as changing clothes or taking showers at camp. Adults should intrude only to the extent that health and safety require. They should also protect their own privacy in similar situations.

Proper Preparation for Activities. All activities should consider the capabilities of the participating children. No activity should be undertaken without the proper preparation, equipment, clothing, supervision, and safety measures.

Appropriate Attire. Proper clothing for activities is required.

Constructive Discipline. Discipline should be constructive and reflect Christian values. Corporal punishment is never permitted.

Hazing Prohibited. Physical hazing and initiations are prohibited and may not be included as part of any SCC activity.

TRAINING LEADERS IN YOUTH PROTECTION

Youth Protection training is a part of every Youth leader's basic training program. This training introduces the material contained in this Youth Protection and reviews the Youth Protection policies of Scottsville Christian Church. The basic training also provides an overall essential orientation to SCC Youth/Children's Ministry.

All current and prospective Youth Workers are required to participate in annual Youth Protection training.