



Safe Sanctuaries

Reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in our congregations

Marlene Harder Bogard
WDC Minister of Christian Nurture



What's Appropriate in Sunday School?

- The 4th grade teachers hold a picnic a for their class at the city park.
- A male teacher of 5th grade boys invites two students to go to a movie.
- A teacher offers a blessing to each student by placing her hands on the child's shoulder.



What's appropriate?

- The high school youth group offers free childcare for parents night out. Present are: one adult sponsor, four youth and 15 children age 1-8.
- Your education committee accepts all offers of anyone who is willing to teach.
- A teacher invites one child/ youth over to his/her home for cookie-baking.



What's appropriate?

- As children leave classroom, a teacher waits by door to give each child a hug.
- A teacher holds class at his/her home on the spur of the moment. Parents have no advance notice.
- During a 6th grade party, all lights are turned off, and everyone plays hide/seek in the church.



Let's begin with stories

- What's going on upstream?
- I'm sorry that I know some things...
- Jesus speaks and acts in Matthew 18: 1-7.



Child Protection – the Foundation of Ministry to Children and Youth

A Video Clip from Reducingtherisk.com



Our Mandate as Christians

- In order for us to fully extend a welcome to children, our churches must be places of refuge and safety.
- The act of providing a nurturing place for children is an act that reflects the way we also welcome Jesus .

(Mt. 18:5)



Why is the Church at Risk?

- Churches behave as relatively trusting organizations.
- We need volunteers!
- We emphasize forgiveness and reconciliation.
- We avoid conflict.
- We fear negative exposure.



Sexual Abuse in Faith Communities: an Expert Roundtable

A video clip from Reducingtherisk.com



Why is the Church at Risk?

- We may have a discomfort or confusion when it comes to discussing sexuality.
- We are notoriously inactive when it comes to screening volunteers - few safeguards.
- Churches routinely provide opportunities for close contact and intimate personal relationships.
- We often lack sufficient training on personal boundaries.



All of these factors add up to one theme of why the church is at risk . . .

Easy Access!



Making Our Churches Safer

- ***Decrease*** Isolation and Secrecy.
- ***Increase*** Supervision and Accountability.
- All activities should be ***Observable*** and ***Interruptible***.
- Provide education on personal, emotional and physical ***Boundaries***.
- Provide education on appropriate ***Touch***.
- *Your prevention policies should reflect all of the above.*



It Can Happen

- Boys who will be sexually exploited by age 18: 1 in 10.
- Girls who will be sexually exploited by age 18: 1 in 5.
- Boys who knew their attacker: 60%.
- Girls who knew their attacker: 80%.
- Registered sex offenders in US: 500,000.
- Registered sex offenders in Marion County: 12, in Harvey County: 45.



It Can Happen

- Single mothers are particularly vulnerable to the designs of a pedophile.
- Children with disabilities are 4-10 times more vulnerable to sexual abuse.
- 2 out of 3 molesters who are caught will abuse again in the future.
- Typical pedophile abuser will molest 117 children.



It Can Happen

- 1 out of 5 molesters begins their activity before age 18.
- The biggest users of on-line pornography are those from 11-17 years of age.
- 77 % of all sexual assault victims are 11 years old or younger.
- 1 out of 5 sexual misconduct cases are committed by minors.



It Can Happen

- An estimated 60 million sexual abuse survivors are in the U.S. today.....and in our churches.
- The highest risks involve situations with male workers and overnight activities.
- Another danger zone is where older youth are given full supervision of younger children, such as in VBS, church nursery.



Remember...

- Our goal is not to create paranoia or unhealthy suspicions, but to raise awareness of risks and demonstrate a high standard of care.
- Whatever we do to protect the “least of these,” we are also protecting ourselves against false allegations.



A Victim's Story

A Video Clip from ReducingtheRisk.com



Remember...

- The most important thing congregations can do is to create an environment of clear communication, high behavioral expectations through education and prevention training.



Basic Procedures for Safe Ministry with Children & Youth

- The Two-Adult Rule
- First Aid / CPR Training
- Annual Orientation for Workers
- The Five Years Older Rule



Basic Procedures for Safe Ministry with Children & Youth

- No Workers Under Age 18
- Windows in all Classrooms & Office Doors
- Open-Door Counseling
- Six-Month Threshold
- Advance Notice to Parents



Basic Procedures for Safe Ministry with Children & Youth

- Participation Covenant
- Parent & Family Education
- Appropriate Equipment & Supervision
- Implement Formal Screening
- Adequate Insurance for the scope of your ministries



Especially for youth workers to *stay above reproach*

- The “opposite sex” rule.
- The “more time” rule.
- The “no confidentiality” rule.
- The “transparency” rule.
- The “no porn” rule.
- The “no fear” rule.
 - See buildingchurchleaders.com



Good, Bad and Confusing Touch

- When you touch a child – what are you trying to express? What are your intentions?
- What might be going on in the life of the child that you will be touching?
- (Some things we know, some things we do not know....)
- How might these things impact how a child receives your touch?



Good, Bad and Confusing Touch

- The receiver's experience of touch is influenced by all the things stirring around in their minds.
- Good touch: makes receiver feel affirmed, received as warm, nurturing, caring, supportive.



Good, Bad and Confusing Touch

- Bad touch: makes receiver feel bad about herself/himself; received as painful, manipulative, coercive, abusive, frightening.
- Confusing touch: makes receiver feel uneasy, confused, unsure. Will have conflicting feelings about touch or person doing the touching.



Good, Bad and Confusing Touch

- Whether a touch is good, bad or confusing is determined by how the receiver experiences, NOT by the intentions of the person doing the touching.
- The message is entirely dependent on how the receiver perceives the touch and the toucher's intentions are irrelevant.



The Element of Choice

- Does the receiver have a choice in the matter of whether or not to be touched?
- Touch that is not freely chosen is likely to be experienced as “bad” or “confusing” touch.

Good, Bad and Confusing Touch materials from FaithTrust Abuse Prevention, c1992.