

# Church Safety and Security Series — CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

This Church Safety and Security series focuses on practical information and tools that will help local church leaders and servant volunteers to keep the children in their care safe and secure.

## The Facts

**Fact #1:** The almost 90,000 cases of child sexual abuse reported each year fall far short of the actual number.

**Fact #2:** An estimated 25% of girls and 16% of boys experience sexual abuse before they turn 18 years old. Children are most vulnerable to sexual abuse between the ages of 7 and 13.

**Fact #3:** Of all victims of sexual assault reported to law enforcement agencies 67% were under the age of 18; 34% were under the age of 12; and 14% were under the age of 6. Of offenders who victimized children under the age of 6, 40% were under the age of 18.

**Fact #4:** Despite what children are taught about “stranger danger”, most child victims are abused by someone they know and trust.

## Terms to Know

**Abuse** is defined as any action designed to control, intimidate, threaten or injure another person.

**Physical abuse** is any kind of actions that cause physical injury, leave marks, or cause pain.

**Child Sexual Abuse** that is sexual in nature involves the participation of a sexual act with a minor and is exploitative in nature.

**Psychological or Emotional Child Abuse** is any verbal or emotional debasement that is directed towards a minor or a child and will impede the child from maximizing his or her potential and wellbeing.

**Child Neglect** occurs when a minor does not have adequate food, housing, clothes, medical care, or supervision.

## Warning Signs

### GENERAL

- ◆ Seems distracted or distant
- ◆ Has a sudden change in eating habits/refuses to eat or appetite drastically increases
- ◆ Sudden mood swings
- ◆ Leaves “clues” that seem likely to provoke a discussion about sexual issues
- ◆ Writes, draws, plays, or dreams of sexual or frightening images
- ◆ Refuses to talk about a secret shared with an adult or older child
- ◆ Talks about a new older friend
- ◆ Suddenly has money, toys or other gifts without reason

### YOUNGER CHILDREN

- ◆ Has new words for private body parts
- ◆ Asks other children to behave sexually or play sexual games
- ◆ Mimics adult-like sexual behaviors with toys or stuffed animals
- ◆ Wetting and soiling accidents unrelated to toilet training

### TEENAGERS

- ◆ Self-injury
- ◆ Inadequate personal hygiene
- ◆ Running away from home
- ◆ Depression, anxiety
- ◆ Fear of intimacy or closeness
- ◆ Compulsive eating or dieting



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### Reporting Abuse

#### Who needs to report child sexual abuse incidents or allegations?

- ◆ The state considers those responsible for reporting as **MANDATORY REPORTS!** Mandatory reports are clergy members, including ordained or licensed leaders of any church or religious body, persons performing official duties on behalf of a church or religious body, or persons employed by a religious body to supervise, educate, coach, train, or counsel a child on a regular basis—this includes everyone working with kids.
- ◆ If you have suspicion that a child is being abused based on something you have witnessed or a child has told you, it is your responsibility to report it to the authorities. Reasonable suspicion means that you have witnessed physical or behavioral signs of maltreatment, either in a child or a parent/caregiver, or both.

#### Reporting Telephone numbers for all New England States:

**Massachusetts**  
(800) 792-5200

**New Hampshire**  
(603) 271-6562

**Maine**  
(800) 452-1999

**Vermont**  
(800) 649-5285

**Connecticut**  
(800) 842-2288

**Rhode Island**  
(800) 742-4453

### Strategies/Practices to Prevent Abuse

**Two Adult Rule** requires that there must always be two non-related adults present when supervising one or more children or youth. This will ensure that we are taking every precaution to take care of the kids as well as protect the adults.

**6-Month Rule** would make sure that no one is allowed to serve in children or youth ministry until they have been a member for at least 6 months or an active attender for at least one year.

**Background Checks** for all leaders and volunteers working with children and youth is a must. These background checks do a national database search of over 2.5 billion criminal and sex offender records. Background checks should be done regularly—at least every two or three years.

### Important Actions

#### Awareness ✦ Education ✦ Relationships

**Awareness** reminds us to pay attention to changes in the children, their family and our surroundings.

**Education** gives us important understanding about this growing and disturbing area of risk for our children and youth.

**Relationships** are the key to our connection with children and their families and we need to leverage relationships to give us the opportunity to share the love of Christ.



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