

Child Safety Comes First

Protecting the kids in your church

[MARK ENTZMINGER](#) ON SEPTEMBER 4, 2019

As a children's ministry leader, you need to consider four anchors to keep your ministry stable for the long haul. If these are not attended to properly there is a risk that long-term effectiveness will be severely hindered.

In today's world a children's ministry must be:

- Safe (free from danger, predators and humiliation);
- Growth centered (understanding of physical, emotional and spiritual growth nuances in children);
- Team oriented (partnering appropriately with the home, leaders in the church, and other age-based ministries);
- Fun (if kids want to come to church on Sunday morning, things are less stressful for everyone).

As important as all four of these anchors are, none will short circuit the ministry effectiveness more severely than a poorly established safety plan.

If your church misses on the anchors of growth, team and fun, recovery is not too hard to accomplish. But a poorly designed or implemented safety plan can not only damage the church's reputation in the community but, more importantly, it can also damage the heart and spirit of a child for a lifetime.

When it comes to child safety, no church family wants to encounter a situation that makes them wish they had been better prepared.

If you are thinking about an audit of your safety procedures, consider some of the more common items that are important for churches:

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- Devising a plan of emergency evacuations for fires and natural disasters
- Preparing for an active shooter situation
- Creating well-child policies
- Handling of discipline
- Protecting from bullying and harassment
- Addressing dietary and food allergy challenges
- Providing transportation
- Establishing check-in/check-out procedures

Although all of these are very important considerations, none is more essential than having a board-reviewed, approved, and accountable plan for mitigating the endangerment of minors from the risk of sexual abuse. The Assemblies of God legal counselor released an update to the [Checklist to Prevent Child Molestation](#) in the summer of 2019 that should serve as the foundation for this priority in every church.

To be clear, the protection of minors is more important than event registrations, fun new themes, agendas for training, building programs, and new carpet colors in the lobby. Ensuring church policies, procedures, and training are in place is essential for the protection of minors and maintaining a good reputation in the community.

How to get started?

If you have a safety plan in place, determine when was it last reviewed and approved by the board. How does it stack up against the update to the [Checklist to Prevent Child Molestation](#)? If you don't have a plan, forward this article to your church leadership today, asking that they build a team to walk through the checklist and create the plan.

If the goal of the church is to avoid legal risk, minors who engage in your ministry may continue to be placed at risk. However, if church leadership is committed to the protection of minors, the legal entanglements will most likely be avoided as well.

Let's agree: Child safety must come first!