

Youth Director Resources...

REDUCING THE RISK

NON-NEGOTIABLES IN YOUTH & FAMILY MINISTRY

Information from the Association of Unity Churches Child/Teen week presentation, August 05.

What Is Risk Management?

Keeping children and adults safe with policies and procedures that reduce the possibility of loss, injury or dangers, thereby, reducing legal risk and liability exposure.

Why Is Risk Management Important?

Children deserve to be safe:

- Physically
- Mentally
- Emotionally
- Socially
- Spiritually

"Let the children come to me and do not hinder them for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs."

- Abuse and tragedy impact a child's life forever.
- It can impact the life of a church for years.

Components of Risk Management

Use common sense about where children meet and child-proof the rooms.

For the Overall Location:

- What space are you using for the children/teens?
- Does the size and layout of the room fit the size and needs of your youth?
- Are classrooms close to each other or strung out across the property?
- Are there two exits from every classroom space? (Count both doors and windows.)
- If in the basement, are there two exits to the first floor or a window that can serve as an exit? If on a second floor, are there two staircases or a fire ladder available?
- Are the rooms for children, infant through second grade, located on the ground floor for easier evacuation?
- Is there adequate ventilation? Cooling and heating?
- Do the appropriate people know where the circuit breakers and water cut-off are?
- Are bathrooms easily accessible? Are they fitted for children's use? (lower toilets, sinks, soap and paper dispensers, door handles, step stool to reach sink...
- If not do you have a plan for children to go to the bathroom during the hour? Are the bathrooms accessible to adults not involved in youth ministry?
- Is drinking water easily accessible?

For Each Classroom

- Are outside windows screened and in working order? When opened, can the window stay open or does it have to be propped open? Does it have a lock?
- If the room is higher than the first floor, do the outside windows of the rooms have a restraint to keep children from falling out? If windows are barred, is there a release mechanism from the inside?
- If room is lower than the first floor, are there outdoor windows that can be used as safety exits? What kind of covering do they have over them?
- If windows are non-operable is there adequate ventilation?
- Are there windows in the door or wall of the classroom that allow people to look into the room without entering?
- Are there locks on the doors to keep people in? Out?
- Are electrical outlets covered in rooms where there are young children?
- Are blind and curtain/drapery cords out of reach of young children?
- Are light switches clearly marked and accessible?
- Is the furniture appropriate for the age it serves, sturdy and in good condition?
- Are the rooms clean and attractive?
- Is the flooring clean and appropriate for the age level?
- Are the cleaning solutions appropriate and kept in safe spaces?
- Is there anything stored in the room that is harmful when ingested or comes in contact with skin or eyes?

Playground

- Who oversees the upkeep of this area? How often is it inspected?
- How often is it cleaned? Washed down?
- Where are the tools?
- Is the area fenced?
- Is there signage that can be easily viewed? Rules and procedures for use?
- Does your insurance adequately cover this?
- When is it in use? By whom?

Evacuation or Emergency Plans

- Do you have an evacuation plan in case of fire or other threat that would necessitate the immediate removal from the building?
- Are the exits clearly marked and accessible?
- Do you have a lock down or shelter-in-place emergency plan for severe weather, suspicious person or missing child?
- Are you prepared to handle other emergencies that may be specific to your location?
- Are these procedures written down, easily accessible, communicated and reviewed?
- Do you have a plan for medical emergencies?
- Do you have emergency kits/first aid kits available and easily accessible to those who would need it? Are fire extinguishers clearly marked and accessible?
- Is there a communication system connecting the children's spaces to adults? How are parents or adults notified in case of an emergency?

Keeping Track of Everyone

- Do you have a registration form for each child participating in your program?
- What are your check-in & check-out procedures?
- Do you have medical releases and permission slips for children/teens involved in activities?
- Do you have photo releases for everyone you take a picture of?
- Do you keep attendance sheets for a period of time?
- Do you have a check-in procedure for activities other than class?
- Who is responsible for the children before, during and after the service?
- If you are serving snacks are you familiar with all of the possible allergies and which children have them?
- How do you handle parents staying in the classroom with their child?
- Who is allowed to be in the Youth ministry classroom on Sunday or during the week?
- Do you have a Policy manual for your teachers and parents?

Transportation/Travel

- Does your insurance cover the children, sponsors or parents when they travel to, during and from a church event? In town? Out of town?
- Will the 2-person rule cover event travel in town? Out of town?
- Do you have travel packets for the drivers or accompanying adults? Be sure to include copies of medical insurance, medical releases, driver's license, etc...
- Have the adults filled out paperwork for this event?
- Will the church's insurance be primary or secondary to the individual's?
- Are seatbelts mandatory?
- Are you comfortable with stopping the vehicle until order/rules are restored?
- If a church member/parent is driving their own car and something happens, who pays?
- Does your insurance cover 15 passenger vans?
- If you rent a vehicle, do you need to take the extra insurance?
- Do you check the driver's license and insurance cards of each adult driving or accompanying?
- Do you have travel first aid kits?
- Do you have emergency kits for varying weather and driving conditions?

Other Insurance Considerations

- Do you know what your insurance covers, who it covers and when it covers?
 - o Everyone from the time they step on the property?
 - o When other groups use your church space?
- Do your outside groups carry their own insurance?
- Do the children attached to these groups come under your policy and procedures for safety?
- What about neighborhood children who use your grounds and equipment for play?
- Are candles allowed to be used in the building?

Staffing

- Who are you looking for? Teacher, guide, role model, mentor, self-disciplined
- Time factor: How long have they been coming to your church? Give them time to get to know the ministry and for you to get to know them.
- Recommended: One year for teen ministry, six months to one year for children's ministry.
- Do youth ministry volunteers need to be church members?
- Are they coming from another Unity? Call!

Selecting and Screening

- Do you have a job description for the positions?
- Do you have a written Application form?
- What are the steps volunteers must go through in order to volunteer in Youth ministry?
- Require and check references –
 - o At least three
 - o Letter, reference form, call
 - o Signed release of liability form
- Do a background check
 - o Not required but recommended to prove church was not negligent in selecting a youth worker.
 - o Criminal record checks only one piece of prevention.
 - o In the future it may be required because other agencies have made it a standard of practice.
- Recommendation
 - o Conduct criminal checks on all paid employees and any volunteer who has frequent, unsupervised access to children/teens.
- Interview
 - o Create behavior-based questions

Supervision

- What training does a volunteer go through before being allow to have their own classroom?
 - o Do you have a Code of ethics, code of conduct
 - o How often are your trainings and teacher's meetings?
- Supervising
 - o Two adult rule in each classroom
 - o Floating monitor
 - o Windows in doors or open doors
- Do they know the Risk Management policies and procedures?

Policies & Procedures

Do you know?

- Churches are not responsible for every injury but responsible for those injuries resulting from negligence.
- Churches have not been found liable for not having a policy but rather for not following one they did have.

Making Your Church Safe from Child Sexual Abuse

As risk increases, supervision should also increase. Risk increases as isolation increases.

Situations that require more supervision:

- Any activity that is located off of church property.
- Any activity on church property but at a different time and location.

Risk increases when there is an imbalance of power, authority, influence, and control between a potential abuser and a potential victim.

- Establish balance of power with multiply adults or with child to child, an age span of less than five years.
- Bathroom considerations: send two kids, ask parents to take them before, send approved adult
- Ministers: what about spiritual counseling, picking up children/teens, private mentoring, etc?

Four Critical Policies Are:

1. **Selecting & Screening Workers** (*See above*)

2. **Worker Supervision** (*See above*)

3. **State Reporting Obligations**

- What constitutes child abuse
- Persons legally responsible for reporting
- Length of time required to make a report
- Nature and content of report
- Agencies to be contacted
- Penalties for failing to report
- Protection from legal and civil litigation if report made in good faith

4. **Responding to Allegations**

- Understand the problem. Take the allegations seriously.
- Provide a caring response.
- Document the allegation (not an investigation but collecting information for reporting.)
- Seek professional assistance limited to need to know (insurance company, church attorney, denomination leader.)
- Provide support to the victim.
- Fulfill state reporting obligations.
- Decide on options regarding the alleged perpetrator.
- Respond to congregational concerns.
- Respond to media.
- Maintain strict confidentiality in all of the about communicating on a need to know basis.