



Church Leader Training  
**CREATING A SAFE  
CHURCH MINISTRY**



FAMILY LEADERSHIP  
INITIATIVE



# Welcome

One of the best ways to reduce the risk of sexual abuse in our congregations is to equip church staff, leaders, and members with an understanding and awareness of sexual abuse. This effort begins laying the groundwork to implement prevention policies and procedures that create safer church environments. This session adapts materials from the Christian Reformed Church Safe Church Ministry and Nazarene Guidelines.

- **Acknowledge the importance of overcoming silence and denial.** *Page 4*
- **Define sexual abuse.** *Page 5*
- **Explain the impacts for children and adults.** *Page 6*
- **Develop an awareness of abuse.** *Page 7*
- **Recognize predatory behaviors.** *Page 10*
- **Implement an abuse response policy.** *Page 13*





## Overcoming Silence and Denial

Your congregation is likely to include many people who have been impacted by sexual abuse. Ignoring or pretending a problem doesn't exist is certainly not a solution. Healing can never happen without first acknowledging the problem. By developing an understanding of abuse, you will not only keep your congregation safer but can also offer support to victims in the greater community.

### The Short Course on Sexual Abuse

- 1 Expect denial.**
- 2 Understand it's not about sex.**
- 3 Abuse usually doesn't "just happen."**
- 4 What is publicly known is typically just the tip of the iceberg.**
- 5 Chaos breaks out.**

# Defining Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is defined as any act of a sexual nature performed in a harmful and/or exploitive manner, as with a child or with a non-consenting adult, for the purpose of sexual gratification and/or for the purpose of gaining power and control.

## Touch

Inappropriate fondling, touching, and/or intercourse.

## Non-Touch

Sexual comments, pornography, and/or watching sexual activity.

This is just one of several varying definitions of sexual abuse. Often, legal definitions differ from state to state. But the key aspects to remember are:

- 1 **Sexual abuse is harmful and/or exploitive.**
- 2 **Sexual abuse is not consensual.**

## Understanding Consent

*Visual*

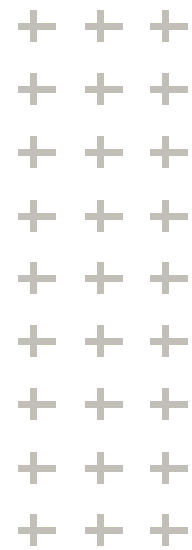


**Consent** implies an equal power balance in a relationship and a shared understanding of an action's meaning.



In the following relationships, one person has more authority and power than the other. This makes meaningful consent impossible.

**Adult > Child**  
**Teacher > Student**  
**Boss > Employee**  
**Doctor > Patient**  
**Pastor > Congregant**



# The Effects of Abuse

Chemicals are released into the brain during traumatic events that have various impacts over time and affect brain function, as well as brain structure (traumatology research). Experiencing trauma at a young age not only impacts brain development, but the negative effects on physical and emotional health can last a lifetime.

## Childhood Trauma

### CHILDHOOD BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

- Cognitive Delays**      Language development, intelligence, and/or trouble in school.
- Emotional Impairment**      Attachment disorders, inability to form relationships, and/or isolation.
- Spiritual Formation**      Inability to believe that God is good or that they are loved by God.

### LIFELONG EFFECTS

- Physical Health**      Obesity, gastrointestinal problems, headaches, and/or diabetes.
- Psychological Health**      Depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and/or addictive behaviors.
- Spiritual Impacts**      Inability to trust and form relationships. Loss of faith and hope.

## Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events that occur in a person's life before age 18. ACEs are linked to chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance abuse in adulthood. ACEs can also negatively impact education, job opportunities, and earning potential. ACEs include:

- Domestic violence.
- Parental abandonment through separation or divorce.
- A parent with a mental health condition.
- Being the victim of abuse. (Physical, sexual and/or emotional)
- Being the victim of neglect. (Physical and emotional)
- A member of the household being in prison.
- Growing up in a household where adults abuse alcohol or drugs.

**The unresolved trauma of abuse impacts the way a person feels about themselves, the way they relate to others, and their relationship with God—it affects everything!**

## Vicarious Trauma

Vicarious trauma can be experienced by those who are close to and love a person who has experienced trauma. A person experiencing vicarious trauma may experience some of the same symptoms as those who have been directly affected. There may be feelings of helplessness and confusion—not knowing how to respond to or help a loved one who is struggling with the impacts of sexual abuse.

## Developing an Awareness

One in four girls and one in 13 boys experience sexual abuse at some point in childhood, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Awareness is essential in reducing the risk of sexual abuse. With the right tools and knowledge, church leaders can be better equipped to recognize predatory behaviors and intervene before abuse occurs.



**An ounce  
of prevention  
is worth  
a pound  
of cure.**

*Benjamin Franklin*

# Sexual Abuse Facts & Statistics

Quiz

1. You have to touch a child to abuse a child. \_\_\_\_\_ **True** \_\_\_\_\_ **False**
2. Child abuse is a big problem. \_\_\_\_\_ **True** \_\_\_\_\_ **False**
3. **1 in \_\_\_\_\_ Americans** are sexually abuse before the age of 18.
4. **Every \_\_\_\_\_ minutes** child protective services substantiates or finds evidence for a claim of sexual abuse.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ **%** of child victims are abused by someone they know and trust.
6. In one large study, the average number of victims for a convicted male abuser:  
\_\_\_\_\_ **victims** for an abuser who molested girls.  
\_\_\_\_\_ **victims** for an abuser who molested boys.
7. Of sexual abuse victims, \_\_\_\_\_ **%** will never talk about the abuse until adulthood—if ever.
8. On average, the convicted male molester begins victimizing children at \_\_\_\_\_ **or \_\_\_\_\_ years old.**
9. The average age for criminal prosecution is \_\_\_\_\_ **years old.**
10. **Less than \_\_\_\_\_%** of sexual abusers will ever encounter the criminal justice system.

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Sources: Salter, A. C., (2004). "Predators: Pedophiles, rapists, and other sex offenders"; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; MinistrySafe; Broman-Fulks, J. J., Ruggiero, K. J., Hanson, R. F., Smith, D. W., Resnick, H. S., Kilpatrick, D. G., & Saunders, B. E., (2007). "Sexual assault disclosure in relation to adolescent mental health: Results from the National Survey of Adolescents," *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*.



**Grooming**

Sexual offenders often use a method called grooming to gradually gain access and build trust with victims. When church staff and volunteers are trained to recognize grooming behaviors, they are able to spot red flags and prevent sexual abuse before it occurs.

**Engagement**

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**Sexualizing the Relationship**

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**Secrecy**

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# Recognizing Predatory Behaviors

Sexual abusers come from all walks of life and cannot be picked out or identified by appearance. But there may be cause for concern if an adult exhibits any of these behaviors:



Repeated use of **poor judgment** when interacting with children.

Displaying **PREFERENCES** for children of a **CERTAIN AGE** and **GENDER**.

Giving **“special” attention** to or displaying favoritism toward certain children.

**DISTORTING RELATIONSHIPS** with children. Adult may use children to meet their own emotional needs.



Initiating or creating opportunities to have **exclusive time alone** with children or a certain child.



**Exposing children to adult sexual interactions** without concern.

**ENCOURAGING CHILDREN TO BEHAVE SEXUALLY** towards each other.



Making others feel uncomfortable by **ignoring social, emotional, or physical boundaries** or limits with adults and children.

Making sexual references or telling **SEXUAL** or **SUGGESTIVE JOKES** to or in the presence of children.



**Excessive touching, hugging, tickling, wrestling** with children even when contact is unwanted.



**Refusing to let a child set their own limits.** (May tease or belittle to prevent a child from setting limits.)

Normalizing or **MINIMIZING INAPPROPRIATE INTERACTIONS** with children.

## Implement a Screening Process

As we have learned, background checks are not a standalone solution in identifying potential risks. Implementing a screening process serves as an opportunity to gather additional information about an applicant's (paid staff or volunteer) past and decide if they are safe to work with children. It is recommended a screening process includes:



*Minimum of six months.*

## Watch for Red Flags

When examining background checks, pay attention to “red-flag” offenses such as:

- Providing alcohol.
- Tobacco
- Pornography
- Contributing to delinquency or indecency.
- Exhibitionism.
- Voyeurism.
- Assault.

Other risk factors that should be noted, but will not show up on a background check include:

- Abrupt relocation.
- Vague employment history.
- A pattern of work with a specific age group.
- Poor peer relationships.
- Surrounding self with children or child-related activities.
- Unrealistic view of children.

## Establish Policies and Procedures

Effective policies and procedures serve as a deterrent and make your church a less attractive target for an abuser. New hires and volunteers are to review the policies and agree to comply. Policies may include:

- Ensuring all adults and children check in for activities.
- Dismissal plans
- Staff to child ratios

### **Nursery**

Two non-related workers for every eight children

### **Two- and three-year-olds**

Two non-related workers for every 12 children

### **Four- and five-year-olds**

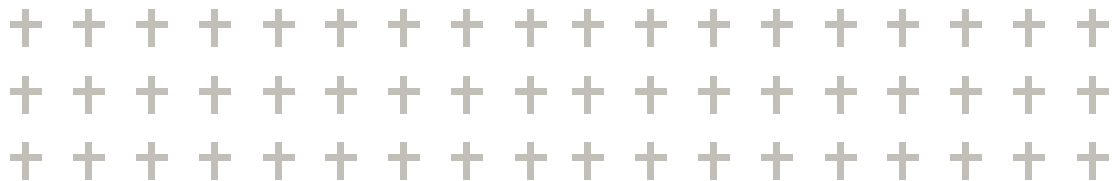
Two non-related workers for every 18 workers

### **Elementary**

Two non-related workers for every 20 children\*

- Bathroom and diapering

*\*MinistrySafe, "My Church Children's Ministries: Policies and Procedures Manual."*





## Abuse Response Policy

Responding to the disclosure of sexual abuse is one of the most difficult situations a church leader or staff member may face. It can be difficult to know how to respond effectively or appropriately. When sexual abuse is reported, having a clearly communicated response policy in place is invaluable. One suggestion is the following:

- 1 Contact the authorities.**
- 2 Care for the victim by placing the victim's needs first.**
- 3 Assign someone to the victim and family, seeking outside expert help as needed.**
- 4 Put measures in place to limit the exposure of the accused to the life of the church.\***

*\*Basyle J. Tchividjian, "Responding with Excellence to an Allegation of Sexual Abuse within the Church."*

**For each scenario:**

- Identify who holds the power in this situation.
- Identify some of the important factors to be considered.
- What might be a good response to the situation?
- How might this situation have been prevented?

## 1 Child Care Catastrophe

A 4-year-old has come to her parents with allegations of inappropriate sexual touching against a fellow church member, Stan. Stan and his wife co-own a home daycare center the girl attends. Stan is also active in church, serving as deacon. The parents of the little girl report the allegation to the appropriate child protection authorities, and an investigation is underway. They also call their pastor for spiritual support in the midst of the shock and confusion of the situation. Stan calls the pastor as well, and explains that there has been a misunderstanding. He's sure that if he can just sit down and talk with the parents of the little girl, things can be worked out. The pastor, shocked by the allegation, calls a Safe Church Team member to get some perspective and, hopefully, some help.

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# 2

## Criminal Record Check

The congregation has finally decided to begin requiring background checks for staff and volunteers who work with children and youth. It's discovered that one of the women leaders, Mary, who has been working in the children's program for many years, has a criminal record that includes sharing sexually explicit images. She maintains that she was innocent, that she was with a friend who used her phone to download and share the images with her boyfriend, and that she knew nothing about it. She pled "no contest" in court to avoid an expensive trial and because her lawyer expressed concern that she may not win her case—the images were found on her phone. She points to all her years of good service at the church and believes the church should make an exception to a new policy in place that restricts anyone with a sexually related criminal offense from serving in any capacity with children or youth. The pastor doesn't want to lose this ministry worker and calls a Safe Church Team member to help him decide what to do.

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# 3

## Sweet Martin

Martin is a sweet man—gentle, compassionate, and well-loved by all. The congregation feels fortunate to have Martin, a retired pastor, who is always willing to help out by visiting those in the hospital, as well as shut-ins. Sandy, a Safe Church Team member, is surprised to get a call one day from Mildred, a widow who has been visited several times by Martin. She seems a little nervous and says she isn't sure if she should say anything or not, but then discloses she isn't comfortable with Martin's hugging and kissing when he visits. Mildred says she wouldn't have called, except she's spoken with two other widows who have experienced the same thing. So, she thought she'd better call a Safe Church Team member and find out what to do.

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## 4

## E-harassment

A youth pastor contacts a Safe Church Team member saying he doesn't know what to do. A relatively new member of the youth group, Karen, approached him after their last youth group meeting, asking to talk. She tells him she is being sexually harassed at school by an older boy, Nathan, whose family is a part of the congregation, though Nathan does not attend youth group. She says he will not stop texting her with sexually explicit messages and it is becoming unbearable. Karen's family does not attend church; she comes to youth group with friends. She is afraid to tell her parents about the harassment, because if they find out it is a boy from church they may not let her come. She begs the youth pastor to not tell anyone. The youth pastor promises to call Karen once he has time to think about the situation. "I have no clue what to do," he says.

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# 5

## What's a Pastor to Do?

Pastor John addresses the council, informing it that Betty, a female member of the congregation has made several inappropriate advances toward him, despite his objections. Some have included sexually explicit language. He is requesting a more flexible office schedule, with more time to work at home rather than in his office at church. Betty often “drops by” his office unannounced, which is very distracting and upsets his work. He claims Betty has told him that the Lord has given her a vision that one day she and Pastor John will be married (despite the fact that Pastor John is already married with two young children). Pastor John complains, “She’s driving me crazy; it makes me not want to come into work.” One of the elders makes it clear that he considers the whole thing a joke, saying, “Pastor, I think you should be able to handle this woman. This doesn’t merit the attention of council.” Getting nowhere with his council, Pastor John contacts a Safe Church Team member for advice.

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## 6 Roger and Rachel

Pastor Paul gets a call from Roger, who is in jail, hoping the pastor will be able to help bail him out. He has recently moved to the area, has no other family nearby and doesn't know where else to turn. He has been arrested for assaulting his wife. The pastor is shocked! Roger is an upstanding man, and Pastor Paul can't imagine he would ever intentionally hurt his lovely wife. Rachel, his wife, also calls the pastor, from the hospital where her minor injuries are being assessed. She expects to be released soon. Rachel is so thankful for Martha, a woman from church, who is able to watch their little girl while she is at the hospital. Martha's daughter is 3 years old, almost the same age as Rachel's daughter. Rachel says she also wants the pastor to help bail her husband out of jail. "I never meant for him to go to jail," she says, "I just want him to stop getting so angry and hurting me the way he does." Pastor Paul is very hesitant to step into this situation and decides to contact a Safe Church Team member for consultation.

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## Additional Resources

- **Mandate Reporter Training**

CareHouse of Oakland County offers online mandate reporter training free of charge at <https://www.carehouse.org/mandated-reporter-training/>. For in-person training, contact Michael Lhamon through the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services at [lhamonm@Michigan.gov](mailto:lhamonm@Michigan.gov) or (616) 443-0876.

- **The National Center on Sexual Behaviors of Youth**

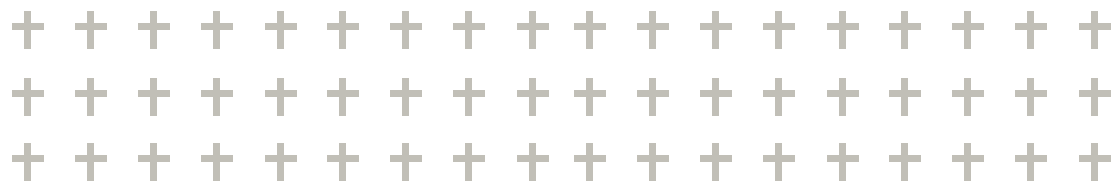
[ncby.org](http://ncby.org)

- **Child Welfare Information Gateway**

Free online resources are available at [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov).

- **Church of the Nazarene**

Access to excellent resources is available through [www.nazarenesafe.org](http://www.nazarenesafe.org) and [www.protectmyministry.com](http://www.protectmyministry.com).



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Slide 1



Church Leader Training  
**CREATING A SAFE CHURCH MINISTRY**



Slide 2

**SESSION OBJECTIVES**

- 1 Acknowledge the importance of overcoming silence and denial.
- 2 Define sexual abuse.
- 3 Explain the impacts for children and adults.
- 4 Develop an awareness of abuse and predatory behaviors.
- 5 Implement an abuse response policy.

Slide 3



**THE SHORT COURSE ON SEXUAL ABUSE**

Expect denial.	What is publicly known is usually just the tip of the iceberg.
Understand, it's not about sex.	Chaos breaks out.
Abuse usually doesn't "just happen."	

Slide 4

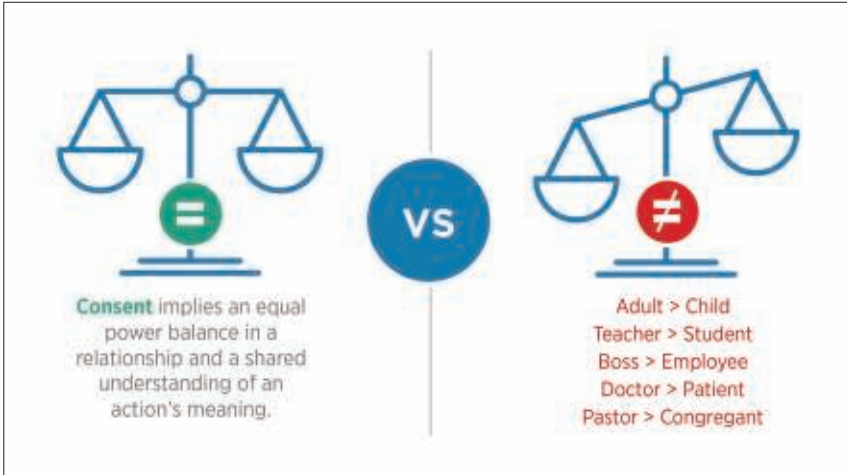


**Sexual abuse is harmful and/or exploitive.**  
**Sexual abuse is not consensual.**

**TOUCH**  
 Inappropriate fondling, touching, and/or intercourse.

**NON-TOUCH**  
 Sexual comments, pornography, and/or watching sexual activity.

Slide 5



**Consent** implies an equal power balance in a relationship and a shared understanding of an action's meaning.

**VS**

Adult > Child  
 Teacher > Student  
 Boss > Employee  
 Doctor > Patient  
 Pastor > Congregant

Slide 6

CHILDHOOD TRAUMA	
<b>Childhood Brain Development</b>	
<b>Cognitive Delays</b>	Language development, intelligence, and/or trouble in school.
<b>Emotional Impairment</b>	Attachment disorders, inability to form relationships, and/or isolation.
<b>Spiritual Formation</b>	Inability to believe that God is good or that they are loved by God.
<b>Lifelong Effects</b>	
<b>Physical Health</b>	Obesity, gastrointestinal problems, headaches, and/or diabetes.
<b>Psychological Health</b>	Depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and/or addictive behaviors.
<b>Spiritual Impacts</b>	Inability to trust and form relationships. Loss of faith and hope.

Slide 7



### Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

- Domestic violence
- Parental abandonment through separation or divorce.
- A parent with a mental health condition.
- Being the victim of abuse. (Physical, sexual and/or emotional)
- A member of the household being in prison.
- Growing up in a household in which there are adults experiencing alcohol and drug use problems.

Slide 8



The unresolved trauma of abuse impacts the way a person feels about themselves, the way they relate to others, and their relationship with God—it affects everything!

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Slide 9

“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

*Benjamin Franklin*



Slide 10

**GROOMING**

- ENGAGEMENT**
  - Targeting the child.
  - Gaining the child's and caregiver's trust.
  - Filling a need.
  - Isolating the child.
- SEXUALIZING THE RELATIONSHIP**
  - Desensitization.
- SECRECY**
  - Maintaining control.

Slide 11

Sexual abusers come from all walks of life and cannot be picked out or identified by appearance.

Slide 12

**IMPLEMENT A SCREENING PROCESS**

Written Application + Face-to-face Interview + Reference Check + Church Attendance


Slide 13

BACKGROUND CHECK  
**RED FLAGS**



- Providing alcohol.
- Tobacco
- Pornography
- Contributing to delinquency or indecency.
- Exhibitionism.
- Voyeurism.
- Assault.

Slide 14




Effective policies and procedures serve as a deterrent and make your church a less attractive target for an abuser.

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Slide 15

**ABUSE RESPONSE POLICY**



- ✓ Contact the authorities.
- ✓ Care for the victim by placing the victim's needs first.
- ✓ Assign someone to the victim and family, seeking outside expert help as needed.
- ✓ Put measures in place to limit the exposure of the accused to the life of the church.\*





FAMILY LEADERSHIP  
INITIATIVE