

Policy Issues



STEWARDSHIP ▾ BUDGET ▾ STAFFING ▾ TEAMS ▾ MULTIPLICATION ▾ LOGISTICS ▾

Abuse Prevention Policy

Any abuse—whether it be sexual, physical or any other criminal act—should be reported to local police without delay. If a crime has been committed, the first responsibility is to notify local law enforcement authorities. Taking merciful and attentive care of any alleged victims and their families is also a primary responsibility.

After these steps have been taken, the church must conduct pastoral care and church discipline work. This process starts with an incident report and ongoing caring ministry to any alleged victims, parents and family.

As church leaders, we have the high calling and duty to safeguard the minor kids and students entrusted to us. This requires a robust abuse prevention policy to provide for the safety of everyone in our care. Among many provisions, an abuse prevention policy might include the following items:

- **Two Workers Rule** – Always staff two or more workers per classroom or group. No worker should ever be alone with a child or a group of children. Make this rule a matter of policy for all ministries and organizations attached to the church.
- **Active Supervision** – Ministry staff, ushers or church security should make frequent visits to areas and hallways used for preschool, children and student ministry.
- **Open Doors** – During ministry events and activities, no classroom door in utilized areas should be locked. Auto-lock doors should be removed from areas used by minor children, unless required by law or for safety considerations.
- **Windows** – Classroom doors and preschool nursery areas should have windows.
- **Bathrooms** – For single-occupant (non-public, non-multi-occupant) preschool or child bathrooms, doors should be kept cracked whenever a child is taken to the bathroom by an adult worker.
- **Limit Abuse Opportunities** – Think through activities, camps and events with an eye for abuse opportunities and potential landmines. Do not allow or ask workers to be alone with a child or student.
- **Environment** – Create an environment where it is virtually impossible for sexual abuse to occur on church property during church ministries and events. Abuse prevention policy, guidelines, training, audits, awareness, security and video surveillance all play a role in creating this environment.
- **Video Surveillance** – Consider the use of video cameras in all areas used by preschoolers, children and students. Video surveillance can be passive, meaning that recordings are made and kept for a specific period of time, without active viewing of archived material except in cases

of alleged abuse or an incident.

Minor Participation Policy

As a matter of policy, churches should require a minor participation and consent to emergency medical treatment form for all special and off-campus activities. Defining which activities require this form is a gray area, but, in general, all recreation, sports, off-campus, overnight and church-provided transportation activities should require a notarized release for minor participation and emergency medical treatment.

Some churches may choose to require a notarized release annually or semi-annually. Age-division ministries can maintain releases on file so that parents don't have to submit one for each special activity in a given time period.



Liability Waiver – Minor (Fillable PDF)



Liability Waiver – Minor

Social Media Policy

Social media policies generally address the positive role played by social networking in advancing the church's mission. A positive opening statement about the need for its responsible use is an appropriate way to begin:

The church understands that social media can be a fun and rewarding way to share your life and opinions with family, friends and co-workers around the world. However, use of social media also presents certain risks and carries with it certain responsibilities. To assist you in making responsible decisions about your use of social media, we have established these guidelines for appropriate use of social media.

This policy applies to all pastors, staff members and employees who work for the church, or one of its auxiliary ministries in the United States.

Social media policies typically address several other areas of concern:

- **General Guidelines** – General guidelines define what social media is, including blogs, web sites, chat rooms, social networking and any other form of electronic communication.
- **Employee Rules** – Employee rules cover inappropriate posts, discriminatory remarks, harassment, threats of violence or other inappropriate or unlawful conduct.
- **Respect for Others** – Fair and courteous behavior towards fellow workers, church members, suppliers and vendors is covered here. Appropriate conflict resolution procedures are emphasized over public complaints via a social media outlet.
- **Honesty & Accuracy** – Confidentiality of church and member information is covered here, as is a respect for financial disclosure laws. In addition, employees cannot misrepresent their own opinions as those of the church.
- **Using Social Media at Work** – Employees are asked to refrain from using social media while on work time unless it is work-related. Since social networking is becoming a widely used ministry tool, supervisors and employees should discuss appropriate parameters for its use.
- **Retaliation** – Employees are prohibited from taking negative action against another worker, including posts on social networking sites.



Sample Social Media Policy

Sample Social Media Policy excerpted from “OM 12-59 Report of the Acting General Counsel Concerning Social Media Cases” from the National Labor Relations Board.

Staff Team Policies

Staff team employee policies include a range of issues, including sabbaticals, work habits, proper handling of church-owned equipment and church-provided services.



Sample Sabbatical Policy



Sample Sabbatical Policy



Sample Digital Equipment Policy



Sample Digital Equipment Policy



Sample Telecommuting Policy



Sample Telecommuting Policy



Sample Employee Counseling Policy



Sample Staff Childcare Policy

ADA Compliance

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provides guidelines for what is necessary for organizations to provide accommodation to individuals with disabilities. While churches must comply with portions of the ADA, churches are exempt from the ADA as it relates to public accommodation.

“It’s Title III, Section 36.102 (e) that provides that the provisions of this title shall not apply to religious organizations,” Attorney John Anthony explains. “The statute basically has a blanket exemption for public accommodation for religious organizations or entities controlled by religious organizations.”

A ministry is not required to comply with ADA standards in its treatment of service animals unless it receives public funding or hosts a publicly funded event.

Even a ministry that is under no legal obligation to admit service animals may choose to use a set of guidelines, such as the ADA, as a guideline for its own service animal policy. By definition, churches are welcoming place and most will voluntarily comply with the ADA in as many ways as possible.



Sample Service & Comfort Animal Policy



Sample Service & Comfort Animal Policy

For further reading, additional public accommodation articles can be found below.



Churches Are Not Places of Public Accommodation by Harvard's Journal on Legislation



Can Churches Bar Service Animals? by Church Law & Tax



Religious Entities Under the Americans with Disabilities Act by the ADA National Network



ADA: Businesses That Are Open to the Public by ADA.gov



Sample Service Animal Policy

Additional Resources



Church Bylaws



ACTION PLANS

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