

WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

Child sexual abuse is any sexual act between an adult and a minor or between two minors when one exerts power over the other, forcing, coercing or persuading a child to engage in any type of sexual act. This includes sexual contact, and non-contact acts including exhibitionism, exposure, pornography and communicating in a sexual way over the phone or internet.

It is crime punishable by law.

It is an agonizing experience for its victims.

CHURCH POLICY

Understand your church policy about child sexual abuse.

Maintain criminal background checks for Sunday School teachers, youth group leaders, or anyone working with minors in the church. It is recommended that you have a training session with staff and volunteers regarding child sexual abuse signs and prevention.

REPORTING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Call 9-1-1 in an emergency.

If it is not an emergency (active or very recent abuse), you may call your local non-emergency law enforcement number rather than 911. This is true for abuse that is being reported many years after it has occurred. Be aware of the statute of limitations in your state.

Law enforcement # _____

Call Child Protective Services (CPS). Have the number of your local agency on hand, in your office or on your phone.

CPS # _____

Call ALC Balm of Gilead at (360) 610-7250

Hours of Service are Monday-Friday, 9 am to 5 pm EST

WHERE TO FIND HELP IF NOT SURE OF ABUSE

Child Advocacy Centers. If you are unsure about whether to make an official report, or if you just need support, contact a child advocacy center and they will help you to evaluate suspicions or answer questions. To find a center near you, contact the National Children's Alliance at www.nca-online.org or call 1-800-239-9950.

If you have questions about suspected child abuse, call the ChildHelp USA National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD.

Remember that you may be a mandated reporter in your state and may be the only one who is protecting the child. *Make sure you know the laws of the state you live in to determine whether you are mandated to report. Contact Child Protective Services (CPS) for specific information.*

HELPING AN ABUSED CHILD

When a child discloses, remain CALM. Do not overreact.

Allow the child to describe what happened. Ask direct, not leading or probing questions. Don't ask, "Did Daddy touch you?" as this is leading, can be answered "yes" or "no", and can quickly halt the conversation. Instead, ask "What happened to your private parts?" which requires a full answer. Limit the number of people who talk to the child about the incident, to maintain clarity of events, should it go to court.

From an investigative standpoint it is VERY important that any adult who talks to children about abuse not give them

any "adult" words for genitalia or what has happened to them (rape, sexual assault, penetration, etc.), or ask them leading questions. It is recommended that parents not ask any questions, but only listen if the child volunteers information.

If there is going to be a criminal investigation, the perpetrator should not be confronted until law enforcement has been made aware. If the perpetrator is confronted by someone, they may pose a danger to the victim, hire an attorney, work to create an alibi, or harm themselves prior to law enforcement having an opportunity to conduct an investigation. It is important that the investigative process go as smoothly as possible.

Believe the child. Do not minimize. Listen and do not fill in words.

Assure the child that it is right for them to tell and that he/she will be protected from the offender.

Reassure the child that it IS NOT their fault and they are not bad. Reinforce that the offender is responsible. Do not burden the child with your anger or any negative feelings you may have. At the same time, it's important at this point to not be overly critical of the offender. Children are very protective of people they care about, and they may care about the offender.

If the child asks you not to tell anyone, remind them that it is your job to help to keep them safe and you will do whatever you need to do for their safety.

Provide the child and family members with support and counseling.

Sometimes a child may recant the disclosure. They may try to “take it back” out of stress or fear, or pressure by someone. It's important to know that less than 1% of sexual abuse cases reported by a child prove to be false.

DEALING WITH A PERPETRATOR

The church MUST adopt a ZERO TOLERANCE reporting policy for sexual abuse. Every church should have an attorney who can advise on reporting for known or suspected child abuse. If you do not have an attorney, call CPS for guidance. Zero tolerance simply means that *any information* about child abuse will be reported to the proper authorities. Make this your church policy, basing it on Scripture (Matthew 18:6, Luke 17:2 and Titus 3:1) and also your church's policy regarding secular authority. Remember that sexual abuse is a crime in all 50 states.

Publish your sexual abuse policy, making congregation members aware of the leadership's position. Give each member of the congregation a copy of the policy. This makes it public and people are aware that you will report known or suspected child abuse.

If there are any suspicions of sexual misconduct by a pastor or member, it is important for the Board to take responsibility, meet and discuss this matter and take proper action. Contacting an attorney is highly recommended as you will need to know if you have a legal duty to report and for any other issues that may arise if abuse has taken place. Your highest priority must be the victim.

Your policy must deal with how to deal with a perpetrator who is repentant, has paid his/her debt to society, sought forgiveness, received therapy/counseling, and wishes to rejoin the congregation. Will your leadership assist in recovery? Do you have a chaperone system in place? Is your church building safe?

Sources:

Glover, Voyle A. *Protecting Your Church against Sexual Predators: Legal FAQs for Church Leaders*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2005.
Kinnunen, Reuben, Detective, Watertown, SD Police Department. (2016, July) Email interview.
The Mama Bear Effect website (<http://www.themamabeareffect.org/>)



Apostolic Lutheran Church of America
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Email: info@alcbalmofgilead.com
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A ministry dedicated to sexual abuse recovery.

A Resource for Church Leadership

Guidelines for:
Reporting Child Sexual Abuse
Helping an Abused Child
Dealing with a Perpetrator

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And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them,

Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me. -Mark 9:36,37