

## **Encouragements to Churches Regarding Prevention of Abuse of Minors\***

The Middle District Baptist Association recognize it has no authority over any Baptist church. However, it is the intention of the Middle District Leadership Committee to offer encouragement to our churches to prevent abuse in any form to minors. In that spirit, the churches are encouraged to take the following actions. For additional information and resources, church leaders may contact the Association's Executive Director.

### **PREVENTION / PROTECTION**

1. We encourage churches practice the regular reviewing, updating, or creating worker policies and guidelines for all staff /church leaders, and youth/children volunteer workers.
2. We encourage churches to take the initiative and advocate for comprehensive screening processes for all staff and church leaders, and youth/children volunteer workers to address such things as:
  - Understanding the need for a written application.
  - Discovering when and how to check references.
  - Researching prior church membership and volunteer work, especially with minors.
  - Conducting internet research for potential news stories containing allegations of sexual misconduct for any potential staff member or volunteer.
  - Calling for background checks.
  - Linking to and utilizing the U. S. Department of Justice National Sex Offender Public Website posted on the Sexual Abuse Prevention page on SBC.net and to viable public databases of sexual offenders in a church or ministry setting as they may be developed.
  - Conducting personal interviews with applicants.
  - Implementing at least a six-month rule of association/membership before service and participation begins in a ministry position.
3. We encourage churches to conduct local and national criminal background checks, and where appropriate, child abuse background clearance for all staff, leaders, and youth/children volunteer workers. This practice should be encouraged as part of a plan to protect children.
4. We encourage churches to promote to church two-person rule of supervision. This practice, designed to protect minors from abuse and workers from accusation, calls for at least two, non-related adults who have successfully completed the screening process to supervise minors at all times, whether on or off the premises, in rooms, vehicles, or other enclosed spaces. In situations where the two-person rule is impossible or impractical, alternatives (such as a floating observer) should be considered.
5. We encourage churches to develop policies regarding digital and electronic communication. Communicating with minors, especially with youth in the digital age (text message, email, communication apps, and social media) is common among youth pastors and other staff that work with children and youth. Such policies will help set boundaries for both the adults and minors involved.
6. We encourage churches to develop policies or statements which could include the following:
  - Develop a clear statement denouncing all forms of abuse.
  - Reporting criminal sexual misconduct to the proper legal authorities as required by law.

- Relieving temporarily persons accused of sexual misconduct from leadership and service positions pending a thorough investigation and review of the circumstances.
- Communicating honestly and transparently with churches, potential employers, or others attempting to conduct an official background check, and disclosing information about any person accused of abuse who left before a resolution of the charge occurred.

## **AWARENESS / EDUCATION**

7. We encourage churches to proactively educate church workers/volunteers about the seriousness of abuse and provide resources to enable the church to protect minors and vulnerable adults.
8. We encourage churches to provide or facilitate ongoing training for all staff, church leaders and youth/children volunteer workers in preventing, recognizing, reporting, and dealing with abuse.

## **MINISTRY CARE / HEALING**

9. We encourage churches in developing a plan for ministering to sex offenders in the church by observing such things as the following:
  - Understanding what the full spectrum of the term “sex offender”.
  - Developing procedures which provide accountability to the offender/abuser and safeguards for all members, especially children and vulnerable adults.
  - Creating a covenant between the offender and church leadership that defines the boundaries of participation, allowing church leaders to apprise others in the congregation as necessary, permitting church leaders to contact probation officers and others assigned to work with the offender and state consequences if the covenant is violated, such as being prohibited from attending church or accessing church property.
  - Designating one or more accountability partners to assist the offender in not yielding to temptation.
  - Restricting any contact with minors.

\*The “encouragements” are adopted from the recommendations of the Southern Baptist Conference of Associational Leaders (SBCAL) and the Officers of the SBC Fellowship of State Executive Directors, June 2019. In developing these recommendations, the following sources were consulted: Brotherhood Mutual, Child Protection in a Ministry Environment, 2019; Church Law and Tax, “Sex Offenders in the Church.” 2019; Richard Hammar, Church Law and Tax, “Prevent Child Sexual Abuse in the Church,” 2019; Richard Hammar, Negligent Selection of Church Workers, 2019.