

# *Creating Safe Sanctuaries*

## **How Safe is Your Church**

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The recent abduction of a two year boy from a church should have all of us reviewing our policies and procedures of “Safe Sanctuaries”. We should be raising awareness of how we strive to protect our most vulnerable whether it is a child, youth, or vulnerable adult. We should erase from our minds the “it will never happen here” mindset.

So, how safe is your church? Have you reviewed your Safe Sanctuary policy recently? Of course, with COVID this past year, so many of us have not met in person, if we have, we have not provided child care and the list goes on of what we couldn't do this past year. We are all anxious to “get back” to worship and begin the new normal we will face. I beg of you as you begin to reopen and develop new programs with our new normal, DO NOT forget your guidelines for Church Safety. I have listed some areas of “Safe Sanctuaries” I hope you will review and remind your staff, your volunteers and most of all your Parents/legal guardians of the efforts you and your church have in place.

Review and update your Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures.

- ◆ Where are “weak” areas in your church? Volunteers, room locations, doors locked/unlocked, etc Do a walk through and put yourself in the place of a parent planning to leave their child with you. You may consider putting yourself as the predator and look for ways to easily have access to church doors, unlocked windows, areas where no one is visible, where the children, etc.
- ◆ The two person rule in classrooms is required. If not possible, please have a “floater” in the hallway to be visible throughout the class sessions. If this isn't possible, consider combining classes or informing parents of the need for added help.
- ◆ Educate and train your classroom teachers and volunteers on your policies and procedures. Walk them through the process, don't just read it on paper and hand it to them.
- ◆ Background checks on staff and volunteers working with the children, youth and at risk adults
- ◆ New person expresses interest in helping with children or youth, DO NOT allow them to be one on one, Must have a teacher/volunteer with them at all times up to 6 months.
- ◆ Educate your teachers and volunteers to never allow a child to be in the hallways alone, If they are walking to the restroom, a teacher/volunteer must accompany the child to the restroom and can wait outside the restroom. This may leave 1 person in the room with other children, have that teacher stand at door to classroom watching both hallway and classroom. This is an extra precaution for both teachers as well as the children.
- ◆ If your teachers and/or volunteers do not feel comfortable with a person in the area, request them to speak up. As much as cell phones can be a hindrance, they can also be a life line, have person call or text stating they are not familiar with a person “hanging” around their area.
- ◆ I encourage you to have the local police department to do a walk through your church. They have a trained eye in areas where predators may seek to hide and watch.....Both inside your church and your church grounds
- ◆ Consider forming a Church Security Team. This is more for your time of worship, however, having a team monitoring your entrances, exits before, during and after your church activities is just another precaution worth taking.

It is my hope and prayer that we do not read of another abduction happening anywhere. As a parent, if I were to be seeking a church home, I would be looking for a safe and secure place of worship. For visitors and potential new members, talking about your safe sanctuary policies and your church safety measures may seem like a negative to some, it is also what many people are looking for.

If you have an questions, concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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