

# Preventing Abuse in the Church

Abuse Prevention Policies and Recommendations



Canadian Baptists  
OF WESTERN CANADA



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The consequences of abuse are profound and devastating. Victims of sexual, physical and emotional abuse can suffer the spiritual and psychological wounds of this trauma throughout the rest of their lives. While much of the abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults happens within their families or within the circle of family friends and caregivers, abuse also occurs when trusted adults or older adolescents at school, sports activities or clubs betray the trust of those in their care. Predators may victimize children and youth from positions of authority within the Church.

Many churches have held the attitude that “it can’t happen here—not in my church!” All of us like to think of our churches as places of welcome, love and trust where no harm will come to our children or those who are vulnerable. Sadly, many predators take advantage of the trusting and open environment within a church. Every church—including your own church—can be a place of risk where the abuse of children, youth and those adults who are vulnerable, such as people with cognitive disabilities or some seniors, might occur.

Abuse is a reality we must face and do our utmost to prevent. Churches that ignore this risk, or think sexual abuse only happens somewhere else, place those whom God has put in their care at even greater risk.

Preventing the great harm that abuse causes to children, youth and vulnerable adults is our primary concern. However, we know that abuse within the Church damages the reputation of Christ and can tear congregations apart. The legal and financial toll on churches where abuse has occurred can be crippling.

**It is essential that each and every CBWC church take active steps to prevent abuse within their congregations.** This manual, *Preventing Abuse in the Church: Abuse Prevention Policies and Recommendations*, is intended to support churches in developing policies and procedures that will protect children, youth and vulnerable adults from sexual, physical and emotional abuses by church staff or volunteers while engaged in church activities or on church property.

It is far better and easier to try to prevent abuse than to have to cope with the traumatic impact of abuse after an incident has occurred. This resource document is intended to provide support in developing and implementing policies and procedures to ensure safety in our churches.

**Be advised that this resource from CBWC does not replace legal advice.**

# Biblical Basis for Protecting Children and the Vulnerable from Abuse

Jesus loves all children. In fact, He encourages each of us to become like little children in our faith:

*Truly, truly I say to you, unless you repent and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble themselves as this little child, that man or woman is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one such little child in my name, receives me (Matthew 18:3-5).*

Jesus' love for children leads Him to continue:

*Whoever shall offend one of these little ones who believe on me, it would be good for the abuser rather if a millstone lay about his neck and he were cast into the sea (Matthew 18:6).*

Clearly, Jesus desires that children be protected from all harm and regards hurting children in any way as an offensive act.

While the Bible does not deal explicitly with the abuse of children, the Bible consistently exhorts believers to forgo sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5), violence (Psalm 10:1), oppression (Proverbs 14:31) and deceit (Psalm 56:5-6). The pattern of behaviour is clear.

As the body of Christ, the Church aspires to be a place of safety, welcome and acceptance. Toward that end, the Bible often charges Christians to be "pure and blameless...without fault in a crooked and depraved generation" (Philippians 1:9-10). Leaders are to be people "of good reputation with outsiders so that they will not fall into disgrace" (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

Many passages of the Bible call for the community of faith to respect the perceived proprieties of our society, so the cause of Christ will not be wrongly judged. Among these types of passages, we are called to be responsible citizens within the ruling boundaries of our society (Romans 13:1-7).

In addition, when we speak our church covenants we often promise each other that we will be communities of truthfulness that promote justice. When we participate in child dedication services we commit ourselves to being places of nurture and growth for children.

Scripture also encourages us to obey the laws of our civil authorities. Since abuse is against the law of the federal and provincial governments of Canada, we are bound to follow these laws (See Appendix 1 for Canada's laws against abuse).



Romans 13:1-5 tells us this:

*Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong.*

*Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.*

The Church is to be a place where we speak truth before God and to each other. If we know of sin in our midst, we are to uncover it, never hide it.

# Why Churches are Vulnerable

While many churches have abuse prevention policies and procedures in place, some churches don't implement the policies effectively and some don't have a plan at all. Some may even cover up abuse and pretend it didn't happen. Resistance to proactively discussing and dealing with abuse is the biggest barrier to preventing abuse from occurring. **This resistance may be caused by many factors:**

- Churches may be in denial about the possibility—it can't happen to us!
- Churches may be unaware of the threat and uneducated about the causes and impacts of abuse.
- Churches may not understand the law.
- Churches may have members who feel threatened by policies regulating their behaviour.
- Churches may fear conflict.
- Churches may minimize the devastating impacts that abuse has on victims.
- Churches may feel they do not have the resources to spend preventing something that might not occur.
- Churches may have other priorities.
- Churches may not know where to begin.

Predators are known to prey on children in churches for these reasons:

- Churches are places that welcome strangers.
- Churches trust that people who attend are following Biblical teachings.
- Churches may lack screening practices for staff and volunteers.
- Churches encourage people to get involved in volunteer service.
- Churches include a lot of activities that revolve around children, such as Sunday School, youth groups, camps, Vacation Bible School, picnics, family events, etc.
- Churches depend on people volunteering at the last minute.
- Churches can promote a deference to adults or to authority figures that may create a climate open to potential abuse children.

Any combination of these attitudes not only puts children, youth and vulnerable adults at risk of abuse, but also puts the church at risk for the legal and financial consequences should an incident of abuse occur.

In Canada there has been a dramatic increase in the number of churches being sued in civil court for damages sustained by victims of abuse and their families. The courts are holding churches accountable for the acts of individual abusers in a church, even if the church or its leaders were unaware of the abuse. Such rulings are made on the following basis:

- The church is vicariously liable for the acts of its personnel, both paid and volunteer.
- The church was negligent in its screening of workers.
- The church was negligent in its supervision of workers.

It is important to note that most insurance companies now require an up-to-date **Risk Management Policy** from a church for it to qualify for a liability insurance policy. Abuse and neglect include acts of commission or omission towards a child, youth or vulnerable adult by a parent, caregiver or person in a position of trust that result in harm or potential for harm.

Risk of harm includes actions or inactions that endanger the safety of a child, youth or vulnerable adult. (cwrp). Abuse includes the physical or psychological maltreatment or risk of such by an adult or person in a position of authority towards a child, youth or vulnerable adult.

The following pages describe several types of abuse: emotional abuse, physical abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse.

## CBWC's Abuse Prevention Policy

CBWC encourages all affiliated churches, camps and other ministries to implement and maintain an **Abuse Prevention Policy for Children, Youth and Other Vulnerable People** that complies with current legislation and insurance company requirements.

Subject to available resources, CBWC may assist in the preparation of such a policy by providing information, advice and sample policies. The CBWC endorses **Plan to Protect (plantoprotect.com)** as a comprehensive policy manual appropriate for our Canadian context.

# What is Emotional Abuse?

Emotional abuse includes those actions and behaviours that harm the self-worth or emotional development of a child, youth or vulnerable adult.

Emotional abuse includes but is not limited to the following:

- Humiliation
- Rejection, exclusion or withholding love or support
- Exposure to violence
- Manipulation
- Taunting or degrading comments
- Minimizing accomplishments
- Terrorizing or intimidating, dominating
- Threatening physical harm to a person, their loved one or a belonging
- Isolating, confining or limiting a person's freedoms
- Exploiting a person's rights or needs for personal satisfaction or gain
- Making unreasonable demands

Here are some signs that a child or youth may be a victim of emotional abuse:

- Extremes in aggressive or passive behaviours
- Extreme lack of self-esteem
- Not reaching typical developmental milestones
- Extremely withdrawn
- Signs of depression
- Actions that are inappropriately adult or infantile

## Some Possible Effects of Emotional Abuse

- Self doubt
- Confusion
- Shame
- Depression
- Withdrawal
- Emotional instability
- Sleep disturbances
- Underachievement
- Substance abuse
- Inability to trust

# What is Physical Abuse?

Physical abuse includes any intentional action that causes or could cause physical harm to a child, youth or vulnerable adult.

Physical abuse includes but is not limited to the following:

- Hitting
- Kicking
- Pinching
- Scratching
- Shaking
- Shoving

Here are some signs that a child or youth may be a victim of emotional abuse:

- Unexplained marks such as bruises, welts, cuts, burns
- Awkward movements or difficulty in walking or sitting
- Sudden changes in behaviour
- Excessively anxious or emotional
- Withdrawn
- Hesitant to engage with others or in activities
- Not reaching typical developmental milestones
- Suicidal ideations

Effects of physical abuse can include the following:

- Interpersonal problems
- Substance abuse
- Aggressive behaviour
- Risk of becoming physically abusive
- Risk of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

# What is Neglect?

Neglect of children, youth and vulnerable adults includes the failure to provide for basic needs, lack of adequate supervision or exposure to hazards. It can also include inadequate nurturing or excessive permissiveness.

Here are some signs that a child or youth may be a victim of neglect:

- Inappropriately dressed
- Listless
- Hunger, stealing food, hoarding food
- Unattended medical issues
- Struggles to pay attention, poor cognitive abilities
- Failure to thrive
- Provokes fights
- Unresponsive to affection
- Apathetic
- Self-abusive behaviours
- Age inappropriate social or emotional behaviours
- Substance abuse
- Excessively withdrawn and submissive
- Limited interactions with peers

Emotional abuse can have many negative effects on victims:

- Physical development impairment
- Intellectual and cognitive development impairment
- Emotional and psychological development impairment
- Social and behavioural development impairment
- Poor health
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Attention difficulties
- Low self-esteem
- Unable to trust others

# What is Sexual Abuse?

Sexual abuse is a form of abuse that uses a child, youth or vulnerable adult for sexual stimulation. It includes forcing, persuading, enticing or inducing these individuals to take part in any explicit sexual conduct or simulation of that conduct.

Sexual abuse includes any sexual intercourse, molestation, exhibitionism or exploitation that violates the Criminal Code (See Appendix 1 for Canada's laws against sexual abuse). Sexual abuse includes but is not limited to the following activities directed toward children, youth or vulnerable adults:

- Sexual comments
- Exposure of genitals of the adult to the child or child to adult
- Masturbating
- Voyeurism (Peeping Toms)
- Touching a child's genitals or asking the child to touch the adult's genitals
- Rubbing genitals against clothing
- Penetration of a vagina or anus with a penis, fingers or objects
- Inducing a child to place a penis, finger or object in the offender's vagina or anus
- Oral sex, including tongue kissing, cunnilingus, fellatio and anilingus
- Showing pornographic movies, books or pictures
- Grooming for or involving in the production of pornography.

It is important to note that these sexual acts are abusive when there is difference between the participants in the following:

**Power** – The offender controls the victim because of factors such as authority (pastor, Sunday School teacher, parent, coach), gender, physical size, and ability to psychologically manipulate.

**Knowledge** – The offender has a better understanding of the significance and implications of the sexual encounter. Age and mental capabilities are crucial here. Generally, the younger a child, the less able the child is to understand the meaning and consequences of a sexual act.

**Gratification** – The offender is primarily seeking his/her own sexual gratification.

Child sexual abuse is considered to have occurred if the victim is still a minor; sexual abuse of adults occurs when the victim is over 18 (See Appendix 2 for provincial age guidelines for reporting of abuse).

Sexual abuse is often hard to spot unless there is physical evidence. Victims of sexual abuse may exhibit one or more of the following signs of abuse:

- Pregnancy
- Sexually transmitted infections
- Bruising or bleeding in genital areas
- Engages in age-inappropriate sexual play or exhibits age-inappropriate sexual knowledge (e.g., through drawing or play)
- Forces or coerces another child to engage in sexual play
- Inserts objects into vagina or rectum
- Directs sexually intrusive behaviour to adults
- Has unexplained gifts, new clothes or money
- Is secretive about “new” friends, activities, phone calls or internet use
- Has unexplained developmental setbacks (e.g., was toilet trained but reverts back)
- Is involved in sexually exploitive activities, such as performing sex acts for money
- Is involved in behaviours such as misuse of drugs or alcohol, stealing, fire-setting
- Flinches when touched
- Regression in behaviour, school performance or attaining developmental milestones
- Acute traumatic response such as clingy behaviour and irritability in young children
- Sleep disturbances
- Eating disorders
- Problems at school
- Depression
- Poor self-esteem
- Comments such as “I have a secret” or “I don’t like Uncle”

Behaviours that might indicate someone is a sexual predator can be found in Appendix 3.

1. D. Finkelhor and A. Browne, “The Effects of Sexual Abuse,” in D. Finkelhor ed. et al., *A Sourcebook on Child Sexual Abuse* (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE, 1986).

At the CBWC, we believe it is essential that our churches do whatever is possible to prevent abuse from happening in the first place.

Preventing abuse prevents sin and protects children, youth and vulnerable adults from harm.

Although no preventive measures are guaranteed to be 100% effective, proactively working to prevent abuse is far easier than dealing with the traumatic consequences of abuse to victims and the church after it has occurred. CBWC churches can take four steps to prevent abuse within their church communities:

**1. Audit how well your church is prepared** to prevent abuse. See our Church Checklist on the next page.

**2. Adopt and implement a written set of policies and procedures** that will protect children, youth and vulnerable adults from abuse. The CBWC recommends *Plan to Protect* as a comprehensive protection plan that includes a guide, forms, training and other resources. Alternatively, samples of current policies from CBWC churches are available for reference and may be adapted to specific contexts. See Appendix 4 for the link to these sample policies.

**3. Get assistance from CBWC staff.**

**4. Remain alert to the potential for abuse within the church** and evidence that abuse may have occurred.

## Reporting Abuse

We are all required to report suspected abuse or neglect to child welfare authorities. This legal duty overrides any duty you may have to protect the privacy of students, clients, patients or staff (with the exception of solicitor-client privilege or confidentiality provisions of the federal Youth Criminal Justice Act).

**It is not up to churches to determine whether the suspicions or accusations of abuse are true or not before reporting abuse.**

Suspected abuse should be reported to child welfare workers. If a child is in immediate danger, report the abuse to police. A link for contact information for provincial child welfare offices can be found in Appendix 4.

# 1. Audit: Church Checklist

The following is a basic checklist of essential elements for establishing an effective abuse prevention plan and reflects the minimum required by insurers in order to qualify for liability coverage:

- **Statement of Policy:** We have a formally approved policy that has been implemented and is reviewed periodically.
- **Definition:** We have a clear definition of the various types of abuse and related issues that is taught to all staff and volunteers.
- **Screening:** We currently screen all volunteers and paid employees—including clergy—who work with youth, children or vulnerable adults. Screening includes a police check, a child welfare check and references. All volunteers working with our children have been part of our church for a minimum of 6 months.
- **Operational Procedures:** We have a written manual summarizing our church’s specific guidelines for preventing abuse.
- **Premises:** Our premises have been modified in order to assist in the prevention of abuse, including windows in classrooms, lighting and controlled and monitored entries and ministry areas.
- **Training:** We train all our staff who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults, both paid and volunteer, to understand the nature and prevention of abuse.
- **Responding:** We have a clearly defined procedure for responding to and reporting a suspected incident of abuse.

Read more about each of these items in Robertson Hall’s full *Abuse Prevention Plan Checklist*, Appendix 5.

# 2. Developing Church Policies and Procedures



Every church should have written policies and procedures so that all staff and volunteers are trained to protect children, youth and vulnerable adults from abuse. Having conducted an audit similar to the one above to determine how well the church is or is not prepared to protect children, youth and vulnerable adults, the church can begin developing comprehensive policies and procedures that cover most situations in church life.

Rather than duplicate work done by other organizations to create our own detailed manual, the CBWC recommends that churches acquire or purchase resources from organizations already recognized as doing excellent work in equipping churches to prevent abuse. We believe the best resource available is *Plan to Protect*, a manual for those working with children and youth. Originally created in 1996 for the Canadian and Missionary Alliance and Winning Kids Inc, it has been created for

Canadian churches and the legal framework within which we operate.

*Plan to Protect* has expanded to serve non-religious organizations within Canada and is fast becoming the standard for abuse prevention. The *Plan to Protect* program creates a standard of care that ensures individuals and organizations have the following:

- **A statement of policy:** Your church needs a written policy confirming your organization’s commitment to providing a safe environment for children. This policy must be formally approved, implemented and periodically reviewed by management. Zero tolerance for abuse, harassment or neglect committed by any worker or volunteer should be clearly expressed. To prevent harm to the children, youth and vulnerable adults in your programs and to protect your staff and volunteers from false or wrongful allegations is the express purpose of such a statement.
- **A definition of abuse:** Defining abuse and related issues will help your workers clearly understand and be able to identify unacceptable behaviour, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, harassment, and neglect.



## 2. Developing Church Policies and Procedures, Continued

- **Screening:** Screening is required of all volunteers and paid staff working with children, youth and vulnerable persons and is proportional to the amount of interaction expected. To discourage harassment, screening should also apply to personnel who have management authority and power over other staff with respect to career advancement and performance review. Screening includes a completed application form, interview, reference checks, criminal record checks and vulnerable sector scan.
- **Operational procedures:** These procedures should be in writing and distributed to all workers. They include (but are not limited to) guidelines for registration, washroom, communication (i.e. social networking), off-site trips, appropriate touch, discipline and prohibiting corporal punishment, retention of documentation, and health and safety guidelines.
- **Premise modifications:** Certain alterations of your facilities can assist in preventing and discouraging abuse incidents.
- **Training:** All staff members and volunteers who regularly work with children, youth or vulnerable adults require orientation and annual refreshers.
- **Protocol for reporting and responding:** A plan must be in place to appropriately handle all allegations or complaints of abuse, adhering to legal requirements.

*Plan to Protect* can be purchased from [plantoprotect.com](http://plantoprotect.com) for \$70 (as of 2016). Training and workshops are also available through *Plan to Protect*. Their materials will help you develop and implement your own policy and offer support for keeping your policy up to date.

It is very important to have your policy approved by your insurance company and also have it reviewed by legal counsel as some matters vary by province and region.

## 3. How the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada Can Help

The CBWC is here to support and resource churches in all areas of need including preventing and responding to abuse. You can contact your regional office to be put in touch with a CBWC staff person who can help you get started on auditing, developing or updating your church's abuse prevention policy.

The CBWC has sample policies and forms that can provide a helpful alternative to Plan to Protect. These policies are currently being used in some of our own churches and can provide a guideline for churches seeking to develop their own policies, or can be adapted and applied to different church contexts (See Appendix 4: "Online Resources" for a link to these sample policies).



The CBWC website also provides information to help your church comply with current privacy legislation as it relates to the retention of personal information.

CBWC staff can help support and guide your church if you are faced with a possible case of abuse. Contact your Regional Minister for assistance.

**I**t is vital to remain alert to the possibility of abuse within the Church.

Constant watchfulness about the behaviours and actions of staff and volunteers, as well as any unusual behaviours among children, youth or vulnerable adults is necessary. Familiarize yourself with the behaviours that may indicate someone is a victim of abuse, as found in the pages above.



**A**s the body of Christ, the Church aspires to be a place of safety, welcome and acceptance; therefore, we have a responsibility to do all that we can to provide protection from abuse. We put protocols and procedures in place in order to keep our children, youth and vulnerable adults safe.

We make preventing abuse a priority because we long to protect the name of Jesus and see the kingdom of God advance where God has called us to minister in His name.



# Appendix 1: Canada's Laws Against Sexual Abuse

In Canada, the law states the following:

- Sexual activity without consent is always a crime regardless of the age of the individual.
- The definitions of the crimes in the new law reinforce the fact that children need to be protected. Individuals who sexually abuse children are not able to avoid criminal responsibility by claiming a child "consented" to the abuse.
- Children under 12 are never considered able to consent to sexual activity.
- Children 12 or older but under 16 are deemed unable to consent to sexual acts except under specific circumstances involving sexual activity with someone less than two years older than the child.
- Young persons 16 or older but under 18 are protected from sexual exploitation and their consent is not valid if the person touching them for a sexual purpose is in a position of trust or authority over them or if they are in a relationship of dependency with that person (Note that this has important implications for youth pastors. As well, the law is recognizing that any sexual act that takes place in a relationship of dependency or trust, regardless of age, may be subject to civil litigation, e.g., a pastor who has sex with an adult parishioner).
- It is not a defense to these crimes for the accused to say that he or she believed that the young person was older. The person accused of the crime has to prove that all "reasonable steps," such as asking for identification showing proof of age, were taken.

# Appendix 2: Defining Age of A Child: Provincial Variations

Under the laws of each province, you have a duty to report your concerns if you have reason to believe a child has been, or is likely to be, abused or neglected. It is not up to the church or individual to determine whether or not the abuse has actually occurred; that is the responsibility of experts in the field.

"Reason to believe" means that, based on what you have seen, or information you have, you believe a child could be at risk. Provinces vary in their guidelines regarding the age at which an individual is considered a child for purposes of protection.

Below is a list of the 2014 provincial guidelines:

British Columbia	under 19 years old
Alberta	under 18 years old
Saskatchewan	under 16 years old (under 18 years old if there is suspicion of sexual abuse or sexual exploitation)
Manitoba	under 18 years old
Yukon	under 19 years old

Child welfare agencies in each province can be contacted 24 hours a day for the purposes of reporting suspected child abuse.

**If a child is in immediate danger, call 911.**

For contact information for local child welfare agencies across Canada, go to [cwrp.ca/help](http://cwrp.ca/help), the "Child Welfare Research Portal," and follow the links for your province and region.

Please note: While this document specifically addresses issues around protecting children, youth and vulnerable adults from abuse, note that abuse of adults is also a crime and a sin. While most adults are more able than children to report being abused, some may need your assistance and support.

Sexual abusers follow patterns that push the boundaries of behaviours that might otherwise be innocent. Follow your intuition and be careful to note if behaviours have crossed a line into being inappropriate. Sexual offenders often display some of the following behaviours:

- Refuses or resists having a police or child welfare check done
- Volunteers to work with children or youth very soon after starting to attend church
- Displays special interest in specific children who otherwise have no connection to the adult
- Gives gifts to children, youth or vulnerable adults
- Regularly seeks opportunities to be alone with children, such as driving them home after an event
- Displays an unusual amount of physical affection towards vulnerable individuals such as holding, hugging or kissing
- Ingratiates themselves with parents and caregivers in a way that is overly helpful to gain their trust
- Misses or ignores social cues on personal boundaries
- Refuses to allow a child to set limits to the relationship. May belittle or tease the child to keep them from setting a boundary
- Minimizes harmful behaviours when confronted or blames others or the child
- Makes fun of children's body parts or makes inappropriate jokes or comments relating to sexuality
- Spends an unusual amount of time with children, preferring to socialize with them rather than with adults
- Shows unusual over-protectiveness of a child
- May be jealous of other relationships the child has with peers or other adults
- Was sexually abused as a child

### Resource Manuals

- Plan to Protect: [plantoprotect.com](http://plantoprotect.com)
- Sample safe ministries policy from Brightview Baptist: [bit.ly/brightview-sample](http://bit.ly/brightview-sample)
- Sample manual from First Baptist Church Lethbridge: [bit.ly/lethbridge-sample](http://bit.ly/lethbridge-sample)

### Canadian Resources

- Church & Charity Insurance Coverage: [robertsonhall.com](http://robertsonhall.com)
- Abuse Prevention Information: [bit.ly/RHChecklist](http://bit.ly/RHChecklist)
- Social Media for Christian Ministry article: [bit.ly/Social-Media-article](http://bit.ly/Social-Media-article)
- Canadian provider of online background checks: [backcheck.ca](http://backcheck.ca)
- Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal Frequently Asked Questions: [cwrp.ca/faqs](http://cwrp.ca/faqs)
- Canadian Child Welfare Provincial and Territorial Contact Information: [cwrp.ca/help](http://cwrp.ca/help)

### Provincial and Territorial Resources

#### Alberta

- Children and Family Services Alberta: [alberta.ca/children-and-family-services](http://alberta.ca/children-and-family-services)

#### British Columbia

- Ministry of Children and Family Development: [gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/public-safety/protecting-children](http://gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/public-safety/protecting-children)
- BC Criminal Record Checks – Children and Vulnerable Adults: [bit.ly/BC-Check](http://bit.ly/BC-Check)

#### Manitoba

- Manitoba Family Services: [bit.ly/MB-Family-Services](http://bit.ly/MB-Family-Services)
- Reporting Abuse: [bit.ly/MB-Reporting](http://bit.ly/MB-Reporting)

#### Saskatchewan

- Child Protection: [bit.ly/Sask-Child-Protection](http://bit.ly/Sask-Child-Protection)

#### Yukon

- Reporting Child Abuse: [yukon.ca/en/child-abuse](http://yukon.ca/en/child-abuse)

# Appendix 5: Robertson Hall Abuse Prevention Plan Checklist

This resource is directly from Robertson Hall's Abuse Prevention Newsletter for Churches and Christian Organizations, [robertsonhall.com](http://robertsonhall.com).

The following seven (7) items are generally acknowledged by experts as essential elements in establishing an effective formal abuse prevention plan and are required by your insurance company in order to qualify for abuse coverage:

- 1. Statement of Policy** formally approved, implemented and periodically reviewed under the direction of your board members. It should confirm your organization's commitment to providing a safe environment for children and declare zero tolerance for abuse, harassment or neglect committed by any children's or youth ministry worker, including employees, members and volunteers.

This policy should be expressed in terms of your organization's statement of faith, scriptural standards and the duty of care owed to children in our society. The declared purpose of the policy should be clearly expressed; that is, preventing harm to the children, youth and vulnerable adults in your programs and protecting your staff and volunteers from false or wrongful allegations. Formally approved policy that has been implemented and is reviewed periodically.

- 2. Definition** of abuse and related issues so that all of your workers will clearly understand and be able to identify unacceptable behavior, including:
- PHYSICAL ABUSE
  - SEXUAL ABUSE
  - EMOTIONAL ABUSE
  - CHILD NEGLECT
  - HARASSMENT
  - IMPROPER TOUCHING/ DISCIPLINE

- 3. Screening** all children's and youth ministry workers to a degree that is appropriate with their interaction with minors in your organization's care. Screening should also apply to personnel who have management authority and power over other staff with respect to career advancement and performance review in order to discourage harassment.

The following staff and volunteers must be subject to mandatory screening:

- All volunteers working with children, youth and vulnerable adults/seniors
- All board members, elders, deacons, trustees, directors and officers
- Designated monitors and care staff

Effective screening for these individuals must include the following procedures:

- Targeted recruitment of personnel
- Employee and volunteer applications including ministry agreements and release for background references and criminal record checks
- Personal Interview
- Background reference checks

- Criminal Record Checks for all new workers 16 and over, prior to eligibility, including:

CPIC - Name-based Criminal Record Check done through the Canadian Police Information Centre

and

VSV - Vulnerable Sector Verification (also referred to as Screening, Scan or Check) including a query of Local Police Indices and National Pardoned Sex Offenders Database

Note: Checks must be original copies viewed within 60 days of issuance by police services

- Criminal Record Re-Checks for existing workers
  - Camping ministries and short-term missions organizations – Annually
  - Schools, daycares and nurseries – Every three (3) years or less
  - Churches and all other organizations – Every five (5) years or less
- Minimum waiting period of 6 months or more for new volunteers regularly attending church services or volunteering with organization prior to eligibility to work with children or youth

- 4. Operational Procedures** should be outlined in a written manual summarizing your organization's specific guidelines for preventing abuse and harassment, including:

- "Team" approach to children's/ youth ministries
- Volunteers under age 18 may assist only under qualified adult supervision
- Off-premises contact during sponsored programs should be subject to signed parental permission and a "two-adult" rule at all times
- Prohibiting corporal punishment
- Appropriate Youth Communication and Social Networking
- Addressing health, safety and sanitation issues for infants and toddlers in nursery programs, including protocol for illnesses, infections and emergencies, cleanliness of change tables, washrooms and floor surfaces and safety of toys, cribs, etc.
- Avoiding activities that could easily lead to allegations of abuse or harassment, such as individual photography of children, unsupervised internet access, vehicle transportation by workers alone with unrelated youth.

# Appendix 5: Robertson Hall Abuse Prevention Plan Checklist, Continued

- Sleepovers, camping or other overnight events should only be allowed when all supervisors and volunteers are fully screened
- Having all workers sign a ministry covenant confirming they have read, understood, and are willing to comply with policies and procedures
- Keeping documentation on file indefinitely for all workers
- Obtaining signed parental consent and permission for off-premises or overnight events
- Sufficient qualified supervision of children outside and in public places (e.g. parks, playgrounds, libraries, amusement parks, etc.) at all times
- Incident reporting forms must be completed for all cases of injury or suspected abuse
- Internal or external audit to ensure Abuse Prevention Plan compliance

- 5. Premises** modifications or alterations to your facilities which can assist in preventing and discouraging abuse incidents, including:
- Windows in classroom doors and/or open door policy for Sunday School and boys' and girls' clubs
  - Designated monitors circulating periodically from room to room for surveillance and to protect against false allegations

- Controlled access/entry and signing infants and pre-Grade 1 age children in and out of sponsored activities
- Adequate lighting inside and outside of building where children's activities take place
- Appropriate design of washroom and shower facilities and/or appropriate supervision of washroom breaks
- Locking rooms and closets when not in use during children's programs

- 6. Training** for all staff members and volunteers who regularly work with children and youth to assist in the prevention of abuse through the following means:

- Initial formal training, including inhouse video and DVD presentations (or online training) and distribution of handbooks or pocket guides containing a summary of prevention policies and procedures for all workers for their reference
- Educating workers about their legal obligation to report suspected abuse and to recognize and identify the signs and symptoms of abuse and molestation

- Follow up with refresher courses or sessions that emphasize the Operation Procedures, Premises and Reporting requirements. Refresher training can be done at any time including during monthly staff, teacher or volunteer worker meetings. Many churches conduct an annual review of their prevention plan for workers at the beginning of their children's and youth program year in September or October.
- Reviewing the ongoing suitability of existing workers including updated criminal record checks.

- 7. Responding** to all allegations or complaints of abuse in an appropriate manner, including the appointment of individual(s) designated to respond to allegations in the following manner:

- Completing incident reporting forms for suspected abuse or injury
- Satisfying statutory legal obligations by reporting all cases of suspected abuse to police authorities and/or child protective agencies

- Consulting a lawyer for advice
- Without admitting legal liability, express your organization's concern to the complainant and their families and assure them of your commitment in assisting the investigation
- Assuring confidentiality for the benefit of both the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator
- Immediately suspending the alleged perpetrator from children's or youth ministry duties without presuming guilt, pending outcome of police investigation
- Avoiding public statements to individuals, the media or from the pulpit, without obtaining legal counsel
- Contacting your insurance agent or broker to report the incident in order to satisfy the statutory conditions of your liability policy and to avoid jeopardizing your legal defense and coverage response

*Don't try to triage suspected abuse incidents. Just as you don't wait to call the fire department when a building is on fire, you also don't wait to report abuse. The responsibility to report suspected abuse is the law in Canada!*

# Appendix 6: Twelve Myths About Sexual Abuse, Debunked

Except where noted, the myths and responses are adapted from the Calgary Communities Against Sexual Abuse (CCASA) website: [bit.ly/Calgary-Myths](http://bit.ly/Calgary-Myths)

## 1. “Child sexual abuse rarely happens in churches.”<sup>2</sup>

According to the *Insurance Journal*, in the three largest insurers of Protestant churches in the United States, there are about 260 claims of child sex abuse against pastors, youth workers, church volunteers or congregation members every year.

The Roman Catholic Church has revealed that there have been 13,000 credible claims against Catholic clergy between 1950 and 2007. The vast majority of child sexual abuse in churches goes unreported, so the full extent of the problem cannot be known.

## 2. “Children are most often sexually abused by strangers.”

Of 13,600 sexual assaults reported against children/youth in Canada in 2008, 75% of the accused were known to the victim, with 33% being family members and 42% being acquaintances.

## 3. “Child sexual abuse is rare.”

According to the *Badgley Report* (1984), the only national study in Canada so far, one out of every two females and one out of every three males have been sexually abused at some time in their lives. Of these unwanted sexual acts, 80% were committed when the individuals were children or youths under the age of 18.

## 4. “Sexual abuse is usually a single or isolated incident.”<sup>3</sup>

Since perpetrators of sexual abuse are usually known and trusted caregivers, perpetrators usually engage a child, youth or vulnerable adult in a gradual process of sexualizing the relationship over time.

Physical force or violence is rarely used but, rather, the perpetrator tries to manipulate the victim’s trust and hide the abuse. This abuse often occurs over many weeks or even years in repeated episodes that become more invasive with time.

2. Statistics come from *Insurance Journal*. <http://www.insurancejournal.com/news/national/2007/06/18/80877.htm>

3. World Health Organization Guidelines for Medico-legal Care for Victims of Sexual Violence 7.2: [http://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/resources/publications/en/guidelines\\_chap7.pdf](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/resources/publications/en/guidelines_chap7.pdf)

Incest or intrafamilial abuse accounts for one-third of all child sexual abuse cases.

## 5. “Children could just say ‘no’ or tell someone. If they don’t, they must have consented to the sexual encounter.”

Children and vulnerable persons rarely feel they have the power to say “no” to their abuser. They may have been told to keep a secret or been threatened.

They may be dependent on the adult or youth who is abusing them or care about, trust or want to protect the offender.

They may have been taught to be unquestioningly obedient to authority figures or people older than themselves.

They may feel embarrassed, confused and ashamed. Many children do not tell about their abuse until at least five years have passed.

**6. Few boys are sexually abused.”** Between 6 and 15% of men report they have been sexually abused as a child. Boys may find it difficult to report abuse when they live in a culture that expects that they can defend themselves from perpetrators of abuse by fighting back or resisting intimidation.

It is hard for boys to report homosexual abuse if their context is one where homosexuality is stigmatized or shameful.

In a context where heterosexual experience is seen as a rite of passage or badge of honour for boys, abuse is difficult to report. To avoid shame, they remain silent.

## 7. “Women do not sexually abuse children.”

In Canada, 90-95% of accusations of sexual abuse of children were against men. Of the females accused, most were mothers or step-mothers and about 25% of female abusers were babysitters, teachers or daycare workers.



# Twelve Myths about Sexual Abuse Debunked, Continued

## **8. “Parents would know if their child was being abused.”**

Some sexual abuse of children has physical symptoms, such as pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases or bleeding or bruising around the vagina or anus. But not all children experience these symptoms. The psychological symptoms, such as over-sexualized behaviour or depression, may or may not be evident. Since parents tend to trust caregivers such as youth leaders, pastors and babysitters with their children’s safety, they may not recognize abuse when it is happening, especially if obvious symptoms are not present.

## **9. “When an accusation of child sexual abuse is made, people will automatically assume the accused is guilty.”**

Research shows that our society blames the victim more often than the accused. It is far more common to disbelieve the victim rather than the predator. On the whole, society under-reacts and gives the benefit of the doubt to the accused in the belief that this allows someone to be “innocent until proven guilty.” Estimates are that only 3% of all cases of child sexual abuse and only 12% of rapes involving children are ever reported, so most predators are never accused, caught, punished or kept from re-offending.

## **10. “Unless it is physically violent, sexual abuse doesn’t really do any harm.”**

The violation of trust and resulting feelings of betrayal, guilt and shame can do emotional, spiritual and psychological damage that can last a lifetime.

## **11. “Children who have been sexually abused are victims forever.”**

Although the emotional, psychological and spiritual impacts of abuse can be severe, many victims become survivors who lead normal lives. Many survivors develop strengths and ways of coping that help them heal and overcome the effects of abuse.

## **12. “It’s Not My Responsibility.”**

Sexual abuse is a crime. We all share responsibility to protect all children, youth and vulnerable adults from sexual abuse, and have an obligation to report suspected abuse.



