

# Church Safety Evaluations

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## Safety checklist when evaluating a church:

When evaluating a church for yourself and your family, consider asking these questions. If you express interest in going to a church but tell them you have questions, every church, big or small, will be happy to provide you with contact information for someone to meet with, speak with on the phone, or correspond with via email. They should be able to answer these questions, and if they can't, they should be able to get the answers and get back to you.

- ☐ Does the church require background checks for all leaders and volunteers working with children and teens?
- ☐ What training (if any) do leaders and volunteers go through to prevent, identify, and report abuse?
- ☐ Does the church require at least two leaders and/or volunteers to be present when working with children or teens (especially when changing diapers or other especially vulnerable times)?
- ☐ Does the church require leaders and volunteers to not enter the bathroom with children or teens they are supervising or, if it is necessary, to enter in pairs?
- ☐ Are there interior windows into classrooms and activity spaces?
- ☐ Is there a system in place for accountability where abuse could be reported?
  
- ☐ *(a question for yourself)* Do you feel you can trust the system of accountability to hold accountable those in positions of power?

Just because they had good answers to all the questions does not necessarily mean you or your family are fully safe. And just because one or more of their answers wasn't as good as you had hoped doesn't necessarily mean someone is going to be abused. These are helpful questions for making choices, but we must always be watching out for our children, ourselves, and for those around us.

## Safety checklist when attending a church:

Here's a series of questions to consider once you've been attending a church for a little while. It is also good to come back to these questions occasionally as time goes on. If you can't honestly answer these questions in the affirmative, it is a cause for concern.

- ☐ Do you and your children feel safe and able to express what you're thinking and feeling honestly?
- ☐ Is this a community where you feel comfortable setting boundaries (both concerning yourself and your children) and where the leadership and community respect those boundaries?
- ☐ Is this a community where people try to earn your trust or do they assume you should trust them?
- ☐ Does this community (purposefully or not) tend to isolate you from outside relationships?
- ☐ As far as you can tell, does everyone follow the church's policies or is there one or more people who treat themselves or who others treat as above the rules?

### **Improve Safety at Your Church**

You're in a church that you love, but you realize the safety conditions aren't as good as they could be. Maybe there are no background checks. Maybe there's no system in place to report abusive behavior. Or maybe the system that's in place seems too easy for a pastor or leader to keep quiet. Even the best ministers can make mistakes.

Here are steps you can take at your church to advocate for a safer place of worship for you, your family, and your community.

- 1) If you haven't already, learn what the current policies are and what your church's process is for changing them. This might mean speaking to a trusted member of leadership or looking through policy documents.
- 2) Express the problem and the changes you would like to see. This might be as easy as a conversation with your friend who's in a leadership position, or it might mean going to one or more meetings. If this is too intimidating you may want to jump to step 3 and come back to this step with more support. If you are satisfied with the results, GREAT! You're done! Thank you! ...but sometimes this process can take a few more steps.
- 3) You might need help. Share your concerns with others at the church and gather support for what needs to change. Depending on the church and its size, shows of support could include friends coming with to a leadership meeting, gathering signatures on a letter, or even organizing a group meeting with leadership specifically about this topic.
- 4) Kindly present your evidence and support to the church leadership and watch for results. A healthy church with good leadership should be receptive to the safety concerns of those who attend there, but even if they are receptive, you may have to keep them accountable to actually make changes.

Lastly, keep yourself safe during this process. Even in the healthiest of churches church politics can get messy, and there can be good faith disagreements about what policies will work best to

keep people safe. But if you are surprised by pushback that seems unusually strong or arguments that seem oddly weak, or if you feel manipulated or just feel like something is wrong, BE CAUTIOUS! Those who abuse or cover up for abuse often come off as really nice people to everyone else, but if their power feels threatened they may start to reveal another side of themselves. Those situations can be hard, but remember you are protecting yourself and your family who are made in the image of God.