

The ABCs of Child Abuse Prevention



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During this session, you will:

- ▶ Know the four basic types of child maltreatment
- ▶ Describe common signs of abuse and neglect
- ▶ Describe ways to prevent abuse and neglect
- ▶ Understand your responsibility as mandated reporter of suspected abuse and neglect, including how to report

Types of Child Abuse

- ▶ **Physical Abuse:** Non-accidental physical injury or death of a child by an adult
- ▶ **Neglect:** Failing to provide for a child's physical needs
- ▶ **Emotional Abuse:** Shaming, humiliating, or verbally attacking
- ▶ **Sexual Abuse:** Exploitation by exposing a child to sexual behaviors, situations, or material

Child Maltreatment in the U. S.

- ▶ 3,121,409 cases reported in 2020
- ▶ 1 in 7 children were maltreated in 2020
- ▶ 614,931 children were substantiated victims of child maltreatment

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|-----|-----------------------|
| 76% | Neglect |
| 16% | Physical abuse |
| 9% | Sexual abuse |
| 6% | Emotional abuse |
| 2% | Medical neglect |
| 6% | Other (not specified) |

Child Maltreatment in Georgia

- ▶ 121,206 cases reported to DFCS
- ▶ 8,604 cases were substantiated

| | |
|-----|-----------------|
| 61% | Neglect |
| 13% | Physical abuse |
| 9% | Sexual abuse |
| 26% | Emotional Abuse |
| 3% | Medical Neglect |

Top Ways to Recognize Abuse

1. Listen
2. Look
3. Ask questions
4. Be alert for behaviors



Remember that sexual abuse will rarely be discovered through physical indicators alone

Common Indicators of Abuse

- ▶ Regression to earlier behaviors
- ▶ Bedwetting
- ▶ Fear of a particular person
- ▶ Withdrawal
- ▶ Acting out
- ▶ Inappropriate sexual behavior
- ▶ Sleep disturbances
- ▶ Extreme hunger or thirst
- ▶ Inappropriate clothing

Common Indicators of Abuse

- ▶ Problems with schoolwork
- ▶ Alcohol use
- ▶ Eating disorders
- ▶ Risky behaviors
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Self-injury
- ▶ Dirty or disheveled appearance
- ▶ Discomfort sitting or walking
- ▶ Burns or bruises shaped like an object

Ways to Prevent Abuse and Neglect in the Church Setting

- ▶ Careful screening of all staff and volunteers working with children
- ▶ Staff and volunteer training
- ▶ Building design to protect children
- ▶ Church policies for child safety

Screening Volunteers and Staff

Multiple components:

- ▶ Written application
- ▶ Background check
- ▶ Interview
- ▶ References
- ▶ Connection with church before volunteering (minimum 2 months)
- ▶ Screening for everyone; no exceptions for “people we know”

Red Flags in Screening

- ▶ Red flags can come out in any part of the screening process
- ▶ Be alert for
 - Abrupt or repeated relocation
 - Pattern of working with specific groups (age/gender)
 - Poor peer relationships
 - Unrealistic views of children
 - Child-related possessions (without children in house)

Training Staff and Volunteers

- ▶ Identifying signs of abuse/neglect
- ▶ Identifying predatory or grooming behaviors
- ▶ Mandated reporting
- ▶ Protective measures in church activities
 - 2 deep leadership (never be alone with a child)
 - Appropriate adult to child ratios
 - Avoiding inappropriate touch (tickling, etc.)
 - Safer virtual events

Safer Virtual Events

- ▶ Copy at least one parent on all written communication to minors
- ▶ No one-on-one communication with minors
- ▶ Conversations focused on topic of event
- ▶ No sharing personal information
- ▶ Know online tools/applications - avoid or disable DM capability

Safer Virtual Events

- ▶ Clear expectations for all involved (adults and minors)
- ▶ Appropriate virtual backgrounds
- ▶ Appropriate dress during virtual events
- ▶ Use images only with parent/guardian permission

Safer Building Design

- ▶ Sightlines into children's and youth spaces
- ▶ Privacy in bathrooms
 - Appropriate for age of child
 - Consider issues for those who need assistance
- ▶ Diaper changing spaces in open
- ▶ Emergency exits with diagram in each room
- ▶ Access to phone for emergencies

Safe Church Policies

Should include:

- ▶ Definitions
- ▶ Protection and prevention
- ▶ Confidentiality/maintaining records
- ▶ Disqualifications for staff/volunteers
- ▶ Who makes final decision about staff/volunteer candidates
- ▶ Supervision procedures

Safe Church Policies

- ▶ Trainings required
- ▶ Behavioral guidelines
- ▶ Limits on when/where adults can transport youth
- ▶ Parental permission for late-night, overnight, and off-site activities with approved chaperones
- ▶ No secrecy

Safe Church Policies

- ▶ Procedures if known sex offenders are in the church
- ▶ Response team
- ▶ How to report suspected abuse
- ▶ How to handle youth who may be abusers

Handling Abuse and Neglect

There are three basic steps to dealing with abuse and neglect:

- ▶ Recognizing signs of abuse
- ▶ Reporting suspected abuse
- ▶ Supporting children

When a Child Discloses

- ▶ Respect the child's confidentiality
- ▶ DON'T promise not to tell
- ▶ Find a private place to talk
- ▶ DON'T promise it's going to be ok
- ▶ Reassure the child
- ▶ Listen openly and calmly
- ▶ DON'T ask probing questions
- ▶ Take notes, word for word
- ▶ Report the disclosure

What is a Mandated Reporter?

- ▶ By law, **anyone** working with children is required to report any suspected child abuse or neglect
- ▶ People required to report abuse are known as **Mandated Reporters**
- ▶ Both paid staff and volunteers are mandated reporters

Immunity from Liability

- ▶ When you report suspected abuse and neglect, you are *Immune from Liability*
- ▶ Cannot be prosecuted in criminal or civil court
- ▶ Must have made the report in **good faith**

Most Important Steps in Preventing Child Abuse

- ▶ Every church should have some type of Child Abuse Policy
- ▶ Offer training on Darkness 2 Light
- ▶ Contact us for references to help in crafting a Child Abuse Policy

Thank you!

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Additional Resources on Child Maltreatment

- ▶ [Darkness to Light training](#)
- ▶ [Prevent Child Abuse America](#)
- ▶ [Prevent Child Abuse Georgia](#)
- ▶ [Children's Advocacy Centers of Georgia](#)
- ▶ [Church Mutual - Sexual Abuse Prevention resources](#)
- ▶ [Church Mutual - Sexual Abuse Prevention Assessment](#)
- ▶ [Faith Trust Institute](#)
- ▶ [United Church of Christ Safety in the Church resources](#)
- ▶ [Insurance Board Abuse Prevention Resources and Templates](#)

Additional Information about Reporting Suspected Abuse and Neglect



Georgia Code: Required Reporting

- ▶ An oral or electronic report
- ▶ Made immediately
- ▶ In no case, later than 24 hours from the time of discovery
- ▶ Based on *reasonable cause* to believe a child has been abused

How to Make a Report

- ▶ Reports must be made to
 - DFCS Child Protective Services (1-855-GACHILD)
 - Law enforcement (especially if immediate danger)
- ▶ Follow the church's written procedure for reporting suspected abuse
- ▶ ***Remember: You're not the investigator!***
 - DFCS will investigate the report

Information for Filing a Report

You will be asked to share:

- ▶ Name and address of child
- ▶ Names and addresses of parents or guardians
- ▶ Child's age
- ▶ What you observed
- ▶ Nature and extent of injuries
- ▶ Other helpful information

After You Report

- ▶ The child will be taken into police custody if in immediate danger
- ▶ DFCS will begin an investigation
- ▶ Based on the results, the case could be
 - ✓ Screened out
 - ✓ Substantiated
 - ✓ Unsubstantiated
- ▶ Investigations are confidential
- ▶ *You may never hear what happens*