

The 4 P's of Child Abuse Prevention

By Arthur F. Blinci, ARM eMBA

All Adventist churches and schools need to establish a proactive child abuse prevention plan to protect children and teenagers from inappropriate conduct by adults or other children. Conducting an assessment of your facilities and programming, plus training staff members, will help identify areas or situations where acts of child abuse frequently occur. Awareness of these potential risk factors will help adult leaders protect children and teenagers from harm while they are involved in ministry activities. Training will help make adult staff members aware of expected conduct and protect them from being vulnerable to accusations of inappropriate behavior with children and youth.

#1 Premises Review

ACCESS TO PREMISES – Carefully monitor the arrival and departure of children at your facilities. Keep all ministry activities within a specified area and do not allow children unrestricted access throughout the building or property.

INTERIOR & EXTERIOR LIGHTING – Be sure your facilities are well lit, both indoors and outdoors, during all children and youth programs to help facilitate appropriate security and supervision.

VISUAL PANELS – Be sure all areas have either windows or vision panels in doors to allow easy monitoring of the activities taking place in these rooms. Ensure that staff and volunteers have not covered these vision panels with paper, curtains, or other materials.

RESTROOMS – Limit the number of children allowed using restrooms and monitor these areas in order to minimize one-on-one situations, which can lead to foul play or inappropriate behavior.

#2 Personnel Administration

STAFF SELECTION – Carefully interview and select all adult staff members (employees and volunteers) after a six-month waiting period. This time period allows you to become acquainted with the individual's talents personality and temperament. Conduct background screenings in accordance with denominational policies.

STAFF TRAINING – All staff members who work with children and teenagers should be appropriately trained in child abuse awareness, prevention, and the reporting laws of the local jurisdiction. Training should also include the expected code of conduct that will be used in keeping with the Christ-centered mission of the ministry.

SUPERVISION – Appropriate adult supervision is required at all times. A two adult rule should be followed at all times. If this is not possible, an adult should never be alone with one child. All staff should make this their highest priority and know what is expected of them as they interact with children and teenagers.

DISMISSAL OF STAFF – Any staff member who fails to abide by the expected code of conduct will be subject to dismissal from further participation in the ministry. This policy is to protect children and teenagers from harm.

#3 Protecting Children & Youth

DISCIPLINE AND TOUCHING – Carefully monitor all interactions of staff members with children and teenagers for appropriate behavior in keeping with the ministry's code of conduct.

OUT-OF-PROGRAM CONTACT – Carefully monitor any staff member who has frequent out-of-program contact with a child or teenager especially on a one-to-one basis or without the knowledge of the child's parent or guardian.

SIGN IN / SIGN OUT CONTROLS – Maintain a record of all children who are participating in the activity and be sure they are picked up and released only by their parent or other authorized adult.

REPORTING INCIDENTS – Be observant of any suspected signs of a child abuse or incidents of inappropriate conduct by adults or other children. Promptly report all incidents of suspected child abuse to law enforcement authorities and to the local denominational administration.

#4 Program Review

LEADERSHIP BY EXAMPLE – As a children and youth ministry staff member you have the privilege of leading young people to Jesus. This is reflected by how the ministry is conducted and how you supervise and interact with the children and teenagers entrusted to your care.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT – Always foster a transparent ministry that welcomes the involvement or observation by parents, guardians, or other adults at any time.

STRANGER AWARENESS – Always be alert and observant of any strangers or unknown individuals who may be watching or lurking around the premises during children and youth ministry activities.

BULLYING AWARENESS – Be observant of any signs of bullying or incidents of inappropriate hazing activity among children or teenagers. Adopt a zero tolerance policy and teach them to respect each other by living the Golden Rule developing strong Christian friendships.