



SafeChurch®

Responding to an Allegation of Child Sexual Abuse

Many churches and religious organizations have never had a serious claim, legal concern or allegation of inappropriate sexual conduct. However, when an organization finds itself on the receiving end of either of these situations, it's helpful to know what to do. Responding correctly and in a timely manner can often reduce or eliminate the concern. Even if it does not, a proper and planned response can save the church thousands of dollars and protect the vitality of its ministries.

Should a misconduct claim or allegation take place, the following steps will assist you in responding in an appropriate way that will not only respect the victim and accused, but your organization as well.

- The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
- The worker alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation.
- Civil authorities will be notified, and the organization will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists.* The organization will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
- The insurance company will be notified, and the organization will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
- The organization will designate a spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. The advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the congregation. All other representatives of the church should refrain from speaking to the media.
- A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.
- Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

By planning ahead and having the above information readily available, you may be able to limit the severity of an allegation or claim, while safeguarding the resources and people that have been entrusted to your care.

*Information on reporting abuse in each state may be found at the following website link provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:

http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reslist/rl_dsp.cfm?rs_id=5&rate_chno=11-11172



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