

Creating a Safety and Security Policy for your Church in New Mexico

Suggestions from The Baptist Convention of New Mexico, BCNM

Why is it necessary?

- When minors are in the care of the church, it is our moral, legal and Biblical responsibility to provide the best care possible for every minor and for the adults caring for them. (Matthew 18:1-5)
- A policy sets standards for the entire church to follow to ensure the safety of minors, the safety of teachers and the safety of the church.
- A policy creates boundaries that would make it more difficult for anyone with ill intent to harm a minor.
- A policy, if followed, can help create protection for teachers and childcare workers when there is an accusation.
- A policy can help protect the church from lawsuits.

Frequently Asked Questions:

- Will our church be inspected or the policy be scrutinized by any state organization?
 - The only time a church is subject to follow any state regulations is when a church has a daycare center or childcare center that meets for more than 4 hours a day twice a week, or more than 8 hours a week. Here's the policy from the State regulations manual saying these programs are an exemption from following state regulations:

Parent's day out programs held in a church, religious building or house of worship, or public building operating for no more than eight hours per week and no more than four hours on any given day. The program will be staffed by parents participating in the program, or by others who are members of the church or public affiliation.
 - If your church wishes to have a daycare center or any programs that meets for more than 8 hours per week, you would be subject to the state regulations. You can find more information about this at www.newmexicokids.org. The BCNM does not have the expertise to advise you on the State Regulations and would recommend that you work with CYFD; Children, Youth and Families Department.
 - Besides the above state regulations for daycares, there are no specific state regulations for churches. The government agencies would have no authority in your church unless a safety issue was called into question or a formal complaint is filed. However, if an accusation is made against your church, you could become open to inspection at that point.
- Will the BCNM inspect or direct any policies for our churches?

- The structure of the BCNM is to recognize the autonomous nature of every church. The BCNM does not inspect facilities but would be happy to make any suggestions in a walkthrough of your facilities. Also, the BCNM does not direct any policies for churches. The BCNM can make recommendations or suggestions but it is ultimately your church decision as to what goes into your policies.
- The BCNM assumes no liability for the policies of your church based on the information provided in this document.

- Where do we begin?
 - Your insurance company is the place to start. Talk with the ‘risk assessment’ department and ask about your insurance. What is your liability coverage? Would the liability coverage be higher if the church had a policy in place? Do they have examples of policies or suggestions for policies? Would they look over your policy as you write it?
 - Put together a team of people who are active in working with minors at the church to work together to write a policy. You could include parents who have children of various ages from babies through teenagers.
 - Have that team talk with small groups around the church about the importance of having a policy to make sure questions are answered and concerns are listened to before presenting it to the church to be voted on. A good policy takes time to formulate so don’t rush the process.
 - **VERY IMPORTANT**: The most important thing to consider when writing policies is to make sure that the church is capable of following any policies written. A court of law would consider a church negligent if they aren’t following their own policy. If it is written in the policy, the church is setting the standard of safety for itself and must follow that standard or it is automatically seen as negligent in a court of law.
 - Have an attorney review any written policies.

- What do we put into a policy?
 - These FIVE items are important as a foundation for your policy but these should not be considered all inclusive:
 1. Only approved workers are allowed to teach or help among minors.
 - An approved worker has filled out an application to serve, including permission to conduct a criminal background check and the background check has been completed.
 - An approved worker must have an interview with two designated leaders or staff members of the church.
 - An approved worker has been a member of the church for at least six months or up to a year. Some churches allow active attenders that have attended regularly for a year to teach. There are some occasions when churches allow people from other churches to help (for example, during VBS). It should be in a policy that the person still follows the approved worker steps but can provide a letter of recommendation from their

pastor or director of children or youth instead of becoming a member of the church.

- An approved worker provides 3 to 5 references of individuals who would be contacted by a director or staff member.
2. There will always be at least two adults over the age of 18 serving in every classroom.
 - These two adults should not be married. In the event an allegation of abuse leads to a criminal trial, husbands and wives cannot be coerced to testify against each other in court.
 - Even though youth can be very helpful in classrooms with younger children, they do not qualify as someone who can vouch for the adult in the room as they are still minors themselves. If your church wants to still use teenagers as teachers or helpers, be sure there are still two adults in the room. Churches may also consider age requirements for youth to serve in children's classrooms. One possible rule could be no one under the age of 18 serving in babies through two year olds. When using teenagers between the ages of 13-17, there should be at least a five year difference in the ages of the classroom where they are helping.
 - Your policy may include what happens if an adult needs to leave the room. For example, if a child needs to be taken down the hallway to use the restroom, what could be done that would still ensure that two adults are present in the room?
 - Any counseling of any minors would not be done in a one on one setting. Another adult would need to be present.
 3. There should be clear sightlines into every classroom.
 - Doorways and/or classrooms should have windows so that every area of a classroom can be seen at all times.
 4. Check-in and release procedures
 - Have a clearly defined age in which children are checked in by a parent or guardian. The safest recommendation is to check in all children from babies throughout elementary years. If not all the elementary years, then third grade is often a recommended age to begin to allow a child to go to and from a classroom without being checked in and out.
 - Use a system in which a parent or guardian receives something (a tag, a sticker, a badge, a wristband) that they must present when picking up a child.
 - Consider what would happen if a parent loses their release tag, sticker or badge?
 - Will there be an age restriction on who may pick up a child? Would it be okay for an older sibling to pick up a child?
 5. Health standards for your Children's Rooms, especially Preschool.

- Children with any of the following symptoms, but not limited to these symptoms, should not be at church: green discharge from nose or eyes, fever in the last 24 hours, vomiting or diarrhea in the last 24 hours, severe coughing, pink eye, lice, strep throat, or unknown rashes. If a child shows up with these symptoms, parents or guardians are asked to come and remove their child from the classroom.
 - All classrooms should be kept clean and wiped down after use. Especially consider disinfecting rooms that have had babies through two year olds. Toys and surfaces are sprayed with a bleach solution and allowed to air dry. (1 tablespoon of bleach to 1 gallon of cool water) Any linens are washed in between sessions.
 - Notification about snacks or any foods must be posted where parents/guardians can see. Parents are asked when checking in children if children have any allergies. Any known allergies are indicated on the child's nametag so that all teachers can clearly see.
- Other things to consider including in a policy.

1. Consider including a Ratio of Adults to Children such as:

Model	Age Grouping	Ratio Adult to Child	# of Children	# of Leaders	Maximum in one Classroom
One	All Preschoolers, Birth through Kindergarten, in one Room	1:3	9	3	12
Two	Birth-Two's	1:3	9	3	12
	Three's-Kindergarten	1:4	12	4	16
Three	Babies	1:2	8	4	12
	One's-Two's	1:3	9	3	12
	Three's-Pre-K	1:4	12	3	12
Four	Babies	1:2	8	4	12
	One's	1:3	9	3	12
	Two's	1:3	9	3	12
	Three's	1:4	12	3	15
	Pre-Kindergarten	1:4	12	3	15
	Kindergarten	1:4	16	4	20
	Elementary 1 st -5 th Graders	1:5	20	4	24

2. Photo, Video and Social Media Policy

- Parents approval should be given before posting pictures of any children on any websites or social media. Also, parent approval should be given before using pictures for any print materials or videos.

- It is New Mexico state policy that foster children would not have their picture posted or used anywhere.
- When in contact with minors outside of church, a good policy for leadership is to not be in any private conversations with a minor. Direct messaging or texting would always include a third person.

3. Overnight or Day Trips

- Before allowing or appointing anyone to drive minors, a driver's license check or a driving record can be obtained through the same companies that do background checks.
- Insurance companies often do not insure anyone under the age of 25 to drive with minors in their vehicle. Check with your insurance company for details.
- When traveling overnight, in hotel or camp accommodations, the same 2 adult rule should apply to rooming.
- Permission slips with signed permission from parents or guardians is vital to carry with you when minors are away from their parents. It should include medical information for any emergency situation and a release for medical treatment.

4. Appropriate Discipline

- Appropriate Discipline could be listed including: redirection, praise, natural consequences, verbal warnings, age-appropriate time out, contacting the director, contacting the parent.
- Inappropriate discipline could be listed including: shaming, yelling, blaming, pulling or hitting.

5. Appropriate Touch

- Appropriate touch could be high-fives, fist bumps, shaking hands, and side hugs.
- Inappropriate touch could be frontal hugs, children on laps (especially of men) and any kissing. Any rough touch should be discouraged such as yanking, grabbing, wrestling, pushing or hitting.

6. Food allowed into classrooms

- Teachers should not bring a hot beverage into a classroom where it could spill and burn a child.
- Parents can bring in snacks as long as it is pre-approved with a teacher so that allergies or special dietary needs can be considered.
- Children with allergies or special dietary needs can bring their own snacks as long as it isn't shared with other children without a teacher's approval.

7. Medical Needs

- Children commonly receive injuries. It is a good idea to document anything that happens in a classroom so that parents know that a child was scratched or bitten by another child or is bruised or bleeding. Document how it happened as well as what was done for the injury. Provide copies for the classroom, the parent and the director.
- Administration of medication is never recommended by a staff member or a volunteer. Parents should be the only ones to administer medication unless a lifesaving intervention needs to occur such as an epi-pen. Overnight trips or long day trips may require a teacher to administer medication. Make sure that the church has written permission from the parent along with exact instructions for the medication. Any medication needs to be in its original packaging.
- Teachers should wear gloves when dealing with any bodily fluid. Wash hands thoroughly afterwards.

8. Consider the Physical Needs for Safety in a Children's Area

- Are children's classrooms easily accessible for anyone walking by the church? How can we lock doors to prevent access and only allow approved workers to be in the area where our children's classrooms are?
- While we want to lock out any unwanted persons, we want children, especially in preschool, to not have access to escape a room until the appropriate adult comes to pick them up. Half doors or dutch doors can be an easy way to keep children in and yet keep the room visible to anyone walking by. A window in the upper portion of a door can still be helpful so the door can be closed from outside distractions when necessary yet the room is still visible.
- All rooms where children or youth are should have full visibility. There should not be any cubbies or corners where a child/youth/adult interacting with a minor cannot be seen.
- Church rooms should be clear of broken toys, stuffed animals (can't be disinfected), and all electrical outlets should be covered. Make sure that baby and toddler rooms don't have anything small that can be put into a child's mouth and become a choking hazard.

9. Emergency plans

- Always have an attendance list to make sure every room knows how many children and who they are in case of an emergency. Train leaders to grab the attendance list if possible when evacuating a classroom.
- How would teachers evacuate a room if necessary? Procedures of where children are evacuated to and who they can be released to should be included.

- How would the church conduct a lockdown in which children and leaders need to stay inside a classroom and lock doors.

10. Diaper Changing and Bathroom Procedures

- Teachers should wear new gloves and diapering tables should have clean paper and be wiped down between each child. Hand washing should be thorough between each diaper change also.
- Some churches do not allow men to change diapers.
- Bathroom policies are always a little tricky but here's some ideas for your policy. Churches who have bathrooms connected to the classroom have the ideal situation of still having two adults in the classroom. Leave a door open so an adult is not alone in a bathroom with a child. If children need to go down the hall to the bathroom, consider having a hall monitor that would escort children down the hall and stand at the doorway of the bathroom but not enter the bathroom to be alone with a child. Have a potty time for all children to go to the bathroom at once so that teachers can escort an entire classroom and still maintain the two adult rule. Check a bathroom first before sending a child in alone. If a child needs assistance in the bathroom, notify another adult before entering the bathroom.

11. Teacher Responsibilities

- Prepare and use teaching activities according to the literature provided by the church.
- Arrive at least 15 minutes prior to the arrival of the first child, prepare the room and be prepared to greet the first child as he/she arrives.
- Ensure parent or guardian is greeted warmly and welcomed to the church.
- Provide a safe and loving environment for every child.
- Ensure that each child is checked into and out.
- Be aware of any allergies and write that on the child's nametag.
- Make sure each parent/guardian has the security tag, sticker or badge.
- Oversee the teaching and care given to the children.
- Know and enforce all procedures and policies.
- Complete an incident report if a child is hurt while in a room. Give copies to director or staff and to parent.
- In babies through two's, disinfect toys, teaching materials, equipment and furniture after the last child is picked up by his/her parents by spraying with bleach solution and allowing to air dry (1 tablespoon bleach to 1 gallon of water). In other classrooms, wipe down surfaces.
- Leave the room clean and prepared for the next session.
- Attend trainings and meetings as possible.

12. Reporting Abuse

- If there is any report of abuse, respond immediately.

- If any indication of abuse from a leader to a minor at church or through church activities is reported, that leader will be immediately removed from the classroom until an investigation is completed. Even if a church feels that the accusation is false, the most appropriate response is immediate separation.
 - If a teacher suspects that a child is being abused, please know that it is New Mexico state law to report any abuse directly. While reporting to the staff or leadership of the church is also important, a teacher is held responsible and can be found negligent if they don't report it themselves. The phone number to call is 1-855-333-SAFE (7233).
 - Teachers should document any injuries or unusual marks on a child even if it happened before the child arrived. This would help a church to prove that a child didn't receive the injury while in their care. It would also provide records if injuries were ongoing and abuse needed to be substantiated.
 - Report anything suspicious to a director or staff member.

- Resources for more information and additional training:
 - www.ministrysafe.com
 - <http://www.sbc.net/churchresources/sexabuseprevention.asp>
 - <http://protectmyministry.com/child-safety-training/>
 - www.reducingtherisk.com
 - Shepherd's Watch at <https://www.group.com/category/ministry-resources/church-safety/shepherds-watch-background-checks.do>

- Insurance Companies
 - www.brotherhoodmutual.com
 - www.churchmutual.com
 - www.guideone.com
 - www.allstate.com
 - www.statefarm.com
 - www.farmers.com
 - www.nationwide.com

- Books to Read
 - On Guard by Deepak Reju
 - The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide for Churches and Ministries by Basyle Tchividjian & Shira M. Berkovits

- Check the sex offender registry for both New Mexico and nationally for sex offenders near your church or to be sure volunteers are not on the list at <https://www.nsopw.gov/> and www.nmsexoffender.com

- Companies for check in and check out systems:
 - www.wristband.com –cheap and easy to buy wristbands to use as check in and check out security tags
 - Database systems to use electronic check-in systems: www.lambslist.com, www.kidcheck.com, www.fellowshipone.com

- Where would you recommend doing background checks?
 - Check with your insurance company for a recommendation
 - www.christianbackgroundchecks.com
 - <https://www.lifeway.com/en/shop/services/church-administration/background-checks>
 - <https://www.safehiringsolutions.com/background-checks>
 - <https://c4operations.com/verticals/ministry/>

BCNM provides these resources regarding church policies and the protection of children as a tool for the use of those churches in cooperation with the convention. These resources are not a substitute for each church doing its due diligence regarding the policies the church should have. BCNM does not warrant or represent that these resources are sufficient for any church.

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