

CHILD ABUSE—Don't let it happen in your church

According to Childhelp, 3 million reports of child abuse are made every year in the United States. Experts estimate that the actual number of incidents of abuse and neglect is three times greater than reported.

Child abuse happens to children of all ages and does not distinguish between gender, race or socio-economic or cultural groups. Sexual abuse and neglect is defined as: A child whose physical or mental health is threatened with harm by the acts or omission of the person responsible for the child's welfare. Sexual abuse involves the exploitation of a child for the sexual gratification of an adult or a person with power over the child.

To work towards eliminating child abuse, church leaders should adhere to the following:

- Establish written employment practices procedures and commit to following them carefully with regard to the hiring, supervision and dismissal of employees.
- Know the statutory requirements and regulations pertaining to your state such as—who are mandatory reporters, timeline for reporting, which agency to report suspected abuse.
- Require a written application for all employee and volunteer positions.
- Perform state and federal background checks on all employees and volunteers working with children or vulnerable people.
- Provide proper supervision of youth activities:
 - There should be at least two staff members present at all times when working with children; policy should not allow one-on-one activities that aren't within clear view of another adult.
 - Provide for easy viewing of classrooms and other areas where children are located. Keep doors to these areas open.
- Provide proper training annually for all staff and volunteers
- Respond consistently and quickly to complaints or allegations. It is important to document all allegations and investigations
- Designate a response team with established procedures including media and community communication.

Keeping children safe is everyone's job. By implementing a awareness and prevention program, we will work together to eliminate sexual abuse.

For more useful tips or a sample sexual misconduct prevention manual please visit our website at: www.presbyterianone.org. Feel free to contact our office with any questions or concerns at 800-234-6787.