



How to Recognize and Prevent Child Abuse

I stared at the computer screen in confusion.
He was the child being abused, and I didn't realize it?

As the new intern for my local church conference, I was participating in child protection training for the first time. The instructional program was guiding me through different hypothetical scenarios as a camp counselor. My fictional campers would do or say something, and I would respond.

In each scenario, I had my eyes on certain kids as potential victims, but I was certain one kid was all right. He seemed happy and comfortable sharing about his home life. With a sweet demeanor, he talked about his ant friends when everyone shared about the pets they had at home.

At the end of the camp, his guardians never showed up. When I asked him if I could call one of his parent's or another individual approved to pick him up, he burst into tears and begged me not to call another person.

He told me his father would beat him if someone else picked him up and insisted he would be fine if left alone to wait. Then he said he was often left alone for extended periods of time. I learned that he was often left locked in the garage while his father went out. His father didn't provide him with food, water, heating, air conditioning, or bathroom facilities in the garage. During these solitary hours, he watched his ant friends because he had nothing else to do.

The training program explained what next steps I should take now that I suspected abuse was taking

place. I couldn't take my eyes off the computer screen as the little boy's face looked back at me. I stared at the cartoon image of this child who represented so many real children who experience abuse in their lifetime.

Abuse Can Happen Anywhere

Children can be abused:

- At home
- At school
- At church activities
- By adults
- By parents
- By other children.

As a camp counselor, Sabbath School teacher, Pathfinder leader, or schoolteacher, your work with children comes with the responsibility and privilege to protect those children from harm. By taking proper child protection measures in your ministry, you can:

1. Prevent abuse.
2. Recognize suspected abuse.
3. Report it to stop future abuse from taking place.

Five Ways to Prevent or Stop Child Abuse

1. Background Screening

Perform background checks on all staff and volunteers before they are allowed to work with kids in your ministry. Repeat the checks every three years. If the



background check shows that the potential volunteer or staff member has a history of child abuse, they are not eligible to work with children.

2. Child Protection Training

Train all staff and volunteers to recognize and report suspected child abuse. Contact your local church conference for recommended programs to use.

3. Supervision

Plan for appropriate child supervision at all your ministry activities. Learn more about best supervision practices in the [Youth Supervision Info Sheet](#).

4. Talk to Children and Youth About Abuse

Talk to the children under your care about:

- Types of abuse
- Consent
- Body ownership
- Appropriate touch
- How to report abuse

An increasing number of child abuse cases involve children abusing other children. Talk to those under your care about what is healthy activity and what is not, and how to ask for help if they are in an unsafe situation.

Use the [Personal and Body Safety for Children and Youth](#) info sheet to talk to children about boundaries for their bodies.

5. Report Suspected Abuse

If you suspect abuse is taking place, report it immediately to your ministry leader. Do not wait for someone else to report the abuse.

Ministry leaders should then report abuse or neglect by calling local child protective services officer or law enforcement agency so professionals can assess the situation. Reporting is required by law.

Notify Adventist Risk Management, Inc. (ARM) concurrent with your notice to child protection services or the police.

You Can Make a Difference

If you work with children, you can help protect them from abuse. Use the information in this article to prevent abuse in your ministry. If you are not a leader in your ministry, but you see an area where your ministry can improve their child protection, speak up. Share this article with someone who works with children. Your actions may prevent another child from being abused.

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