

CHILD CARE CENTER

Today's headlines frequently highlight child molestation in day care centers. Church-sponsored child care centers, "mother's day out" programs, and schools are not immune from this problem. Sponsoring such facilities/programs exposes the church and the minister to many dangers.

Every state has its own legal definition, so it is important to know exactly how your state defines sexual abuse. This information can be obtained from your local and state department of social services. Sexual abuse usually includes touching, as well as nontouching abuse, such as indecent exposure, language, exploitation, etc.

Following are some suggestions to prepare wisely for the operations of a child care center. This list is not exhaustive but should heighten awareness.

- Have a church-elected child care center committee. LifeWay Christian Resources (Church Leadership Department) can provide information on the responsibilities of such a committee.
- Written applications (Illustration D), appropriate releases (Illustration E), thorough interviews and thorough reference checks (Illustration F) are essential when considering prospective employees.
- Obtain insurance for such facilities. The committee should have a good working relationship with a reputable attorney. Church insurance professionals can assist you in selecting a qualified church insurance company that specializes in church-related insurance products.
- Make sure your principal or child care director is familiar with the laws and procedures in handling suspected molestations. One source of information is the book, *Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church*, by Richard R. Hammar, Steve W. Kilpowicz, and James F. Cobble, Jr. This book may be secured from Christian Ministry Resources, P.O. Box 1098, Matthews, NC 28106, or phone 1-704-841-8066.
- Maintain good communication with your staff. People who get along well together naturally look out for one another.
- Children brought to day care must be released only to adults listed on the child's enrollment form. It should be the parent's/guardian's responsibility to maintain this form in a current condition. In the event that the day care worker in charge does not personally know the adult attempting to pick up a child, the worker must ask for personal identification.
- Inform parents, children and staff on handling improper advances. A voluntary information program may suffice, but it should be repeated every year. Additional efforts should be made to determine professional training available for child care workers. Staff and volunteer child care workers should be encouraged to attend such professional training.
- Build a solid base of support within the congregation for the child care center or school. Christian schools and child care centers provide a wonderful ministry. The possibility of problems should not hinder a church from having a child care center. Do it correctly!
- **It is very important** to check all legal implications of having a **church day care center**, **church school**, or **both** with your local and state departments of social services and health, etc. In addition, check with your attorney.

- Such situations **must be reported** when it is suspected that any child has been molested, abused and/or neglected; or if any person is suspected of child molestation, abuse and/or neglect.
- The report may be made **orally** and followed by a written report, if requested; and should contain, if known:
 1. The name and address of the child, the child's parents, or other individuals responsible for the child's care.
 2. The child's location.
 3. The child's condition, including the nature and extent of the child's injury.
 4. Whether the alleged perpetrator has access to the child.
 5. Any other information that the mandated reporter believes might be helpful in showing the cause of the injuries or the extent to which the child's life might be in danger.

The reports should be made to the state department of social services (SDSS). When the department is not open for business, the report may be made to an appropriate law enforcement agency, particularly if the child has serious injuries or is in immediate danger. A reporter may also call the statewide child abuse **TOLL FREE HOTLINE NUMBER 1-800-922-5330 (Kansas) or 1-800-652-2099 (Nebraska)**.

On the next day that the SDSS is open for business, the law enforcement agency shall report to the SDSS any report received (by the law enforcement agency) and any investigation initiated. These reports may be made orally or, on request of the SDSS, in writing.

The law provides immunity from lawsuits against reporters and other persons participating in the investigation of suspected child abuse or neglect.