

STOPPING SEXUAL ABUSE

A Report to Missouri Baptists

*Provided by the Missouri Baptist Convention's
Sexual Abuse Response Team*



Messengers of the Missouri Baptist Convention,

On May 22, 2022, every one of us who cares deeply about the mission of the Southern Baptist Convention was affected by the release of the Sexual Abuse Task Force Report with the understanding that our convention of churches would never be the same. The primary emotions were deep sorrow and righteous anger as the report revealed much and caused much debate both in our churches and online.

However, amidst an array of reactions, there was a strong consensus in every circle that we must learn from this and do better to ensure this particularly egregious sin does not continue to have a foothold in our churches. As Southern Baptists, we recognize we are imperfect people, but we have been historically and rightly defined by our commitment to the inerrancy of the Bible and the task of the Great Commission. The abuse of anyone, especially the sexual abuse experienced by survivors, is contrary to everything we hold dear about the gospel and the call of Christ on our lives to love and cherish one another, as those created by God in His image.

This undergirding reality is the foundation for the content of this report. Your MBC Sexual Abuse Response Team (SART) was given a simple charge: take the findings from the national report, along with the best information available, and help Missouri Baptists improve our ability to protect and care for survivors, prevent sexual abuse in affiliated churches and institutions, and properly respond to abusers in a redemptive way that reflects the heart and calling of Jesus Christ toward those we are blessed to minister to and alongside. This response is only the beginning of the work we all have to do.

Respectfully submitted,

Missouri Baptist Convention's
Sexual Abuse Response Team

(NOTE: The information contained in this guide is general and is not intended to provide legal advice. The Missouri Baptist Convention (MBC) does not have the authority in your church to implement policies and procedures, participate in screening and hiring employees, or investigate and prosecute abuse claims. The MBC encourages each church to consult with legal counsel when implementing local policies and practices.)

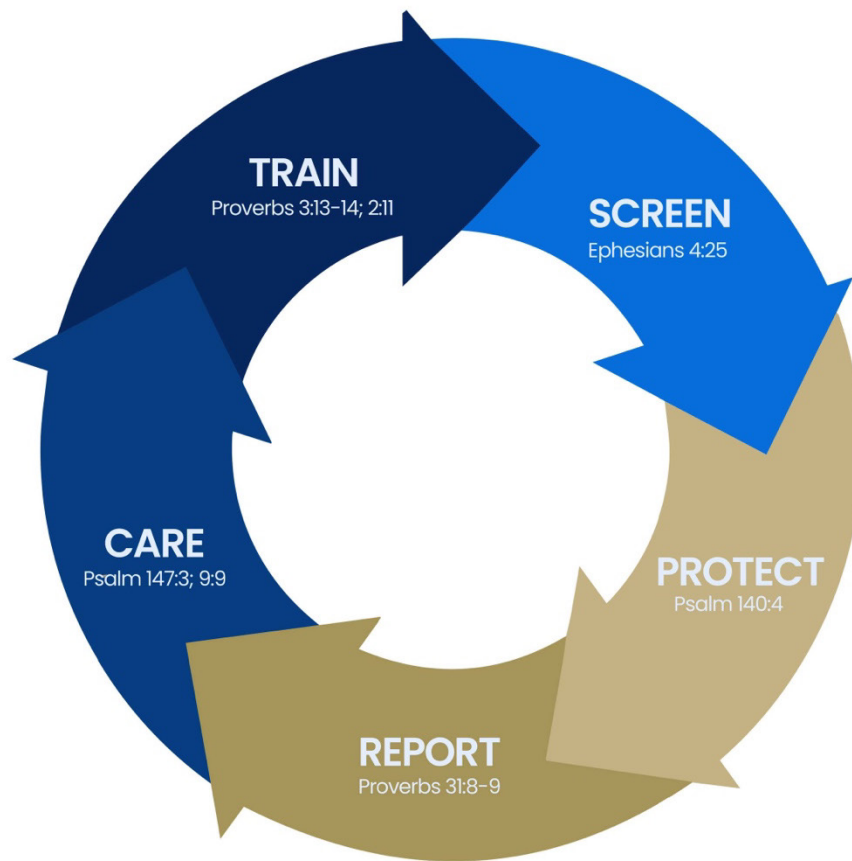


Chart originally created the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware

To help make our churches safe from abuse, we must be proactive. Developing policies and procedures ahead of time, training and educating staff and volunteers, as well as partnering with abuse experts will set your church up well to be a safe place for your community. It is up to the pastors and leaders of a church to lead this charge. Here is the pathway to begin to protect your church from predators who seek to prey on the vulnerable among you and to help care for victims and survivors of abuse in your church and community.

Table of Contents

WHY SHOULD I CARE ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE?	4
WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW TO HELP AND NOT HARM?	8
WHERE DO I START?	9
DEFINITIONS	12
What is abuse?	12
Who is a mandatory reporter?	12
WHAT SHOULD YOU DO WHEN SOMETHING HAPPENS?	13
COMMON MYTHS ABOUT ABUSE AND REPORTING	15
SUPPLEMENTS	19
Now that I know this, what should I do?	19
Providing survivor care	22
Profile of an abuser	24
Profile of a victim	25
Internet and social media checks of potential staff/volunteers	26
ACTION POINTS/RECOMMENDATIONS TO MBC	28
RECOMMENDED RESOLUTIONS	29
1. On biblical definitions and policies	29
2. On Missouri state laws	30

Why should I care about sexual abuse?

Biblical reasons

- We are compelled by the gospel to protect God's flock (1 Pet. 5:1-3).
- Sexual abuse is sin (2 Sam. 13, Gen. 34).
- Negligence in proactively preventing and lovingly responding to sexual abuse creates distrust in the faith community, especially among children and youth. The consequences go far beyond our legal system, or even public opinion. Abuse negatively shapes children (Matt. 18:6).
- We are called to speak up for the vulnerable (Prov. 31:8).
- The Good Shepherd lays down His life for sheep, not for institutions (John 10:11).

Social reasons

If we do nothing, the brokenness created by this sin (and crime) triggers numerous consequences that directly affect our communities – inclusive of the Church and our own biological families.

Did you know...?

Child sexual abuse is the root cause of many social problems, which impact every church family and extended family:

- Violent crime and other criminal activity
- Homelessness
- Runaway behavior
- Teen pregnancy, motherhood, and the possibility of abortion
- Sexual promiscuity
- HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases
- Substance abuse

Mental health problems are also linked with enduring sexual abuse:

- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
- Clinical anxiety and depression
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Self-inflicted harm
- Suicide

Physical health issues may impact those who experience sexual abuse:

- Obesity
- Diabetes, cancer, heart problems
- Stroke and hypertension

And then, there are:

- Educational problems
- Delinquency
- Decreased school performance
- Dropping out

Increased need and taxpayer funding for:

- Social services
- Foster care
- Law enforcement
- Healthcare

Increased probability of civil and criminal liability:

- Lawsuits
- Expensive settlements
- Higher liability insurance coverage costs
- Damaged reputation of the church, if involved

Statistical reasons

Statistics may be viewed as boring or irrelevant and thus easily dismissed. But the following stats are listed to make one point: You likely either *are* a survivor or you know someone who is a survivor of sexual abuse. Consider these statistics:

- Every 68 seconds another American is sexually assaulted.¹
- Research shows that one in 10 children will be the victim of sexual abuse before their 18th birthday.²
- 55 percent of sexual assault occurs at or near the victim's home.³

¹ <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/scope-problem>

² <https://www.d2l.org/child-sexual-abuse/prevalence/>

³ <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/scope-problem>

- Out of every 1,000 sexual assaults, 975 perpetrators walk free.⁴
- Only 5 percent of sexual assault reports filed have been proven false.⁵
- Nearly a quarter (24.8%) of men in the U.S. experienced some form of sexual violence in their lifetimes.

What about in Missouri?

- At least one in seven children have experienced child abuse and/or neglect in the last year.
- Child sexual abuse is likely the most prevalent health problem children face, with the most serious array of consequences. About one in 10 children will be sexually abused before they turn 18, including one in seven girls and one in 25 boys.
- In Missouri, there were 5,465 substantiated cases of child abuse and/or neglect in 2018. Approximately 30 percent were cases of physical abuse, and 25 percent were cases of sexual abuse.
- Missouri Child Advocacy Centers served more than 9,100 children in 2019. More than 6,000 children reported sexual abuse, and 2,400 reported physical abuse.⁶

You didn't need these statistics, though, did you? You personally know someone – or perhaps many people – who have been sexually abused. Perhaps that person is *you*.

Dealing with these statistics and abuse reform in our convention of churches can be disturbing. We have different responses to these traumas. Some want to fight back. Others want to fly or freeze. The truth is, we can be numb to these statistics and abuse reform because we don't want to acknowledge them and deal with our own traumatic experiences.

Does this happen in churches?

Our assumption is that you *care* about sexual abuse. You believe it's an issue in our communities. But you might be wondering whether this is a *church* problem. The simple answer is: yes. And on multiple levels.

⁴ <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system>

⁵ <https://legaljobs.io/blog/sexual-assault-statistics/>

⁶ All statistics from <https://www.missourikidsfirst.org/the-issue/statistics/>

First, clergy sexual abuse is happening. Consider this information shared by an online resource:

More than 7,000 claims of sexual abuse by church staff, congregation members, volunteers, or the clergy were made to just three insurance companies over a 20-year period (Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 2007). Recently, a study of more than 300 alleged child sexual-abuse cases in Protestant Christian congregations found the overwhelming majority took place on church grounds, or at the offender's home, most frequently carried out by Caucasian male clergy or youth pastors (Denney, Kerley, & Gross, 2018).⁷

Second, churches often are easy targets for sexual predators. As Deekpak Reju notes, there are at least six reasons for this:

1. Christians are naive
2. Christians are ignorant of the problem
3. Churches offer access to children
4. (Many) Christians abuse authority
5. Churches can be manipulated
6. Churches offer cheap grace⁸

Next, even if the incident doesn't happen in your church, what does the gospel of Christ call us to do in care for the vulnerable? We are called to bring the gospel to the broken-hearted. Yes, we are called to minister to perpetrators of sexual abuse, as well. Yet, our first level of care must be to the one who is "half-dead" on the side of the road (Luke 10:25-37).

Last, consider the impact that caring well for survivors could have on your community. Jesus often served the broken and battered. He centered His ministry on the vulnerable. He is the Good Shepherd, leaving the 99 and going after the one. The trauma of sexual abuse impacts everything in your community. What would it look like if the church applied the balm of Christ to these hurting souls?

⁷ <http://www.notinourchurch.com/statistics.html>

⁸ <https://www.challies.com/articles/6-reasons-why-sexual-predators-target-churches/>

What do I need to know to help and not harm?

Acknowledging that sexual abuse is an issue is only a part of the battle. We must also educate ourselves to know how to help and not harm. When victims of abuse are inadvertently or intentionally mistreated by the people they thought they could trust with their story, they experience a second harm. Consider this from The Mend Project:

Accusatory questions such as "What were you wearing?" or, "If it was so bad, why didn't you leave?" or even, "Why are you just now sharing this?" place undue blame on the victim who is already coming from an incredibly traumatic place. Additionally, remarks like "Yeah, well, we all have hard times in marriage," or, "He's so nice, I just can't picture this." are unempathetic and create added anxiety for the victim. As listeners, we don't need to say much. In fact, it's more important to simply be present in a compassionate demeanor. Offering critiques, giving advice, or asking questions interrupt the victim as well as cause them to explain further, requiring them to work much harder in the conversation than is helpful. It's more impactful if we simply offer compassionate body language and a safe space for them to process their abusive experiences at their own pace. You might say something like, "I'm sorry that happened to you" and, "Thank you for opening up, I know that wasn't easy," or, "You have every reason to feel upset and frightened." These are words of validation and support.⁹

We must be intentional and dedicated to responding to disclosures in a way that is helpful and not harmful.

⁹ <https://themendproject.com/double-abuse-how-victims-experience-secondary-abuse/>

Where do I start?

Perhaps you're relatively new to this discussion. And you feel a little overwhelmed with all this talk of trauma and survivor care. It *can* be daunting. And, as Diane Langberg has said, "We would rather believe a comfortable lie than an inconvenient truth." Because of this inclination, we're tempted to oversimplify or run from the information. But we can't run from this reality.

We recommend that every church consider starting with the Caring Well Challenge (<https://caringwell.com>). This resource is already paid for through your church's Cooperative Program giving. The Caring Well Challenge is a unified call to action on the sexual abuse crisis in the Southern Baptist Convention. It provides churches with an adaptable and attainable pathway to immediately enhance their efforts to prevent abuse and care for abuse survivors.

The 8 Steps in Caring Well are:

1. Commit to the challenge
2. Build a Caring Well team
3. Launch the Caring Well Challenge
4. Train your team
5. Equip leaders with video lessons on caring well
6. Prepare policies, procedures, and practices to prevent abuse
7. Share lessons learned when the church gathers
8. Reflect on what went well or requires improvement

In our opinion, the Caring Well Challenge is a great place to begin, but it's not enough by itself. As noted earlier, it gets the conversation started. But as you go through the challenge, you likely are going to discover areas where further training is needed and where writing better policies could help. To that end, we have a few more recommendations.

Do I need more training?

As you discover that more training could be helpful, there are a couple resources we recommend.

First, MinistrySafe (<https://ministrysafe.com>). MinistrySafe is an industry-leading organization that specializes in training and prevention. The training is phenomenal in helping spot potential predators. You also can take a test and be certified. A church going through Ministry Safe will certainly benefit. The training is top-notch.

Second, Darkness 2 Light (<https://d2l.org>). This organization provides phenomenal training that is survivor-centered and trauma-informed. It's available at no cost to participants. And it's highly recommended by advocates and survivors. Darkness 2 Light's "Stewards of Children" training rivals MinistrySafe in quality. Like MinistrySafe, it focuses on prevention and empowering adults to prevent sexual abuse.

The Stewards of Children Workshop is a single two-hour session. It's video-driven and facilitator-led in person or virtually. The training covers 5 Steps to Protecting Our Children:

1. Learn the facts
2. Minimize opportunity
3. Talk about it
4. Recognize the signs
5. React responsibly

The training features basic components of child sexual abuse prevention and response policy, and prevention in a youth-serving organization, along with links to other comprehensive guides for establishing policies and procedures. It adds a sample Code of Conduct for all church staff/volunteers to customize.

To schedule a Stewards of Children Workshop at your church, contact David Burch, Children & Family Ministries Church Engagement Strategist for the Missouri Baptist Children's Home at david.burch@mbch.org.

These two organizations focus on prevention and training. But where do you turn if something already has happened?

Need help walking through a crisis?

The State of Missouri provides a Sexual Abuse Hotline (800-392-3738). You are not required to provide any proof. Anyone making a good-faith report based on reasonable grounds is immune from prosecution.

For survivors, Missouri Advocacy Centers (CAC) can help answer questions about where to find resources related to child sexual abuse. To find the one closest to you, go online to <https://nationalcac.org/find-a-cac>.

One of the best organizations at writing policy and walking through an abuse situation is GRACE (God's Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment). This organization has a team of helpers to assist your church in writing policy unique to your congregation, as well as consultants to help you navigate difficult situations. But GRACE (<https://netgrace.org>) can be costly. This might prove to be cost-prohibitive for some churches.

Definitions

What is abuse?

A frequently used definition of abuse is "a pattern of behavior used by one person to gain and maintain power and control over another."¹⁰ Abuse comes in different forms: physical, sexual, verbal/emotional, psychological, economic, and cultural.

You may wish to complete an emotional abuse questionnaire. You can find one at the Family Justice Center's website: <https://www.fjcsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Emotional-Abuse-Questionnaire.pdf>.

Who is a mandatory reporter?

In Missouri Code Section 210.115, ministers, teachers, child-care workers, and other persons with responsibility for the care of children are among a long list of mandatory reporters. This means, if they have reasonable cause to suspect a child has been or may be subjected to abuse or neglect, they must report it immediately to the Children's Division of the Missouri Department of Social Services Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline (800-392-3738) or local law enforcement (911).

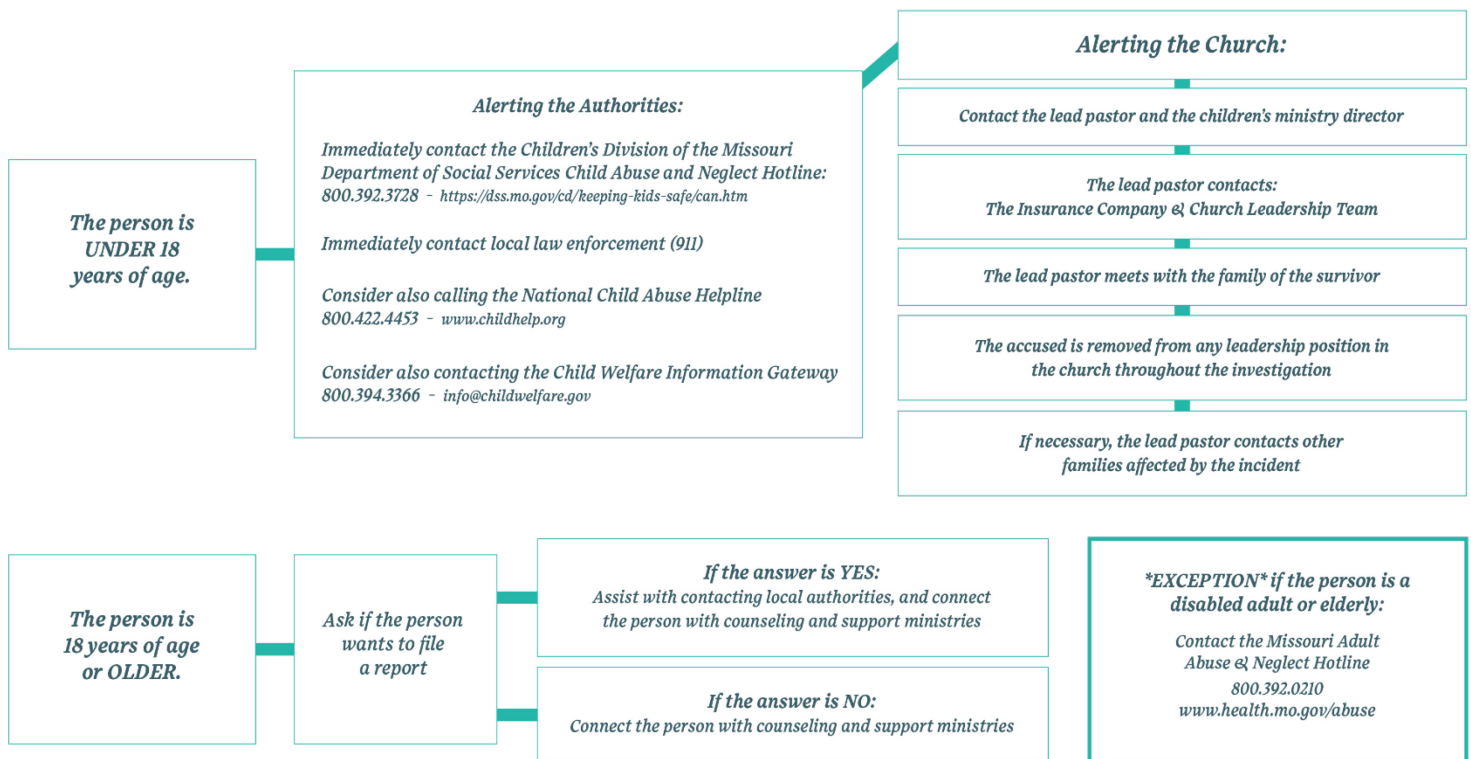
Abuse includes physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, neglect, or sex-trafficking. Anyone can be a voluntary reporter. There is clergy privilege in Missouri Code Section 210.140. However, if a clergy member concludes that clergy privilege may be asserted in given circumstances, competent legal counsel should be consulted. This attorney should be equipped to understand child sexual abuse issues. What qualifies as clergy privilege is more limited than many initially assume.

¹⁰ <https://reachma.org/blog/6-different-types-of-abuse/>

What should you do when something happens?

If you receive a disclosure of abuse, or if any of the following four things happen, then take the steps indicated on the included chart.

1. You witness a pattern of boundary violations by an adult or youth
2. You intervene in boundary violations, and yet the person continues
3. You receive a disclosure of abuse or boundary violation from a child
4. You see physical signs of abuse



When a lead pastor is accused

If the person being accused is the lead pastor of the church, other leaders (elders, deacons, committee chairs, etc.) will need to work together to respond to the situation. Review the next two sections for guidelines in such a scenario.

Ten things to do when the lead pastor is accused

1. Report the incident to the authorities.
2. Immediately place the pastor on leave until an investigation can occur.
3. Consult an unbiased third party for assistance in the investigation.
4. Care for the victim.
5. Assign a trusted member of leadership as a liaison. This person should have a good relationship with the family of the accuser.
6. Consider assigning a specific leader as the point person for all communication.
7. Inform the church of the accusation without naming the accuser.
8. Contact the church's insurance company.
9. Cooperate with authorities.
10. Hold the pastor accountable if the allegations are deemed credible.

Ten things to avoid when the lead pastor is accused

1. Do not ignore or dismiss the allegations.
2. Do not retaliate against the accuser(s) or reveal their name(s).
3. Do not limit your actions to an internal investigation.
4. Do not make public statements without stating all relevant facts.
5. Do not tamper with evidence, interfere in the investigation, or pressure victims to remain silent.
6. Do not assume guilt or innocence.
7. Do not publicly support the pastor while the investigation is ongoing.
8. Do not neglect the accused pastor and his family.
9. Do not delay in taking action.
10. Do not confront the pastor without first properly reporting to authorities.

Common myths about abuse and reporting

Myth #1: False reports are common.

FACT: Most statistics show that the percentage of false accusations is from 2-10 percent. But a compelling case can be made for an even lower percentage. According to one author:

Overall, an estimated 8 to 10 percent of women are thought to report their rapes to the police, which means that — at the very highest — we can infer that 90 percent of rapes go unreported. Obviously, only those rapes that are reported in the first place can be considered falsely reported, so that 5 percent figure only applies to 10 percent (at most) of rapes that occur. This puts the actual false allegation figure closer to 0.5 percent.¹¹

Even if we take the highest percentage of false reports, this particular crime has no higher degree of false reporting than any other crime.

Myth #2: Strangers are our biggest threat.

FACT: Most victims know their abuser.

A common myth is that child sexual abuse is perpetrated by strangers and pedophiles. But most people who sexually abuse children are our friends, partners, family members, and community members. About 93 percent of children who are victims of sexual abuse know their abuser. Less than 10 percent of sexually abused children are abused by a stranger.¹²

¹¹ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1077801210387749>

¹² <https://www.ywca.org/wp-content/uploads/WWV-CSA-Fact-Sheet-Final.pdf>

Myth #3: Pastors having consenting sex with congregants is not abuse.

FACT: A congregant cannot give meaningful consent to one in spiritual authority over them. It constitutes sexual abuse. As the Faith Institute explains:

Sexual contact or sexualized behavior within the ministerial relationship is a violation of professional ethics. There is a difference in power between a person in a ministerial role and a member of his or her congregation or a counselee. Because of this difference in power, you cannot give meaningful consent to the sexual relationship.

Individuals usually seek counseling or support from their religious leader at times of stress or crisis. During these times, you are emotionally vulnerable and can be taken advantage of by a religious leader.¹³

The SBC spoke to this as well in a 2022 Resolution: <https://sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/on-support-for-consistent-laws-regarding-pastoral-sexual-abuse>.

Myth #4: Unless charges were filed, the accused is innocent.

FACT: Out of every 1,000 sexual assaults, 975 perpetrators will walk free.¹⁴ Many incidents go unreported. Often, those who are assaulted or abused are not able to process the event until years later. By this time, in many states, the statute of limitations has expired. A major study was done in Massachusetts and disclosed:

For every 100 rapes and sexual assaults of teenage girls and women reported to police, only 18 led to an arrest, according to a study (<https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/252689.pdf>) conducted by three professors in the School of Criminology and Justice Studies under a \$1.19 million grant from the National Institute of Justice.

Forty-two out of 100 languish as "inactive" cases, while 30 more are closed by "exceptional clearance" – a designation that is supposed to mean that police have enough evidence to arrest a suspect but can't do so for reasons outside

¹³ <https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/learn-the-basics/ce-faqs/>

¹⁴ <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system>

their control, such as the death of the suspect or his arrest in another jurisdiction.¹⁵

Myth #5: Survivors have a responsibility to forgive

FACT: We do better to focus on the perpetrator's need for repentance and reparation.

This is a complex issue. Yes, Matthew 18:15 does call us to forgive those who have sinned against us. But Luke 17:3-4 must also be considered. There, we see that forgiveness is predicated on repentance. We can learn from God's forgiveness of us. He has a posture of forgiveness towards all humanity. But we do not walk in full forgiveness and reconciliation until we repent.

There is an added complexity to forgiveness in regards to sexual assault as well. One study explains the complexity:

At times, forgiveness has been used by abusers as a means of guaranteeing the victim's silence (Casey, 1998). The pressure by the community on the victim to forgive can be understood as contempt for his or her suffering, as a way of detracting from the seriousness or importance of the abuser's behavior (Rudolfsson and Tidefors, 2015) or as a way of releasing him from responsibility or from deserved punishment (Tracy, 1999), making revictimization more likely (Tener and Eisikovits, 2015). According to Casey (1998), any therapeutic approach that insists on the need for forgiveness has fallen time and time again into the trap of denying the child the space to show the pain of their childhood; it is an attempt to close the wound before cleaning or healing it.¹⁵

Myth #6: Exposing abuse will harm the body of Christ.

FACT: We are called to walk in the light (1 John 1:7). Abuse harms the body of Christ. Exposing it is cleansing.

¹⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7859423/>

Often, abuse isn't dealt with because we fear that exposing an incident will lead to a reproach upon the body of Christ. Sadly, those who disclose instances of abuse can be accused of stirring up trouble or trying to give the church a black eye. But in reality, exposing sexual abuse within the body of Christ does not harm the community; rather, it is the presence and perpetuation of abuse that cause harm. It is crucial to dispel the myth that bringing such issues to light somehow tarnishes the reputation of the Church.

It's important to understand that the harm caused by sexual abuse stems from the abuse itself, not from shedding light on it. By addressing and confronting these issues, the body of Christ can strive towards healing, restoration, and creating safe and nurturing environments for all members.

Supplements

Now that I know this, what should I do?

Policies and procedures

It's been said that it is better to prepare and prevent than to have to repair and repent. Our goal is that every MBC church would:

- Implement policies and procedures to reduce the risk of sexual misconduct
- Conduct training to identify grooming activities and potential concerns
- Be prepared to respond appropriately and with compassion if an allegation arises
- Have the proper insurance in place in the event of sexual misconduct

Every church should have a written child/youth protection policy. You may view a sample policy for considerations to include in your plan:

- VFIS Sample Sexual Abuse Policy
<https://education.vfis.com/Portals/0/Documents/fire-and-ems-operations/Sexual-Abuse-Sample-Policy-VFIS.pdf>

You may consider additional sample child/youth protection policies provided by MinistrySafe and SafeChurch:

- MinistrySafe Sample Children's Ministry Policy
<https://app.box.com/s/jmcxj43kqty1e7efr5yerzslh6euq1lx>
- MinistrySafe Sample Student Ministry Policy
<https://app.box.com/s/2z7d2prq0vas6psy7dr91agzxp2eyk3>
- SafeChurch Sample Child Youth Protection Policy
<https://app.box.com/s/vvzc4gdyqhyq2nxjaelhbvob61vst8my>

Also, consider checking with your insurance company to receive any guidance or sample policies they can provide to customize policies and procedures to reflect your individual church's programs and facilities. Your policies and procedures must be well-communicated to your staff and volunteers with a commitment to follow them consistently.

Each church should also establish counseling boundaries and include training on sexual harassment to reduce the risk of adult-to-adult sexual misconduct. It's wise to ask your local legal counsel to review your policies and procedures.

Abuse awareness training

Remember that establishing policies and procedures is only one element of an effective safety system. The foundational element is Sexual Abuse Awareness Training. Such training is available through several resources, such as:

MinistrySafe

To learn more about an Effective Safety System, MinistrySafe membership, and discounted access, visit <https://ministrysafe.com/mbc>. In addition to extensive training through that membership, other sample policies and procedures are available for daycare, education, youth sports, camps, and more.

Stewards of Children

Stewards of Children by Darkness 2 Light through the Missouri Baptist Children's Home. Visit <https://d2l.org/education/stewards-of-children/>.

Caring Well

Caring Well Training is available through the SBC. Caring Well offers a variety of resources, including video training for your church staff and volunteers. Visit <https://caringwell.com/challenge/train/>.

Potential providers for abuse prevention and response

Beyond those already mentioned, the following providers may also assist your church in preventing and responding to instances of abuse.

In Alphabetical Order	Assessments	Consultation	Awareness Training (in-house)	Background Checks (in-house)	Sample Document Library	Reporting Resources	Response Resources	Digital Dashboard	Independent Investigations	Based on Membership
Darkness to Light			•			•				\$10/PP (group pricing available)
ECAP (accreditation)	•	•					•			Based on attendance
G.R.A.C.E.	•	•	•			•	•		•	See website
Lifeway One Source				•						\$9-\$40
MinistrySafe	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		\$250 annually
Plan to Protect	•	•	•		•	•	•			See website
Protect My Ministry			•	•	•			•		a la cart Ministry Mobilizer
Safe Ministry Solutions	•	•	•	•				•		SBC pricing
Safeguard from Abuse			•					•		\$6.75-\$7.75/pp
Zero Abuse Project			•			•	•			See website

Contact Information

- Darkness to Light (800-656-4673)
- ECAP (www.ecap.net)
- G.R.A.C.E. (www.netgrace.org)
- Lifeway One Source (800-464-2799)
- MinistrySafe (833-737-7233)
- Plan to Protect (877-455-3555)
- Protect My Ministry (800-319-5581)
- Safe Ministry Solutions (888-215-8296)
- Safeguard from Abuse (720-420-3322)
- Zero Abuse Project (651-714-4673)

Although our heartfelt desire is that no person would ever be a victim of sexual abuse, if it occurs, a church should be sure to have adequate limits of sexual misconduct liability insurance to meet the needs of the victim(s). You also should have employment practices liability insurance to provide coverage for sexual harassment claims that occur among employees.

Providing survivor care

We highly recommend developing programs within your church, association, and state convention to help with counseling for victims of sexual abuse. It's important that survivors can pick their own counselors and that a relationship of dependence is not created between the organization and the persons harmed. It also might be helpful to keep a list of trusted counselors in the area to suggest as a resource.

Counseling offers essential support to survivors of sexual abuse, providing a safe and confidential space to process their experiences, emotions, and trauma. It helps them navigate the complex journey of healing and recovery, addressing the psychological, emotional, and mental impact of the abuse. Because of the complexity, the counseling offered should be trauma-informed.

Standing with survivors

There's a lot of confusion about what it means to experience sexual trauma. Below are two letters from survivors and proposed responses from the church.

Example survivor letter #1

What would make an abused person in the church feel seen, heard, and cared for?

Dear Church,

I was abused by a member of our church. It is important to me that the members of our church believe me. I would not be accusing this person if it wasn't true. Please don't judge me, it wasn't my fault. I didn't like what was happening to me, but because I couldn't stop it, it still happened. Please don't call me a victim or a survivor, that is not who I am. I am me! My name is the name I was born with. Please don't call me, "The woman who was abused," or "the woman whose accusation brought down another member." My name is the same as it was before the abuse happened. Church members, please don't judge me, point your finger at me, and please don't gossip about me, or stare at me. I need your support, your kindness and most of all don't turn your back on me.

Example church response

This is an example of how church leaders could publicly or privately respond to the survivor of sexual trauma:

We, the church, are so very sorry for what has happened to you. We see you, we hear you, we care about you, and, most of all, we believe you and love you. We are here for you no matter what. We want to support you, help you through this difficult time, and walk with you through everything you are facing. You are not alone! None of this is your fault! The authorities need to be notified. God does not like what happened to you! What happened to you is called sin. The person who hurt you will be accountable not only to our church and the authorities, but also to God.

Example survivor letter # 2

Again, what would make an abused person in the church feel seen, heard, and cared for?

Dear Church,

I am not less-than! I am not a piece of property that people can use and abuse, then cast me away like an old shoe. I am not a liar! I am telling the truth. The person who touched me took away my innocence. I am so angry! I am so hurt! Why me? I feel all alone! I don't know if I should be mad at God, the church, my perpetrator, or myself. I trusted my perpetrator, and now I feel foolish in doing so! I feel like I will never trust anyone again. Did I wear the wrong clothes? Did I say the wrong things? Will my perpetrator continue to attend this church? How do I move forward?

Example church response

This also is a possible template of how church leadership could respond to a survivor of sexual trauma:

We, the church, will never view you as a piece of property to be used and abused, and you should never view yourself that way, either. We believe you. We do not think you are a liar, or you made up this story. We know that your innocence was taken away. It's okay to feel pain and shed tears over what has happened to you.

Those who abuse others are spiritually corrupt. They often experience no guilt in performing evil deeds, and feel justified by their actions.

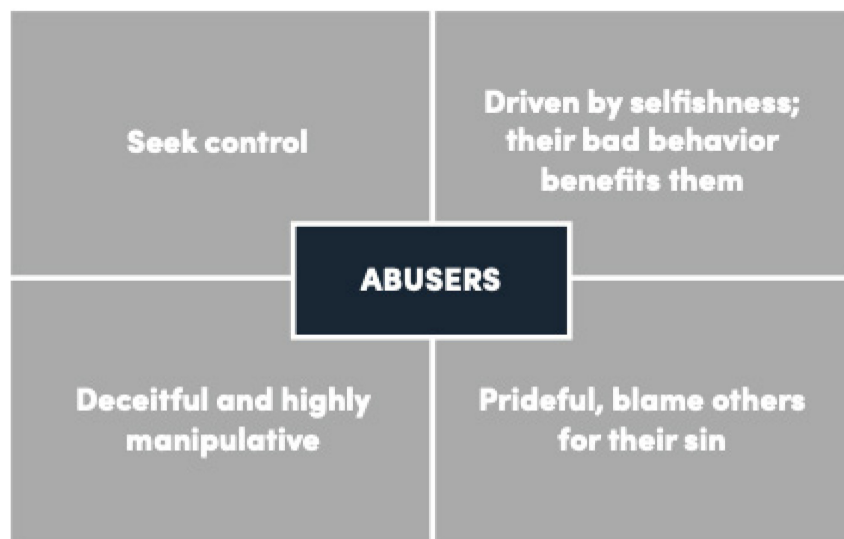
The good news is, even though you don't feel that way now, with lots of love from our Heavenly Father and this congregation, you will be able to move forward. The Book of Genesis tells the story of Joseph. Joseph was treated unjustly by his brothers because of their jealousy, envy and covetousness. At the end of the story, in Genesis 50:20, Joseph tells his brothers, "You meant evil unto me, but God turned the evil into good, to save much people."

Just know your church is here for you. If you feel you need counseling, no matter how long, let us know and we will help you in any way we can.

Profile of an abuser

In a church context, we often know the accused abuser. It is essential to know that abusers are deceptive and master manipulators. Often their own spouses fail to recognize their abuse. We cannot rely on outward appearances or what we think we know about someone.

The following chart shows the common attributes of an abuser and is adapted from Darby Strickland's *Is It Abuse?*



Psalm 10:2-6 explains the heart of the abuser:

*In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak,
who are caught in the schemes he devises.
He boasts about the cravings of his heart;
he blesses the greedy and reviles the Lord.
In his pride the wicked man does not seek him;
in all his thoughts there is no room for God.
His ways are always prosperous;
your laws are rejected by him;
he sneers at all his enemies.
He says to himself, "Nothing will ever shake me."
He swears, "No one will ever do me harm."*

Churches should take the danger posed by abusers as seriously as the psalmist does.

A special note on alleged abusers who are members of the church

To wisely navigate relationships and responsibilities when responding to abuse, it is important to keep the following facts in mind:

- Statistics show that alleged abusers are often well-liked and are believed more often over their victims.
- Church support and pastoral care often rally around the alleged abuser.
- An alleged abuser is often an exemplary member of the church.
- If the alleged abuser is married to his victim, he is often working hard to reconcile his marriage, while his spouse may be resisting efforts towards restoration.
- Many times, the alleged abuser immediately and sorrowfully repents.
- Church leaders and/or the church body may prematurely accept the alleged abuser's repentance as genuine.

It is important not to prioritize reconciliation over the well-being of the victim.

Profile of a victim

A victim is any oppressed individual who is subject to abuse. For the purposes of this profile, we will refer to the victim with a female pronoun, understanding that this could apply to men as well.

The statistics on domestic abuse are staggering, and sadly, do not change within the context of the church. According to the National Center for Prevention and Control's

Division of Violence Prevention, one in four women experience severe physical violence from an intimate partner. While both men and women experience domestic violence, 85 percent are women.



- A victim is often disoriented, fearful, and ashamed.
- A victim has often endured significant trauma and is facing extreme self-doubt.
- A victim is often terrified that the pastor won't believe her.
- A victim often discloses very little at first to determine if the pastor is a "safe person."
- A victim can seem mentally unstable.
- Research shows that only three to nine percent of abuse reports are false.

"Bear in mind that false accusations are incredibly rare, and if you fail to heed this warning, you will not only do incredible damage to the survivor, but may in fact facilitate the abuse of others yet unharmed." -- Rachel Denhollander

Internet and social media checks of potential staff/volunteers

In an era in which most people have an online presence, it is helpful to review an applicant's online information for red flags or any content that could indicate improper behavior. A general Google search may yield helpful information. Are there any news articles written that include their name?

By searching the applicant online, you may ascertain what the applicant values, their level of discernment, and how they interact with children. Red flags often found on social

media are inappropriate pictures, suggestive or even explicit comments, and excessive commenting and interest in children or students by someone older. You may find some of these red flags, or you may come across other information that indicates this person is not a good fit for ministry service.

Some questions to consider:

- Do the applicant's posts contain language/content that would be deemed inappropriate for a volunteer/staff serving with minors in a church setting?
- Who are the applicant's friends? Does that raise a red flag? For example, if the applicant is in his 30s or 40s and a large portion of his friends are young teenage boys, this might be a red flag.
- What websites are the applicant affiliated with? Do they reference movies, music, or other items of interest that may be inappropriate?

All of these items provide a profile of the applicant's personal life that help determine if the applicant is a positive influence for minors.

Potential inappropriate social media posts could include:

- Inappropriate pictures
- Suggestive or explicit comments or affiliations
- Language or content that would be deemed inappropriate for service in a church setting

Action Points/Recommendations to MBC

- Present resolution calling for stricter laws
- Develop/purchase a resource for every Missouri Baptist pastor
- Work with associations to implement the SART recommendations
- Maintain a list of trauma-informed counselors and third-party investigators while encouraging associations to take the lead
- Explore creating a fund for survivor care
- Provide and encourage training for all MBC staff and entities and encourage training for all associations
- Maintain a webpage with a digital toolbox
- Consider more training sessions at the MBC Annual Meeting
- Consider training teens at Super Summer events
- Ask the MBC to put together its own Caring Well Team
- Encourage local churches to establish a Caring Well Team (or safe team)
- Create an MBC position, with appropriate support, and staff it with someone trained in trauma-informed care to provide ongoing support to Missouri Baptist pastors and churches in sexual abuse education, prevention, and response.

Recommended resolutions

1. On biblical definitions and policies

EXHORTING AFFILIATED MISSOURI BAPTIST CONVENTION CHURCHES TO DEVELOP BIBLICAL DEFINITIONS AND POLICIES TO CONFRONT SEXUAL ABUSE

WHEREAS, the Missouri Baptist Convention's 2022 Sexual Abuse Response Team (Task Force) recognizes the devastating impact of sexual abuse on society, as well as on affiliated churches and their congregations; and

WHEREAS, as part of its commission to acknowledge sexual abuse and to equip Missouri Baptist Convention member churches to work to prevent, report, and facilitate healing from the effects of sexual abuse in their congregations; and

WHEREAS, the Bible deems sexual assault/abuse as sin against God (Gen. 34); and

WHEREAS, explicit passages address non-consensual sexual acts as sexual assault and a violation of God's law (Gen. 12:10–16); and

WHEREAS, sexual assault/abuse can result in physical and emotional trauma, shame, and loss of self-worth (2 Sam. 13); and

WHEREAS, every life has been created in the image of God and has worth, dignity, and value (Gen. 1:27); and

WHEREAS, God ordained the sexual union between a husband and a wife (Gen. 2:24–25) for their pleasure, with the intent to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28), and to symbolize the one-flesh relationship between Christ and His Church; and

WHEREAS, anyone who has experienced sexual abuse can find hope, healing, and freedom in Christ (Luke 4:18–19) because He will deliver the needy, the afflicted, and the oppressed and rescue them (Pss. 22:24; 34:18), and

WHEREAS, the Sexual Abuse Response Team has defined sexual abuse as: *Any sexual activity or harassment, with perpetrators exerting power over the other, making threats*

against another, or taking advantage of victims. Sexual abuse also includes acts such as exhibitionism, exposure to pornography, voyeurism, and communicating in a sexual manner by any means. The absence of force or coercion does not diminish the abusive nature of the conduct; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that we, the messengers of the 189th session of the Missouri Baptist Convention meeting in Springfield, Missouri, October 23-24, 2023, exhort churches and their leaders to recognize the potential effect sexual abuse can have on individuals and their congregations; to develop biblical definitions of sexual abuse; and to develop and/or strengthen policies and procedures to acknowledge, prevent, report, and facilitate healing from the effects of sexual abuse in their congregations consistent with Holy Scripture and applicable law.

2. On Missouri state laws

STRENGTHENING AND CLARIFYING LAWS CONCERNING PASTORS AND CHURCHES REGARDING SEXUAL ABUSE

WHEREAS, those in pastoral ministry are entrusted with the responsibility, under the authority of Christ, to serve, shepherd, and guard those whom the Lord entrusts to their care (1 Pet. 5:1–4); and

WHEREAS, Scripture makes clear that overseers must be above reproach, keeping watch over the congregations they serve as those who will give an account and, therefore, will receive a stricter judgment (1 Tim. 3:1–7, Heb. 13:17; Jas. 3:1); and

WHEREAS, *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000* (BFM), Article XV, condemns "all forms of sexual immorality" and states, "We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, [and] the abused"; and

WHEREAS, laws and codes of professional ethics in Missouri prohibit sexual relationships between professionals such as physicians, psychiatrists, attorneys, and their patients/clients, even with consent, because the position of authority held by the professional creates an unhealthy opportunity for abuse; and

WHEREAS, various states have passed laws that criminalize sexual acts between pastors and those under their care and make no exception for the consent of the victim, since

members of the clergy are in a position of trust, which is broken when the one in authority engages in a sexual act with the victim (such states include Arkansas, Connecticut, Iowa, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin); therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that we, the messengers of the 189th session of the Missouri Baptist Convention meeting in Springfield, Missouri, October 23-24, 2023, encourage lawmakers to pass legislation to provide consistent definitions and classification of sexual abuse by pastors, as sexual abuse committed by pastors constitutes a clear abuse of authority and trust; and be it further

RESOLVED, we encourage Missouri lawmakers to remove barriers to the free flow of information between churches and other entities about employees and volunteers and, in so doing, empower churches to prevent sexual abuse; and be it further

RESOLVED, that while we hold convictions about and affirm local church autonomy, we also believe that it is both important and biblical (1 Cor. 14:33) to develop a culture of transparency and mutual responsibility between churches, so that affiliated churches are not places for predators to hide, as we, "contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death," seeking "to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love" (BFM, Article XV); and be it further

RESOLVED, that while in this world we must face the temporal consequences of sin, such as disqualification from ministry, we joyfully acknowledge that there is no sin that cannot be forgiven and no person who cannot be restored to Christ (Ps. 103:12; Eph. 1:7-8); and be it further

RESOLVED, that we encourage churches to be proactive in vetting all volunteers and staff by using in-depth background and reference assessments to thwart any abuse; and be it finally

RESOLVED, that we work to discover and implement effective methods to protect the innocent and assist victims and survivors of abuse and preserve the witness of Christ's Church.