

## Part III

### **Biblical solutions for church staff and volunteers working with children and youth**

**“How do you manage hidden offenders in churches when you can’t see them?”**

#### **Ongoing training for volunteers**

##### **Opening the ears to hear and eyes to see**

Church staff or church member sex offenders have two weaknesses. Hidden churchgoing offenders will display two “give away categories” of behaviors prior to each sexual offense: boundary violations and suspicious sexual behaviors. When enough eyes at church are trained, these boundary violations and suspicious behaviors can be observed and addressed to head off offenses before a child is harmed. Most church offenders take weeks and months of boundary violations (grooming) prior to the first sexual offense. It is too risky for a hidden sex offender to stay in a church skilled in questioning suspicious behaviors.

##### **Will questioning suspicious behaviors increase false accusations of innocent church members?**

Not likely. Our training for church youth workers is ongoing using sexual abuse cases, and practice sessions include false accusation scenarios and boundary awareness scenarios. If your church has 50 church youth workers, it means you have 50 workers skilled at avoiding false accusations, decreasing boundary violations and questioning suspicious behaviors. The practice sessions are user-friendly, ongoing, and can either be completed at the youth worker’s home, or in a group training setting.

The goal for an entire church is to create an environment where the congregation is looking out for each other to avoid false accusations. Example: A Sunday school teacher is reading a story with a toddler on his lap. A trained youth worker would explain to the Sunday school teacher: *I want to help you avoid a false accusation or a misunderstanding. It would be better to read the story with the boy on a chair.* If a church has created a safe church environment, the response from the Sunday school teacher will be of gratitude and not defensiveness. Why will this Sunday school teacher be grateful and not defensive? That Sunday school teacher would have received many practice sessions on boundary awareness from ongoing training.

If the Sunday school teacher were a hidden sex offender, you have increased the hidden offender’s paranoia that he may get caught. If he is only looking for access to victims, he will leave this church. It is too risky for an offender to stay in a church that questions behaviors. If he is in a secret struggle, he will be continually pushed away from harming a child, and toward godly repentance, which will include confession and accepting help to change.

##### **How do we prepare youth workers to question suspicious behaviors without making false accusations of innocent church youth workers or staff?**

A church youth worker is better prepared to deal with any situation if the worker is allowed to practice and rehearse situations before they occur. The goal is to use real events, both suspicious behaviors and verified sexual abuse cases, and develop the cases into practice scenarios. Each individual church worker is given a variety of practice scenarios through out the year as on-going training. The practice

sessions can be completed at home, or used as material for group training. This training is provided through KidSafe Journal. The following is an excerpt from an issue of KidSafe Journal.

### **KidSafe Journal**

The following are typical scenes any church youth worker may face while working with kids at church. Please read each boundary scene and select the best solution for each scenario. Ask yourself if this is a boundary problem or not and select the best answer.

1. Church youth day at a water park. Your youth group wants to have a friendly competition with the youth leaders. You pick sides and have a friendly game of chicken in the water. This is a game where youth pair up and one sits on the other's shoulders. The purpose is to wrestle with each other until one falls off the shoulders of their partner. You are asked by the kids to participate.

- A. I would decline the invitation to play or volunteer to referee.
- B. I would play, but I would have separate matches for the boys and girls to avoid opposite sexes grabbing each other and wrestling.
- C. It could be a boundary problem if there is one adult youth leader present, but since there are three parents on this outing there is no problem.
- D. I would go have some fun! Church people take life too seriously. No harm in playing chicken.

2. Church Camp: All the youth are around the campfire. A very spiritual moment is taking place with many youth coming forward in a decision for Christ. You have church leaders praying with the youth. One youth approaches you and asks for some privacy to talk about something. You find an empty pop-up trailer and the youth confesses a serious sin that he/she was involved in.

- A. No boundary problem because there are times a youth needs to be alone with a youth leader to be able to reveal something this important.
- B. Yes, it is a problem if you are alone with a youth in a pop up trailer.
- C. No, it is not a problem if the pop up trailer is close to the campfire and you tell another staff member you are taking the youth in the pop-up trailer to talk in private.
- D. Yes, it is a problem, but I would take the youth just out of hearing distance so nobody can hear the conversation and stay in staff's eyesight to avoid being alone.

The following is a sexual abuse case. There is much to learn from other church sexual abuses cases to prevent similar situations happening at your church. Please read this case and answer the question below.

A 42-year-old female Sunday school teacher has been teaching for 10 years at her church. At times her 14-year-old son helps out in the class. He is great with the 6-year-old boys and the kids like him as well. One day a parent of one of the 6-year-old boys complains that her son is speaking inappropriate

sexual language after church. The concerned parent tells the Sunday school teacher about the problem. The teacher is sympathetic, but states boys will be boys. The worried parent has no proof, but thinks her son picked up the bad language from the 14-year-old boy who works in his Sunday school class. The concerned parent went to the youth pastor and he states he knows the Sunday school teacher and her son and he doubts it came from the 14-year-old boy. The youth pastor states kids will pick up bad language at public schools. He tells the worried mother that he will talk to the Sunday school teacher. Ten months later the 14-year-old boy is arrested for molesting two kids at church.

How would you handle a similar situation if you were teaching a class and a parent has a complaint about one of your Sunday school teacher helpers?

What can we learn from this church situation?

### **How do you communicate to Sunday school teacher helpers if you witness something questionable?**

Example: Bob is a grandfatherly type gentleman. He is not a sexual offender. He was raised in an Italian family with much affection and touching. Everybody at church loves Bob because of his humor and deep care for people. He is one of those rare finds that will get on the ground with the 3-4-year-olds and play with kids. Bob has a habit of boundary violations. He will pick up kids and pretend it is their birthday and proceed to give birthday spankings. He doesn't give the kids real spankings, but he does bend them over his lap and pretends and the kids love it. Twenty years ago this was considered normal behavior and a game some still play today. A new visitor complains to the youth pastor about this behavior.

### **What would you say to Bob about his behaviors without causing misunderstandings?**

The beauty of practice scenarios is that you build skills. Some of these scenes will never happen at your church; however, all scenes have common elements that will develop skills and will transfer over to any situation that may occur at your church.

### **Why are practice scenarios effective?**

All practice scenarios are provided with possible solutions so church youth workers can learn from each situation. This was a small sample of practice sessions and the actual cases. KidSafe Journal is distributed three times per year to all church youth workers. Over time church youth workers will have experienced many practice sessions so they will be better prepared to respond to any real situations that arise.

There is something to learn from the content of sexual abuse cases, but it is the process that makes this work more effectively. There is power in making a decision about what you would do in this particular situation. When each volunteer is working on the same material, church workers are empowered to communicate with one another to avoid false accusations and to look out for children's safety.

Hidden offenders are paranoid; a church that asks questions about suspicious behaviors is a real threat to hidden offenders. Offenders looking for victims will leave a church instead of risking a lifetime in prison. Offenders who are struggling with their secret sin will be pushed away from children as potential victims and toward repentance and change.

## **Summary**

Church youth workers can protect kids simply by questioning behaviors. It is too risky for a church sex offender to continue seeking access to potential victims in a church that questions behaviors.

Church youth workers can prevent false accusations of innocent church youth workers simply by looking out for one another. Questioning behaviors will train youth workers to avoid being placed in a vulnerable situation that could lead to a false accusation.

The Kidsafe Journal is emailed three times per year to an appointed church leader to distribute by print out or e-mail to all church youth workers. Small churches may want to print out the Kidsafe Journal and distribute to all church youth workers.

## **Ongoing training for church leaders**

Church leadership owns the responsibility for children's safety. Even church leaders who do not have direct contact with children and youth are responsible for their safety. This responsibility requires more training than church youth workers.

### **Are church leaders defenseless protecting church kids with secret sexual sinners in their church?**

Absolutely not! Church leaders can be trained to be skilled at identifying suspicious behaviors or recognize early signs of sexual offender's behaviors (grooming) prior to any offense. Most church offenders take weeks and months of grooming prior to the first sexual offense.

## **Monthly Lessons Learned for church leadership**

You should have received information about how to set up a news alert system that sends automatic alerts of church sexual abuse cases in the news to your computer. This is a powerful tool to use as Lessons Learned.

The following is a guide on how to use your monthly Lesson Learned in your regular meeting of leadership (such as a staff meeting):

1. Each month an alert is selected, printed out and posted for review by all staff.
2. This alert will be discussed at your meeting monthly.
3. Staff will pray for the victims, the church leaders, and the accused in crisis from the monthly case.
4. As the church leadership, pray for opening the ears to hear and eyes to see to protect your kids to avoid the same situation at your church.
5. Discuss the lessons learned from the case and apply it to your church.

Below is a sample Lessons Learned. Keep in mind the alert will be different than what is listed below. Your alerts will be news stories of sexual abuse cases.

The following lessons learned are true church sexual abuse cases. We have altered some of the demographic information to protect victims and their families. We provided samples of lessons learned and some examples of discussion questions your staff might come up with for the meeting.

**A 30 year old worship leader prosecuted for abusing 5 teens over a span of 6 years.**

The worship leader found more fulfillment in his life working as youth choir director than anything else in his life. The worship leader went from giving equal time to the whole choir to giving of himself for individual voice lessons. Neither parents nor church staff knew he was giving individual free voice lessons. He manipulated parents to gain access to their kids by having special choir practices that were not listed on the choir practice schedule. The parents were suspicious, but they trusted their worship leader.

**Church staff:**

**We have been called to minister and it is satisfying. What are the signs that someone is over-involved leading to boundary issues?**

**Ministry involves individual attention due to a congregation's individual needs. How do you meet individual needs as a staff, while protecting yourself from false accusations?**

**If this 30-year-old were your staff member, how could you as a staff identify the red flags, boundary violations, and suspicious behaviors prior to his offending?**

**What kind of church environment exists at your church today? What is your staff doing to avoid a power dynamic that parents would not report suspicious behavior?**

**A deacon molested children for 20 years, as young as 5 and his oldest victim was 16**

Most of his victims had a single parent. As a deacon, he was overly helpful to single parent moms, which led to gaining access to their kids. The deacon was loved and valued by his church for his unselfish devotion and his commitment to serving single parents. Parents reported that this deacon was overly friendly to the victims by hugging/kissing them and the kids called him Uncle Bob. This deacon revealed suspicious behaviors and he was caught in numerous lies, but his behavior was excused due to his claim that he had the beginning stages of Alzheimer's.

**Church Staff:**

**Are there staff, deacon/elder, or volunteers that the church is overly dependent on to meet a ministry need?**

**Some volunteers believe they are stuck in a ministry position because there is nobody to replace them. How can your church avoid staff or volunteers from becoming overly dependent in their ministry position?**

**Do all your volunteers, deacons/elders, and staff have clear expectations for physical boundaries or appropriate physical contact at your church?**

**How can you improve compliance for proper physical boundaries with staff and volunteers who work with youth?**

**All church sex offenders are chronic liars. They lie so much that they can't keep track of all their own lies. As a staff, how would you deal with dishonesty with volunteers or staff working with kids?**

The beauty of Lessons Learned is that your staff builds skills. It is unlikely these exact same situations described in Lessons Learned will occur at your church; however, all sexual abuse cases have common elements, i.e. red flags, boundary violations, and suspicious behaviors, and environments that allow for secrecy and overlooking problems. The skills you will develop in the long run will empower you to respond correctly to any real life situation that occurs in your church.

### **Summary**

Church leaders are responsible for building a safe church environment that will protect kids from secretive church members who offend on kids.

Trained church leaders can help identify grooming behaviors and intervene before a church sex offender can offend on a teen or child.