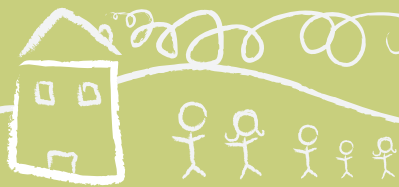




PROTECTING our Children



“ Help! I’ve been asked to develop ways to protect our children. ”

At Awana we are often asked for help in protecting children. We are happy to respond to these requests. We recognize that in helping churches protect children, we are also helping to protect the adults working with children and the ministry of the church. We believe churches that do not protect children suffer lost ministry opportunities. (Our list of suggestions here cannot be taken as legal advice.)

1. **Is your church screening children’s workers?**
This is one of the most important protections and may be the most difficult for churches. Many feel that screening workers implies to church people

that you don’t trust them. However, put yourself in the place of the unchurched hearing the news about a child molester found working in your children’s ministry. What do you think that does for the trust factor with those in the community you are trying to reach? When the community around your church doesn’t trust your church, you lose opportunities to minister.

2. People often contact Awana and state that they can’t write child protection policies. However, screening workers, retaining records, proper record handling, training workers, supervising workers and children and reporting abuse and suspected abuse are all **child protection policies** (CP). The development of these practices into written policies that are followed not only protects the children, it helps protect your church in difficult situations.

3. Once you have CP policies, you have a basis for **training** your workers. Training prevents misunderstandings among workers, makes clear the expectations for working with children and helps parents know that you are prepared. It is curious that we prepare for every other ministry but so often do not prepare for child protection. Training is also a way to get to know your workers. During training you can discuss how they would handle situations that arise in children's ministry. Also, during training, teach the workers how the check-in and check-out procedures will work, when it is OK to release the children and to whom the children can be released. Many churches have been glad they implemented check-in and check-out procedures.
4. During training, let your workers know that you and others will **supervise** them and that you are always available for questions and unforeseen issues. **Supervision** insures policies are followed and that children and workers are not in situations they shouldn't be. In your supervision, you should be seeing, among other things, that there are two or more adults with each group of children. The doors should be open to the classrooms or you should be able to see through the windows. Also, check that children are not roaming freely in the church or engaging in unsupervised play before activities begin.
5. There are times when you see something that doesn't look right or a child reports abuse to you. At this point, you have decisions to make about **reporting child abuse** or **suspected abuse**. You may be the only person who can help that child or call that odd behavior into question. Your church needs a clearly determined way of handling these matters, and your church needs to be aware of state laws requiring **child abuse reporting**. Reporting obligations vary by state.
6. Having a great screening and training process for your children's ministry is commendable; however, churches find themselves in a difficult position when they can't show they've screened or trained their workers. Two of the saddest news reports we've read involved two different churches that were found to have child molesters working in their children's programs, and no one was able to prove they had screened the individuals. **Retaining records** for screening and training isn't the first thing that comes to mind in children's ministry; however, we can't stress enough the importance of keeping the appropriate records in a safe place.
7. That brings us to our last category of **professional advice**. Legal counsel and/or the insurance company for your church, local law enforcement and others can help you not only with the record retention issue but also with other questions surrounding child protection.



The following is a list of resources to help your church:

The Awana Ministry Catalog in print and on the Web (www.awana.org/catalog) has CP resources.

Also, some additional resources on the Web and in print are listed below:

www.christianlaw.org

Books, training materials, legal matters and more

www.churchlawtoday.com

Information, training, legal information

www.yourchurchresources.com

Church resources

www.churchmutual.com

Safety Tips on a Sensitive Subject (DVD and booklet), insurance information

www.backgroundchecks.com

Background screening service

www.protectmyministry.com

Background screening service

www.klaaskids.org

Child ID kit, cyber safety, AMBER alerts

www.familywatchdog.us

Sex offenders in your church neighborhood

www.safechurch.com/safeministry

A resource web site for churches and leaders.

This list is not meant to be all inclusive, and a mention here is not meant to be an endorsement. Referral to these Web sites does not imply that Awana is in agreement with the entirety of this organization's doctrinal statement or ministry philosophy, nor does this constitute our endorsement of all content found on this site. Each church is responsible for conducting its own evaluation of products and services and obtaining its own legal advice. Children in this document refers to anyone under 18, and workers refer to paid and unpaid people. Please understand this is not legal advice; Awana is not able to give legal advice.