



SafeMinistryTraining.com

Course Notes

1. Introduction

Welcome to the Safe Ministry Training course. We all want our churches to be safe places for everyone - kids as well as adults. The purpose of this training is to explain the basic principles and processes which you and your church will take to ensure we all provide safe ministries.

There's four main areas of this training, and each area has its own short video and quiz. We include the quiz to make sure everyone understands this important information.

- First, you'll see how your church is going to make sure it only has Appropriate leaders and volunteers serving in ministry teams.
- Second, you'll learn what is and is not appropriate behaviour as a volunteer at your church.
- Third, you'll learn how to spot signs that someone's been treated inappropriately.
- And lastly, how you should respond if you think someone's been treated inappropriately.

It's worth saying that because of the explicit nature of some of the material covered in this training, some people may find it disturbing.

Ok, see how you go with the first quiz and we'll get started with the training.

2. Screening, Training & Appointing of Appropriate Leaders

The first aspect of providing safe ministries at your church is to make sure that only appropriate people are involved in leading those ministries.

Now, when we use the term “leader”, we don’t just mean the Pastor or the Head of the Sunday School. For insurance purposes, a “leader” is anyone who is appointed to a position of authority over others. That could be a Bible Study Leader, a Sunday School helper, a Band leader, an Event Organiser. They’re all in leadership.

So what makes an appropriate leader? Well, it’s really just 3 things...

1. First, appropriate leaders are people who’ve been a regular part of your church - usually for more than 6 months. There might be some exceptions to this, which your church leadership can sort out. Before leaders start, they’ll be interviewed and have their potential roles and responsibilities clearly outlined for them.

2. Second, appropriate leaders are people who have had reference checks to confirm they have the appropriate character to be involved in leadership at your church.

This also means, if they’re going to be working with children, they also have the appropriate legal approval.

So, if you’re in NSW, that means providing your Working with Children Check Number. Your church will confirm with the appropriate authority that you are approved to work with children.

No one with a criminal record of child abuse, molestation or similar offences can be involved in any ministry in your church to people under 18 years old.

3. Third, appropriate leaders are people who have completed a Safe Ministry Training Course like this one. This material should be reviewed every 2-3 years.

So, you’re already part way through the training, so that’s done. But, in order to confirm that you will be an appropriate leader at your church, there’s a couple of things we’ll record from you now.

3. Appropriate Leaders - how they behave

There are certain behaviours that all ministry leaders should observe. When we follow these behaviours, it will greatly reduce the likelihood of inappropriate behavior and/or abuse occurring at your church. But also, adhering to these behaviours will help reduce the likelihood of false allegations being made against leaders like you, as well as the church.

So how do should we behave and run safe ministries?

A. **Stay where others can see you**

The core to leading safe ministries is to always be within eyesight of other people. Incidents of abuse are much less likely to happen when there are other people around.

This is especially true with children. Never be alone with a child, and never allow other people to be alone with a child. This is also true of leading vulnerable adults - always be where other people can easily see you.

B. **Model appropriate physical contact**

It's important that you understand what type of physical contact is, and is not, appropriate for the ministry you're doing. Appropriate physical contact will depend on a person's age;

- a. It's appropriate that babies and young toddlers be picked-up and cuddled.
- b. Children aged 1-3 may require physical assistance for tasks, however leaders should avoid having children on laps, or any extended physical contact.
- c. With children aged 4-6, unless there's an emergency, leaders should ask the child's permission if they need physical assistance. Even though it's common for these children to initiate hugs and other contact; leaders should quickly redirected such children to other activities.
- d. With anyone over 6 years old, its almost always best to avoid physical contact. It is fine to high-five, handshake, side-hug. But again, avoid prolonged contact.
- e. Also, if you're playing games which involve physical contact, carefully consider how to reduce the chance of unsafe or inappropriate contact between individuals and/or leaders.

C. **Model appropriate interactions**

As a potential leader, you need to consider how you interact with others, both verbally and nonverbally. Avoid all crude language and sexually explicit joking; these are commonly mistaken as flirting or advances. Be careful discussing overly private matters outside the scope of your ministry. Also, be careful to dress modestly, keeping yourself private at all times.

People often give leaders great influence over their lives. Therefore, leaders must be very careful about offering advice and suggestions, as these can be heard as instructions. Leaders should never use their position of authority to achieve their own personal gain.

D. Provide safe ministry spaces

When it comes to the places you're running ministry activities, you need to think carefully. Ministry spaces should be clean and safe to use. You should know where to quickly find first aid, and where to gather if there's an emergency.

If there's someone hanging around a ministry space when they don't need to be there, feel free to ask them to leave the space.

If you're involved in runnings camps, weekends away or you need to use change rooms, you must first get advice from a *Safe Ministry Supervisor* at your church.

E. Appropriate transportation

If you ever need to transport people, be sure to get appropriate permission from parents/guardians. Leaders should obey all road rules and only use suitable vehicles (that is, make sure they're registered and in good working order). You must take direct routes to and from the locations so you can not be accused of any wrongdoing along the way.

F. Toileting procedures

Lastly, know your church's policy about toileting young children. Usually, it is best to ask parents to take their children to the toilet. However, If leaders need to take children to the toilet: This is usually only be done by females who should try to take a group of children to the toilet (so they do not end up being left alone with a child).

There's a lot to remember there, so as you're involved in leading programs, keep asking others for feedback on how to behave appropriately.

4. Inappropriate Incidents - How to identify them

It is a sad fact that many people (children and adults) have been the victim of abuse or inappropriate behaviour.

Abuse can arise in various forms: Sexual Abuse, Physical Abuse, Emotional Abuse and Neglect.

As a potential leader at your church, you should be able to identify the signs of an abuse victim, and respond appropriately.

In this section, we'll just look at how to identify possible forms of abuse.

- **Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse is when a child or adult has been injured from a non-accidental act. This injury might be caused by being hit, punched, kicked, shaken, burnt, bit, or from having their hair-pulled. The signs of such physical abuse include bruising, lacerations or welts, burns, fractures or dislocation of joints.

Another sign of physical abuse could also be when an explanation of an "accident" is not consistent with the injury you can see.

Please note that a crime has been committed if a child has been hit around the head or neck. It is also a crime if a stick, belt or other object has been used to discipline or punish a child.

If someone shows one or more of these signs, they could have experienced physical abuse.

- **Sexual abuse**

Sexual abuse is when one person uses their power (or authority) to take advantage of another person's trust and involves them in a sexual activity. Both children and adults can be sexually abused and it does not necessarily involve genital contact.

Signs of sexual abuse can be:

- Adolescent pregnancy
- bruising or bleeding in the genital area, breasts, buttocks, stomach or thighs
- Signs of sexual abuse can also include a child describing sexual acts or having an inappropriately detailed understanding of sex for their age
- regressive behaviour like bed-wetting, or going to be fully clothed
- Self-harm, self-loathing or persistent running away from home

Sexual abuse is a crime. If a child or adult displays one or more of these signs, they could have experienced sexual abuse.

- **Emotional abuse**

Emotional abuse is when, usually over an extended time, a child or adult is excessively criticised, withheld affection, exposed to domestic-violence, intimidated or threatened. The

possible signs that a child or adult being emotionally abused are;

- an inability to value or trust others,
- either extremely aggressive or extremely eager to please,
- constant feelings of worthlessness,
- persistent running away from home.

If a child or adult displays one or more of these signs they may be experiencing emotional abuse.

- **Neglect and homelessness**

Neglect is when a child or adult does not have their basic needs met, like shelter, food, clothing. Signs that a child or adult is experiencing neglect or homelessness are:

- extremely poor personal hygiene,
- extreme hunger,
- a reluctance to go home,
- always arriving early.

If a child or adult displays one or more of these signs, they may be experiencing neglect and/or homelessness.

These are certainly dreadful things to happen to people. However, they do happen, and one of the best ways to avoid them happening in your church is to be aware of them and be able to identify them.

5. Inappropriate Incidents - How to respond to them

As a potential leader at your church, you may be in a situation where you suspect a child or adult is experiencing abuse. This may be because of things you've observed, or the victim might choose to tell you they're experiencing abuse.

So, what should you do if a child or adult at your church tells you they are experiencing abuse?

1. Stay calm and love them by listening carefully. Tell them that you are listening and you are there to give them support.
2. DO NOT make any promises. People who have experienced abuse have already had their trust destroyed. So don't promise that you won't tell anyone. In the same way, don't promise that the abuse will stop. Just say, "I'll work out the best thing to do."
3. DO NOT ask "leading questions". Leading questions are when we ask things like, "You're saying he hurt you when he did that?" They are questions that are phrased in a way that suggests a certain answer. If the incident ends up with legal authorities involved, leading questions like that can make it difficult for police to press charges against abusers.

So, what should you do if you suspect a child or adult at your church is experiencing abuse?

1. Write it down
Whether you've had a conversation or observed potential signs of abuse, write a record of as much of the conversation or the signs as you can remember. Include the date, location and time of the conversation. Again, if any authorities need to get involved, this initial record becomes very important.
2. DO NOT contact the person who you suspect of inflicting the abuse.
If there is truth to the accusation and the abuser thinks they have been discovered, they not only can make legal action even more difficult, but they can also bring further danger to the victim.
3. DO NOT contact the parents of a child you suspect has been abused, .
There have been a few cases where the parents have not believed their children and caused further abuse, or the parents are involved in the abuse. Even if this seems unbelievable to you, you are not the best person to contact the child's parents about this.
4. You should immediately raise the matter with one of the Safe Ministry Supervisors at your church.
The Safe Ministry Supervisors at your church understand all the appropriate steps and procedures to take if there's an incident or accusation. Depending on the details, the Safe Ministry Supervisor may contact Family and Community Services or the Police and take appropriate action. You also may be required to provide a statement to the Police and/or to

Family and Community Services if it is confirmed that a child is at risk.

(Obviously, if the accusation is against one of the Safe Ministry Supervisors, you should go to one of the other Safe Ministry Supervisors at your church).

5. DO NOT speak about this to anyone else other than the Safe Ministry Supervisors.

These types of accusations have the power to destroy careers and even whole churches.

There have been some instances where false and malicious accusations have been made, and even though they were proved false, the stigma of the accusation destroyed people's lives. So don't mention it to anyone else.

One last note: If someone tells you that they think another person is experiencing abuse, you can not report that. It's secondhand information. Rather, the best thing is to take them to the Safe Ministry Supervisor so they can report what they heard themselves.

Thanks for doing the Safe Ministry Training online course. After you finish this last quiz, we'll send you and your church a confirmation email, saying you've completed this training.