

The
**CHILD
SAFEGUARDING**

POLICY GUIDE

for Churches
and Ministries

Basyle Tchividjian
& Shira M. Berkovits

“Many abused and neglected children have left the faith community because they found that churches are unable or unwilling to protect them. In contrast, many sex offenders love to go to church because they know that weak policies and poor training give them the best chance to get away with their crimes. *The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide* is a comprehensive, concrete resource that will aid churches in keeping children safe, holding offenders accountable, and witnessing their commitment to care for the least of these.”

Victor Vieth, Senior Director & Founder, Gundersen National Child Protection Training Center

“Nobody relishes a good long talk about child abuse—especially at church. But any place where trusting children gather provides opportunities for the predator. That makes child abuse a necessary discussion for any ministry. This book provides expert advice and guidance for that conversation. I pray God will use it to bring protection to many young lives.”

Paul O. Wendland, President and Professor of New Testament Studies, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

“As his aunt, I have known Basyle Tchividjian since before he was born. I can attest to his strong Christian character, his great sense of fun, his love for his family, his commitment to awaken the church to the growing epidemic of child sexual abuse, and his passion to do something about it. He has my applause!”

Anne Graham Lotz, Author; speaker; chairperson of the National Day of Prayer; Supporter of Grace; www.annegrahamlotz.org

“Simply put, *The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide* is now the standard for any ministry desiring to create safe and protected environments where the precious souls of children can flourish. This guide provides the direction needed to implement a complete care system that prevents abuse, as well as loving interventions for those affected when the unimaginable happens. I can’t think of anyone more qualified than Boz and his team to write this groundbreaking guide.”

Santiago “Jimmy” Mellado, President and CEO, Compassion International

“The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide is a much-needed, beautifully-researched resource created for churches and ministries so that all children can be protected, heard, and healed in a predatory world. Every church should read this book and put its succinct and simple policies into practice.”

Mary DeMuth, Author of over thirty books, including *Not Marked: Finding Hope and Healing after Sexual Abuse*

“Jesus said, ‘Bring the children to me. . . .’ This is the definitive guide for protecting those whom we are seeking to bring to him. Detailed, practical, specific, and with appropriate recognition of when and how exceptions may be made to ‘gold standard policies,’ *The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide* should be in every church and Christian school library in the world.”

Samuel T. Logan, Associate International Director, The World Reformed Fellowship

“To be welcomed into a church is to be welcomed into the arms of God’s people. It is meant to be a welcoming embrace of love. Any predatory threat to any person in that church tragically harms the whole church and poisons its capacity to embrace. Basyle Tchividjian has offered to the church an enormous gift by offering not only policies and guidelines for protecting children, but also teaching us on a subject too many have avoided. I am grateful for his thoroughness and his obvious pastor’s heart. Christian leaders should take heed.”

Greg Brewer, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Central Florida

“The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide is a book every church pastor, staff member, teacher, youth worker, and women’s ministry leader should read. Written by a team of child abuse experts, and coauthored by Basyle Tchividjian of GRACE, this book offers solid practical advice for keeping church children safe from sexual and other forms of abuse. It is a must read and I highly recommend this book.”

Denise George, Author of over thirty books, including *What Pastors Wish Church Members Knew*

“Being a local church pastor for almost fifty years, I know of no better organization or system of safeguarding the children of our church than GRACE ministries. I have learned from and admired Boz for years. This amazing book gives every church the best equipping tool to protect our most precious congregants (our children) from the most heinous of acts.”

Joel C. Hunter, Senior Pastor, Northland, A Church Distributed

“Child abuse is a fearful, uncomfortable, and shocking topic that some church leaders may want to ignore. But Jesus’s ministers must run TOWARD the battle. We’re called to disciple children to be worshipers of God—but you can’t disciple an unsafe child. Safeguarding is a spiritual pursuit. Basyle Tchividjian and the GRACE team have crafted an invaluable resource to educate and guide church leaders in building a safe discipling environment for children. We’ve used this training at Thomas Road Baptist and will definitely utilize this guide with our team.”

Matt Willmington, Director of Ministries, Thomas Road Baptist Church

“The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide for Churches and Ministries is a crucially important handbook for the protection of our children. Churches and faith communities should be one of the safest places for children to grow up, learn, and play. Tragically, this is not always the case. Basyle Tchividjian and Shira Berkovits bring not only their hearts to this mission but years of dedication and experience in this field.

This book is an answer to prayer for those who deeply desire to protect the children of their communities and who are seeking practical guidance in how to achieve this. Protecting our most vulnerable should always be of absolute importance for all of us. Amidst the untold suffering and silence, we hear the words of Christ in our hearts saying, ‘Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.’”

Jonathan Jackson, Star of CMT’s *Nashville*; Lead singer of Enation; author of *The Mystery of Art*

“This book could save your ministry. As a seminary president, I am mindful of the insidious challenge of child sexual abuse in what should be the safest of places—church. Boz Tchividjian and G.R.A.C.E. have provided guidelines to help churches avoid such tragedies and if they occur, how to deal with them. *The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide* should be required reading for every pastor, church worker, and seminarian. As uncomfortable as this topic is, Christians cannot avoid it.”

Frank A. James, President and Professor of Historical Theology, Biblical Theological Seminary

“Scripture tells us to ‘speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves’—that has to include children! They have no more courageous a defender than my friend Boz, who is passionate about helping the church protect its children. Our good intentions are not enough. Use this excellent, comprehensive, and practical guide, developed by experts incorporating best-practice child protection policies and procedures, to help your church or ministry recognize, prevent and respond to child abuse. Make sure your environment is safe for innocent children and unsafe for those who would do them harm. A very important book!”

Wess Stafford, President Emeritus, Compassion International

“Forty-five years of counseling, writing, and speaking have shown me that the church is a powerful system—one meant by God to bend down as he did and care for least. I have also learned that powerful systems can easily be dangerous places for the small and the vulnerable. Sadly, the church has often protected abusers and itself, thus further traumatizing victims. *The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide*, coauthored by Basyle Tchividjian and Shira Berkovits, is the first book that provides the A to Z of developing comprehensive child protection policies. It is my prayer that the gift of this resource will transform the church, so she is known as a refuge for all.

Diane Langberg, Psychologist; author of *Suffering and the Heart of God*

“Some lessons are much too important for pastors not to grasp early on in their ministries. One such lesson is how to protect the most vulnerable souls in our churches, namely, the children. I know of no better teacher and mentor for church leaders on this subject than Boz Tchividjian. In *The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide*, Boz gives pastors, children’s staff, and volunteers everything they need to protect children from having their souls vandalized by abuse. Please read this guide and, much more importantly, implement it as soon as possible in your ministry.”

Scott Sauls, Senior pastor, Christ Presbyterian Church, Nashville, TN; author of *Befriend* and *From Weakness to Strength*

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FOR CHURCHES AND MINISTRIES

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Basyle Tchividjian
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INTRODUCTION

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GETTING STARTED WITH CHILD SAFEGUARDING

Children are one of the greatest treasures any church holds. Imagine the joy children bring to a congregation: their laughter, their energy, their curiosity, their sincere faith. Jesus agrees. He said, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me” (Mark 9:37 NIV). When our churches are full of children, Jesus is present. At Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment (GRACE), we believe that our care of children—our “welcoming” of them among us—is a direct reflection of our love for and obedience to God. As the sweet nursery song teaches, Jesus loves the little children, and one of the most important works any church can undertake—to love God—is to love the children in its care.

The GRACE team who put this guide together believes in providing compassionate care and advocacy for children. Because you are reading this guide, we believe you do too.

The mission of GRACE is to empower the Christian community through education and training to recognize, prevent, and respond to child abuse. In the GRACE team’s experience, we have met many sincere Christians who want to protect the children in

their care and respond well if any harm ever came to these children, but they also know that doing so is easier said than done. People who harm children create and/or exploit whole environments that make child advocacy difficult. This guide offers support and help to those who want to overcome these challenging realities.¹

Maybe the statistics about child sexual abuse and its prevalence alerted you to the problem. Maybe you have experienced or seen firsthand the harm any form of child maltreatment brings to precious souls. Whatever reason brought you to this guide, we hope you find it informative, healing, helpful, and encouraging. This guide is a way to partner with local churches, joining forces to protect children—an attainable goal. As psychologist Anna Salter says, “It is precisely our lack of knowledge and understanding that gives predators their edge, and there’s nothing wrong with trying to level the playing field a little.”²

Churches can level the playing field by cultivating a proactive culture of protection that prioritizes their children’s safety. By taking the time to work through this guide and implement child safeguarding best practices, your church can work to prevent child sexual abuse and other forms of childhood maltreatment, and respond well when it occurs. The guide will walk you through developing and implementing a Child Protection Policy: the what, why, and how of child safeguarding within a local congregation.

Our prayer is that as you pursue child protection, you will also bring gospel light into the lives of the many adult survivors in your congregation and community. Many experts and survivors of child sexual abuse agree that an important way to demonstrate support to survivors is to enact and enforce child protection policies.

One survivor recounts how she avoided church for years until one day she felt God was telling her, “I didn’t hurt you. It was evil men who used my name. It’s time to come back.” She ripped from her phone book the address of every church in her community. Working through the list, the woman drove to each church and

asked the pastor to show her their child protection policy. If the pastor could not produce one, she moved on. If the pastor produced a poor policy, she walked away. After visiting more than twenty churches, she met a pastor who told her the church developed their policy working with local child protection professionals and that the policy was accompanied by annual training for all their workers. The church had reported cases of abuse, the pastor had preached against the sin of abuse, and the church was involved with community child abuse prevention programs. This was the church the woman chose—the church she found most welcoming to children who are hurting.

By reading and working through this guide, you are taking great strides to protect your children and care for anyone who carries the wounds of child abuse. Child abuse brings untold pain and suffering to the lives of real people, and shining a light into this dark topic is difficult but worth every effort.

Notes on How to Use This Guide:

The guide can be used alone, but it was originally developed as a part of the curriculum for GRACE's Child Safeguarding Certification. There may be times when you feel you need more help understanding a topic or navigating implementation. Pastors and church leaders often and understandably find themselves dealing with child safety issues that are out of their area of expertise. Being connected to the best resources in the field of child protection will greatly enhance your knowledge and support base. We encourage you to use the guide in conjunction with the Child Safeguarding Certification, where GRACE will connect your local church with one of its Certification Specialists, a real person who has extensive experience in child sexual abuse prevention and response. Through its Child Safeguarding Certification, GRACE provides additional, necessary resources and support.

Just as pastors and church leaders may need help from experts, they will also need help from within their congregations. Protecting children in a church is too much work for any one person, and one advocate for children is insufficient to sustain an environment of protection. We suggest that a Child Safeguarding Committee (“Committee”) work through the guide together. Having a Committee will set up the church for long-term success—a culture where adults are educated and willing to protect kids. If you are a part of GRACE’s Child Safeguarding Certification, your Certification Specialists will help you form a Committee. Appendix One also offers guidance on how to establish one.

While the guide and GRACE’s Safeguarding Certification focus primarily upon child sexual abuse, where applicable, we will talk about other forms of child maltreatment: physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and spiritual abuse. As will be discussed, when children are sexually abused, often they are abused in other ways as well. Similarly, protecting against one form of abuse can protect against others.

Throughout this guide you will also find numerous examples, illustrations, and stories. All of these are based on real incidents that have come across our desks, but details about the victims, perpetrators, and institutional settings (e.g., name, religious affiliation, gender, staff position) have been changed to protect the identities of those involved. In a number of instances, we have combined several cases into one, where we thought doing so would be more protective of the involved parties’ identities.

Policy Section One

The Foundation

Adult-child relationships within the church bring untold benefits to the child, the adult, and the community. Children need adults in their lives—advising, loving, and shaping them in Christian faith. Adults pass down to children their community values, and nothing can replace rich, deep, multi-generational relationships for spiritual formation. Healthy communities promote healthy relationships. Understanding how child sexual abuse and other forms of child maltreatment work allows communities to pursue healthy behaviors and relationships because it allows them to competently identify abusive behaviors and relationships.

In one community, adults called a child-protection expert because they were concerned that two six-year-olds would wave and said “good day” to strangers as they passed by the church’s playground. The community believed the children’s behavior put them at risk for abuse. Waving hello to strangers with adequate adult supervision shows a beautiful hospitality, not an indication of danger. When protecting their children, some communities may want to protect their children against everything, even healthy behaviors and relationships. In doing so, they create a paranoid or fear-based culture instead of a proactive and protective culture.

And yet, to the other extreme, some communities miss abuse because they do not have a thorough definition and proper training. Common misconceptions still inform religious communities on child maltreatment. Maybe communities miss sexual abuse between

a teen and an adult, calling it “sexual activity” or an “inappropriate relationship”; maybe they believe that a child enjoyed the abuse and thus is culpable in part; maybe they think that an adult who touched a child’s penis was *just touching*, with no long-term harm. These communities may even be in denial about the prevalence of child abuse and its impact. These dangerous misunderstandings about abuse and abuse dynamics leave children unprotected.

The goal of a Child Protection Policy is to create a culture where children can flourish with healthy intergenerational relationships, including protecting them from maltreatment. But before a community can protect its children from child sexual abuse, they must know what child sexual abuse is. Before communities can respond appropriately to abused children, they must be able to spot indicators that children are being abused. Before communities can get children who have been abused the help they need, they need to know the impact of maltreatment. Finally, before communities can curb abusive behavior, they must know how people who sexually abuse children behave. The following chapters explore these dynamics of child sexual abuse and other forms of child maltreatment. They lay the foundation for proactive, protective measures.

CHAPTER ONE

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DEFINING ABUSE

With so many news reports and stories about child sexual abuse, defining it might feel intuitive, but communities who take this approach often fail children because they do not have an adequate understanding of it and other forms of child maltreatment. Instead of relying on popular (and possibly incorrect) definitions, the Child Protection Policy (henceforth, “Policy”) can define child sexual abuse and child maltreatment for its community in a way that accounts for the community’s legal obligations, the church’s moral values, and current research.

A thorough Policy includes thorough definitions. Publicly defining child sexual abuse and child maltreatment may feel scary, but doing so will empower the community with knowledge that will allow it to take proactive, calm, preventative measures that protect the community, adults, and—most importantly—children. Clear definitions protect adults by giving them freedom to pursue healthy, loving relationships with children; they know what is acceptable behavior and what is not. Defining abuse also protects the church by ensuring the community complies with all its legal obligations. Each state has its own definition of abuse and for that matter, its own definition of child.¹ Search for your state’s legal definition of child abuse and use it as a starting point. The Policy’s definition of abuse must at least incorporate the state’s definition.²

Nonetheless, while the behavioral requirements for criminal liability may be narrowly defined, actions that can damage a child are far less specific. For this reason, most churches will employ a broader definition of abuse, choosing to err on the side of protecting children even if such language encompasses behaviors that may or may not be illegal. In this respect, clear definitions protect children by accurately identifying harmful behavior as abusive and guiding the community toward healthy behaviors that allow children to flourish.

This guide focuses on preventing and responding to child sexual abuse because it is a serious threat to children. However, abuse rarely comes in only one form. Research indicates that children exposed to one form of maltreatment are often experiencing other forms of maltreatment. Sexual abuse often includes emotional and spiritual abuse. Physical abuse can involve bullying or sexual abuse. The term for this dynamic is polyvictimization because children often suffer many forms of victimization.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study surveyed adults about their childhood and asked adults whether, in their childhood, they had experienced³ contact sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, physical neglect, emotional neglect, a mother who was treated violently, a household member who used substances, a household member who was imprisoned, a household member who suffered from mental illness, and not being raised by both biological parents. Perhaps not surprisingly, researchers found that 66 percent of this sample had experienced at least one ACE category, and of those who did, 87 percent also experienced a second ACE category.

According to another study, 66 percent of maltreated children are abused in at least two ways, 30 percent are abused in at least 5 ways, and 10 percent endure 11 or more types of abuse.⁴ This means that a child who suffers any form of abuse is often maltreated in other ways as well. One study found that children who had been

physically assaulted in the past year were five times as likely to be sexually assaulted that same year.⁵ Other studies have found that children from homes with familial dysfunction, such as parental discord, poor parent-child relationship, substance abuse, or physical or emotional unavailability, are at increased risk of sexual abuse.⁶ Other conditions, such as a violent family or neighborhood and pre-existing emotional difficulties increase a child's likelihood of experiencing multiple types of maltreatment.⁷ Finally, those who have been abused by one perpetrator are at increased risk of experiencing repeat maltreatment of the same kind by other perpetrators.⁸

Churches should use the knowledge of polyvictimization in their efforts to protect youth.

- When a child is identified as the victim of one type of maltreatment (e.g., sexual abuse), steps should be taken to protect the child from further harm in other areas.
- Include education on multiple forms of child maltreatment in your church trainings.
- Provide support for caregivers of children who are at increased risk for polyvictimization.
- Pay particularly close attention to youths in vulnerable circumstances (e.g., living in violent homes or neighborhoods or who are emotionally neglected) and during vulnerable times (transitions into grade and high schools).

Accordingly, when your church protects a child from sexual abuse, you are often protecting the child from additional forms of maltreatment such as physical abuse or neglect. Therefore, the following chapter defines sexual abuse, but also other forms of child maltreatment, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and spiritual abuse. The guide will mostly reference child sexual abuse, but when applicable, it will reference these other forms of child maltreatment.

Sexual Abuse

Any occurrence in which an adult engages a minor in sexual activity is abusive. Sexual activity between an adult and child is abusive regardless of whether the adult or the child is the initiator, whether the activity is forced or not, or whether the child understands that the activity is sexual in nature. Sexual activity between children can also be abusive, particularly if there is a significant disparity in age, development, or size; if one child is in a position of responsibility, trust, or power over the other; if one child is unconscious; or if coercion is used. Sexual activity may include but is not limited to:

Contact Behavior

- touching with any part of one's body another's genitalia, buttocks, breasts, or surrounding areas (e.g., thighs, stomach, lower back), except as necessary for caregiving (such as changing an infant's diaper) or medical purposes (such as administering an Epi Pen to a child's buttocks).
- using one's own genitalia, buttocks, breasts, or surrounding areas to touch another's body (e.g., rubbing one's penis against a child's back)
- kissing, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal, anal, or other orifice penetration by a penis, finger or other object
- exploiting a child by engaging the child in prostitution or the production of pornography

Non-contact Behavior

- sexual communication (whether verbal or written, including by telephone, text message, email, or social media)
- voyeurism (spying on private or intimate behaviors, such as those involving undressing, nudity, or sexual activity)
- exposure to pornography or other sexually explicit material
- exhibitionism (exposure of part or all of an adult's naked body)

- exposure of part or all of a child's naked body (except as necessary for caregiving or medical purposes)
- any activity intended to abuse, degrade, arouse, or gratify sexual desires
- instruction from an adult for a child to engage in sexual activity alone or with a third party.

The child protection field uses various terms to describe these dynamics: child molestation, rape, or abuse to name a few. This guide will consistently use the term child sexual abuse.⁹

Denial of abuse is one of the primary impediments toward its prevention. Child sexual abuse is not a new phenomenon; it cuts across socioeconomic status, geographic location, race, and religion. Including a definition in the church's Policy acknowledges that the issue exists. Furthermore, defining abuse in the Policy acknowledges that abuse can and does happen within the Christian community, even possibly within your church. The Policy should include a statement about abuse's prevalence.

Sixty-seven percent of all sexual abuse reported to law enforcement in the United States each year is perpetrated against children.¹⁰ It is impossible to know the true prevalence of child sexual abuse since many victims never report their abuse and many studies use non-standard definitions and varying methods of data collection.¹¹ However, the ACE study estimated that approximately 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men were sexually abused before the age of eighteen.¹² These staggering estimates underscore the pervasiveness of child sexual abuse and make it likely that every reader of this guide knows someone who has been, or is currently, the victim of sexual abuse.

Physical Abuse

In all fifty states, it is a crime to physically assault anyone, including a child. Although definitions vary, generally a physical assault involves conduct intended to cause physical pain or injury. In many states, it is also unlawful to place anyone in fear of being assaulted.¹³ Accordingly, kicking, punching, slapping, choking, throwing objects, or otherwise inflicting pain or fear of immediate injury to a child is unlawful and should be reported to law enforcement.

Although the law permits parents to use corporal punishment, the law requires the discipline to be reasonable.¹⁴ Churches may be hesitant to address where the line is on corporal punishment for fear of offending parents. Parenting and discipline are understandably very personal and sensitive subjects. However, when churches name physically abusive actions, they can also help promote careful and thoughtful discussion about the Bible's teaching on discipline. Churches can promote the many biblical forms of discipline, including guidance, correction, and teaching. Furthermore, churches that name physical abuse guard against people who might misinterpret, misapply, or justify their abuse with the Bible. Pastors must challenge people who excuse any form of abusive behavior with justifications from the Bible.¹⁵

The Centers for Disease Control report that 28 percent of more than seventeen thousand respondents in the ACE study indicate that they were physically abused before the age of eighteen. These numbers only include abuse that was so forceful as to result in injury or lasting marks on the child. Further, unlike with sexual abuse, the prevalence of physical abuse provided in the ACE study is limited to abuse perpetrated by an adult living in the child's home and does not account for abuse perpetrated by those in positions of authority over the child outside the home (e.g., teachers or counselors) or by other children.¹⁶ In a study of 4,549 children, the Department of Justice discovered that nearly one half of children surveyed were

physically assaulted in the past year alone.¹⁷ In another study, more than 1.25 million children were found to have been maltreated in the US alone in one year. Of those who had been abused, most had been physically abused.¹⁸

Think back to your own childhood in schools, camps, extracurricular programs and churches; chances are good that you can recall at least one staff member who was a little too physically aggressive and certainly a number of children who did not hesitate to beat up on a younger—or more vulnerable—child. One young boy seemed to always be the target of his teachers. Some would wrestle him to the ground, others would throw erasers and chalk when he asked one too many questions, and one particularly violent teacher threw a metal chair straight at his head. Such violence is not necessarily the exception or a relic of abusive educational practices that do not exist anymore. Recently, three young boys explained what they like most about their new school: the teachers do not beat them.

Emotional Abuse

Children suffer from emotional or psychological abuse when they are repeatedly ridiculed, blamed, humiliated, or compared unfavorably to others.¹⁹ In some instances, an adult may verbally terrorize a child by threatening to beat, cut, or commit other atrocities. It is also possible to abuse a child emotionally through unrelenting pressure to meet impossible expectations in academics, athletics, or other areas. One child abuse prevention guide defines emotional abuse as “derogatory name-calling and put-downs or persistent and deliberate coldness from a person—to the extent where the behavior of the child is disturbed or their emotional development is at serious risk of being impaired. Serious emotional or psychological abuse could also result from conduct that exploits a child without necessarily being criminal, such as encouraging a child to engage in inappropriate or risky behaviours.”²⁰

The CDC estimates that more than 10 percent of children have been emotionally abused at home, with girls experiencing significantly higher rates of abuse than boys; these numbers do not account for the emotional abuse children experience outside the home or within the home from other children.²¹ Often, the emotional abuse is blatant or overheard by others in an institution, but it is dismissed as merely uncomfortable, awkward, or mean.

Emotional abuse can stand alone, but it often accompanies other forms of child maltreatment. In one study, for example, emotional abuse was found to be present in the vast majority of physical abuse cases.²² This can happen, for example, when an adult beats a child and says the beating is because the child is stupid or ugly or disobedient. In one case, a pastor sexually abused a five-year-old girl, but after several weeks of abuse, she resisted the pastor and shouted at him to leave her alone. The pastor quickly clamped his hand over her mouth and said, “You’ve ruined everything! You are the worst child in this entire church.” Years later, the girl still struggles with feelings of inadequacy and a belief that she is at the core a “bad girl.”

Emotional abuse can also involve bullying. Bullying²³ is defined as any form of harassment that one should reasonably expect would demean, threaten, or hurt (physically or emotionally). Bullying can be physical, verbal, demonstrative, or electronic. It can be of a sexual nature or otherwise. It can take place in person, over the phone, in cyberspace, or through an on-line communication, or any other means that communicates such harassment. It can be one-on-one or group-based. Both adults and children can be bullied or be the bully.

Neglect

In many cases, neglect involves depriving a child of food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, or other necessities of life. Neglect

can also involve exposing a child to harmful substances or practices such as drugs, alcohol, or violence. Sometimes neglect is emotional, such as when a parent completely ignores or rejects a child. Parents who cannot provide for children as a result of poverty are not committing neglect, though these parents and children may need assistance. Neglect, instead, is a deliberate act that impacts children physically and emotionally. In some instances, neglect can cost children their lives.

Neglect is the continued failure to provide a child with the basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, shelter, hygiene, medical attention, or adequate supervision, to the extent that the child's health, safety, and/or development is, or is likely to be, jeopardized. Neglect can also occur if an adult fails to adequately ensure the safety of a child where the child is exposed to extremely dangerous or life-threatening situations.

Neglect may be:

- Physical (e.g., failure to provide necessary food or shelter, or lack of appropriate supervision)
- Medical (e.g., failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment)
- Educational (e.g., failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs)
- Emotional (e.g., inattention to a child's emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care, or permitting the child to use alcohol or other drugs)

Neglect is the most prevalent form of child maltreatment in the US,²⁴ but it is often overlooked in the institutional context. It is hard to imagine that parents in our community might starve their child, or that a youth director might feed all of the children on a weekend trip while neglecting to feed a specific child or a select group, but these things can and do happen.

Spiritual Abuse

An often-overlooked form of psychological maltreatment is the infliction of spiritual abuse on a child. According to dozens of studies involving more than nineteen thousand abused children, a large number of maltreated children have not only been injured physically and emotionally, but also spiritually.²⁵ Child spiritual abuse is abuse administered under the guise of religion. It includes harassment or humiliation and possibly results in psychological trauma or spiritual injuries. Spiritual abuse may include misuse of religion for selfish, secular, or ideological ends. Spiritual abuse can occur when a perpetrator incorporates religion into the abuse of a child. Examples of spiritual abuse include:

- Use of religious ideology, precepts, tradition, or sacred texts to harm a child
- Compelling a child to engage in religious acts against his or her will
- Abuse that occurs in a religious context (e.g., church)
- Abuse perpetuated by a religious leader (e.g., pastor)
- Invocation of divine authority to manipulate a child into meeting the needs of the abuser

In one case, a youth pastor who sexually abused a teenage girl in the church would do so in the church sanctuary. In her memoir, the girl explained that her abuser told her, “the love we shared was sacred, and so the sanctuary was the perfect place.”²⁶ The youth pastor also told her that the sexual abuse he perpetrated on her was “God’s will.”²⁷ Messaging of this nature can be profoundly and spiritually damaging. In other cases, a spiritual injury may result because a child has unanswered questions. The child may have prayed that the abuse stop and wonders why a God who can part seas and raise the dead chooses not to stop beatings, rapes, starvation, and other atrocities.

According to a number of studies, children who have been spiritually injured are often angry with God, develop a fear of dying, leave their houses of worship and, in some instances, abandon their faith tradition altogether. This same research, though, finds that when faith communities assist children in healing from spiritual injuries, these children also do a better job of coping emotionally and spiritually.²⁸

Policy Worksheet: Defining Abuse

What is your state's legal definition of "child"? _____

For the purposes of your Policy, how will you define a child? ____

Consider whether you will use the legal definition for your Policy, or extend the law to apply to older children (e.g., up to twenty-one years old) as well.

Sexual Abuse

What is your state's legal definition of "child sexual abuse"? ____

Are there any ideas or words missing from the legal definition that you want to include in your Policy? If so, what are they? _____

This guide defines sexual abuse as physical contact with a sexual or intimate part of the body, or other forms of sexual activity, conducted without consent, or engaged in for the purpose of sexual gratification or to degrade or abuse.²⁹

Physical contact includes:

- » Touching, grabbing, patting, slapping, pinching, rubbing, fondling, groping, poking, or other forms of contact, whether over or under clothing
- » Rubbing one's genital area up against another person or touching another person with one's genitals, whether over or under clothing. This includes instances when an individual acts as though the rubbing was inadvertent but was in fact intentional.
- » Sexual intercourse of any kind

Sexual or intimate body parts include, but are not limited to:

- » Breasts
- » Buttocks
- » Genitals
- » Groin area
- » Upper thighs

Other forms of sexual activity include:

- » Photographing, videotaping, or making any other visual, descriptive, or auditory recording of sexual activity or the sexual or intimate parts of a person's body
- » Displaying to another any writings, photograph, videotape, or other visual or auditory recording of sexual activity or the sexual or intimate parts of a person's body

Lack of consent includes:

- » Explicit indication of lack of consent
- » Physical/verbal force or intimidation, whether express or implicit
- » Circumstances making it obvious that consent has not been granted, such as:

- ~ If one individual is an adult and one individual is a child, since children cannot legally consent to sexual activity with an adult.
- ~ Being too intoxicated to say “no”
- ~ Being asleep
- ~ Lack of knowledge of the activity’s occurrence
- ~ Otherwise not having the physical or mental capacity to consent.

Underline the language you will include in your Policy.

Your Sexual Abuse Definition: _____

Physical Abuse

What is your state’s legal definition of “child physical abuse”? ____

Are there any ideas or words missing from the legal definition that you want to include in your Policy? If so, what are they? _____

The guide defines physical abuse as a non-accidental physical injury (ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death) as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting (with a hand, stick, strap, or other object), burning, or otherwise harming a child, that is inflicted by a parent, caregiver, or other person who has responsibility for the child. Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether the caregiver intended to hurt the child. Physical discipline, such as spanking or paddling, is

not considered abuse as long as it is reasonable and causes no bodily injury to the child.³⁰

Underline the parts of the guide's definition you would like to include in your Policy.

Your Physical Abuse Definition: _____

Emotional Abuse

What is your state's legal definition of "child emotional abuse"? _

Are there any ideas or words missing from the legal definition that you want to include in your Policy? If so, what are they? _____

The Guide defines emotional abuse as acts toward a child that cause or have a substantial likelihood of causing harm to the child's physical, psychological, social, spiritual, or moral development. Emotional abuse might include, but is not limited to, patterns of:

- » restricting a child's movement
- » discrimination (e.g., serving snack to all the children in a youth group except for one child or one group of children)
- » blaming
- » belittling, denigrating, ridiculing, or humiliating
- » threatening or scaring
- » unrealistic expectations and demands
- » other non-physical forms of hostility or bullying

Underline all parts of the Guide's definition that you would like to include in your Policy.

Your Emotional Abuse Definition: _____

Neglect

What is your state's legal definition of "neglect"? _____

Are there any ideas or words missing from the legal definition that you want to include in your Policy? If so, what are they? _____

- » Physical (e.g., failure to provide necessary food or shelter, or lack of appropriate supervision)
- » Medical (e.g., failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment)
- » Educational (e.g., failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs)
- » Emotional (e.g., inattention to a child's emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care, or permitting the child to use alcohol or other drugs)

Your Neglect Definition: _____

Spiritual Abuse

The guide defines child spiritual abuse as abuse administered under the guise of religion.

Examples include:

- » Use of religious ideology, precepts, tradition, or sacred texts to harm a child
- » Compelling a child to engage in religious acts against his or her will
- » Abuse that occurs in a religious context (e.g., church)
- » Abuse perpetuated by a religious leader (e.g., pastor)
- » Invocation of divine authority to manipulate a child into meeting the needs of the abuser

Place a check mark by any of the examples you will include in your Policy's definition.

Your Spiritual Abuse Definition: _____

Sample Policy Language:

[Faith Church]³¹ takes all indicators and suspicions of child maltreatment seriously. We are aware of the research on polyvictimization, which tells us that children who are maltreated in one way are at significantly increased risk of being maltreated in multiple ways. Therefore, as our church becomes aware of an indicator or report of a child being maltreated in one way, we will be alert to the possibility that this child might also be maltreated in another way, and we will take steps to protect the child from known risks and be extra attentive to and supportive of the child.