

“Deepak Reju writes with conviction and compassion about the sobering reality of child abuse and the challenge of protecting children in this fallen world. Highlighting both the responsibility and privilege of our stewardship, Deepak’s straightforward, thorough, and well-researched insights will instill in any parent or church leader a healthy fear and God-dependent confidence while providing us with practical steps and effective strategies for fulfilling the calling and responsibility we have as God’s stewards. We earnestly encourage church leaders to embrace Deepak’s concern and apply his counsel for the protection and the joy of the next generation.”

Pastor David and Sally Michael, Founders, Children Desiring God

“Child sexual abuse in the church is a scandal and yet many of us in church are woefully ill-equipped to identify danger signs, understand our legal responsibilities, or respond in an appropriate pastoral manner to the victims. In this timely book, Deepak Reju addresses all of these areas of concern, offering helpful advice to pastors, elders, and Christians in general on what the reality of this evil requires of them in terms of organization, wisdom, and action. Whether your church is just starting to formulate a child protection policy or seeking to protect the children in its care more effectively, this book will be a very useful resource in addressing the challenges and, most important of all, in keeping children safe and giving comfort and care to the victims of abuse.”

Carl R. Trueman, Pastor, Cornerstone Presbyterian Church, Ambler, PA; Paul Woolley Professor of Church History, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia

“Deepak has given the church a fine gift. He has written a very practical plan for churches so we can better love and protect our children and teens. It won’t overburden a church with endless regulations, but it will give church leadership what they must know, and it will lay out what church leadership must teach its members and ministry staff. This book will, guaranteed, make you and your church wiser.”

Ed Welch, Author and CCEF Faculty

“Everyone agrees that we should be on guard to protect children in our churches. What’s been lacking is a clear and concise guide that shows church leaders how. In *On Guard*, Deepak Reju has now provided us with a theologically grounded and deeply practical guide precisely for this purpose.”

Timothy Paul Jones, PhD, C. Edwin Gheens Professor of Christian Family Ministry at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“*On Guard* is a road map that will help your church, its leaders, staff and congregation create a safer environment for families. It does not pull its punches delivering case studies, facts, and figures that will shock many, and by deconstructing the stereotypical image of the sexual predator, it forces the reader to reflect on the reality that predators very often hide in plain sight, behind the facade of the all-American father, youth pastor, preacher, or highly respected member of the congregation. If your church hasn't got a child protection policy or you want to test the one you have, this provides all the references and checklists you will need. Whether inside or outside the church, this is a must-read for all child protection professionals.”

Jim Gamble QPM, CEO INEQE Safe & Secure; former CEO of the Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre; founding Chair of the Virtual Global Taskforce on Child Protection; lead on Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Child Abuse Investigation until 2011

“How should a church respond to a convicted sex offender who, after serving his sentence, wants to join your church? How do we affirm the gospel of grace without making naïve and tragic mistakes? How can predators be identified and what ‘best practices’ do we need to guard against abuse within the church, even by leaders? Sad to say, we really need this book.”

Michael Horton, Professor of Theology, Westminster Seminary California; cohost of the White Horse Inn

“The church has been woefully behind the curve when it comes to addressing sexual abuse. Fortunately, *On Guard* by Deepak Reju brings a much needed resource to church leadership. Reju is a shepherd who clearly loves the vulnerable sheep. Beyond statistics and stories, Reju speaks into the heart of contemporary church life with insight that faces evil and also brings practical help. I recommend every new pastor or intern read this book. *On Guard: Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse at Church* is a mouthful we're going to have to digest to move toward the front of the curve.”

Andrew J. Schmutzer, PhD, Professor of Biblical Studies, Moody Bible Institute; author/editor of *The Long Journey Home: Understanding and Ministering to the Sexually Abused*

“*On Guard* is a much-needed bomb and balm. It detonates many dangerous assumptions of the evangelical church regarding child abuse, and it points us toward true healing and wise safety measures. This is a must-read for every pastor and ministry leader and a gift of love to every child. I wish this book had been published decades ago!”

Peter Hubbard, Teaching Pastor, North Hills Community Church, Taylors, SC; author of *Love Into Light*

“Thanks to *On Guard*, many children will be protected from the horrors of child abuse. In addition to providing a more comprehensive approach toward child abuse, he offers helpful strategies to prevent and respond to abuse at church. All pastors, children ministry leaders, church staff, and parents need Deepak’s book.”

Justin S. Holcomb, Episcopal priest; seminary professor; coauthor of *Rid of My Disgrace*

“I can’t recommend Deepak’s book highly enough. Deepak provides a thorough education on child protection for your childcare workers, practical help in implementing a child protection policy at your church, and sets an appropriately tough standard that will scare the daylights out of any predators looking to target your children. Get a case of these books to give to your children’s ministry workers as a training tool to equip them in their service and care of your children.”

Marty Machowski, Children’s Pastor; author of *The Gospel Story Bible* and *Gospel Story* curriculum, *Long Story Short*, and *Old Story New*

“This book is a must-read for every church and pastor. The church has a moral responsibility to be fully equipped in the protection of children under its care and how to respond in a God-honoring way when our best efforts at prevention fail. We have not lived up to this standard, but Deepak has served the church well by writing this needed resource. It is now our responsibility to study it, examine our current practices at each church, and make necessary changes. Make sure every church and pastor you know gets a copy.”

Brad Hambrick, Pastor of Counseling at The Summit Church, Durham, NC (www.bradhambrick.com/beyondprevention/)

“I know of no single book that captures well the full picture and essential need to protect children in the modern church and how to accomplish it wisely . . . until now. I am deeply grateful that Deepak Reju wrote this book. His wise pastor’s heart and years of credible experience he brings to this area of ministry permeates from every page. *On Guard* is thoroughly biblical and immensely practical. Every pastor, church leader, and church member working with children in the local church must read this book. This is one of the most important books for the local church I have read in many years!”

Brian Croft, Senior Pastor, Auburndale Baptist Church; founder, Practical Shepherding; author

“*On Guard: Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse at Church* needs to be in the hands of every pastor and ministry leader in every church. This candid, compassionate, and comprehensive manual provides exactly what the church desperately needs to protect children and to protect the reputation of Christ and the Bride of Christ. Replete with wise biblical principles and practical real-life policies and procedures, *On Guard* equips the church to take the lead in proactively protecting the most precious and vulnerable among us.”

Bob Kellemen, PhD, Executive Director, Biblical Counseling Coalition; author of *Gospel-Centered Counseling*

“Rev. Reju boldly articulates that the church does not, in fact will not, write a child safety plan if it does not understand the call of Scripture as the basis for such a plan. From chapter to chapter, the author extracts from numerous scripture verses and stories the sound theological foundation for a child safety plan. He emphasizes that every movement toward the development of a child safety plan must embrace our duty to love the church and the little ones in its care, but also to abhor the moral failure of doing nothing to protect little ones from harm or restricting potential abusers from unfettered access to do harm.”

Beth A. Swagman, MSW, ACSW, JD, Director of Safe Place Consulting, PLC, Grand Rapids, MI; author of *Preventing Child Abuse: Creating a Safe Place*

“Sexual predators target children in churches. This sobering truth ought to lead us to pray—and prepare. In his timely book, Deepak Reju helps pastors and parents consider what it means to proactively defend children from those who would seek to do them harm. This valuable resource brings needed sobriety along with practical wisdom to assist churches in developing policies, procedures, and response plans to help guard our children. I have great hope that God will use this book for his glory and the good of many children.”

Garrett Kell, Lead Pastor, Del Ray Baptist Church, Alexandria, VA

“*On Guard* provides a compelling and challenging glimpse into one of the gritty realities facing churches today—the prevalence of child sexual abuse. Reju’s statistics and stories are startling. But his recommendations for a thorough child protection policy and suggestions for writing one are practical, helpful, and insightful—born from real-world experience. *On Guard* challenges churches, leaders, and parents to proactively protect the children in their care. A valuable resource for churches of all sizes!”

Kathy Stout-LaBauve, LCSW, Vice President of Aftercare, International Justice Mission

“In a perfect world, a book like *On Guard* would not be necessary. But our world is broken, and we need serious help navigating the often complex issues of protection, justice, and healing when it comes to the most vulnerable in our churches. Deepak Reju has met this need in a clear, practical, and powerful way.”

Jared C. Wilson, Pastor, Middletown Springs Community Church, Vermont; author of *The Wonder-Working God*

“I wish we lived in a world where books like *On Guard* were not necessary. Since we don’t, however, I am very glad that Deepak Reju wrote this excellent book. *On Guard* is an immensely helpful guide for pastors and other church leaders who want to prevent and respond to child abuse in their midst. I recommend that you read it and implement its wisdom before you need it.”

Mike McKinley, Pastor Sterling Park Baptist Church (Sterling, VA); author of *Am I Really a Christian?*

“A lead pastor often has his mind wrapped up in the next sermon, staff issues, the overall vision of the church, and shepherding the adults of his congregation well. But, how often does he stop to think about the critical logistical issues that could build or utterly destroy the health of a congregation, such as the physical safety of the children and youth in its ministries? And is he prepared to shepherd well when a horrible situation occurs involving a child? *On Guard* changed how I think. I have never disagreed with the principles and wisdom in the book, but nor have I really given much attention to them so I could lead and be accountable for our children’s ministry staff. Deepak Reju has addressed the vital issues of safeguarding and responding to child abuse in the context of a local church within a theological and pastoral framework. Whether you are a children’s ministry volunteer or a lead pastor, this is an essential read.”

Jay Thomas, Lead Pastor, Chapel Hill Bible Church

“*On Guard* should be mandatory reading for every pastor! For too long, the sexual abuse of children has been one of the darkest places inside the Church. This is the reason I am so excited to endorse this book by Deepak Reju that helps to shine light and brings hope to this issue. Not only does this book do a thorough job in identifying the complex issues, but it also offers fantastic practical guidance on how to confront and address abuse in a manner that protects children and serves survivors.”

Boz Tchividjian, Executive Director, GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment)

“This is a full book-length treatment of a terrifyingly common reality—the sexual abuse of children in religious environments. It is well-grounded in biblical and theological truth, and it provides concrete information both about the extent of the problem and about the specific steps that churches must take to address the problem (steps that are also directly relevant to synagogues and mosques). It should be required reading for the leaders of all religious communities.”

Dr. Samuel Logan, International Director of the World Reformed Fellowship

“We all might wish that a book like this wouldn’t have to be written, but wishful thinking is exactly the kind of thing that puts children at risk. Child predators aim to victimize children, and they know that many churches are doing little to keep them out. Deepak Reju has done an enormous service to God’s people by showing us how to keep our churches *On Guard* against child predators. This book is extremely practical and a must-read for pastors and church leaders.”

Denny Burk, Professor of Biblical Studies, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“One of the greatest challenges facing the twenty-first century church in North America is how to protect our children from child abuse. While the moral responsibility to guard our children from emotional and physical harm is undisputed, it seems that too many church leaders continue to respond wrongly to allegations and even the proof that abuse has occurred. How to handle these situations becomes overwhelmingly confusing and complex when a church has not properly planned for how to prevent and respond to abuse. In *On Guard*, Deepak Reju has served us all. He pulls back the curtain of child abuse and provides a clear-headed analysis of the problem, and then he provides eleven strategies for preventing and responding to abuse. We can’t get this wrong! The moral, physical, and emotional health of our children and the faithful witness of the justice and loving kindness of God displayed in the gospel depend on it.”

Keith Whitfield, PhD, Assistant Professor of Christian Theology, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC

“Authority exercised well is one of the most beautiful pictures we have of God and His character. Authority abused, especially among children, is one of the most heinous sins and offenses against God because it lies about his image and who he is. In *On Guard*, Deepak reflects pastorally, practically, and biblically on how to exercise authority well so that Christian leaders and parents can most effectively protect and care for children in the church. This is an essential resource for every local church, filling a much-needed gap and giving practical tools that will honor God, protect children, and strengthen the witness of the gospel in a dark, dark world.”

Ryan Townsend, Executive Director, 9Marks

“Dr. Deepak Reju brings practical and pastoral wisdom to a subject not many people are willing to talk about today, despite the fact that one in three girls and one in four boys will be sexually abused at some point in their childhood. His eight strategies for protecting against abuse are worth the price of the book. Read this one and weep. Then get to work to protect our children.”

C. Ben Mitchell, PhD, Provost, Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Graves Professor of Moral Philosophy, Union University

ON GUARD

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PREVENTING AND RESPONDING
TO CHILD ABUSE AT CHURCH

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DEEPAK REJU



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I've often heard it said that writing a book is a labor of love. You pour yourself into it with the hope that it will help someone. *My first and foremost desire is that as a result of this book, children will be protected from the horrors of child abuse.*

My second desire for this book was to fill a gap. Everywhere I go, lawyers and psychologists are talking about child abuse and telling the church what to do, but pastors rarely have anything to say. I'm a pastor, and I spend a lot of time working alongside our children's ministry and youth staff. I wanted to make a statement as a pastor who labors on the "inside" of a church.

My third desire was to state what I thought would be a more comprehensive approach preventing and responding to child abuse at church. If you look at the literature on child abuse directed at churches, you see a lot about writing a policy, screening, reporting abuse, and responding to abuse. But there was very little other instruction, and what was available was often out of print. Hence, my eleven strategies to prevent and respond to abuse at church.

Thanks to Barbara Juliani and Marty Machowski, both of whom believed that this would be worthy of putting into print—and who took a risk on a relatively new author.

Thanks to the elder board and members of Capitol Hill Baptist Church (CHBC) and our very talented children's ministry

team—especially Gio Lynch, Jennilee Miller, and Connie Dever. What a delight it is to work and serve at a church that makes the gospel so central to everything.

I'm grateful for Carl Simmons and Gretchen Logterman who worked through the manuscript with me and made this a better book. Thanks also to writer and reporter J.C. Derrick, who edited and gave me feedback on my very first draft, long before I had a publisher.

Thanks *especially* to my very dear wife, Sarah, who has shown great kindness to me for more than a decade, treating me much better than I deserve.

INTRODUCTION

• • • •

WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

Jonathan was shocked. A convicted sex offender had molested a young boy in the bathroom. The three deacons in the church were supposed to be watching him but let down their guard when it came time to collect the offering. As the new pastor, Jonathan didn't know what to do. No one had described anything like this in seminary.

In another church, Carl, the youth pastor, would typically drive the kids home after their Friday night meetings. Darla wasn't his first victim. He would often drop her off last and would "touch" her after the other kids were gone. Pats, tickles, and poking turned into caressing in inappropriate places.

Janel was an innocent teenager in a hallway of the local mega-church heading home after a youth event. Sam, a building manager, pulled her into an empty classroom and forced her to have sex. She was at the wrong place at the wrong time. No one else was around, and she didn't know what to do, so she just gave in to Sam's demands. He threatened her so that she wouldn't tell anyone, but it was hard to hide because she cried the whole rest of the day. Sam had a rap sheet. He had been hired because he had friends who worked for the church, and no one had bothered to check into his past.

You might be surprised that these situations actually happened in churches. Of all places, aren't churches supposed to be associated with good things—a loving God, sacrificial believers, children's

choirs, and Christmas pageants? Take a brief look at the local news, or live long enough in a fallen world, and you'll quickly see how Satan makes his way into churches, wreaking havoc in all kinds of ways (1 Peter 5:8). Pastors have affairs; people embezzle money; Christians gossip, complain, and bicker with one another. And that's just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to what can go wrong in a local church.

In this book, we are dealing with one particular manifestation of evil—*wicked people doing unspeakable wrong against children*. Those who think that churches are immune from this problem are deeply mistaken. As we'll find in the pages ahead, some sexual offenders deliberately target churches because they want to take advantage of naive Christians. To deny that this could ever happen in a church puts our kids at risk. Denial doesn't get anyone anywhere in a fallen world filled with sin and evil.

As you read this book, my hope and prayer is that you'll grow in your understanding of the problem (including how child abusers act and think) and of ways to lower the risk of an offender harming children in your church. With that said, let's begin.

Section One

Getting Familiar
with the Problem
of Child Abuse

CHAPTER 1

• • • •

THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

In the movie *Grand Canyon*, Kevin Kline plays the role of an immigration lawyer who flees from a bumper-to-bumper traffic jam by heading down a side street. Within just a few minutes, a rather predictable Hollywood scenario unfolds: An upper-class lawyer driving a fancy car stalls in a dangerous neighborhood. He calls for a tow truck, but while he waits, a street gang surrounds his car and starts threatening him.

The tow truck soon arrives, and the old driver starts to hook up the disabled car, much to the chagrin of the gang members. “What are you doing, old man? Can’t you see you are spoiling our fun?” protests the gang leader.

Taking him aside, the driver explains, “Man, the world ain’t supposed to work like this. Maybe you don’t know that, but this ain’t the way it’s supposed to be. I’m supposed to be able to do my job without askin’ you if I can. And the dude is supposed to be able to wait with his car without you rippin’ him off. Everything’s supposed to be different than what it is here.”

Welcome to the cold, hard reality of life in a corrupt and sinful world.¹

Not the Way It's Supposed to Be

In the beginning, it wasn't this way. God made the world, and everything he made, even the first man and woman, he deemed "good" (Genesis 1:5, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). But quickly things went wrong as Adam and Eve chose to listen to the words of the serpent rather than trust in God (Genesis 3:1–13). Sin entered the world through the first couple and has been passed on to every generation since then.

The Bible explains to us why this world is not the way it is supposed to be—sin entered the world and corrupted everything. That's right—*everything*. No one and nothing escapes its evil grasp. The apostle Paul wrote, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. . . . For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:10–11, 23).

Every human being is a sinner. No one escapes the curse of Genesis 3. Sin has corrupted every part of our human existence—our thinking, our actions, our desires, our plans, our hopes, and our dreams. Our nature is sinful from birth (Psalm 51:5). Every bit of who we are is affected.

It is no surprise, then, that some adults will do unspeakably wrong things to children. In a fallen world, one sees and experiences all kinds of evil. Some men and women are so distorted by sin that they willingly commit atrocious acts against innocent children. I am going to call these people by a variety of terms—sex offender, child abuser, or perpetrator. Sometimes I will even call them *sexual predators* because that's exactly what they are—evil people who deliberately prey on kids.

Abuse and Moral Authority

Child abuse can be defined as any act or failure to act resulting in imminent risk, serious injury, death, physical or emotional or sexual harm, or exploitation of a child.

God has entrusted the care of children to parents (and extended family), which means they have the moral responsibility to protect, feed, mentor, care for, and love their children. There is also a more general sense in which God has given moral responsibility to adults. Church members care for other people's kids in children's ministry; teachers guide children through their education; community baseball and soccer coaches encourage and equip kids with skills in a particular sport. Even an adult passing by a child lying hurt in the street will feel more than just the tug of a good Samaritan; he will feel a natural impulse to help someone who is weaker and more vulnerable than himself.

God has given parents a unique authority over their children, but in some sense, he has given any adult who watches over a child—a teacher, coach, babysitter, or even a fellow church member—a level of responsibility and authority for that child. Every good authority reflects God; and every bad authority speaks a lie to children about God and who he is. When any adult—relative or otherwise—abuses a child, it is a violation of the moral authority entrusted to adults. Abuse is antithetical to an adult's God-given charge to care for kids. To put it more bluntly: Abuse in any form is *wrong*. There is *never* an excuse to abuse a child.

Show Me the Numbers

To get a greater sense of the problem, a quick statistical overview of child abuse is helpful:

- There are approximately 747,000 registered sex offenders in the U.S. alone.²
- There are more than 100,000 sexual offenders who fail to report every year.³
- As many as one in three girls and one in four boys will be sexually abused at some point in their childhood.⁴
- Approximately thirty percent of all cases are reported to authorities—meaning that seventy percent never get proper attention or prosecution.⁵

- Over 63,000 cases of child sexual abuse were reported in 2010.⁶
- Offenders typically prey on children they know, not strangers. Most perpetrators are acquaintances, but as many as forty-seven percent are family or extended family.⁷
- Almost half (forty-seven percent) of the offenders who sexually assaulted victims under age six were family members, compared with forty-two percent of whom assaulted youth ages six through eleven, and twenty-four percent of whom assaulted juveniles ages twelve through seventeen.⁸
- The Department of Justice reports that children under age twelve make up half of all victims of forced sodomy, forced fondling, or sexual assault with an object.⁹
- Numerous experts have made it clear that sexual predators often have not just one or two victims, but dozens. The Abel and Harlow Child Molestation Prevention Study found that each child molester averages twelve child victims and seventy-one acts of molestation. An earlier study by Dr. Gene Abel found that out of 561 sexual offenders interviewed there were more than 291,000 incidents involving more than 195,000 total victims. This same study found that only three percent of these sexual offenders have a chance of getting caught.¹⁰
- A 2007 FBI report states the following:
 - ~ One out of five girls will be sexually molested before her eighteenth birthday;
 - ~ One out of six boys will be sexually molested before his eighteenth birthday;
 - ~ One out of every seven victims of sexual assault reported to law enforcement agencies was under age six; and
 - ~ Forty percent of the offenders who victimized children under age six were juveniles (under eighteen).¹¹

Appalling, isn't it? A quick glance at the numbers shows how pervasive the problem is. This fills out the Bible's picture of sin with

more specifics, helping us to see how common sexual and physical abuse is in our society.

When the Church Fails Our Kids

While there are no statistical reports on child abusers in churches, experts have collected a slew of anecdotes about offenders who deliberately target churches. If you think it can't happen at your church, then be forewarned: it can.

Anna Salter, one of the nation's experts on sexual abuse, describes the life of Mr. Raines. Here is his story, in his own words:

I want to describe a child molester I know very well. This man was raised by devout Christian parents. As a child he rarely missed church. Even after he became an adult, he was faithful as a church member. He was a straight-A student in high school and college. He has been married and has a child of his own. He coached Little League baseball. He was a choir director at his church. He never used any illegal drugs. He never had a drink of alcohol. He was a clean-cut, all-American boy. Everyone seemed to like him. He was a volunteer in numerous civic community functions. He had a well-paying career job. He was considered "well-to-do" in society. But from the age of thirteen years old, he sexually molested little boys. He never victimized a stranger. All of his victims were friends.... I know this child molester very well because it is me.¹²

Mr. Raines has been out on parole on several occasions—and scary enough, tries to infiltrate churches to become, of all things, a volunteer children's choir director. He does this despite the fact that he has had at least two incarcerations and three criminal convictions for child molestation.

How is this possible, you say? Mr. Raines is a very likable fellow, so his previous churches quickly grew to trust him. And once those

Christians trusted him, Mr. Raines put himself in direct contact with as many kids as possible. What better way to have access to kids than to be their choir director?

Sexual offenders are not dumb. They are deliberate and calculating. The very thing Christians see as strengths—love for others, a trusting disposition—perpetrators see as weaknesses on which they can prey. Dr. Salter writes: “I believe in my heart the next time Mr. Raines gets out of prison, he will successfully ingratiate himself in youth activities in a church once more. He will do this even though he now has at least three criminal convictions for child molestation and likely more, all of which any church could have discovered. But who will check criminal records for such an outstanding, polite, well-spoken young man? After all, volunteers are hard to come by.”¹³

Many perpetrators know that churches are struggling to find volunteers to help in children’s ministry, and they want to exploit that fact fully. I recently sat down with a pastor, his children’s minister, and their lead volunteers. Only five to ten percent of their church membership was willing to help with their kids. So, as the children’s minister said, “We’re *desperate* for more volunteers....”

Why do you think that sexual offenders try to infiltrate churches? Because many know that most churches don’t even bother checking criminal records. They’re too busy. They’re small enough that they feel they know everyone. They don’t think that convicted sexual offenders will come to *their* church. Why bother checking criminal records when the person is a nice, respectable guy?

The question then comes: How do we protect our church kids from the Mr. Raineses of the world? If child molesters are out there (and they are), we need a plan to build a sufficient firewall around our churches. In the pages ahead, we’ll help your church come up with that game plan. But before we describe a plan, our next step is to consider our stewardship of the children in our care.