

# Planning Steps: Safe Kids and Teens

Adapted from Pre-School Sunday School Central  
[www.psscentral.com](http://www.psscentral.com)

Church should be a safe place to bring our kids. Read some tips on how to make sure your church is a welcoming place for the children/youth you are entrusted to. Wouldn't it be wonderful to just be able to teach in church without worrying about anything going awry? Sure, it would. But, unfortunately the times that we are living in do not allow us to do this. We have to think about this subject and discuss it because reports of child abuse taking place in churches across the world are climbing in numbers. Here are some steps to take to help you strengthen your procedures.

## Two-Adult Policy

This is perhaps the easiest policy to set in place. Adults who are left alone with children have greater access to harming them. By making it a rule that there must be at least two adults present in a children's classroom should eliminate any such actions. This rule not only protects the children, but also protects the adults who are working with the children. If a child ever made an untruthful accusation, both adults have a witness as to their actions. If you only have one teacher, the 'second adult' could be a ministry for someone who wants to help but not teach.

## Open-Door Policy

If it is not possible to have two adults in a room at one time, enforce an open-door policy. This simply means to leave doors open during class at all times. In order for someone to abuse a child, they need privacy. This should alleviate any tendency to abuse a child. If there is a reason for a door to be shut, such as for noise, fear of escaping children, and so forth, plan to have an adult drop in on the class unannounced in each session.

## Bathroom Rules for Children

When a child needs to use a bathroom, the ideal situation would be for a same-sex adult to accompany the child. An adult should never enter a stall with a child. Simply state, "If you need me, I will be waiting right outside the door." If you are working with young children, the bathroom door should be propped open so that the adult and the child can be seen. Another alternative is to adopt a parent-assist policy in which the parent/guardian attending worship is recruited to assist his/her child.

## OUR CHURCH'S POLICY...

### TWO-ADULT POLICY

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### OPEN-DOOR POLICY

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### BATHROOM RULES

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### BACKGROUND CHECKS

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### TEACHER TRAINING

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### CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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### PRACTICE POINT:

Develop a permission form for activities in which children/youth will be supervised by someone other than their parents. Form should request contact information, emergency contact information, dietary or medical concerns, and a waiver of liability. Examples can be found at [www.dioceseofalgoma.com](http://www.dioceseofalgoma.com)

## **Background Checks**

Most child molesters are all too good at disguising themselves as someone good and trustworthy. Numbers do not lie, and the number of incidents of child abuse in church is climbing all too rapidly. The safest thing to do is have potential workers fill out an information form that gives you the right to have your law enforcement agency run a background check before letting them come onboard. The form must include the individual's Social Insurance Number. Please check with your local Police Station to learn their process and fees for running a background check.

## **Teacher Training**

Train your teachers and workers about how to conduct themselves in classrooms, on bathroom trips, and in other situations when working with children to protect themselves against unwanted accusations. With all this said, our primary role as teachers, and more importantly Christians, is to teach children about the Lord. This is a privilege for us. Along with this privilege comes the responsibility of keeping them safe while they are in our care.

## **Ministering to Children/Teens with Special Needs**

Children and teens with special needs need special care. Learn what your Ministry or Sunday school class can do to reach out to the families of kids with special needs. If you have a child in your Ministry or Sunday school class with special needs, then you may wonder how you will find activities that will include the child. Kids come in all shapes and sizes, and even disabilities. Even if you cannot see a physical disability, you could deal with issues such as hearing loss, ADD, or even something such as dyslexia. You need to make sure that you are reaching out to these children.

### **A. Awareness is Key**

One of the first things that you will want to do when you have a special needs child in your Ministry is to make sure that those who will teach the child are aware of the situation. It is always a good idea to sit down with the child's parents and find out what the child can and cannot do, and how you can make things easier for the child. Most parents will appreciate the fact that you are sensitive to their child's unique needs. If the child will be joining a Sunday School class, make sure that the teacher and the children are also aware. Point out that the child may look or act a little differently, but is really not that different at all.

### **B. Introduction to the Children**

The next thing you will want to do is to introduce the child to the other children. The children may have a lot of questions about the new child and let them know that it is okay to ask. You might even want to play a game with all the children and let them try to bounce a ball in a wheelchair or blindfold the children to see how they react. This is a good way for the children to see what the special needs child goes through on a daily basis.

### **C. Assign a Buddy**

Children are almost always eager to help out, so why not give the special needs child a buddy each week. The buddy can help the new child with crafts, reading or even just navigating around the church. Take turns and assign the child a new buddy each week. This will make the special needs child feel like a part of the group, and it will give all the children a chance to make a new friend.

### **D. Adapting Activities**

As you plan activities for the children, you will want to keep the special needs child in mind. It may take some creativity, but you will be able to adapt most games and activities for the child. For example, if you are doing an obstacle course and the child is unable to participate, could he or she call out what to do next or keep score? If a game is timed, can you allow for extra time so that the child can complete the work? If the child has problems with fine motor skills, can you pre-cut small pieces or assign that task to the weekly buddy? There are many ways to adapt activities for children. The child's parents will be a great resource for ideas about adapting activities.