

# Maintaining Nursery Care Safety

## Keeping the Nursery Safe

Is your nursery safe? Churches providing nursery care have taken on increased responsibility for protecting the safety of children while their parents worship and participate in other activities.

Physical injuries to children left in a nursery could range from minor cuts and bruises to more serious injuries such as broken bones and concussions. Falls, electric shock, food poisoning or the spread of communicable diseases could be seen as the consequence of a poorly supervised nursery or an unsatisfactory physical environment.

Building and room inspections should be undertaken at regular intervals with a focus on the physical conditions of ceilings, walls, floors and floor covering, lighting and general housekeeping.

A “kid’s eye view” inspection of the church nursery, adjacent areas and washrooms used by nursery students is recommended. When you inspect your nursery, get down on your hands and knees and observe the room from the height and perspective of the children who use the nursery.

There are several potential hazards which should be checked. Any stairs used by nursery students should have anti-slip treads and child-high handrails. Walkways and stairs should be free from recognized “trip and fall” hazards. Climbing toys that are not age-appropriate for nursery students should be removed. Do not leave furniture or toys stacked so a child would find them inviting to climb, which may result in physical injury to them or others in the nursery. All cribs and playpens used in the nursery should meet current safety standards. Serious injury may occur if a child’s head becomes wedged between the slats or other opening. The distance between components in the cribs (such as slats, spindles, crib rods, corner

posts) should be no wider than 2¾”(6 cm). The dimensions of openings in your cribs and playpens should be checked to verify that the safety standard is met. If any equipment does not meet this standard, discard it.

Electrical wiring, switches and outlets should be checked and brought up to local electrical codes. Electrical outlets should be covered when not in use, preferably with safety caps. Do not allow cords from clocks or other electrical appliances to dangle, creating potential strangulation hazards. Extension cords should never be used as permanent wiring, and must not be exposed to access by children even when used temporarily for electrical devices such as DVD players, VCRs, CD players, tape recorders or record players.

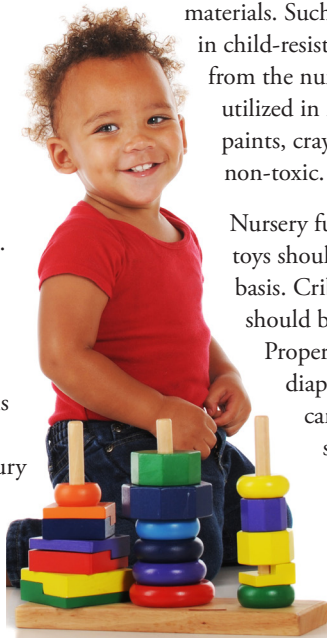
Gates should be installed on stairwells and windows which are accessible to young children. Doors need to be closed to prevent children from wandering off, while maintaining access for parents and other adults into the nursery. A safety glass viewing port in the door or the use of a split door can provide a solution.

Great care needs to be taken in the proper and safe storing of cleaning supplies, insecticides, matches, power tools and any other hazardous materials. Such materials should be stored in child-resistant, locked enclosures away from the nursery area. Any supplies utilized in nursery activities, such as paints, crayons and the like, must be non-toxic.

Nursery furnishings, equipment and toys should be sanitized on a regular basis. Crib and playpen mattress covers should be made of washable vinyl.

Proper disposal facilities for soiled diapers are a requisite. All trash cans in the nursery should be securely covered.

If snacks or beverages are provided by either the church or parents, provisions to keep



## Ministry Protection Memo

“MPM” is a series on various topics relative to Church and safety. Send your comments and interests to Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church’s Director of Risk Management.

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“A safety check of your church nursery facilities should be a high priority. It should become a routine activity for those responsible for the nursery operation and completed at least twice a year.”



the food at the proper temperature until it is consumed are essential. Clean up thoroughly after the children eat refreshments to avoid food poisoning from the consumption of spoiled leftovers or spillage and attracting insects or vermin.

Churches with nurseries in a location at some distance from the church sanctuary, fellowship hall, church office, or another location where adults are present when the nursery is in use, will want to consider the installation of a remote audio monitor. Adults away from the nursery listening in on the activities can speed the response should an emergency require additional assistance. A buzzer system, accessible only to adults, incorporated into the monitoring system allows for a “help” signal to be sent when necessary.

The fire and emergency evacuation plan should be posted and known by every nursery worker. At a minimum, two remote fire exits with illuminated exit signs, and preferably with panic hardware, should be provided. Never lock exit doors with padlocks or deadbolts. Emergency lighting should be installed in order to provide necessary illumination in the event of a power failure. An approved automatic sprinkler system is the best defense against the peril of fire, and may be required due to your building construction or local ordinances. Check your local building code to verify that you are meeting all ordinance requirements.

Approved fire extinguishers should be properly placed, available within 75 feet of the nursery, and accessible to adults but not young children. Extinguishers should be inspected

or recharged and tagged at least annually. All possible sources of fire should be eliminated or properly controlled. Boilers and furnaces should be enclosed within a minimum one-hour fire resistive rooms and located well away from the nursery.

A safety check of your church nursery facilities should be a high priority. It should become a routine activity for those responsible for the nursery operation and completed at least twice a year.

## Liability Exposures

One of the first risk management steps for every church with a nursery program is to review the current insurance policy to confirm that there is adequate protection in place. The liability coverage provided under insurance policies for local churches usually includes bodily injury and medical payments. There may be separate policies or endorsements for vicarious liability for physical/sexual abuse and for daycare centers. Check with your conference administrator to determine what is covered by your policy and at what limits. You do not want to discover an underinsured problem in the event of a loss. You should also confirm that liability protection is afforded non-medical personnel that administer first aid to children and others who may be injured in the nursery or elsewhere at the church.

An assessment of liability exposure is recommended for a church nursery program. Parents have a right to be concerned about the well-being of others during worship, weekday care, or other church activities. Evaluate your **supervision, security, safety and sanitation** procedures to assure yourself that you have taken the necessary preventive steps to avoid an accident or incident.

Adequate supervision of children in the nursery may be taken for granted and if not properly maintained, may result in tragic consequences. Do you have a minimum of two nursery attendants on duty at all times, with a ratio of at least one nursery worker to every four children? Should one of the children require special assistance when only one person has been assigned to the nursery. Is backup assistance readily available? Are your nursery attendants an appropriate age for this assignment? Ensure at least one of the employees is age 18 or older when the church nursery is in use. It is inappropriate to have older children responsible for the church nursery. Adult supervision is mandatory. Have you thoroughly

screened your nursery workers to determine qualifications? Have you checked references for any previous history which would disqualify any of the workers to serve in the nursery?

**Security** is as much an issue with church nurseries as in secular settings. Is your nursery located so that access from outside the church facility is regulated? Are the washrooms used by nursery attendants and children, adjacent to or near the nursery? Do others involved in church activities, such as ushers or staff, check on the nursery periodically to see that things are okay? Is a phone readily available and is the location known by nursery staff so that emergency police, fire and medical personnel can be summoned quickly? Remember to post emergency phone numbers, including direct-dial numbers, as an alternative to 9-1-1 service. Are there measures in place to restrict the persons who pick up children at the end of worship or other event to only those authorized to do so? Your church does not want to contribute to unauthorized pickup, whether by a stranger or from a non-custodial parent or other relative. Many churches have implemented a sign-in, sign-out policy, utilizing matching identification tags for child and parent, to prevent children leaving with an unauthorized adult.

Children’s safety can be enhanced by evaluating several concerns. Are all the nursery toys and furnishings in proper repair? Are the toys and equipment age-appropriate? Are toys, furniture and equipment stacked so that they will not become unstable and fall on children? Are children prevented from wandering off unobserved through entrance ways and windows? Are electrical outlets guarded, fans and other electrical appliances out of the reach of children? Do cribs meet safety code standards; and those which do not, discarded?

**Sanitation** care of the nursery includes cleaning toys, furnishings and washroom facilities with a disinfectant on a regular basis; having proper disposal facilities available for, and safe handling procedures in place, for soiled diapers; having first-aid supplies readily available for emergency use and having safe procedures in place to avoid disease transmittal from treating wounds.

These are just some of the aspects of church nursery operations that should be reviewed regularly. Many county and state departments of health and child protective services agencies have helpful resources available.

## Screening Nursery Workers

Parents and guardians who leave infants and toddlers in the care of church nursery workers expect that their children will have a safe and nurturing experience. Lasting impressions about the caregiving by church members are formed with the children and adults. The church's love in action is the desired impression, so every possible step should be taken to ensure that nursery time is positive. Churches particularly want to avoid the occurrence of any accident, as well as avoid the victimization of children by physical or sexual abuse in the church's nursery.

Workers are the nursery, as much as the setting, housekeeping, toys, activities and the children. Local churches typically conduct minimum application, screening, and supervision of their paid and/or volunteer nursery staff, a step so crucial to successful nursery operation. The enthusiastic acceptance the church historically offered to almost anyone willing to work with children is widely known both inside and outside the church membership. This has left many of our churches vulnerable to violation of the trust given to nursery workers by church leaders, parents and children. Would physical discipline of toddlers be promptly dealt with as unacceptable? Are your nursery workers capable of responding to immediate first-aid needs should a child be injured? Is your nursery staffed by a person authorized to change soiled diapers or who can locate a parent when a change becomes necessary? Families and other church members need reassurance that only persons qualified to handle these and the other demands placed on nursery workers are assigned. It is crucial that you develop a policy requiring persons to formally apply for these important positions and that the policy be implemented and applied consistently.

Responsible church leaders use the utmost care in screening volunteer and paid staff who will be working with children in the nursery. Child abuse prevention specialists suggest that, as other professional child-serving programs and agencies implement more effective screening techniques, church programs will be an attraction to chronic child abusers. It is crucial that local churches begin to exercise more care in screening all who work with children and teens. Experts suggest that you use an application form to check that background, training and experience of individuals volunteering their services, as well as those applying for paid nursery positions. The

encouraged practice should require all persons to submit an application for any desired position. The significance of any position is affirmed when persons wishing to serve must apply for the opportunity. A model form for use with volunteers is included in the Appendix. It is essential to request information about current employment, previous church membership, previous volunteer work, qualifications and possible criminal record. It is appropriate to ask why individuals wish to work in the nursery. References should be carefully checked and a written record of the process kept in the volunteer's file. Previous incidents or allegations which could disqualify them may be discovered. Nursery worker applications with criminal records, child abuse history of alcohol and other drug abuse problems should not be entrusted with the care of children.

Similar queries should be made of applicants for paid positions, although the type of questions which may be asked of persons applying for paid positions varies from state to state. Generally, applicants for paid positions may only be asked questions which are relevant to the position being sought. Application and reference forms used in your local church should be reviewed with legal counsel familiar with your state's employment laws prior to implementation.

### **Please review "MPM Screening Volunteers" and "Paid Staff Workers with Children and Youth" for additional information.**

You should be clear that all nursery workers serve a probationary period and may not be continued in their position after that time. It is best for all parties involved to have a clear probationary and termination procedure than to face the difficulty of needing to release an ineffective, inappropriate, or disqualified nursery worker after weeks or years of service.

Some local church members may resist the idea that all persons wishing to serve in the nursery be required to apply for the responsibility. "No one would ever harm any of our children" and "it's hard to get anyone to volunteer to work in the nursery as it is" are two commonly heard comments. Without a consistently enforced policy in place, a local church may find itself in the awkward position of attempting to respond to an applicant with a potentially inappropriate background to work in the nursery, and at the same time, having no assurance that others already working in the nursery are appropriately placed.



Document all of your personnel processes: hiring, probations, incidents and dismissals. Maintain your documentation with the full knowledge that others may read the records, so take care to include factual details, not speculative commentary. All employment and volunteer applications should be retained permanently, locked up and available only to properly authorized church staff and members. Typically, personnel records for former employees should be maintained for three years after termination. However, information on church workers with children should be maintained for a longer period, given the statute of limitations on abuse or misconduct incidents.

Remember, those who work in the church nursery represent your church to others as much as the pastoral leadership, the quantity and quality of your ministries and missions, and the impression created by your buildings and grounds. Appropriate screening of nursery workers will go a long way toward developing an excellent church nursery that you can be proud of, and which parents will be pleased is available.

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*The Ministry Protection Memo (MPM) series is offered as an educational tool in support of Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church's property and casualty insurance program to help you develop loss control procedures to suit your specific needs. With these publications, Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church does not seek to establish a particular standard of care or to promote legal advice. We encourage church leaders to consult with competent attorneys with regard to their specific loss control need. Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church encourages reproduction and distribution of this MPM within denomination.*

# SUSPECTED INCIDENTS OF ABUSE OR MISCONDUCT

Report Form

|   |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|
| <b>VICTIM INFORMATION</b>                               |       |       |
| VICTIM'S NAME:  |       | AGE:  |
| PARENTS/GUARDIANS OF VICTIM:                            |       |       |
| LOCATION OF INCIDENT:                                   | DATE: | TIME: |
| BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF INCIDENT:                          |       |       |
| DATE/TIME/LOCATION OF INITIAL CONVERSATION WITH VICTIM: |       |       |
| NOTES OF CONVERSATION:                                  |       |       |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <b>ACCUSED INFORMATION</b>   |  |  |
| NAME OF PERSON ACCUSED OF ABUSE OR MISCONDUCT:                             |  |  |
| DATE/TIME/LOCATION OF INITIAL CONVERSATION WITH ACCUSED (if staff member): |  |  |
| NOTES OF CONVERSATION:   |  |  |

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>PARENT(S)/GUARDIAN(S)</b>  |  |  |
| DATE/TIME/LOCATION OR PHONE CALL OF INITIAL CONTACT WITH PARENT(S)/GUARDIAN(S): |  |  |
| PERSON SPOKEN TO:   |  |  |
| NOTES OF CONVERSATION:  |  |  |

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES</b>                                |  |  |
| DATE/TIME/LOCATION OF CALL TO CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES AGENCY: |  |  |
| PERSON SPOKEN TO:   |  |  |
| NOTES OF CONVERSATION:  |  |  |

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY</b>                         |  |  |
| DATE/TIME/LOCATION OF CALL TO LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY: |  |  |
| PERSON SPOKEN TO:                                     |  |  |
| NOTES OF CONVERSATION:                                |  |  |

Report prepared by: \_\_\_\_\_

NOTE: USE REVERSE SIDE IF ADDITIONAL SPACE IS NEEDED



# INJURIES OCCURRING IN THE NURSERY

Report Form

|                                       |       |        |                  |
|---------------------------------------|-------|--------|------------------|
| TODAY'S DATE:                         |       |        |                  |
| INJURED'S NAME:                       |       | AGE:   | PRIMARY PHONE:   |
|                                       |       |        | SECONDARY PHONE: |
| ADDRESS:                              | CITY: | STATE: | ZIP:             |
| DATE/TIME/PARENT/GUARDIANS CONTACTED: |       |        |                  |

|   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| <b>ACCIDENT</b>                             |                   |
| LOCATION OF ACCIDENT:                       |                   |
| DATE OF ACCIDENT:                           | TIME OF ACCIDENT: |
| STAFF PERSON IN CHARGE AT TIME OF ACCIDENT: |                   |
| BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF ACCIDENT:              |                   |
| OTHER CHILDREN INVOLVED IN ACCIDENT:        |                   |
| OTHER ADULT OR YOUTH WITNESSES TO ACCIDENT: |                   |

|   |
|---|
| <b>ACTION</b>                               |
| ACTION TAKEN:                               |
| MEDICAL ATTENTION REQUIRED:                 |
| TREATING MEDICAL PERSONNEL AND/OR FACILITY: |
| FOLLOW-UP REQUIRED:                         |

|                            |              |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| <b>INSURANCE</b>           |              |
| INSURANCE-RELATED ACTION:  |              |
| NAME OF INSURANCE COMPANY: | POLICY TERM: |
| AGENT:                     |              |
| ACTION TAKEN:              |              |

Report prepared by: \_\_\_\_\_

# VOLUNTEER APPLICATION

**SAMPLE ONLY: Please review with local attorney or other authority prior to**

*The information obtained on this form is for internal use by this local church only.*

|                      |       |                |                 |  |
|----------------------|-------|----------------|-----------------|--|
| NAME:                |       | DATE OF BIRTH: | HOME PHONE:     |  |
|                      |       |                | BUSINESS PHONE: |  |
| ADDRESS:             | CITY: | STATE:         | ZIP:            |  |
| POSTION APPLIED FOR: |       |                |                 |  |

| CURRENT OCCUPATION                            |       |                   |      |  |
|---|-------|-------------------|------|--|
| OCCUPATION:                                   |       | CURRENT EMPLOYER: |      |  |
| BUSINESS ADDRESS:                             | CITY: | STATE:            | ZIP: |  |
| TIME AT THIS EMPLOYMENT: ___ YEARS ___ MONTHS |       |                   |      |  |

| CHURCHES  |       |        |      |  |
|---|-------|--------|------|--|
| LIST (NAME AND ADDRESS) OTHER CHURCHES YOU HAVE ATTENDED REGULARLY THE PAST FIVE YEARS: |       |        |      |  |
|   |       |        |      |  |
| ADDRESS:  | CITY: | STATE: | ZIP: |  |
|   |       |        |      |  |
| ADDRESS:  | CITY: | STATE: | ZIP: |  |
|   |       |        |      |  |
| ADDRESS:  | CITY: | STATE: | ZIP: |  |

| PASTOR, EMPLOYER, AND PERSONAL REFERENCES  |       |                   |      |  |
|--|-------|-------------------|------|--|
| NAME/ADDRESS/TELEPHONE NUMBER OF PASTOR, EMPLOYER, AND PERSONAL REFERENCES WHO MAY BE CONTACTED: |       |                   |      |  |
| PASTOR:  |       | TELEPHONE NUMBER: |      |  |
| ADDRESS:   | CITY: | STATE:            | ZIP: |  |
| EMPLOYER:  |       | TELEPHONE NUMBER: |      |  |
| ADDRESS:   | CITY: | STATE:            | ZIP: |  |
| PERSONAL:  |       | TELEPHONE NUMBER: |      |  |
| ADDRESS:   | CITY: | STATE:            | ZIP: |  |

| EXPERIENCE  |
|---|
| DESCRIBE YOUR BACKGROUND WORKING WITH THE PROGRAM AND/OR AGE GROUP REQUESTED (include information about church-related, volunteer, and paid experience you may have): |
|   |

**NOTE: PLEASE COMPLETE REVERSE SIDE**

|  |
|--|
| <b>GROUPS YOU ARE CURRENTLY ACTIVE IN:</b> |
|  |
|  |
|  |

|   |                              |                             |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:</b>   |                              |                             |
| Have you ever been convicted of any criminal offense?   | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| Have you ever been charged with or convicted of child neglect or abuse?   | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| Have any complaints or allegations of misconduct involving children ever been against you?  | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| Have you been convicted of the possession, use, or sale of drugs?   | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| Within the past 30 days, have you abused alcohol, legal or illegal drugs?   | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| Have you been convicted or plead guilty to a traffic offense within the last 5 years?   | <input type="checkbox"/> YES | <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| Current Drivers License Number:   |                              |                             |
| Please explain fully any YES answers to the above questions. In addition to the above, is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the supervision, guidance, and care of young people? (Explain): |                              |                             |
|   |                              |                             |
|   |                              |                             |
|   |                              |                             |
|   |                              |                             |

The information that I have provided may be verified by contacting persons or organizations that my have information concerning me. I hereby release and agree to hold harmless from liability any person or organization that provides information and this release may be sent to any reference. I also agree to hold harmless the (name) United Methodist Church, and the officers, employees, and volunteers thereof from any use of this application or information. I waive any right that I may have to inspect references provided on my behalf.

I certify that the information I have provided is true and correct; if it is found that the answers given are untrue, I understand it may be cause for dismissal.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_