

## The Essential Role of Leaders in a Culture of Protection

*Mike Sloan, MDiv*  
*Director of Safeguarding*



1

## Practice Self Care



2



## Training Plan

- The role of a leader in creating a safe church culture.
- Definitions, Common Dynamics, and Scenarios - How does prevention work?
- Training Framework



3

## Jesus and Abuse



"Behold I am sending you out as  
sheep in the midst of wolves.  
Therefore, be wise as serpents  
and innocent as doves."

Matthew 10:16



4

Jesus and  
Abuse



"They come to you in sheep's  
clothing, but inwardly they are  
ferocious wolves."  
Matthew 7:15



5



"...offenders can recognize ideal  
settings for [abuse] even  
if the rest of us can't."  
- Dr. Anna Salter, *Predators*



6



"It is precisely our lack of knowledge  
that gives predators their edge."  
- Dr. Anna Salter




7



"Predators will recognize systems  
where leadership will prioritize the  
system over the individual."  
- Dr. Diane Langberg




8



**Institutional Courage vs. Institutional Betrayal**  
"It is an institution's commitment to seek the truth and engage in moral action, despite unpleasantness, risk, and short-term cost. It is a pledge to protect and care for those who depend on the institution. It is a compass oriented to the common good of individuals, the institution, and the world. It is a force that transforms institutions into more accountable, equitable, healthy places for everyone."

*The Institutional Courage Questionnaire  
(Smidt & Freyd, 2019)*



9




Faith communities can be a powerful part of the problem or the solution.



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Abuse occurs when a person, holding power and trust, uses that power and trust to exploit, violate, or domineer a person who is more vulnerable.


Abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional, spiritual, financial, etc.



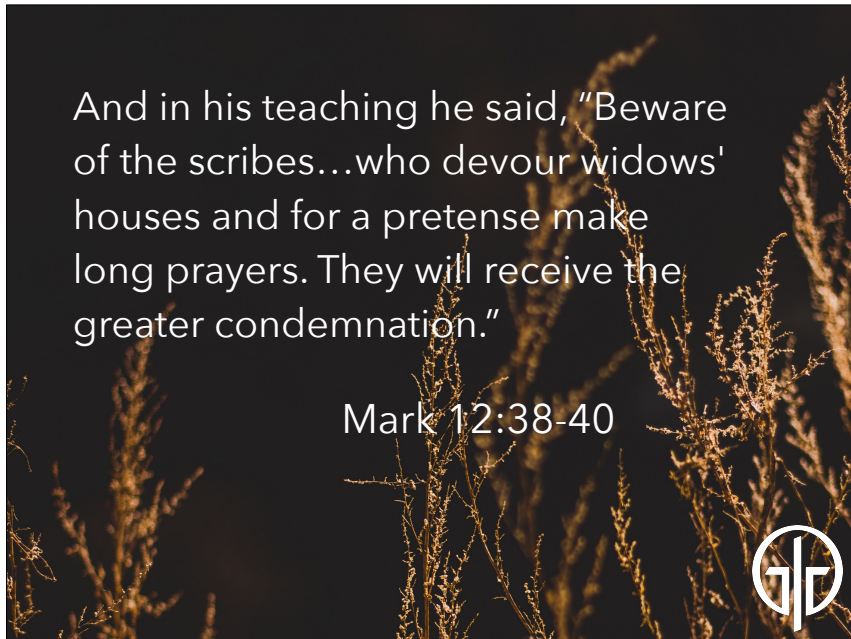
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"Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them."

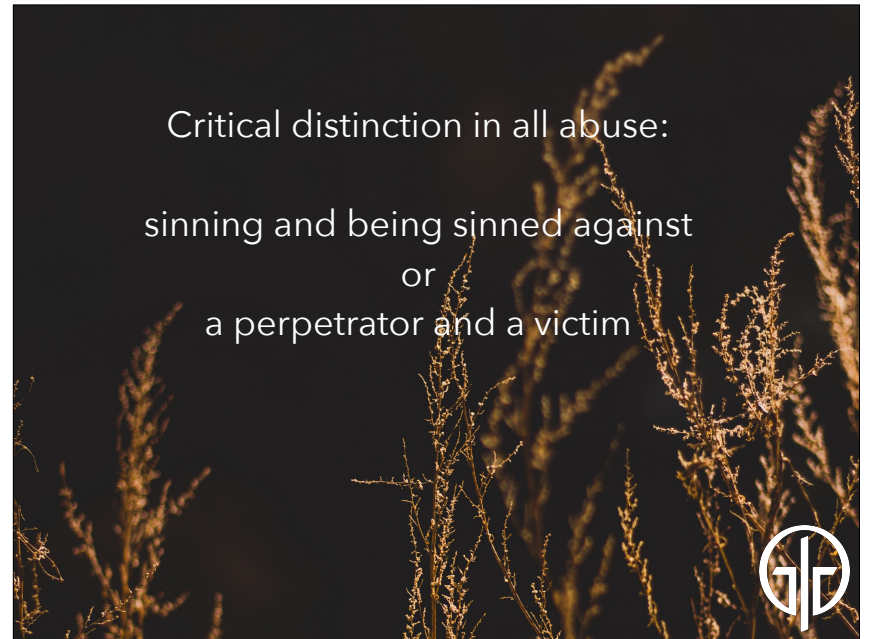
Ecclesiastes 4:1



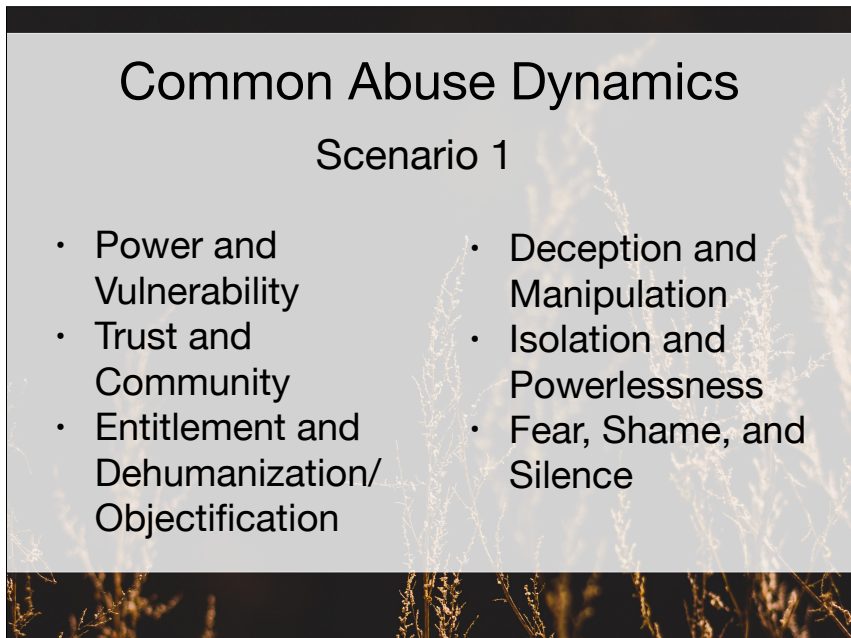
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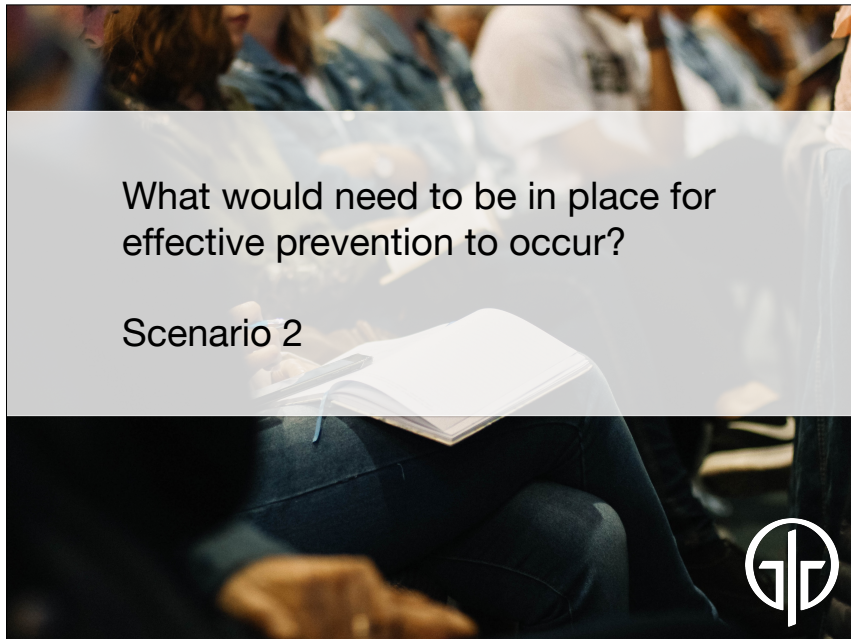
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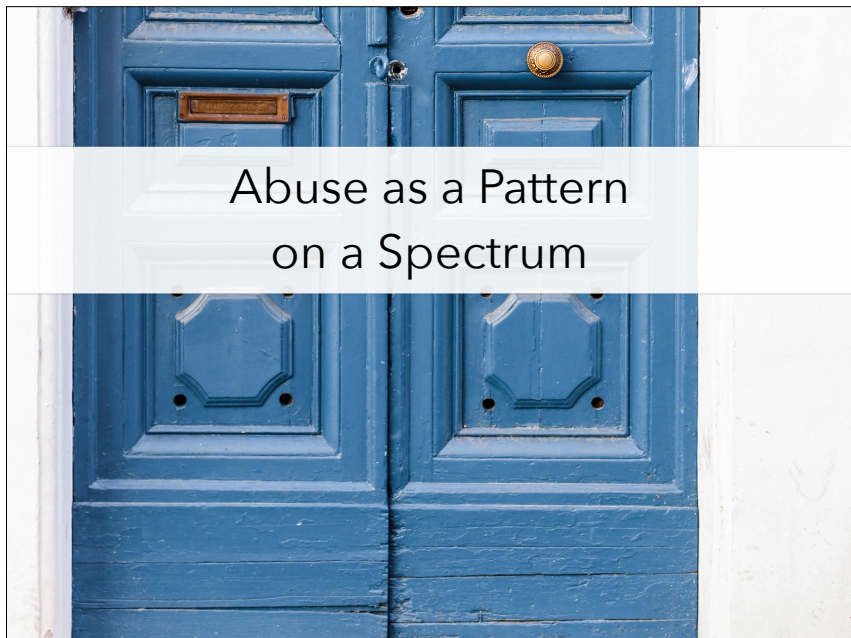
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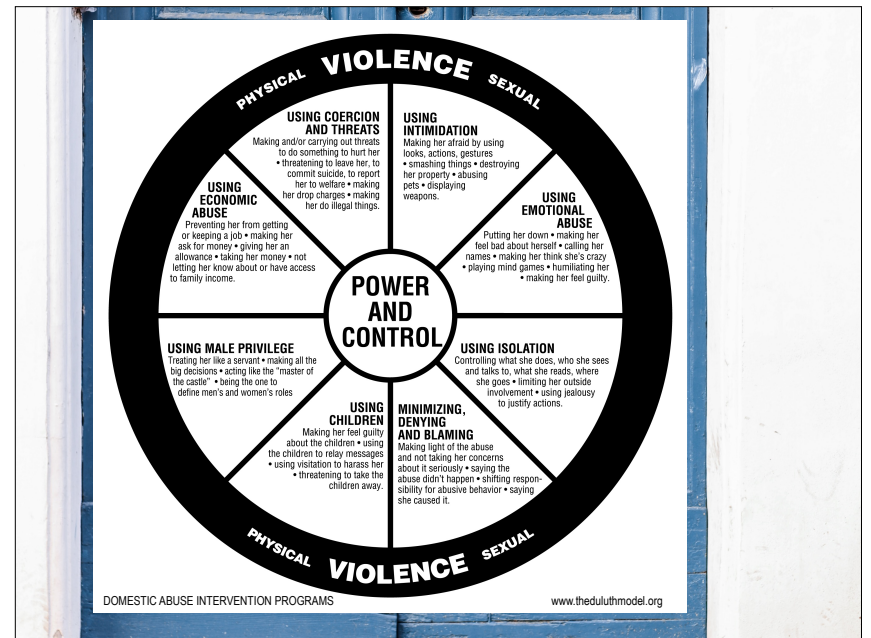
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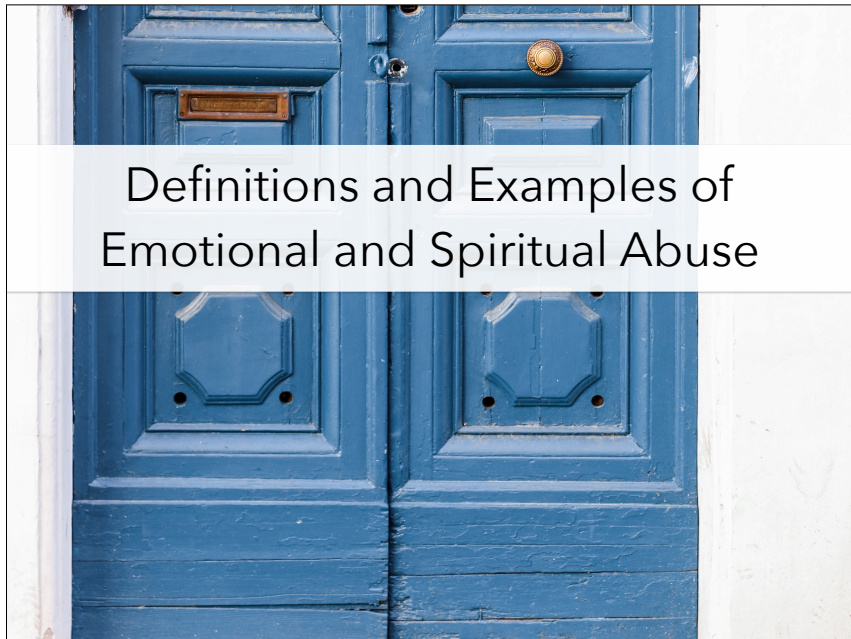
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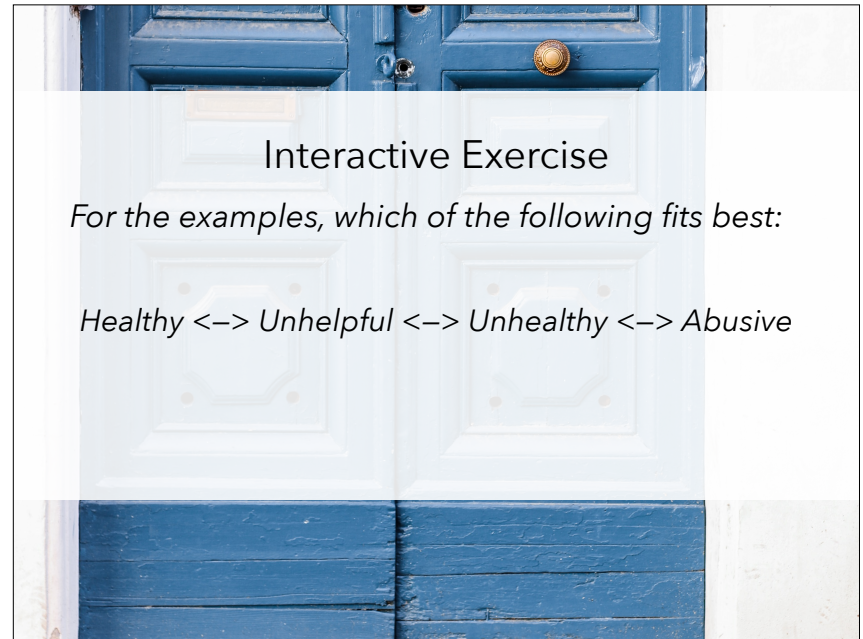
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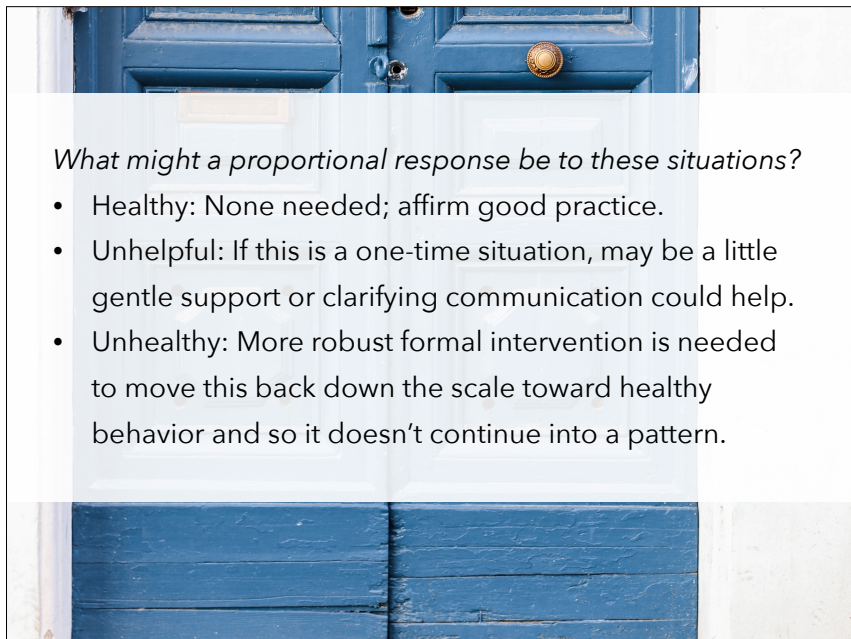
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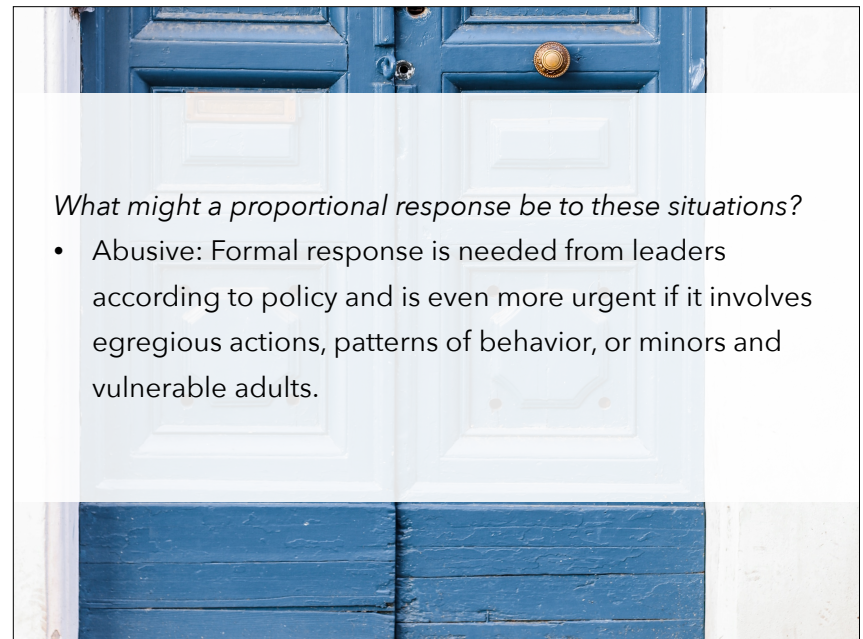
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## What is not abuse?

1. Legitimate uses of power
2. Legitimate boundary setting
3. Legitimate accountability seeking
4. Legitimate calls to conform to Christian ethics
5. Upholding doctrinal or other standards of a church/denomination
6. Conflicts/Disagreements
7. Harmful/Unhelpful Behavior

What is often determinative that something is not abuse is when behaviors are not exploitative, coercive, deceptive, dehumanizing, targeted, or a persistent pattern of behaviors.

25

Effective prevention and response  
is a function of the community.

## Christian Faith

Education



Boundaries

Accountability



26

1. Ground abuse prevention in the Christian faith as a matter of discipleship and God's priorities.
2. Raise the education level of all in the church in appropriate ways over time.
3. Clarify appropriate conduct for all and set clear boundaries - especially toward the vulnerable.
4. Engage all in a culture of ownership of prevention and response where all are aware of pathways for accountability.



27

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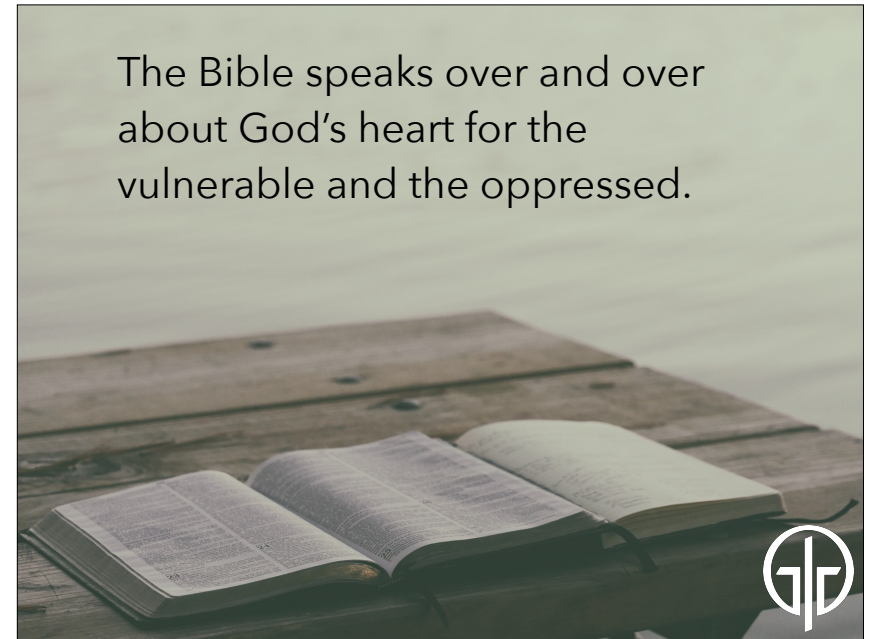
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A circular graphic with a white background and a light blue border. On the left is a black silhouette of a church with a cross on top. To the right of the icon is the text "Christian Faith". Below this is a numbered list of three items. In the bottom right corner of the circle is a white logo consisting of a cross inside a circle.

**Christian Faith**

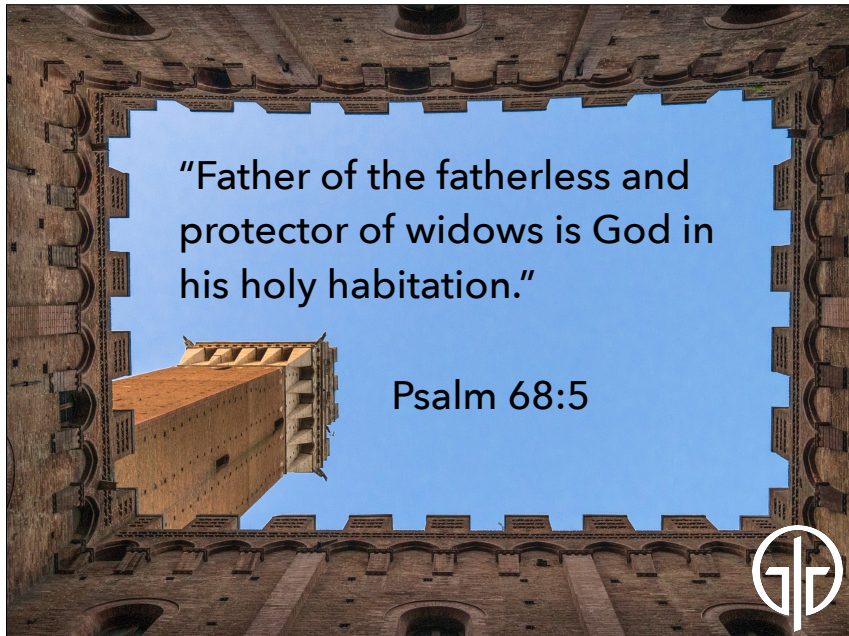
1. **God**
2. Church Mission and Values
3. The Abuse of Power

29

An open Bible with white pages and a dark cover, lying on a rustic wooden surface. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light green. In the bottom right corner is a white logo consisting of a cross inside a circle.

The Bible speaks over and over about God's heart for the vulnerable and the oppressed.

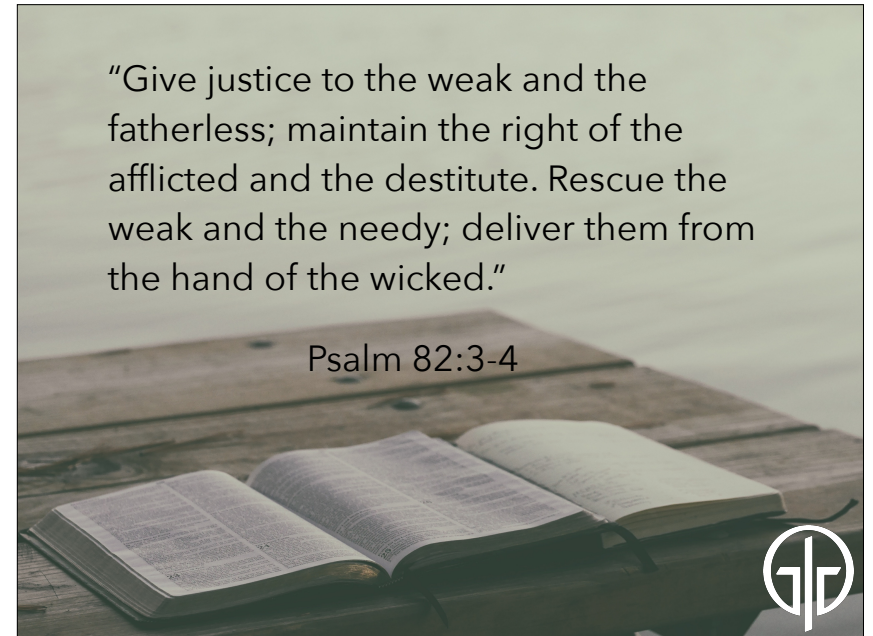
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A low-angle shot looking up through a stone archway at a tall, brick building against a clear blue sky. The text is overlaid on the sky. In the bottom right corner is a white logo consisting of a cross inside a circle.

"Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation."

Psalm 68:5

31

An open Bible with white pages and a dark cover, lying on a rustic wooden surface. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light green. In the bottom right corner is a white logo consisting of a cross inside a circle.

"Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."

Psalm 82:3-4

32

Leaders must use the Bible and church teaching to speak with conviction about the dignity and value of all people and stand against all forms of abuse.



33

"I've been in church all of my life, and I've never heard a pastor talk this way about God and his heart for the abused."



34

Every person is created with inherent worth and should be treated with dignity and respect.

Genesis 1



35

Jesus vocally named and confronted abuse in his ministry.



36

Think about how you communicate regarding any priority or value:

- What avenues for teaching and communication do we already use?
- How can we further speak to these issues using our existing structures and modes of communication?
- Key: Frame it positively and connect it to our Christian Faith.



37



## Christian Faith

1. God
- 2. Church Mission and Values**
3. The Abuse of Power



38

What are some ways you talk about your mission?  
values?  
identity?

How can you connect these to protecting the vulnerable and standing against abuse?



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“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

Matthew 28:19-20



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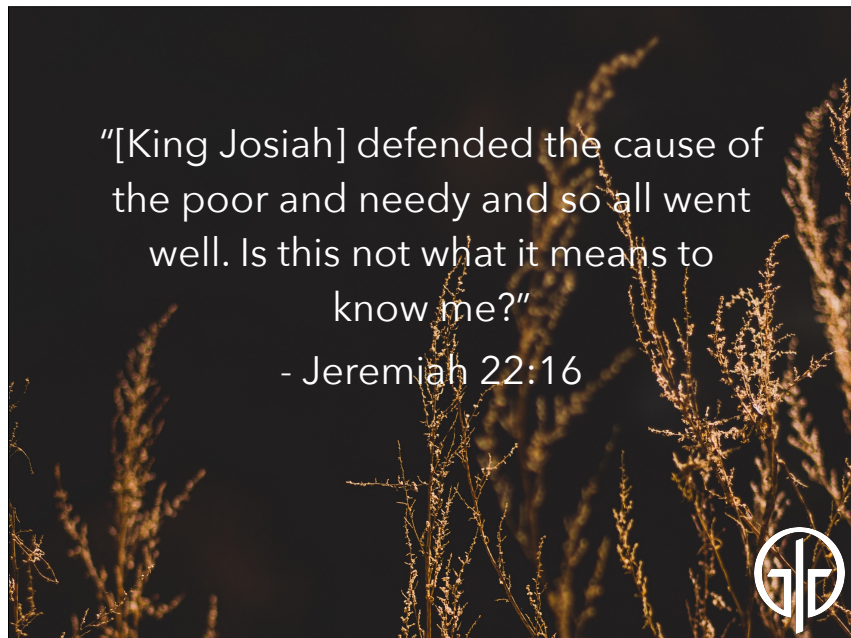
What does it mean to  
know God?

41



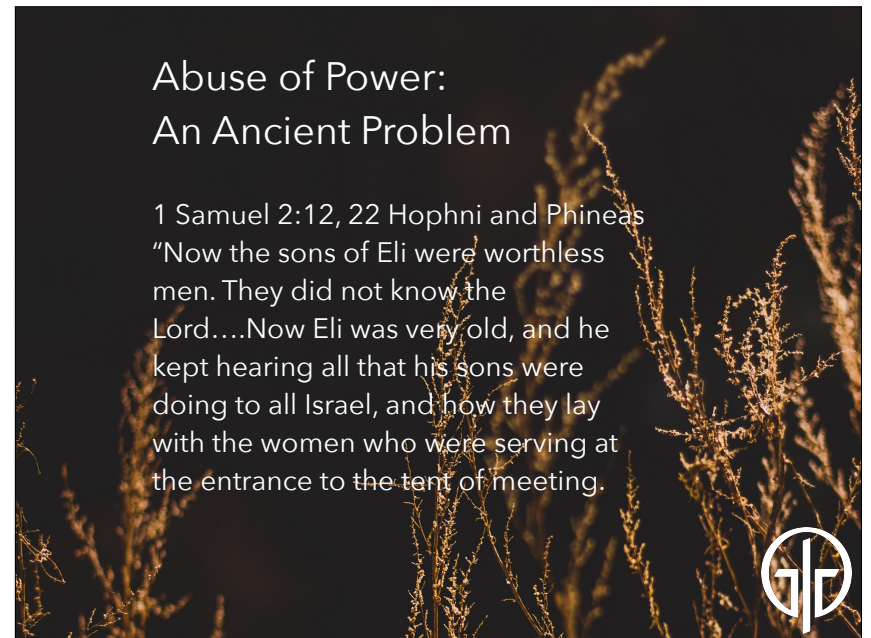
"Heaping oppression upon  
oppression and deceit upon deceit  
they refuse to know me."  
- Jeremiah 9:6

42



"[King Josiah] defended the cause of  
the poor and needy and so all went  
well. Is this not what it means to  
know me?"  
- Jeremiah 22:16

43



## Abuse of Power: An Ancient Problem

1 Samuel 2:12, 22 Hophni and Phineas  
"Now the sons of Eli were worthless  
men. They did not know the  
Lord....Now Eli was very old, and he  
kept hearing all that his sons were  
doing to all Israel, and how they lay  
with the women who were serving at  
the entrance to the tent of meeting.

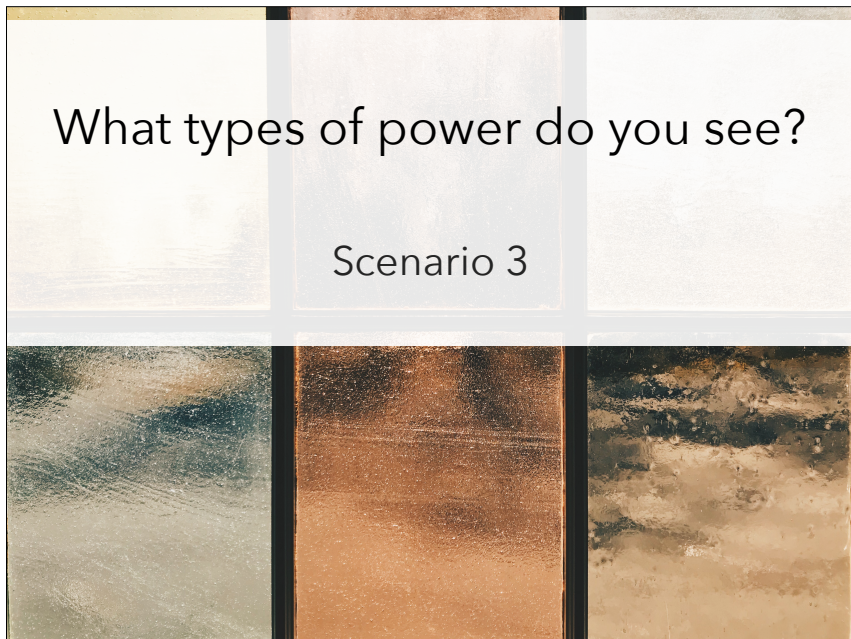
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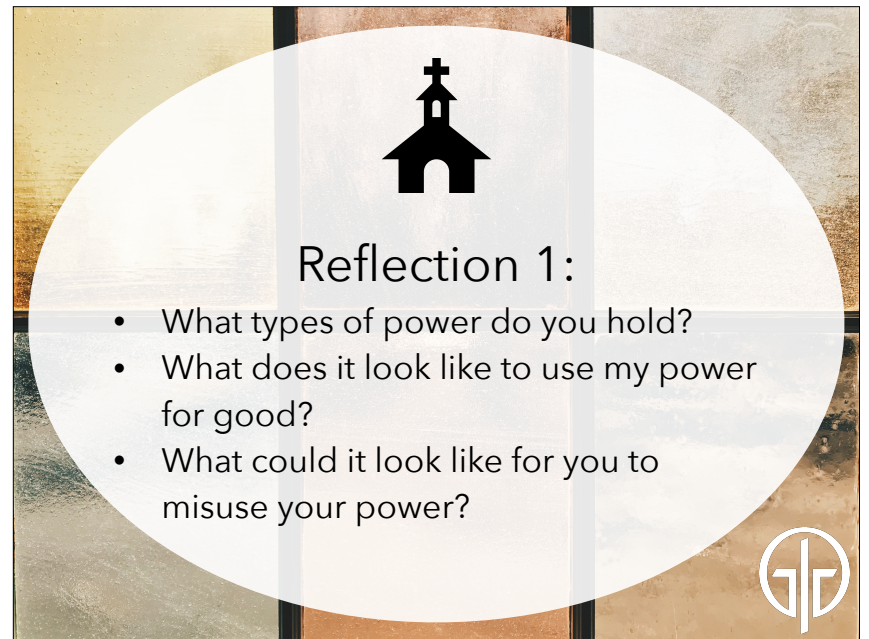
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Organizations do well to establish clear boundaries in power dynamics:

- Pastor - Congregant
- Supervisor - Employee
- Counselor - Counseled
- Teacher - Student
- Adult - Minor
- Mentor - Mentored
- Older Child - Younger Child



49

## Jesus and Power

“You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant...”

Mark 10:42-43



50

## Reflection 2

The prophetic background to John 10 is about the abuse of power by leaders (Ezekiel 34):

“I am the Good Shepherd.”



51

## Jesus and Power

Proactive leaders who are safe, trustworthy, and transparent drive effective prevention and response in the system.



52

## Jesus and Power

You cannot outsource  
protecting the vulnerable.



53

## Jesus and Power

"All authority in heaven and on  
earth has been given to me."

Matthew 28:18



54

## Jesus and Power

Ministry leaders can present a  
powerful vision of Jesus's use  
of power in relationships,  
work, the home, and church.



55

## Jesus and Power


Leaders must name abuses of  
power, *and* demonstrate safe  
behavior toward the vulnerable.



56

Jesus and Power


Those who hold power must implement pathways for accountability, to which they themselves are accountable




57

Effective Prevention and Response is a function of the community

Christian Faith

**Education**  **Boundaries**

Accountability



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**Education**

1. Denial and Myths
2. Educating the Community
3. Survivors
4. Offenders



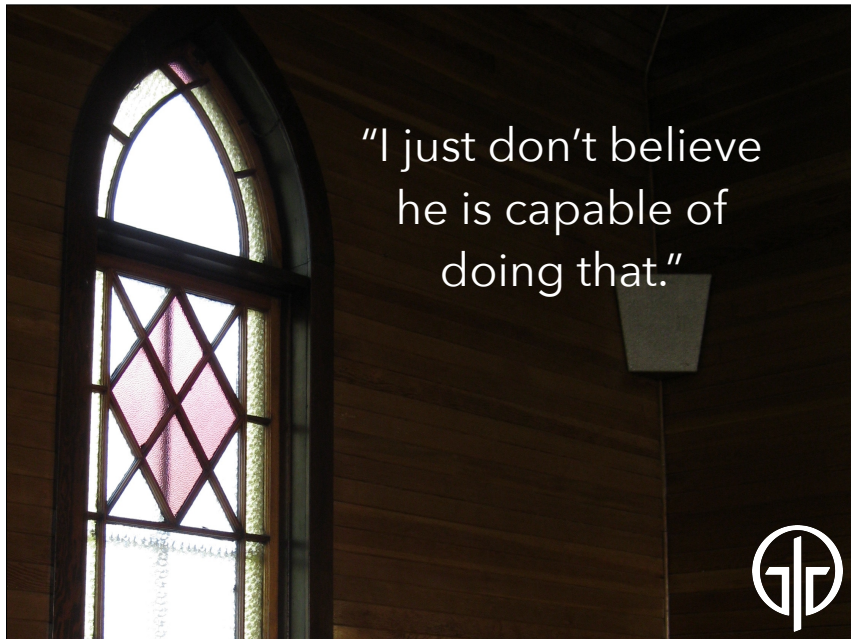
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Denial  
Fuels  
Abuse



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"I just don't believe  
he is capable of  
doing that."



61

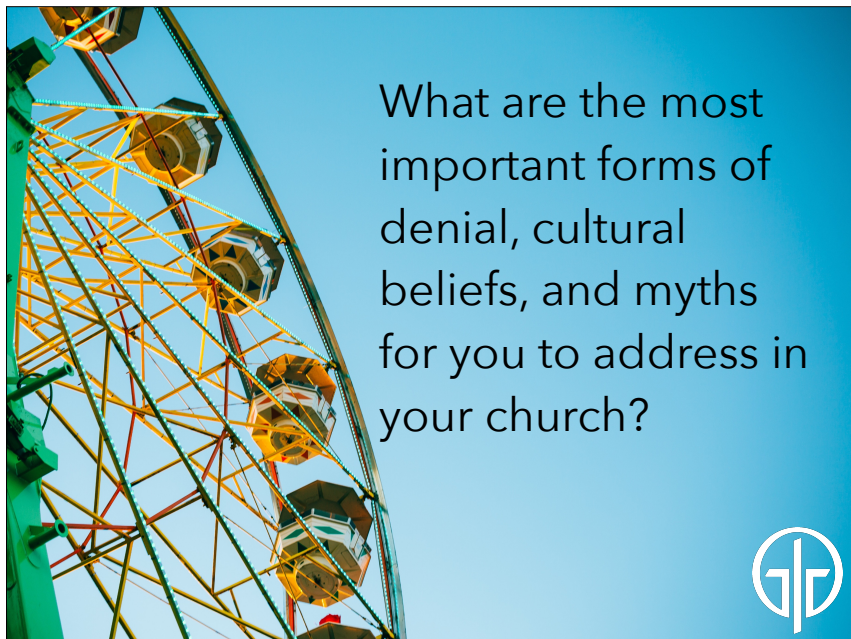


## Common Abuse Myths

- ❖ Abuse is rare
- ❖ Abuse doesn't happen here (church, ministry, family).
- ❖ Sexual abuse survivors victimize others.
- ❖ False reports of abuse are common.



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What are the most important forms of denial, cultural beliefs, and myths for you to address in your church?



63



What might keep you from confronting denial and myths about abuse?


- In yourself
- In the ministry




64

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- 2. Educating the Community**
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66

The Safest Community is  
an Educated Community



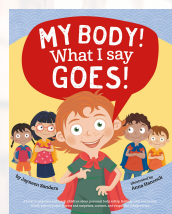
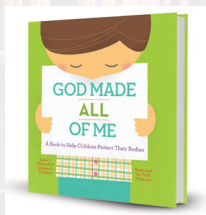
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Work on a plan to continue to  
educate all in the church in  
appropriate ways.



68

## Educate kids



69

It is good to alternate between training by outside experts and internal trainings that develop your own voice.



70

Leaders must anticipate and overcome the barriers to educating the congregation.



71

## Common Organizational Barriers


- Investing time and resources
- Effective training must be repeated
- Does training communicate we have a problem with abuse?
- Logistical realities - how to training reach the whole community on a regular basis



72

Common Individual Barriers


- "I don't volunteer with the kids or youth, is this training for me?"
- "I don't have time."
- "I don't even want to think about abuse, much spend my morning in a training."
- "I don't know anyone who has been abused, why do I have to do training?"




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**Education**

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- 3. Survivors**
4. Offenders



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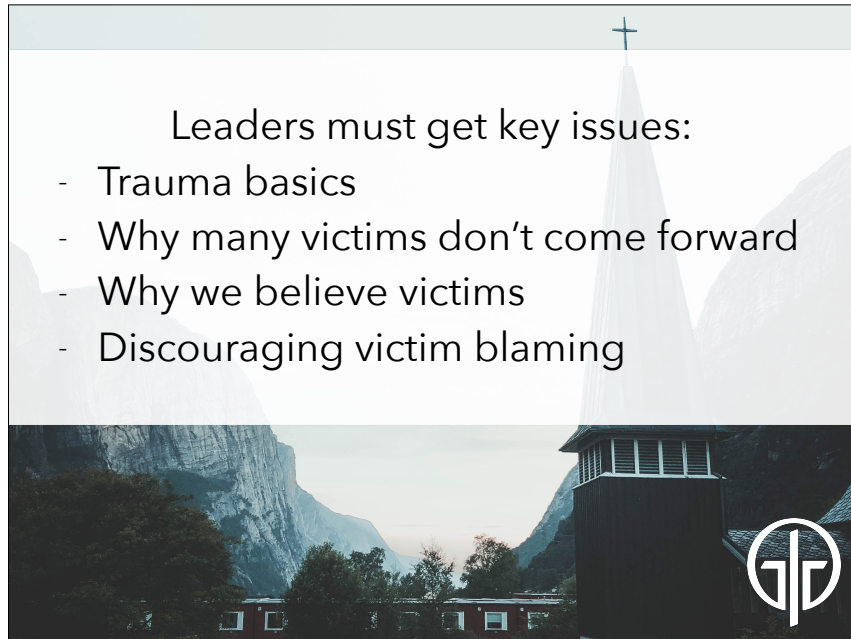

'Take care of him, and  
whatever more you  
spend, I will repay you  
when I come back.'  
- Luke 10:35



76

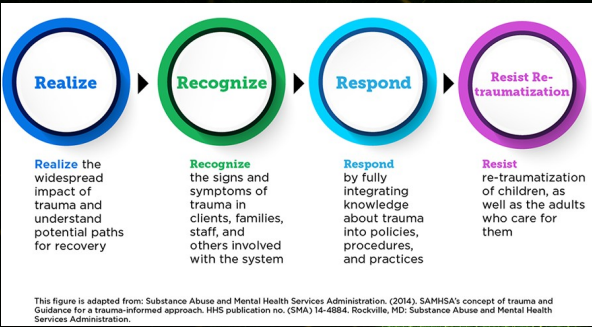
Leaders must get key issues:

- Trauma basics
- Why many victims don't come forward
- Why we believe victims
- Discouraging victim blaming

77

### What is a Trauma-Informed Organization?



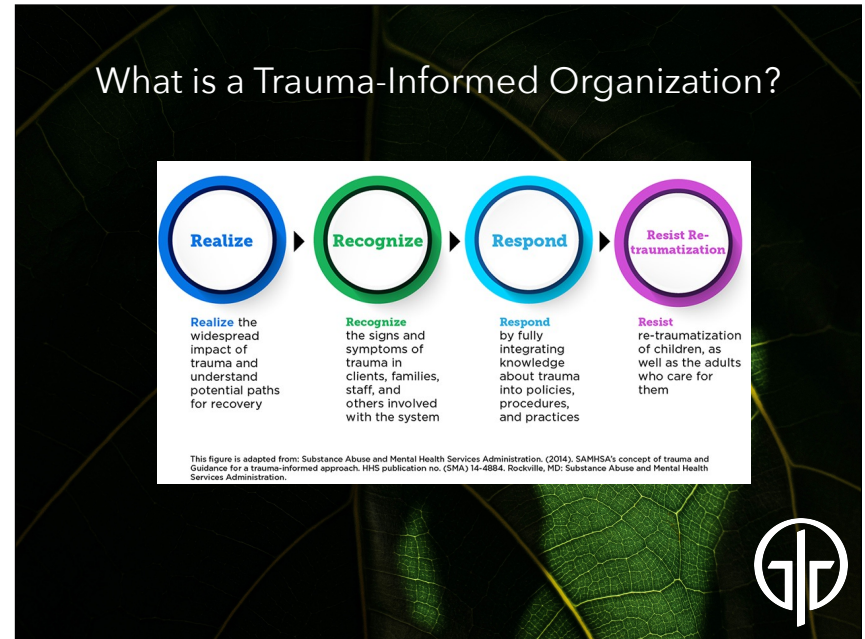

**Realize**  
Realize the widespread impact of trauma and understand potential paths for recovery

**Recognize**  
Recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system

**Respond**  
Respond by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices

**Resist Re-traumatization**  
Resist re-traumatization of children, as well as the adults who care for them

This figure is adapted from: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, (2014). SAMHSA's concept of trauma and Guidance for a trauma-informed approach. HHS publication no. (SMA) 14-4884. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

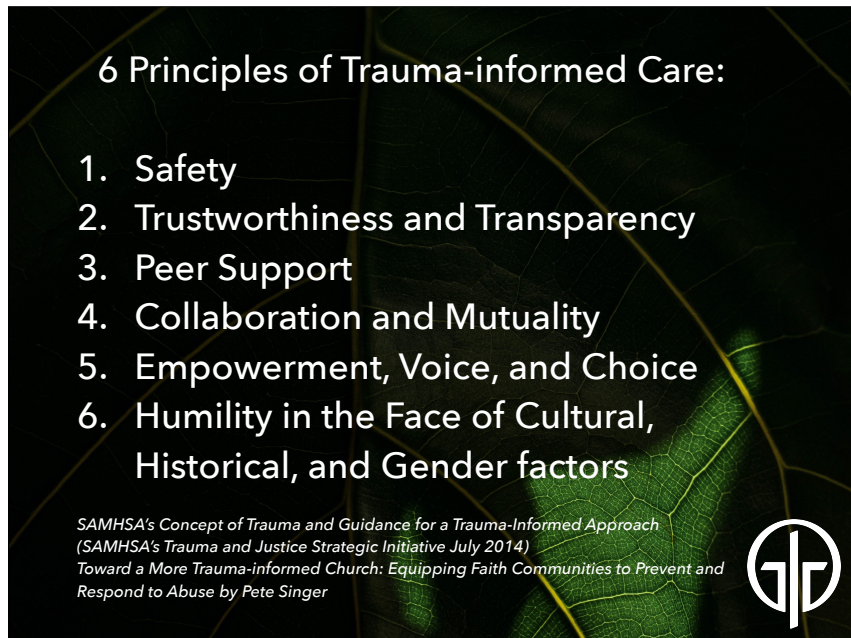




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### 6 Principles of Trauma-informed Care:

1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness and Transparency
3. Peer Support
4. Collaboration and Mutuality
5. Empowerment, Voice, and Choice
6. Humility in the Face of Cultural, Historical, and Gender factors

SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach (SAMHSA's Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative July 2014)  
Toward a More Trauma-informed Church: Equipping Faith Communities to Prevent and Respond to Abuse by Pete Singer

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### The Role of Your Community AND The Role of Professional Trauma Counselors




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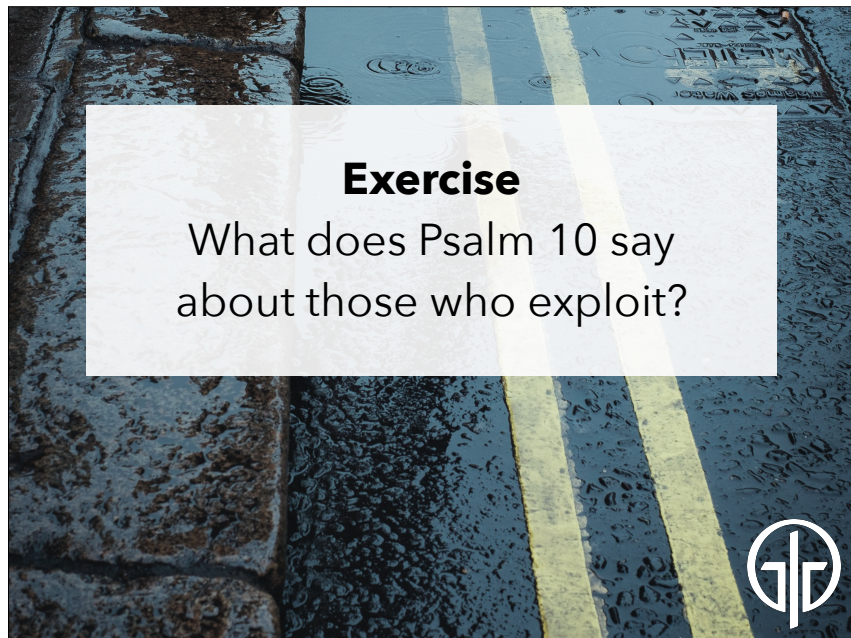
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## Education

1. Denial and Myths
2. Educating the Community
3. Survivors
4. **Offenders**

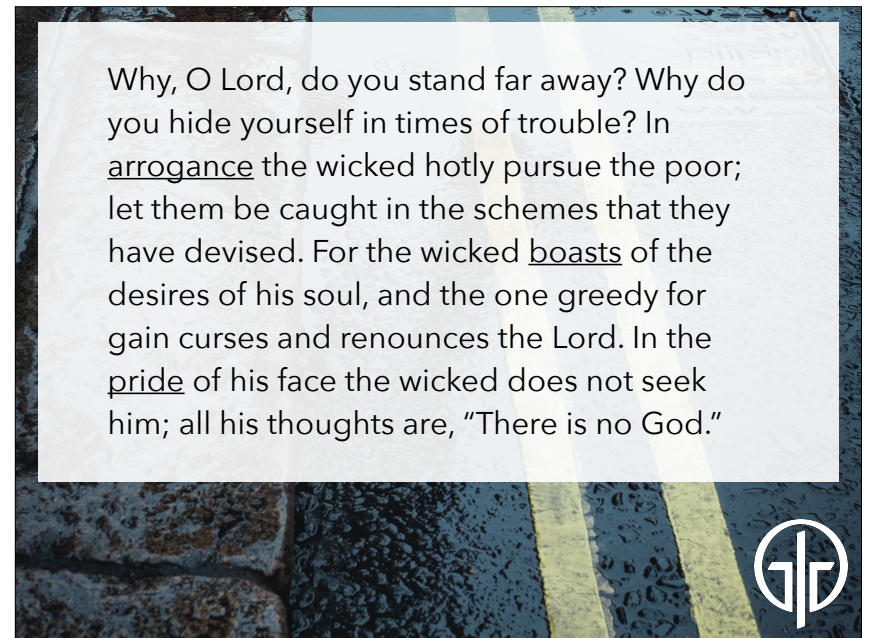
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## Exercise

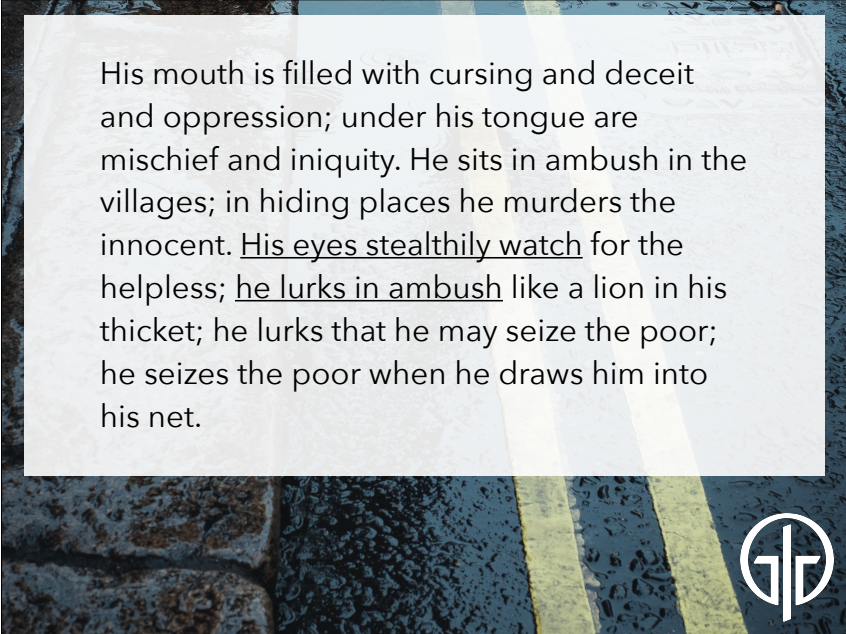
What does Psalm 10 say about those who exploit?

83



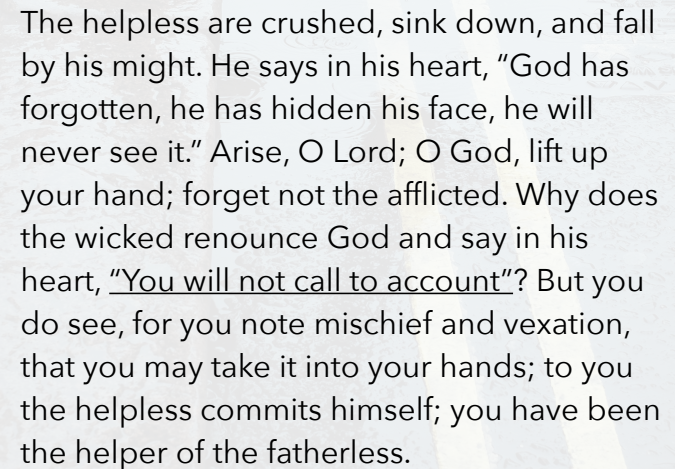
Why, O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor; let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised. For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the Lord. In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, "There is no God."

84



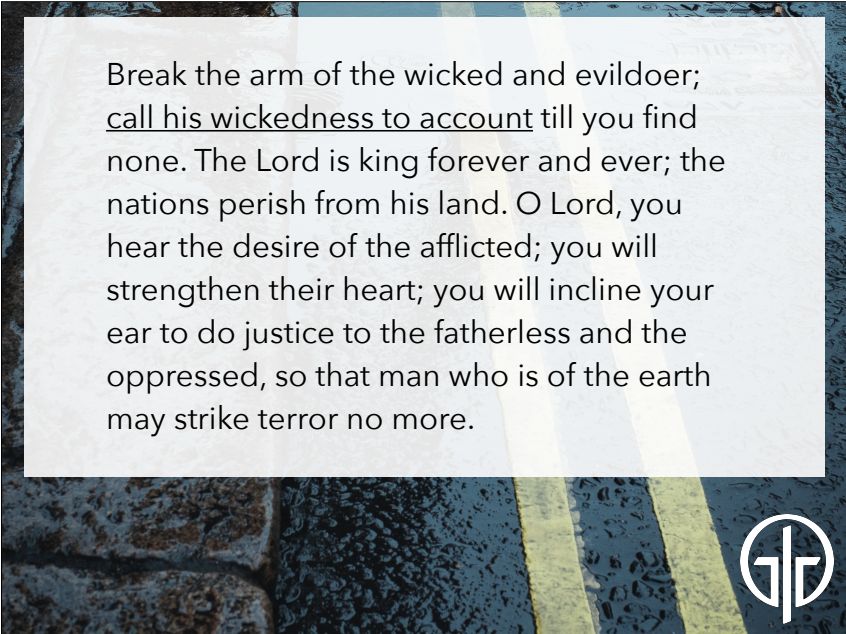
His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue are mischief and iniquity. He sits in ambush in the villages; in hiding places he murders the innocent. His eyes stealthily watch for the helpless; he lurks in ambush like a lion in his thicket; he lurks that he may seize the poor; he seizes the poor when he draws him into his net.

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The helpless are crushed, sink down, and fall by his might. He says in his heart, "God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it." Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up your hand; forget not the afflicted. Why does the wicked renounce God and say in his heart, "You will not call to account"? But you do see, for you note mischief and vexation, that you may take it into your hands; to you the helpless commits himself; you have been the helper of the fatherless.

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Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer; call his wickedness to account till you find none. The Lord is king forever and ever; the nations perish from his land. O Lord, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.

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Main Point: Offenders Need Accountability

88

All adults should learn basic offender tactics:

- Grooming
- DARVO



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Main Forms of Prevention:

- Deterrence
- Interruption
- Stopping further abuse



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Offending involves -  
"cognitive distortions"  
- twisting reality

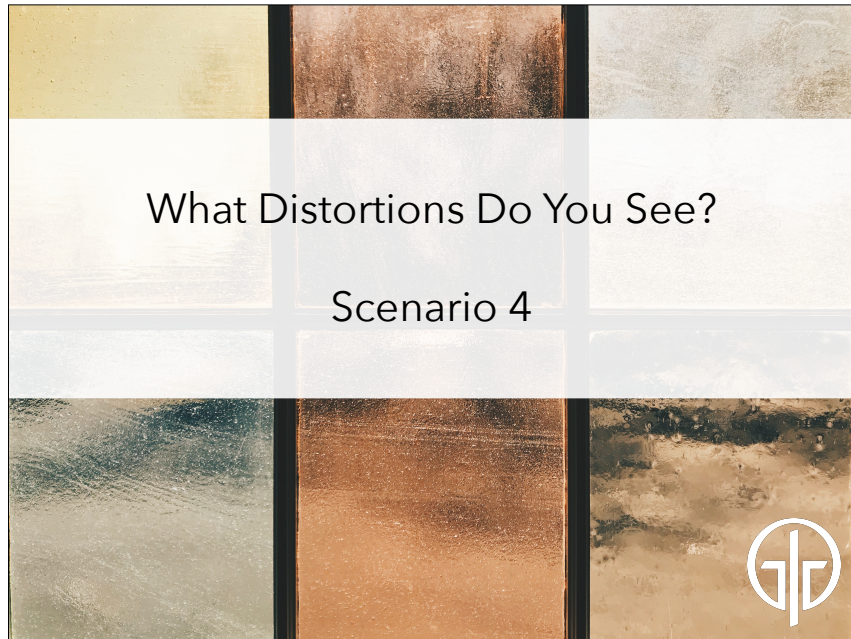


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Effective ministry to known offenders requires addressing patterns of distortions - minimizing, excusing, victim-blaming, etc.



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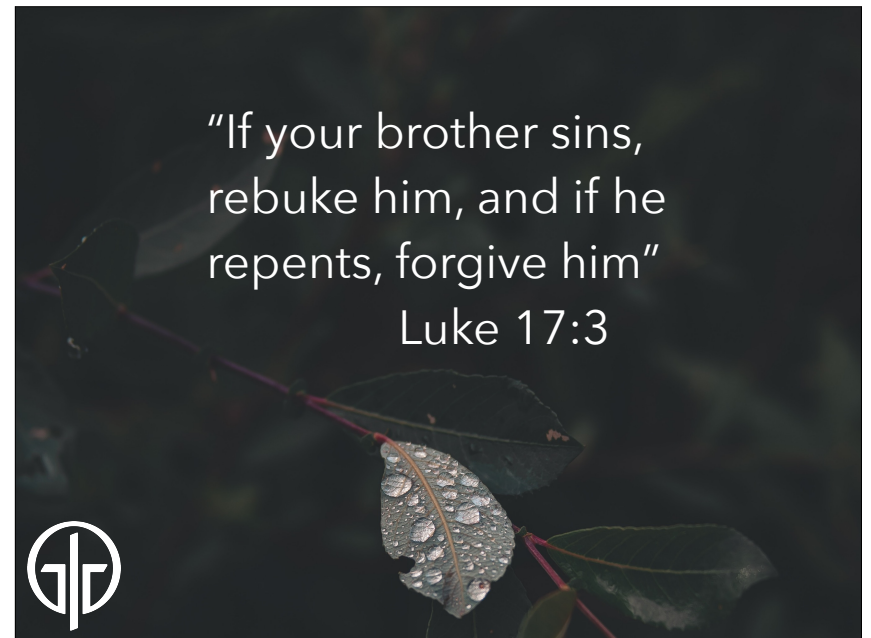
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Effective Prevention and Response  
is a function of the community

Christian Faith

Education  **Boundaries**

Accountability



97



Effective Policies account for the  
*actual reality* of abuse, rather than  
doing Risk Management



98



"Risk Management" policies only  
focus on abuse for which the  
church could be responsible for  
in a civil lawsuit.



99



"Doing the smart thing and doing  
the right thing *is the same thing.*"

Church Attorney in "Developing Effective Church  
Policies on Child Maltreatment" by Victor Vieth



100



Reflection Exercise:  
Where are the policy gaps?



101



Clear expectations of conduct  
are essential to prevention.



102



Effective boundaries must apply  
to the whole community.



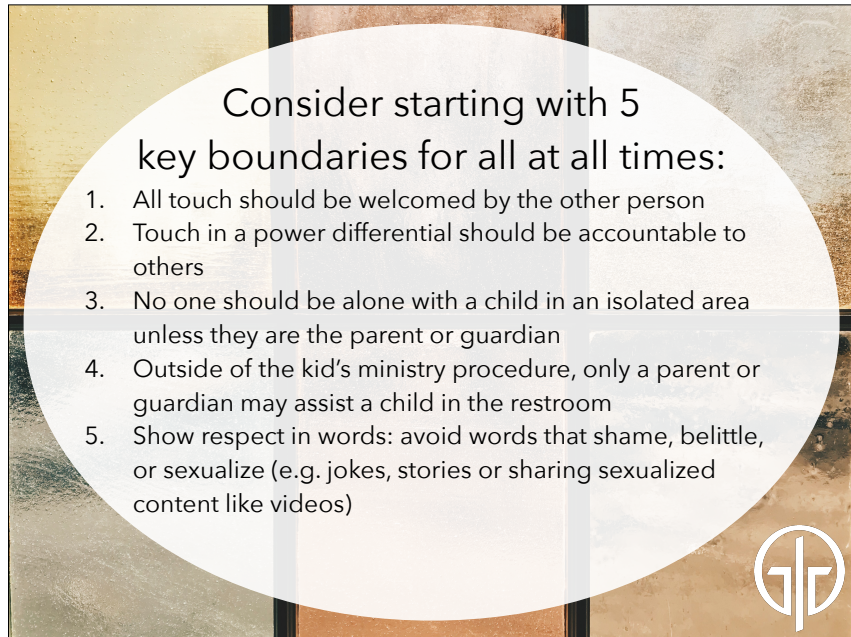
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Frame it positively in terms of  
our Christian commitments.




104



Consider starting with 5 key boundaries for all at all times:


1. All touch should be welcomed by the other person
2. Touch in a power differential should be accountable to others
3. No one should be alone with a child in an isolated area unless they are the parent or guardian
4. Outside of the kid's ministry procedure, only a parent or guardian may assist a child in the restroom
5. Show respect in words: avoid words that shame, belittle, or sexualize (e.g. jokes, stories or sharing sexualized content like videos)



105



Leaders must establish a team that will document boundary violations.



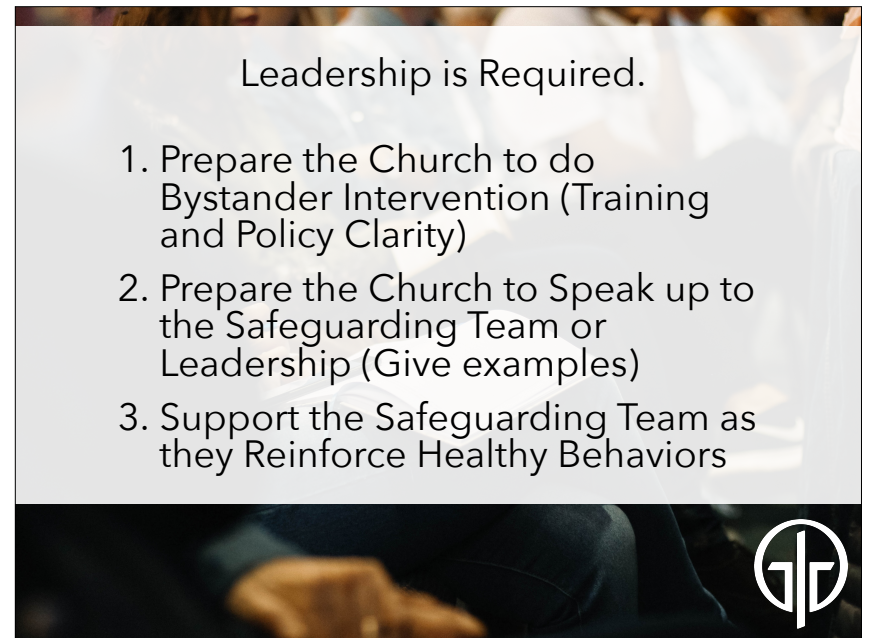
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Empower all to speak up when there is abuse or a concern.




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Leadership is Required.

1. Prepare the Church to do Bystander Intervention (Training and Policy Clarity)
2. Prepare the Church to Speak up to the Safeguarding Team or Leadership (Give examples)
3. Support the Safeguarding Team as they Reinforce Healthy Behaviors




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Responding to "Issues/Concerns"

1. Document
2. Evaluate with the Team
3. Take Appropriate Action to Reinforce Healthy and Safe Behaviors

- Yellow Examples
- Orange Examples
- Red Examples



109

Leaders must have the courage to remove those who cross boundaries from ministry.



110


Effective policy and prevention depends upon a culture




111

Effective Prevention and Response is a function of the community

Christian Faith

Education  Boundaries

**Accountability**



112



Every adult in a church should be empowered to speak up in three types of situations:

1. Potential abuse
2. A policy violation
3. There is a concern about a person or a situation



113

## REPORT. DON'T INVESTIGATE.

Some adults in Washington have a legal obligation to report child abuse and neglect.

All Christians have an ethical obligation to report child abuse and neglect.



114

## REPORT. DON'T INVESTIGATE.

Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect

Emergencies: Call 911

Authorities can ensure the immediate safety of a child and get medical attention if needed.



115

## REPORT. DON'T INVESTIGATE.

Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect

Report to the Relevant  
Child Protective Services

&

Relevant Local Law Enforcement



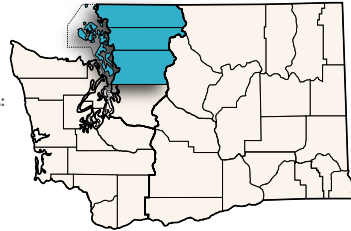
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# Reach the DCYF Intake Line in Your Community

## 866-829-2153

REGION 3 – NORTH WESTERN WASHINGTON COUNTIES:

WHATCOM      SAN JUAN  
SKAGIT        ISLAND  
SNOHOMISH



For more information about supporting families  
as well as identifying and reporting child abuse  
and neglect, visit [www.dcyf.wa.gov](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov)



DCYF does not discriminate and provides equal access to its programs and services for all persons without regard to race, color, gender, religion, creed, marital status, national origin, citizenship or immigration status, age, sexual orientation or gender identity, veteran or military status, status as a breastfeeding mother, and the presence of any physical, sensory, or mental disability or use of a dog guide or service animal. If you would like free copies of this publication in an alternative format or language, please contact DCYF Constituent Relations at 1-800-723-4831 or email [communications@dcyf.wa.gov](mailto:communications@dcyf.wa.gov). DCYF PUBLICATION CWP\_0036C (11-2024)

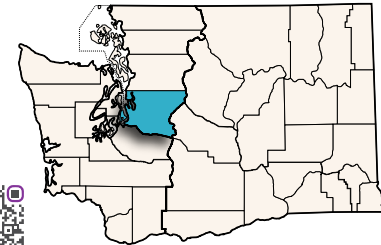


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# Reach the DCYF Intake Line in Your Community

## 800-609-8764

REGION 4:  
KING COUNTY



For more information about supporting families  
as well as identifying and reporting child abuse  
and neglect, visit [www.dcyf.wa.gov](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov)



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## REPORT. DON'T INVESTIGATE.

Report online exploitation of children:

Cyber Tipline

800-843-5678

[www.CyberTipline.org](http://www.CyberTipline.org)



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## REPORT. DON'T INVESTIGATE.

Reporting Abuse of a Vulnerable Adult

Report Online to Washington State Adult

Protective Services

OR

Call 1-877-734-6277



120

## REPORT. DON'T INVESTIGATE.

### Common Reasons for Not Reporting

Protect the relationship  
Unsure if it meets abuse definitions  
Fear of conflict with caregiver(s)



121

## REPORT. DON'T INVESTIGATE.

- Report internally only after reporting externally (though getting support in reporting is fine)
- Do not inform the family if the alleged offender is in the family or unknown
- Cooperate fully with the investigation
- Fully assess the possibility of other victims and take protective measures
- Focus on protecting the vulnerable, not the institution or reputations of leaders
- An "Unfounded" or "Unsubstantiated" investigation doesn't necessarily mean "Innocent."



122

"Love your neighbor as yourself"

In responding to abuse allegations, leaders must continually seek to put ourselves in the shoes of the reporting victim in the situation.



123

There is no substitute for leaders who act with ethical clarity and courage.

There are no structures that can guard against abuse of power without leaders of character.



124

### Take a Team Approach:

1. Leadership culture: no one is above accountability.
2. Leadership turnover and diversity to avoid siloing information and “yes men”
3. Recuse any alleged offender and their family
4. Be mindful of dual roles
5. Do not allow leaders to tilt church policy and bylaws to make accountability difficult.



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Leaders must respect the roles of others in response and know their limits. Keys:

1. Educating the congregation and implementing policy with 3rd party interventions if needed.
2. Setting boundaries with an alleged offender who continues to groom and control the narrative.
3. Not allowing “DARVO” to stop a process of accountability.



126

After a report or knowledge of potential abuse, a safety team and/or leaders must:

1. Assess safety
2. Assess boundaries and accountability
3. Care for survivors
4. Seek answers from support resources and organizations



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## Responding to Abuse Against an Adult



128

It is important to respect the agency of an adult victim if they do not want to report to law enforcement.

As an organization, we may feel conscience-bound to report out of a sense of responsibility to protect the congregation.



129

Prepare to connect adults to resources in your community:

- Domestic Violence Resources
- Sexual Assault Resources
- Child Advocacy Center

Find out what services local resources offer and what areas they serve.



130

Like with children, after any knowledge of potential abuse, a safety team and/or leaders must:

1. Assess safety
2. Assess boundaries and accountability
3. Care for survivors
4. Seek answers from support resources and organizations

Scenario 5



131

Adult Clergy Sexual Abuse is not always a crime...

...yet it is a deep betrayal and leaders must commit to holding abusive leaders accountable, even if the abuse of power is not a crime.




132

The reality of grooming argues for independent consultation or investigation in many cases when there are allegations of abuse or harassment.



133

Seek answers to your questions from professionals or experts (e.g. child advocacy center, domestic violence shelter, the investigator, GRACE).



134




Proactive leaders who are safe, trustworthy, and transparent make the difference.




135

Effective Prevention and Response is a function of the community

Christian Faith

Education  Boundaries

Accountability



136



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