

Resources from the United Church

- Duty of Care webpage:
www.united-church.ca/local/duty
- *Faithful Footsteps: Screening Procedures for Positions of Trust and Authority in The United Church of Canada* (2000).
www.united-church.ca/local/duty/environments

Other Resources

- Girl Guides of Canada, *Safe Guide: Risk Assessment and Safety Management for Organized Activities* (November 2004).
http://patrol.girlguides.ca/safe_guide_and_forms
- Melton, Joy Thornburg, *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth* (Upper Room Books, 2008).
- The Presbyterian Church in Canada, *Leading with Care* (policy and resources).
www.presbyterian.ca/resources/online/275
- Scouts Canada, *Volunteer Recruitment and Development (VRAD) Handbook* (October 2007). www.scouts.ca: Click "For Volunteers," then "Volunteer Recruitment and Development."
- Volunteer Canada, *Screening in Faith* (1999). Limited print quantities available from United Church Resource Distribution (UCRD).

For More Information

See www.united-church.ca/local/duty or contact dutyofcare@unitedchurch.ca.



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Duty of Care with Children's Ministries



Theological Statement

But Jesus called for them and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." (Luke 18:16)

Our churches are, and must continue to be, God's house—places where people of all ages can come together for worship, faith formation, and service knowing that they are safe and secure in a community of faith and mission.

The church, like all non-profit and voluntary organizations working with children, must exercise a duty of care to ensure the quality and integrity of its programs and services. As a Christian community, we also believe that humankind has been created by God in God's own image. God has given all people worth and dignity, and they are therefore to be respected.

We use the image of the body to depict our connection with one another. When one part of the body is injured physically, emotionally, or spiritually, the entire body is made less than God intended. We hold a special responsibility to ensure that all members of the body—particularly those most vulnerable—are protected from abuse.

What Is a "Duty of Care"?

With respect to staff, volunteers, and participants in a ministry, a duty of care is the obligation to take reasonable care to avoid causing foreseeable harm to another person or his or her property.

In congregations, it is the responsibility of members of the official board/council and committees to exercise the care, diligence, and skill of a reasonably prudent person in the oversight of the church's programs.

Congregational "Duty of Care"

How a congregation demonstrates its duty of care is reflected in the policies it adopts and the steps it takes to show reasonable care has been taken to avoid harm. Some examples may include

- a screening policy implemented for staff and volunteers
- regular safety inspections conducted of the church building and property to identify hazards
- emergency systems tested by competent professional agencies
- emergency procedures in place and staff/leaders/participants trained on what to do

A Common-Sense Approach

- **Supervision:** Whenever possible have two adults supervising a program. Where this is not possible, have a "roaming" adult or more than one program running at the same time.
- **Responsibility:** There should be sufficient difference in age between leaders and children to support an environment of respect.
- **Location, location, location!** Keep programs public whenever possible.
- **Visibility:** Adopt an open-door policy or have windows in all meeting room doors.
- **Information:** Provide the congregation, leaders, and parents/families with information about your screening program. Address the questions of why you have it, how it works, and whom to go to.
- **Plan:** Have a detailed plan for addressing an incident when it occurs.

Practical Steps You Can Take Now

1. Conduct an internal audit of the following:
 - children/youth programs
 - job descriptions/risk assessments
 - employment/volunteer practices
 - safety inspections
 - emergency procedures
 - insurance—type and level of coverage
 - rental agreements
2. Develop a screening policy for staff and volunteers, including reference checks and police record checks.
3. Review and revise policies to meet the needs of the programs offered in your congregation.
4. Develop and implement strategies to address identified risks, such as installing windows in classroom doors.
5. Implement emergency drills as part of regular programming, particularly in the fall when programs start up and after extended breaks such as Christmas. Ensure all volunteers and staff are aware of their responsibilities and whom to notify in the event of an emergency.
6. Review your programs and activities with your insurance broker to ensure adequate and appropriate coverage.

