

# Preventing and Responding to Abuse in Ministry



**Southwestern Minnesota Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.



As we seek to protect children and vulnerable adults in the name of Christ, there are four things we must do:

1. Create guidelines or policies for Child Protection including:
  - appropriate boundaries between adults and youth
  - abuse prevention
  - clear procedure for high risk situations
2. Create a screening process for volunteers and staff
3. Provide training on how to prevent, identify and respond to/report abuse
4. Monitor and follow up on behavior

In this packet you will find recommended resources to help you protect others and the ministry through which you serve.



## 1. Create Guidelines or Policies for the Protection of all people

See examples on synod website. <https://swmnelca.org/preventing-responding-to-abuse-in-ministry/>

## 2. Create a Screening Process for Volunteers and Staff

Screening processes will vary by congregation or ministry. Background checks will most likely be a part of that process. We recommend you perform the following searches:

- multi-state or national criminal search
- national sex offender search
- Social Security number validation
- name and address history
- alias search
- County Courthouse Criminal Search, if recommended by your background check company. Some counties do not report their records to the state in a timely fashion.

If staff or volunteers are driving minors, a Motor Vehicle Registry record check is advised.

Include an application and interview in your screening process.

Recommended background check companies are listed in the recommended background check companies document which also provides education and training options. The companies will advise you through ministering to people whose background checks reveal history which limits their service in your congregation or organization. Use them as a resource.



### 3. Provide Training on How to Prevent, Identify and Respond to and Report Abuse

Training of this sensitive nature is complicated. You must be thorough in your education for the sake of kids, adults and the ministry through which you serve. While you may offer in-person trainings led by a pastor, youth minister or resource person presenting their own material or sharing a DVD, it is increasingly difficult to provide comprehensive training to all the people you want to train. Scheduling conflicts and varying curriculum are factors. We recommend you use a trackable online training that people can complete on their own schedule which is reinforced by notetaking and a test.

#### Online training may be utilized many different ways.

- With online training, individuals participate in a class that uses video, PowerPoint and interactive features. At the end the training they take a test to show what they have learned. Successful completion of training is reported to the congregation or ministry.
- You may want to ask individuals to do the online training within a 2 week window, then get the individuals together in person to address questions and concerns, lift up key points and go over congregation's/organization's reporting process.
- If you choose to do an in-person training, online training can be used for individuals who could not attend that training or for individuals you want to train mid-year.
- You may choose to use one of the following online trainings:
  - Safeguard from Abuse by Secure Search, documentary style video, 75 minutes
  - Child Safety Training by Active Screening Faith, 35 minute version for volunteers, 66 minute version for staff and leadership (also offered in Spanish)
  - Armatus Training, including a suite of courses with different courses recommended for different church roles over the course of three years, by Praesidium/Insurance Board typical course is 25 - 35 minutes
  - Sexual Abuse Awareness Training by Ministry Safe, conference style teaching video, 1 hour for volunteers, 2.5 hours for staff
  - Online Abuse Prevention Training by Safe Gatherings, PowerPoint with voice narration, 90 minutes

#### If you choose to do an in-person training, here are some resources:

- In person training led by pastor, youth minister or resource person
  - Design your own training
    - Resources:
      - <https://www.childwelfare.gov>
      - <http://www.stopitnow.org/learn>
    - You may also consider inviting someone from your county's child protection services to come speak to your group.
- In person training facilitated by pastor, youth minister or resource person, using one of the trainings listed above.



#### 4. Monitor and Follow Up on Behavior

Use what you've learned in training to monitor and follow up on behavior including:

- document and report suspicious behavior and abuse
  - contact your county's Child Welfare or Child Protection department
- communicate with your supervisors about red flags
- provide annual training for staff and volunteers
- repeat background checks and training every 3 years or when a person changes context of ministry



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## **Recommended Companies which provide both Background Checks and Training**

*All of these companies are used to working with congregations and faith-based organizations. They will advise you on which checks to run based your risk tolerance and the state(s) of residence of the people being screened. They will also walk you through ministering to people whose background checks reveal history which limits their service in your congregation or organization.*

As resources are continually changing we invite you to decide which of the following companies would work best for your congregation/organization.

### **Safeguard From Abuse (training) and Secure Search (background checks)**

[www.safeguardfromabuse.com](http://www.safeguardfromabuse.com) or [www.securesearchpro.com](http://www.securesearchpro.com)

- Rate for Background Check\* and one County Courthouse Criminal Search: \$14.50 plus courthouse fees if any
- Rate for Motor Vehicle Registry Record: \$5.00 plus state fee if any
- May add Continuous Screening for \$2/person per month. This means they will notify you if the person has a reportable offense. This may eliminate the need for re-screening.
- Online Safeguard from Abuse video training, 75 minutes plus a 10 minute First Aid Course. Includes a learning management system where the administrator may view who has registered, track their progress, and view test results: \$6.75 per person. Use coupon code "ELCA"7376
- to receive this price.
- Unlimited Annual License \$299 Includes the most up-to-date training materials plus the basic first aid course but without access to the benefits of the learning management system. Private video link can be shared to an unlimited number of trainees annually.

\*Background Check includes multi-state criminal search, national sex offender search, Social Security number validation, name and address history validation, alias/maiden name search.

### **Active Screening Faith**

[www.activescreeningfaith.com](http://www.activescreeningfaith.com)

- SW MN Synod Rate for Protection Background Check Package\*: \$11.50
- SW MN Synod Rate for Confidence Background Check Package\*\*: \$20.50 plus fees if any
- Package discounts available based on a prepay towards the background checks
- SW MN Synod Rate for Motor Vehicle Registry Record: \$5.50 plus state fee if any
- SW MN Synod Rate for online Child Safety Training, 66 minutes for staff (English or Spanish), 35 minutes for volunteers \$149 One Time Access fee plus \$5.00 per person

\*Protection Background Check includes national criminal database search, national sex offender registry search, Social Security number verification and address history trace, alias/maiden name search, re-verification of records and possible records.

\*\*Confidence Background Check includes the Protection Background Check PLUS one county court search plus fees if any

### **Praesidium via Insurance Board**

<https://www.insuranceboard.org/safety-central/safeconduct-abuse-prevention/>

<https://www.praesidiumib.com>

Thanks to a relationship with the ELCA, Insurance Board offers discounted background checks and free training for all ELCA congregations, whether you are their insurance client or not.

- Background Checks\*: Praesidium Level Search \$22 or \$11 if you are an Insurance Board Member
- Motor Vehicle Registry Record Check: \$5.00 or \$2.50 if you are and Insurance Board Member
- Praesidium's online training platform, Armatus®. These courses use extensive interactivity, video-clips, compelling graphics, and sound effects to fully engage participants.
  - Free to everyone thanks to a relationship between Insurance Board and the ELCA
  - There are multiple courses within this system. Specific courses are recommended for different levels of involvement with children, youth and vulnerable adults.
  - Armatus® comes with a robust database that allows you to easily track course completion.

To initiate background checks and participate in training, complete the Administrator Guide on the Safe Conduct Workbench. There is no cost to do this.

\*Background Check includes multi state criminal records search, national sex offender search, Social Security number validation, name and address history, alias search and one county criminal records check.

### **MinistrySafe**

[www.ministrysafe.com](http://www.ministrysafe.com)

- MinistrySafe Membership – \$125 for congregations with Church Mutual Insurance, \$250 for others
  - Only one membership is needed per organization. (Membership is required to access trainings.)
  - Provides access to the MinistrySafe Control Panel, allowing you to send and manage trainings.
  - Includes library of sample policies and screening forms.
- Background Checks: Level 3\* \$18, Level 4 \$22 plus fees if any
- Online Safety System Trainings (conference style teaching with personal testimonies added)
  - Sexual Abuse Awareness Training, 1.5 hours, for All child-serving staff & volunteers, \$4 for Church Mutual clients or \$5/person for others
  - Skillful Screening Training, 2.25 hours, for Screening & hiring personnel, managerial employees, \$40 for Church Mutual clients or \$50/person for others
  - MinistrySafe Institute, 15 hours (6 modules), for Ministry leaders, risk managers and pinnacle child-serving employees, \$120 for Church Mutual clients or \$150/person for others

\*Background Check Level 3 includes identity search, multi-jurisdictional search, sex offender database, state criminal search. Background Check Level 4 includes everything in Level 3 plus Motor Vehicle Search

## **Safe Gatherings**

[www.safegatherings.com](http://www.safegatherings.com)

- Safe Gatherings All Inclusive Package - \$37 per person for:
  - Two electronic references
  - Background check\* - Safe Gatherings reviews the background check report for you and either approves or denies the applicant
  - 90-minute online abuse prevention and boundary awareness training (online narrated slideshow)
  - Safe Gatherings is unique in the fact that it includes reference checks and that once you start the process, they handle all the details of communicating with the applicant to gather references and complete the training. They also send out a newsletter which contains scenarios, stories and tips that you can send on to volunteers to keep them thinking about preventing and responding to abuse.

\* Background check includes a national and one county of residence 7-year background check, national and state of residence Sex Offender Registry check. Additional background checks, including motor vehicle report can also be ordered for an additional cost.