

Review Your Child and Youth Protection Policies

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In January 2020 the Stated Clerk issued a letter to the church calling on councils to “take all steps possible to prevent sexual abuse and misconduct.” The Stated Clerk also declared:

While we as a denomination have talked about providing a safe space for individuals to live, work, and play while carrying out the mission of God in Christ, our sexual misconduct policies have not always been effective in protecting vulnerable persons among us. Tragically, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has sometimes failed to listen to the long-silenced voices of survivors of sexual misconduct by church leaders.

We must do better—as individuals and as a church.

As we approach Advent and celebrate the birth of the Christ Child, it is a good time to pull out child and youth protection policies to update them and to train staff and all volunteers who work with children on the policy and about child protection. Remember that the *Book of Order* in G-3.0106 mandates that “All councils shall adopt and implement a sexual misconduct policy and a child and youth protection policy.” There are resources available to help sessions comply with this mandate:

1. You can contact your synod and presbytery offices and ask to review a copy of their sexual misconduct and child and youth protection policies to determine if they can be adapted for use by your congregation.

2. [Creating Safe Ministries](#)

This web page includes resources such as the General Assembly’s anti-sexual abuse and misconduct policies, guidance on creating policies, prevention, and how to make a report of misconduct or abuse.

3. [Insurance Board Workbench](#)

The resources on this web page are available to all PC(USA) councils, and include a sample child protection policy.

What more is required than just a policy? Best practices. In the September/October 1997 issue of church and society, the *Journal of Just Thoughts (PCUSA)*, Ruling Elder Lois Rifner, a founding member of the Presbyterian Child Advocacy Network (PCAN), offered several options for church response that are still relevant today:

1. Sexual abuse prevention training for minors
2. Staff and volunteer training – today it would be training on a council’s child protection policies
3. Supportive ministry for victims and parents
4. Developing personnel policies, including background check policies, two-adult policies, and more

Consult [We Won’t Let It Happen Here: Creating a Child Safe Church](#) (published by PCAN).

As the Stated Clerk declared regarding our call to protect the children of the church: We must do better—as individuals and as a church. Use this season of Advent as a time to enhance your child and youth protection policies and to train those who work with minors to protect the most vulnerable among us.