

Nurture and Protection of Children

Seventh-day Adventists place a high value on children. In the light of the Bible they are seen as precious gifts from God entrusted to the care of parents, family, community of faith and society-at-large. Children possess enormous potential for making positive contributions to the Church and to society. Attention to their care, protection and development is extremely important.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church reaffirms and extends its longstanding efforts to nurture and safeguard children and youth from persons—known and unknown—whose actions perpetrate any form of abuse and violence against them and/or sexually exploit them. Jesus modeled the kind of respect, nurture, and protection children should be able to expect from adults entrusted with their care. Some of His strongest words of reproof were directed toward those who would harm them. Because of the trusting nature and dependence of children upon older and wiser adults and the life-changing consequences when this trust is breached, children require vigilant protection.

Redemptive Correction

The Seventh-day Adventist Church places a priority on church-based parent education that helps parents develop the skills necessary for a redemptive approach to correction. Many children experience harsh punishment in the name of a biblical approach to discipline. Correction characterized by severe, punitive, dictatorial control often leads to resentment and rebellion. Such harsh discipline is also associated with heightened risk for physical and psychological harm to children as well as increased likelihood the youth will resort to coercion and violence in resolving their differences with others. By contrast, examples from Scripture as well as a large body of research confirm the effectiveness of more gentle forms of discipline that allow children to learn through reasoning and experiencing the consequences of their choices. Such milder measures have been demonstrated to increase the likelihood children will make life-affirming choices and espouse parental values as they mature.

Making Church a Safe Place for Children

The Church also takes seriously its responsibility to minimize the risk for child sexual abuse and violence against children in the congregational setting. First and foremost, church leaders and members must themselves live by a strict code of ethics that precludes even the appearance of evil as regards the exploitation of minors for the gratification of adult desires. Other practical measures toward making church a safe place for children include attention to the safety of the church facility and its surroundings and the careful supervision and monitoring of children and their environment during all church-related activities. Education regarding what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate interaction between adults and children, the warning signs of abuse and violence, and the specific steps to be followed should inappropriate behavior be reported or suspected are vitally important. Pastors and church leaders who are visible and approachable play an important role in prevention as well as in responding well to the needs of children whose safety may have been jeopardized. Regular updates are needed regarding their moral and legal responsibility to report child abuse to appropriate civil authorities. The designation of trained personnel and specific protocols at wider

levels of Church organization will help to ensure appropriate action and follow-through when abuse is reported within the church setting.

Because of the complex nature of the problem of child sexual abuse and violence against children, intervention and treatment of perpetrators requires resources beyond the scope of ministry provided by the local church. However, the presence of a known perpetrator in a congregation calls for the highest levels of vigilance. While perpetrators should be held fully responsible for their own behavior, the supervision of persons with a history of inappropriate behavior is necessary to ensure that such persons maintain appropriate distance and refrain from all contact with children during church-related activities. Provision for alternative opportunities for perpetrators to grow spiritually in settings where children are not present greatly enhances child protection.

Fostering Emotional and Spiritual Healing

Children who have been personally victimized or who have witnessed disturbing events need the care of adults who treat them with sensitivity and understanding. Practical support that helps children and families maintain stability in the midst of turmoil empowers victims and their families and promotes healing. The Church's commitment to breaking the silence frequently associated with child sexual abuse and violence, its efforts toward advocacy and justice for all victims, and deliberate action to safeguard children from all forms of abuse and violence will contribute much toward the emotional and spiritual recovery of all concerned. The Church regards the nurture and protection of children as a sacred trust.

(This statement has been informed by the principles expressed in the following biblical passages: Lev. 18:6; 2 Sam. 13:1-11; 1 Kings 17:17-23; Ps. 9: 9, 12, 16-18; 11:5-7; 22:24; 34:18; 127:3-5; 128:3-4; Prov. 31:8-9; Is. 1:16-17; Jer. 22:3; Matt. 18:1-6; 21:9, 15-16; Mark 9:37; 10:13-16; Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21; 1Tim. 5:8; Heb. 13:3.)

(See also "Seventh-day Adventists Speak Up For Ending Violence Against Women and Girls".)

This statement was approved and voted by the Executive Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists on June 23, 2010, and released at the General Conference Session in Atlanta, Georgia, June 24-July 3, 2010.