

How Well Do We Screen and Train Children's Workers?

12 question checklist to help you identify gaps in your screening process.

by Laura J. Brown

Use the following checklist to gauge how your church is doing at screening.

HOW ARE WE DOING	YES	NO	WORKING ON THIS
Do we interview all prospective volunteers and employees before they begin working with children?			
On and off church premises, do we have at least two adults supervise a group of children at all times, whether they are in a room, a vehicle, or other enclosed space—even if only one or two children need care?			
Do we discourage the use of teenagers as primary childcare workers during organized church functions?			
Do we train all paid and volunteer workers who work with youth or children?			
Do we ask volunteers to wait until they are associated with our ministry for at least six months prior to allowing them involvement with children of any age?			
Do we invest in a background screening program for all volunteers and employees who work with children?			
Does the background check include investigation into prior church membership and volunteer work, reference checks, and criminal records checks?			
Do we explain how we expect workers to interact with children?			
Do we regularly discuss and rehearse proper response to emergency situations like fire, lightning, natural disasters, and violent attacks?			

Do our employees and volunteers understand their role in administering first aid, obtaining professional medical care, notifying parents, and documenting injuries that occur while they are on the job?		
Do our employees and volunteers know what procedures to follow to prevent children from being abused emotionally, physically, or sexually?		
Do our employees know what reporting requirements they must follow if they suspect a child is being abused?		

Carefully screening people before allowing them to work with children in your ministry costs little, but it can increase safety greatly. Here's why. Background screening can:

- deter child predators from applying to work in your ministry, reducing the likelihood of child sexual assault.
- demonstrate that your ministry has taken reasonable care to safeguard its members.
- reduce your liability in court if you should accidentally hire someone who commits a crime.
- help you learn if someone has been convicted of a crime in the past that may lead to future problems.
- offer a glimpse into the candidate's past work performance and why he or she is seeking a new ministry position.
- give you information about a person's character, skills, knowledge, and suitability for a particular position.

More than a criminal background check

Background screening and criminal background checks are similar terms that can be confused with one another. Background screening is far more comprehensive than running a person's name through a criminal records database.

How do you screen paid and volunteer workers?

A thorough background screen includes four components: written application, reference checks, personal interview, and criminal records inspection.

These components are the same for both paid and volunteer employees, although additional laws govern background screening for paid employment.

Because states often have additional laws employers must follow, you should strongly consider hiring a qualified agency to conduct criminal background checks on prospective employees.

Reference checks are vital

Criminal background checks are important, but reference checks are vital, says John Hein, corporate counsel for Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company. "There's no substitute for a reference check," Hein says. "It's a good indicator of whether this person will be a good fit for your ministry."