

Are We Prepared for a Sexual Misconduct Allegation?

Use this checklist to help prepare for a sexual harassment allegation in your church.

by Lorie Quicke

Sexual harassment occurs in all kinds of work settings. While we may think it's more prevalent in secular businesses and organizations, the church is not immune to incidents of sexual misconduct among ministry workers. Use the following checklist to gauge how proactive your church is at preventing sexual misconduct and how prepared it is to respond to an allegation of sexual harassment.

HOW ARE WE DOING	YES	NO	WORKING ON THIS
Do we monitor employee's overtime hours, or an individual's declining performance, increased absences, inability to concentrate, or changes in his/her work habits?			
Does our current insurance policy cover our church adequately against sexual harassment claims?			
Are we equipped to understand, prevent, and respond to a sexual misconduct allegation?			
Do we show our staff that we take sexual harassment seriously by providing awareness training on this topic?			
Does our church have a safe atmosphere and clear channels of communication for victims to address a problem without fear of retaliation for coming forward?			
If our church employs 15 or more people, have we adopted a clear, written policy regarding sexual misconduct?			
Do the men on our staff practice Paul's words in 1 Timothy 5:2 to "treat older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity"?			
Do our office doors have glass inserts or windows in them?			

Do we educate employees on appropriate behavior and best practices for working with the opposite sex?		
Have we clearly defined sexual harassment and posted reporting laws in areas where employees can see them?		
Do we have a clearly defined process for sharing concerns of sexual harassment?		
Do we practice confidentiality with all employee issues?		

The legal definition of sexual harassment is when the terms, conditions, or privileges of employment are determined on the basis of sex. The two recognized forms of sexual harassment are (1) when an employee is subjected to unwelcome advances and submission is explicitly or implicitly made a condition of employment, and (2) when the employer (directly or through agents) creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.

The following are some simple steps to help prevent sexual harassment.

Create a Safe Environment

Be vocal. Let your staff and congregation know that you take harassment seriously. Those who work at and attend the church should feel safe if they need to come forward with an accusation of sexual harassment.

Define policies. If there aren't currently policies in place concerning sexual harassment in your church, create them. The church must be prepared if an allegation surfaces. Putting your staff and volunteers through a sexual ethics course may also prevent harassment at your church.

Keep a Safe Environment

Practice accountability. One way to keep your staff accountable is to monitor overtime hours, an individual's declining performance, increased absences, inability to concentrate, or changes in his/her work habits.

Check your insurance. Make sure your church insurance covers employment-related claims, such as a sexual harassment claim.

Address allegation. When an allegation surfaces at your church, remove the accused from contact with the claimant during the investigation. The claimant should also be offered pastoral assistance, including counseling. Contact your insurer, attorney, and governing church bodies so they can further advise you on your next steps.