

Safe Sanctuaries, Young Children and Bathroom Use

Church nursery workers and preschool Sunday school teachers need to be educated about appropriate touch and boundaries with young children and protocol for bathroom use. In a like manner, parents of young children need to be educated on what they can do to encourage a safe environment. Here are a few guidelines to consider:

- 1. Develop procedures for bathroom use.** Teachers, nursery workers and helpers determine what the safest way of helping children use the bathroom. Set a policy, make sure all teachers and helpers know it and practice it. Post it in classrooms or bathrooms if you desire. Ideas: leave door to bathroom partly open while in use, ask child if they can take care of everything by themselves, ask child to tell you when they are done with clothing pulled up, make sure hands are washed thoroughly, tell another teacher where you are, never touch a child in private areas, if there is an accident, get a parent. In some congregations, it is standard diaper changing policy to be handled by parents only and they are summoned when a change is necessary.
- 2. Communicate with parents.** Talk to each parent about “bathroom protocol.” Ask them for suggestions on how they want trips to the bathroom handled. Tell them that you expect the children in your classroom need to take care of their own bathroom needs. Show them locations of all bathrooms in the church.
- 3. Request that parents dress their children in clothing that the children can handle themselves.** Elastic waist pants and skirts can be easily pulled up and down by very young children. If the clothing is complicated (bows, ties, buttons), it may increase the chances of an accident (takes too long to undo the clothing) and it increases the amount of touch and assistance an adult must provide.
- 4. If a child becomes agitated** at using the bathroom alone **or** with you near, go and get the parents. Tell parents this is what you will do.
- 5. If a child has disabilities or special needs**, the bathroom protocol may be different, so visit with the parents on what they suggest.
- 6. Know the indicators of child abuse** and be prepared to report it to authorities. At times, these indicators are discovered as a child uses the bathroom.

Remember, *Safe Sanctuaries* is not trying to sabotage or shut down any effective ministry. The goal is to keep relationships healthy; encourage appropriate boundary management; protect church workers from accusations; protect the children and youth from possible misconduct and abuse.

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