

Four Steps to Keeping Boys Safe



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Every week churches across the nation bring men and boys together around fun activities to grow in Christlike manhood, learn new skills, and become a community where men and boys can explore and apply their God-given talents and abilities in building the kingdom of God.

To guarantee this process is fulfilled, it is essential that every church and outpost take the essential steps necessary to ensure the safety of every boy participating. These steps can be summarized as the following:

1. Selection
2. Training
3. Supervision
4. Response

These four steps provide a clear and consistent process for protecting boys and ensuring the environments we create for them become healthy and not harmful.

Step 1: SELECTION

The process by which your church screens and selects potential leaders for your Royal Rangers outpost serves as your first line of defense in protecting your boys from harm. The process typically includes the following items:

- Completion of a children and youth workers application
- Contacting personal or institutional references
- Performing a criminal background check
- Participation in a personal interview with church leadership

Application

A written application should be required of every individual seeking any leadership role. “At a minimum, the application should include the applicant’s name and address, the names of all youth-serving organizations in which the applicant has worked as an employee or volunteer, a full explanation of any prior criminal convictions, and the names of two or more references” (*Leader Manual*, 27.5). Although personal references can be used, the best reference is an institutional reference.

References

Institutional references are those “from another organization in which the applicant has worked with minors, either as a paid employee or an unpaid volunteer” (*Leader Manual*, 27.5). Examples may include Boy Scouts, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCA, youth sports teams, public or private schools, or other churches or religious organizations. The reference should be asked to provide any information they are aware of that might indicate that the applicant poses a risk of harm to minors or is in any other respect not suitable for youth or children’s ministry. Obtaining positive references from

multiple institutions that have observed the applicant interact with minors is the most desirable result.

Once the application is submitted, all references should be contacted and asked to submit a written statement on the suitability of the applicant to work with children or youth. If the references do not respond within the desired time, a phone call can suffice. When contacting references by phone, their comments concerning the applicant should be documented and kept with the application.

It is also recommended that you explore any additional legal requirements that may apply in your state. “For example, a number of states require church-operated child-care facilities to check with the state before hiring any applicant for employment to ensure that each applicant does not have a criminal record involving certain types of crimes. You will need to check with an attorney for guidance” (*Leader Manual*, 27.7).

Background Check

“A criminal background check consisting of a nationwide search of sex offender registries, and a national criminal file search” should be performed on all applicants (*Leader Manual*, 27.7). “Criminal record checks are inexpensive and convenient, and they are an essential component of risk management. Preferential pricing may be available from your insurance company, or a denominational office” (*Leader Manual*, 27.8).

Interview

All prospective leaders should complete an interview process that provides the church with an opportunity to explore the prospective leader’s background, motives, and suitability for the position being considered. This is also a good

opportunity to discuss any issues that may have arisen from the background check or reference checks.

Step 2: TRAINING

The second step in protecting boys is the practice of establishing well-defined church policies and practices to govern your outpost and the actions of your leaders and training all staff to ensure their awareness of them.

Policies & Practices

When developing policies and practices for your church, a good place to start is reviewing policies from well-established, reputable churches and youth-serving organizations in your area. Examples may include the YMCA, Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, or Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Possibly your best source for comparison is your local public-school district. As agencies of the state, public schools are required to maintain practices that align with the latest developments in the law.

Additional policies may include:

- **Waiting Period.** “Churches can reduce the risk of sexual molestation of minors by adopting a policy restricting eligibility for any volunteer position involving the custody or supervision of minors to those persons who have been members in good standing of the church for a minimum period of time, such as six months. Such a policy gives the church an additional opportunity to evaluate applicants, and will help to repel persons seeking immediate access to potential victims” (*Leader Manual*, 27.7).
- **Policy Review by Legal Counsel.** The practice of “having an attorney periodically review your worker selection procedures will help to establish the exercise of reasonable care which will reduce

the risk of harm to minors as well as a legal judgement of negligence in the event of an incident” (*Leader Manual*, 27.7).

- **Two-Adult Rule.** Consider adopting a “two-adult” policy that requires the presence of two adults during any meeting or activity. “Such a policy simply says that no minor is ever allowed to be alone with an adult during any church activity. This rule reduces the risk of child molestation, and also reduces the risk of false accusations of molestation” (*Leader Manual*, 27.7).

Training the Staff

Churches should conduct periodic training of all employees and volunteers on the latest policies and practices of the church to ensure everyone is aware of the expectations. This training should also include information on “recognizing and reporting child abuse and the identification of potentially abused minors” (*Leader Manual*, 7.9). It is helpful for the training to include presentations by legal specialists in your area, such as police officers, prosecuting attorneys, or employees of the child abuse hotline agency.

Note: This is not Royal Rangers training, such as completing Ranger Basics or attending NRM. This is training on policies and practices unique to your church, conducted by your church leadership with input from local specialists.

Step 3: SUPERVISION

Established policies have little value or effect if leaders are not adequately supervised in their interactions with boys. Therefore, the practice of supervision that children and youth workers represent is the third step in protecting boys.

Church leadership must be given full access to all Royal Rangers meetings and activities to ensure church policies are being followed and all leaders

participating have been screened and appointed according to those policies. Church leadership should never be denied participation due to lack of program training, FCF membership, or similar criteria. Private clubs or activities are expressly prohibited in Royal Rangers due to the increased potential for harm resulting from limited supervision.

“The installation of video cameras in strategic locations can also serve as powerful deterrents to child molesters, and can reduce a church’s risk of negligent supervision. Video technology has become affordable for most churches, and should be considered by all churches as both a powerful deterrent and a means of proving or disproving alleged misconduct” (*Leader Manual*, 27.9).

Step 4: RESPONSE

Even when our best efforts have been made to select the right leaders, establish clear policies, and provide adequate supervision, the potential for problems cannot be eliminated completely. However, when problems do arise, it is essential that church leadership respond promptly and adequately to correct the situation. Response, therefore, is the fourth way we protect our boys from harm.

Promptly Report

Prompt reporting of all known or suspected abuse of children must be a central mandate for any children or youth ministry program. “It is imperative for church leaders to comply with their state’s child abuse reporting law and promptly report all known and reasonably suspected cases of child sexual abuse to the designated state agency. In some states a report must be filed within twenty-four hours. Know the reporting requirement in your state” (*Leader Manual*, 27.8). Be sure to document any reporting phone calls you make, with a second person

listening in on the conversation, when possible. “Resolve any and all doubts in favor of reporting. Prompt reporting has several advantages:

- It is required by law (for mandatory reporters).
- You avoid misdemeanor liability for failure to report.
- You avoid civil liability in many states for not reporting.
- Reporters are given immunity from liability in every state (except for malicious behavior).
- You protect the current victim from further harm.
- You are placing the abuser’s identity in the criminal justice system, making it more likely that this will be flagged to other churches and youth-serving charities seeking a reference.
- You minimize the risk of public outrage that can be unleashed if your church failed to report the abuse to the state” (*Leader Manual*, 27.8).

Halt High-Risk Behaviors

“Promptly address and halt high-risk behaviors. Often, those who molest minors in churches or church activities have openly engaged in high-risk behaviors, including:

- Minors spending the night in a leader’s home
- An adult leader drives a vehicle with one or more unrelated minors on board, and no other adults
- An adult goes on day trips with an unrelated minor
- An adult goes on overnight trips with an unrelated minor
- A leader spends the night in a hotel with one or more unrelated minors
- A leader meets one or more minors in malls or other places where minors congregate

- An adult leader sleeps in a tent with an unrelated minor during a campout

“These, and similar, ‘grooming’ behaviors are associated with many incidents of child molestation involving youth and children’s ministry leaders and volunteers in churches and must be promptly confronted and stopped” (*Leader Manual*, 27.8-27.9).

Violations of other areas of church policies and practices must be addressed as well. Failure to correct violations of policy implies that these policies, and possibly others, may be ignored. Individuals who repeatedly violate established policies should be moved out of children and youth work before greater problems develop.

By following these four steps, churches can help to provide safe environments for their boys and the leaders involved, providing a platform where boys can be mentored into true Christlike manhood, becoming the men of God they were created to be.

The content for this article is adapted from the 2019 edition of the Royal Rangers Leader Manual in “Chapter 27 Safety and Supervision” and the article “Managing the Risk of Child Molestation” by Richard Hammar, legal counsel for the Assemblies of God.



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