

TORONTO UNITED CHURCH COUNCIL

Connecting Resources with Ministry

Church Development Discussion Papers

TITLE: Effective Screening Procedures

AUTHOR(S): The United Church of Canada

PAPER: 2011-45

REVIEW DATE: January 2011

Local churches typically conduct minimum application, screening and supervision of their paid and/or volunteer nursery and child care staff, a crucial step for a successful nursery and children's program. The enthusiastic acceptance the church historically offered to almost anyone willing to work with children is widely known both inside and outside the church membership. This has left many of our churches vulnerable to violation of the trust given to nursery workers by church leaders, parents and children. Would physical discipline of toddlers be promptly dealt with as unacceptable? Are nursery workers capable of responding to immediate first-aid needs should a child be injured? Is the nursery staffed by people knowledgeable about changing soiled diapers?

Every congregation is encouraged to develop a policy and practice that requires all persons volunteering their services or applying for paid child care positions to submit an application. The application form is used to identify the background, training and experience of individuals who want to work with children. It is essential to request information on the form about current employment, previous church membership, previous volunteer work, qualifications, and why the individual wishes to be in ministry with children.

References should be contacted, a police check obtained, and a written record of the process kept in the volunteer's or employee's file. Previous incidents or allegations that could disqualify them may be discovered. Applicants with a criminal record, a history of spouse or child abuse, or alcohol and other drug addiction problems should not be entrusted with the care of children. Inform all new nursery workers that they will serve a probationary period and may not be continued.

Document all of your personnel process: hiring (or acceptance of a volunteer), probations, incidents and dismissals. Maintain your documentation ensuring it is factual and not speculative commentary. All employment and volunteer applications should be retained permanently (given the statute of limitations on abuse or misconduct incidents), locked up and available only to authorized church staff and members.

Some church members may resist the idea that all persons wishing to serve in the nursery go through this process. Such resistance must give way to a consistently enforced policy. Remember those who work within the congregation's nursery are

in a leadership role. Appropriate screening of nursery workers will go a long way toward developing an excellent church nursery that the congregation can be proud of and which parents will be pleased is available.

Compiled from The United Church of Canada sources.

Church Development Discussion Papers are not formal publications of The Toronto United Church Council. They present independent ideas and observations that are intended to encourage discussion and comment among church leaders in local congregations and Presbyteries. The information, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in these Discussion Papers are entirely those of the author(s) and should not be attributed to The Toronto United Church Council. Articles are reprinted with permission.