

How the Church Approaches Abuse

As followers of Jesus Christ, we condemn abuse in any form. Abuse is a serious public health concern and is against the law in many countries. It is also forbidden by the commandments of God. No one should abuse another, and no one should have to endure abuse.

Protecting and caring for others was a priority for Jesus Christ in His life, and it is a priority in His Church today. The Savior warned His disciples: “Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (see Matthew 18:1–6). These are powerful words of condemnation from the Savior.

The Church is continuously looking for ways to improve its efforts to prevent and stop abuse and to care for those whose lives have been harmed by abuse.

HOW THE LDS CHURCH APPROACHES

ABUSE



Help the Victim, Stop the Abuse

Abuse is a matter the Church takes very seriously. When we learn of abuse, our first priority is to help the victim and stop the abuse. We train local Church leaders and provide resources to stop and prevent abuse and to keep individuals safe. We provide resources to help members know they are safe to come forward and get help if abuse has occurred.

The Church's efforts to prevent and stop abuse reflect the Savior's teachings to "help the one" (see Luke 15:4). A victim of abuse is a child of a loving Heavenly Father. We must do everything we can to protect and love them. We urge our local leaders and members to reach out to victims, comfort and strengthen them, and help them understand that what happened was wrong and that the experience was not their fault. We encourage leaders and members to make efforts to prevent it from happening again.

Policies

The Church has a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to abuse. This means that if we learn of abuse, we cooperate with civil authorities to report and investigate the abuse. Offenders are also subject to the laws of God. Whether or not someone is convicted of abuse, offenders are subject to Church discipline and could lose their membership in the Church.

Efforts to Prevent Abuse and Protect Individuals

Preventing abuse and protecting individuals from abuse is a top priority for the Church.

Communities with similar values:

- Our members attend church where they live, and members usually know each other and each other's children. There is no professional clergy at the local Church level—all leaders are volunteer, trusted lay leaders who serve for several years and typically live in the community.

- Local leaders of adults and youth are neighbors, parents, and friends. They teach each other and each other's children.
- We encourage our congregations to be safe places of worship.

Safeguards to protect:

- Church facilities are designed to protect against abuse. Since 2006, all classrooms in new chapels and meetinghouses have windows so parents and others can help watch over children and keep them safe.
- For any youth activity, we have a firm requirement that at least two adult leaders are present.
- When leaders are assigned to teach children and youth, at least two responsible adults should be present at all times.

Process for calling leaders:

- When an individual is identified as a candidate to be called to work with children or youth, the bishop receives a recommendation from other adult leaders, interviews the individual, and reviews their Church membership record. If there is any indication of that person being involved in abusive behavior, that person is disqualified from serving in any capacity with children or youth. Before serving, the individual is presented to the entire congregation for a sustaining vote. A bishop or his counselors are asked to interview youth leaders at least twice each year.

Membership record annotations:

- Every member of the Church has a membership record, which includes important information like baptism date, marriage, children, and so forth. This includes annotations for offenses such as abuse.
- When a bishop sees an annotation, he calls the Church and is given clear direction about how to protect members of the congregation. Members with annotations are barred from any position involving children.

Professional help line:

- The Church established a help line in 1995 to connect Church leaders with a professional counselor and legal professionals and to ensure compliance with abuse reporting laws.
- If a bishop, branch president, or stake president suspects or learns of abuse, he is instructed to call a help line number. Where available, he will be put in touch with a professional counselor to help the victim, stop the abuse, and prevent abuse of others. The bishop will also be connected with a lawyer to make certain that all legal reporting requirements are observed.

Counseling available:

- The Church offers and often covers the cost of professional counseling for victims, regardless of their ability to pay.
- The Church believes that victims can overcome the effects of abuse and live productive and Christlike lives, often through the assistance of professional counseling. The Church helps victims on the path to healing and hope.

Convicted Abusers Can Be Forgiven

As Christians, we believe in forgiveness. If those convicted of abuse pay the legal price for their crimes and undergo the rigorous repentance process, they can be forgiven and regain full fellowship in the Church. However, they will never be given an opportunity to serve in a calling with children or youth.

Responsibility to Educate

The Church encourages families to talk with their children about abuse and to educate themselves on how to recognize and prevent abuse. Parents are also encouraged to be engaged in their children's activities and to make time to establish open and trusting lines of communication with their children. Everyone in and out of the Church has a responsibility to be alert and watchful against abuse. Generally,

someone who abuses others is skilled at deception and hiding his or her actions. Churches, youth organizations, families, and society as a whole must be vigilant.

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