

## Supplement 10

# Template for a Local Sexual Abuse Prevention Symposium

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### Importance of the Work

None of us want to have to deal with the subject of sexual abuse prevention. It grieves our hearts that it is necessary for our churches to have to prepare, protect, and be proactive against the epidemic of child abuse and abuse of all kinds.

We have to do this because according to the CDC, 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 13 boys experience child sexual abuse. 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men have experienced some form of physical violence ([www.ncadv.org/statistics](http://www.ncadv.org/statistics)). We know that actual incidences of sexual abuse far exceed the number of reported incidences because many survivors never report their abuse. According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, out of every 1,000 incidents of sexual abuse, only 25 abusers ever face incarceration.

Churches are not immune to these statistics. The problem is we are being thrust into this issue with little knowledge. We are trying to catch up because most of us have not really dealt with this issue before, and if we have, we most likely dealt with it properly. That is why there is a concerted effort to correct our response, as churches, to the issue of sexual abuse. That is why we are scurrying to develop best practices so that we can improve our response and be better equipped to respond when we are faced with this issue.

Let's be reminded that:

- It is clear sin for anyone to use their power to mistreat people made in God's image (Psalm 11:5).
- Violence against the weak and needy is abhorrent to God, and so Christians have a much higher calling than merely not abusing people (Psalm 82:4).
- As Christians, we are called not only to avoid abuse and protect people from abuse, but to refuse to conceal abuse when we know it is happening or has happened (Proverbs 10:6).
- We live in a sinful world where abuse is happening. There is a high likelihood that someone who has been abused is already a part of your congregation, no matter the size of your church. As leaders, we must be doggedly determined to care for these people who are struggling (Psalm 147:3)

**“A church that shows itself to care about the public is much more likely to lead to a public that cares about the church.” –Michael Wear**

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The area of sexual abuse prevention and protection and response to survivors is an important way we can show that we care about our community.

While I am grateful for the efforts of our Southern Baptist Convention and our Alabama Baptist State Convention to heighten our awareness and help us learn from our experiences in the past, I believe if we are going to see true and genuine reform, prevention, and protection in our churches our Associations are going to be vital and crucial.

Since serving as chair of the Alabama Baptist Sexual Abuse Advisory Task Force, the primary burden I have carried is concern for connecting with our normative size churches. Many of our larger churches have taken precautions and established policies. Several have enrolled with MinistrySafe for guidance and help. Let me say, MinistrySafe is a wonderful choice and they offer so much assistance. Our State Convention has setup scholarships that are available for any church. ALSBOM will scholarship \$200 of the \$250 enrollment fee. You can take advantage of this by going to [alsbom.org/MinistrySafe](http://alsbom.org/MinistrySafe).

However, many of our normative size churches will not choose this route, so we must find another way to connect with them. In the Etowah Baptist Association we held a Sexual Abuse Prevention Symposium that targeted our normative size churches. The idea was that if we focused on our local issues with sexual abuse we might be able to get our smaller church's attention. We assembled a panel of community leaders who deal directly with sexual abuse in our county. The good news is God favored our effort and it worked. We had over half of our normative size churches in attendance. Pastors and laypeople alike attended and they paid attention. The results have been fantastic as we have seen our churches ask for help and reach out to some of our community leaders for assistance.

Here is who we invited:

**Sheriff** - The Sheriff was able to speak to child abuse in our county. He shared how many registered sex offenders we have living in our community. He also shared what he and his deputies are doing to combat this issue in our community. The Sheriff also shared about how they address cyber abuse and pornography along with some of the methods they use to catch criminals online.

You could also invite the police chiefs of the municipalities in your county.

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**Child Advocacy Center Director (CAC)** - I realize not every county has a CAC, but most likely there is one in your region. The CAC Director can speak to the counseling aspect of abuse survivors. The CAC is directly connected to the DA's office. The CAC is the organization that does the interviews with abuse survivors. One of the most alarming things we learned was how many child abuse survivors were seen in our county in January 2023. Our local CAC set a record in January for the number of survivors they saw. The CAC Director can also speak to predatory behavior and will even come to your church and offer training for your volunteers, at no cost.

**Department of Human Resources** - DHR is helpful in explaining mandatory reporting, especially as it pertains to ministers and church volunteers. DHR can also talk about their process of removing children and placing children in a safe place. DHR can also talk about their State Sexual Abuse Registry which is one of the best tools for screening pastors, staff members and employees.

**Probate Judge** - the Probate Judge is an excellent resource for helping to understand the placement of children. He handles the foster child adoptions and can speak to the need for foster parents and homes for the survivors. He will also have other resources to assist your church with the issue of abuse of all kinds.

**Counselor** - If you have a local Christian or trauma-informed counselor in your area they are an excellent addition to your panel. They can speak to the impact abuse has on survivors. They can also speak about how to respond to a survivor of abuse, especially if they have shared their story with you. Pathways Professional Counseling through the Alabama Baptist Children's Home & Families is an excellent resource for this. You can contact them at [pathwaysprofessionals.org](http://pathwaysprofessionals.org).

**District Attorney or Assistant DA** - the District Attorney can enlighten you on the prevalence of abuse in your community by sharing how many cases he/she prosecutes in your area. You will be shocked by how much abuse is going on in your area.

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The format of the Symposium was a panel discussion. We set up chairs and tables on the platform. I served as the emcee introducing the panel and inviting them to share. What they shared opened the door for me to ask more specific questions. At the end, we opened it up for the people in attendance to ask questions. They took advantage and asked great questions. A couple of other panelists you might consider would be someone who deals with church security or a local pastor whose church has already developed and implemented policies.

I can speak first hand that if you want to connect with your normative size churches in the hopes that they will pay attention and take action, localizing and personalizing the issue to your county and community will make a difference. You can Google all the national and state statistics, but when you have someone who is on the frontlines of protecting the vulnerable in your community, no matter what age, and you hear them share the real stories and what they are doing in your neighborhoods to keep people safe, it will make a profound impact.

I truly hope that this information will be helpful to you as you lead in your Association. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at (256) 328-5757 or [craigc@etowahbaptist.com](mailto:craigc@etowahbaptist.com)

Sincerely,  
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