

# Ten Ways

## TO MAKE YOUR CHURCH A SAFER PLACE



We believe that because each person is created in the image of God, each one is to be treated with dignity and respect. Faith formation happens best in a nurturing context of healthy relationships. Thrive equips congregations in abuse awareness, prevention, and response, helping to build communities in which the value of each person is honored and people are free to worship and grow free from abuse. Although no ministry is risk-free, there are action steps that can minimize harmful risks and prevent abuse.

### **1. PAY ATTENTION TO ABUSE PREVENTION.**

A safe environment doesn't happen by itself; someone needs to pay attention and take action. It's well worth our efforts! Identify a group of people in the congregation to work together to prevent abuse and create a safe environment for everyone. Make sure the group includes council representation.

### **2. IDENTIFY A CHAMPION WITH PASSION.**

Often abuse prevention is most effective when someone champions the effort. There are people in every congregation who have directly or indirectly experienced abuse and, as a result, may be passionate about preventing it. One of these people may agree to spearhead efforts to form a safe church team for the congregation or for the classis.

### **3. CONNECT WITH THRIVE.**

It's easy! [Subscribe to our e-newsletter](#) or browse the many resources available on [The Network](#). You can also contact your classis safe church representative or [Thrive](#) directly ([crcna.org/safechurch](http://crcna.org/safechurch) or [network.crcna.org/safe-church](http://network.crcna.org/safe-church)).

### **4. DEVELOP AND FOLLOW A SAFE CHURCH OR ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY.**

A [policy](#) sends a strong and positive message that your church cares about the value of each and every person. Policies designed to protect those who are most vulnerable among us help to ensure a safe and respectful environment for everyone. When we don't make the effort to have a policy, what message do we send?

## **5. PARTICIPATE IN ABUSE AWARENESS SUNDAY.**

The last Sunday in April has been designated Abuse Awareness Sunday. [Resources](#) are available from Safe Church Ministry. If that Sunday doesn't work, any other day is also a good day for increasing abuse awareness!

## **6. IMPLEMENT [THE CIRCLE OF GRACE](#) PROGRAM.**

This excellent program is easily adaptable and fits with any curriculum currently being used. It's designed to equip children and youth to be active participants in creating a safe environment for themselves and others. Everything needed is included: video training, information for parents, and vocabulary so that everyone can talk together about important relationship issues.

## **7. EDUCATE CHURCH AND MINISTRY LEADERS.**

Church and ministry leaders need to acknowledge that abuse exists and need to understand appropriate ways to respond to a child or an adult who discloses abuse. Much harm has been done, often unintentionally, due to a lack of understanding about the dynamics and impacts of abuse.

## **8. ENCOURAGE AND ENFORCE HEALTHY BOUNDARIES FOR MINISTRY LEADERS.**

[Healthy boundaries](#) provide a safe space for effective ministry. Where do pastors and ministry leaders receive boundary or ethics training? How are healthy boundaries being maintained? Are there accountability structures in place? Healthy boundaries in ministry relationships are an important key to providing a safe environment.

## **9. ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT FAMILIES.**

Much abuse happens in the home. Our efforts to support strong marriages and to teach effective parenting skills also help reduce the risks of abuse.

## **10. ABUSE IS NOT OK—BUT TALKING ABOUT ABUSE IS OK.**

Establishing a culture in the congregation that allows people to be open about their struggles and what is really going on in their lives can help reduce abuse. Abuse thrives in silence and secrecy; we must not give it opportunity to thrive in our congregations.

This resource has been developed by Thrive. If you have questions or would like support in ministry, please email [thrive@crcna.org](mailto:thrive@crcna.org).

