

FOR CHURCHES · FOUR

Household and safeguarding

*The church-side pack, with a
template policy.*



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The early church met in households. Children weren't sent to another room while the adults did church — they were at the table from the beginning, and their absence from most modern group models is a corruption of the original pattern, not a feature of it. A table with kids at it isn't a complicated table. It's the original kind.

Nothing about the rhythm changes. Meet, Share, Grow, Act — same four movements, mixed ages. Gatherings might run shorter and louder. That's not a problem to solve.

Kids get real roles, not childcare:

- **Story-retellers.** Recite/Retell/Recall is a children's game adults forgot. After the host tells the story, let a kid retell it. Two things happen: the child learns the story for life, and the adults hear it fresh — details children keep are details adults have stopped noticing.
- **Question-askers.** Kids ask the questions adults are too polite or too churchied to ask. "Why did the father run?" is a better discussion starter than anything in a curriculum. Let them ask; don't rush to answer for the table.
- **Act-reminders.** Give the kids the job of remembering what everyone committed to. "Dad, you said you'd check on Mr. Bailey — how'd it go?" Children keep a table honest, and they learn that faith is something families do, not something adults believe.

When the conversation goes deep. Some Share moments and some stories touch heavy things. Use judgment the way a healthy family does: some conversations happen with everyone at the table, some after the kids drift to the other room. The host doesn't need a policy for this — parents at the table will show you where the line is.

Milestones. As household tables mature, they'll want to mark things — a new baby, a child ready to own their faith, a graduation, a move. How these are celebrated, and how baptism and dedication work, follows your church's practice and polity. Bring milestone moments to your church contact early; these are the moments your church most wants to share, not just permit.

The non-negotiables. Two adults present at every gathering that includes minors — always, no exceptions, no "just this once." Your church's child-safety policy covers household tables exactly as it covers everything else the church does; hosts get a copy before the first mixed-age gathering. If your church doesn't have a policy yet, the safeguarding pack includes a template — adopt one before any household table launches. This is the one part of the model with no flexibility in it, and a host who finds it inconvenient is a host who shouldn't have kids at their table.

ONE

The safeguarding pack

PROTECTION IS PART OF THE WELCOME.

Open doors mean more protection, not less. A model that gathers people — including children and hurting adults — in private homes owes them more vigilance than a building with hallways and windows, not less. None of this is bureaucracy. It's what love looks like when it's thought ahead.

The host checklist (one page, every host, before the first gathering)

For every table:

- ☐ The church contact's name and number are written in your Host's Guide.
- ☐ You know your church's reporting path for abuse disclosures (below) — before you need it.
- ☐ Money never changes hands at the table. No collections, no fundraising among members, no lending inside the group. (Group service projects with a budget run through the church.)
- ☐ Nobody's attendance, struggles, or stories leave the table without their permission. Confidentiality has exactly two exceptions: harm to self, harm to others — those go to your church contact immediately, and hosts say this out loud at the first gathering so nobody is surprised later.

Additionally, for any table that includes minors:

- ☐ Two unrelated adults present at every gathering. Always. A gathering where the second adult cancels is a gathering that reschedules.
- ☐ Every adult regularly present has been screened under the church's child-safety policy (background check included).

- ☐ No adult is ever alone with a child who isn't theirs — including rides, bathrooms, and "helping in the kitchen."
- ☐ Parents know exactly where their kids are and what a gathering involves. No surprises, ever.
- ☐ Anything a child discloses about harm goes to the church contact the same day — and hosts understand that in most places, reporting suspected child abuse to authorities is a legal obligation, not a judgment call. The church contact helps navigate; the host never sits on it.

If someone discloses abuse — the one-page path

1. **Listen. Believe. Don't investigate.** Your job is to be safe, not to be the detective. Don't press for details, don't interview, don't confront anyone.
2. **Say what happens next, honestly.** "Thank you for telling me. I have to bring in [church contact] so we can keep you safe." Never promise secrecy you can't keep.
3. **If a child is involved or anyone is in immediate danger: emergency services first.** Then the church contact. Suspected child abuse gets reported to the authorities per your state's law — the church contact helps you do it right, the same day.
4. **Write down what was said, in their words, dated.** Facts, not interpretation.
5. **Stay their friend.** The table's job doesn't end when the professionals arrive. Reporting is an act of love; so is still being there next week.

The two questions for your insurer

One phone call, before the first gathering. Ten minutes. Write the answers down and put them in the launch file.

1. *"Our church is starting small weekly gatherings in members' homes — shared meals, conversation, sometimes with children present, hosted by our people. Does our current general liability coverage extend to regular church-connected activities in private homes, or do we need an endorsement for off-site ministry?"*

2. "For home gatherings that include minors, what does our abuse-and-molestation coverage require of us — screening, two-adult rules, training — so those gatherings are covered exactly like activities in our building?"

That's it. If the answers require changes, make them before launch, not after the first hard moment.

The template child-safety policy (for churches that don't have one)

A starting framework. Have it reviewed by your insurer, your denomination's safeguarding office, or a local expert before you adopt it — child-protection law varies by state, and this is where a policy starts, not where it ends.

1. **Screening.** Every adult in regular contact with minors completes an application, a national background check renewed every [2–3] years, and a reference check. No exceptions for tenure, family, or reputation — the policy protects the trusted, too.
2. **The two-adult rule.** Two screened, unrelated adults present whenever minors are in the church's care, in any setting, including homes and vehicles.
3. **Visibility.** No closed, unobservable one-on-one settings between an adult and a minor. Doors open, spaces visible.
4. **Communication.** Adults don't have private digital communication with minors; anything necessary includes a parent.
5. **Reporting.** Any suspicion or disclosure of abuse is reported to [named church safeguarding officer] the same day, and to civil authorities as state law requires. The church never conducts its own investigation in place of the authorities, and never handles an allegation "internally."
6. **Response.** An accused person is removed from contact with minors immediately and pending resolution — a safety measure, not a verdict.

7. **Training.** Every screened adult receives basic awareness training: recognizing grooming, boundary violations, and the reporting path.
8. **Review.** The policy is reviewed annually and every incident triggers a review.

Before your church relies on this, have it reviewed by someone with real child-protection credentials — your insurer, your denomination's safeguarding office, or an organization like GRACE. What follows is a sound starting point, not a certified policy.

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