



# GRACE Recommendations for Developing a Safeguarding Team

The simple goal of a standing Safeguarding Team or Safety Team is to facilitate the essential prevention and response actions within a church or organization. Prevention and response is only effective when leaders and key individuals help the whole community understand that all contribute to the overall safety of the community. Developing and investing time and resources into a standing team is an effective way to advance the overall safety of the church or ministry by clarifying policy and responsible actions in prevention and response for all in the community. A Safeguarding Team is made up of members of a community and it is recommended to outline the exact duties and expectations for a Safeguarding Team. This brief guide is designed to help you get started with establishing a Safeguarding Team.

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## Getting Started

The size of your team will vary based on the size of your community and the exact role you are expecting the team to fulfill. You will have to choose a place to start and see what works well for your community. Most communities will begin with a team in the range of 4-8 people. It is good to try to have a team that is representative of the community as a whole and include a mix of staff and lay persons. For all churches it is important to have at least 50% women on this team as more victims of abuse statistically are female. If you have individuals with professional experience, such as trauma therapists, social workers, or law enforcement personnel in your church they should be considered to join your team. These individuals can contribute valuable insights or skills relevant to the team's objectives. What matters most is finding people who are willing to work on these issues together, who demonstrate a character of humility to learn about these issues, and who are committed to God's priority of protecting vulnerable people.

## Establish Basic Expectations for the Team

The logistics of each team will vary by church or ministry including how a team will be chosen, how long each person will serve, and how often a team will meet. Establish a practice in these areas that makes sense in your context given your church governance practices and with an eye towards the practical. For example, it is not good to have a wholesale change in a team. Setting it up so team members rotate off in a staggered way allows you to incorporate new members while still maintaining continuity. Having a rotation allows you to share the work and avoid burnout. The key is to try an approach that you think will fit with your community and see what you learn. There is no way to establish such a team without learning by experience what works well in your specific context.

It is important to give members of the Safeguarding Team a realistic view of what will be expected in terms of length of service and how often the team may meet. There will be some responsibilities that arise in response to a need, so this will not be able to be fully detailed to all members of the team beforehand. Communicate this as forthrightly as you can and refine how you do this as you learn. Some churches may choose to start with a more limited role for the Safeguarding Team and grow it over time. Try to list the main duties of the Safeguarding Team to give potential members a sense of the church's priorities for the team.

## Sample Duties of the Safeguarding Team

These are some suggested duties for Safeguarding Team members:

- Implement and oversee compliance with the \_\_\_\_\_ Church Abuse Policy
- Maintain rigorous familiarity with the \_\_\_\_\_ Church Abuse Policy
- Brief all staff, volunteers, and members on the application of the policy on a regular basis
- Receive, Document, and Respond to any policy violations or concerning behavior (see church policy for details)
- Lead in responding to any allegations of abuse (see church policy for details)
- Cooperate with staff on the screening of pastors, officers, staff, and volunteers.
- Complete continuing education from a qualified organization on a regular basis and help leaders maintain an education plan for the whole church (to be updated annually)

## Key Responsibilities in Response

A Safeguarding Team helps the community understand that everyone plays a part in making it a safe and respectful place. The team can help all in the community understand key expectations and that God's heart is that we prioritize the protection of the vulnerable as a community. Education and clear expectations for healthy interactions in the policy make all the difference, and the Safeguarding Team can help everyone understand this reality and take more ownership. A Safeguarding Team can develop a plan for bringing more training and education to the whole community so that all adults are empowered to contribute responsibly to prevention and response. It is also important to have basic safety talks with youth and kids. A Safeguarding Team can help with an approach to this key aspect of prevention.

## Key Responsibilities in Prevention

One key responsibility for a Safeguarding Team is to receive, document, and respond in appropriate ways to any safety concerns or policy violations. In our view, it is critical that this weighty responsibility is not placed on one individual, such as a supervisor. It is important that we give all in the church concrete direction on what to do if there is a safety concern or policy violation. A Safeguarding Team can document any concerns or policy violations and take a team approach to any appropriate accountability. Documentation is crucial because, for example, grooming behavior is often difficult to recognize in isolation, but it is easier to recognize when it is part of a pattern of documented behavior. So as both a matter of practicality and effective response, it is important for any information regarding policy violations or concerning behavior to be housed in one place. A Safeguarding Team can also work with leaders to help with key actions after potential abuse. Having a clear policy to set expectations for this is critical, and taking a team approach to assess what is responsible is important.

## Notes

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This is a practical tool that churches, and especially church leaders, may find useful. Please see our [training](#) and [policy services](#) pages online or email us at [safeguarding@netgrace.org](mailto:safeguarding@netgrace.org) for further assistance.

GRACE is a 501(c)(3) Non-Profit organization with a mission to to empower Christian communities to recognize, prevent, and respond to abuse.