

## ***CHILDREN MORE AT RISK OF ABUSE IN CONGREGATIONS***



Remember hearing stories about a Boy Scout leader who couldn't keep his hands to himself? This generation of children won't be telling as many stories as in the past. Now staff and volunteers are screened and trained in every major youth organization—*except in faith communities!* Now police are receiving more allegations against youth workers in congregations, and district attorneys are less hesitant to prosecute a religious leader. Congregations that are negligent in protecting their youth face daunting civil suits. Worst of all, children are being harmed in a place they should feel safest—the sanctuary.

Tragically wherever children gather, child molesters also gather. Several factors increase the risk to children gathering in church; most can be remedied. Only one, the *assumed sense of safety and ability to trust* faith leaders and members, can hopefully be preserved.

Which of the other factors amplify the risk of children in your congregation?

- Denial that any of “your people” could abuse a child
- Unclear boundaries (especially about touching)
- Discomfort with sexual issues
- Misuse or misinterpretation of scripture  
(especially concepts of forgiveness, suffering, and being “nice”)
- Unsupervised access to children
- Lack of safeguards
  - little education of clergy and congregation
  - few protective policies and guidelines
  - inadequate screening of staff and volunteers
  - weak accountability and supervision of staff and volunteers
  - few consequences to harmful behavior
  - inappropriate response to child abuse allegations
- Poor self-care of leaders and volunteers
  - stress and burnout
  - workaholism
  - weak one-to-one relationships
  - unaddressed history of childhood abuse and other emotional issues
  - inability to meet personal needs
  - substance abuse and alcoholism