**Steps to process sexual abuse claims**

It’s important to remember that as a youth leader you are a mandated reporter for students 17 years or younger. It is highly recommended you make the following statement a regular and consistent communication with all your students.

“Anything you share with me will stay with me, UNLESS you share that you are planning on harming yourself or another person or that you have been abused in any way”

Some will choose not to share, that is ok. Others however, will still entrust the information with you. Be sure to always thank them for their trust and reassure them that you will walk with them through whatever journey lies ahead.

The following are some suggested steps to take in processing sexual abuse claims in your ministry. All of these steps are taken after a student shares that they have been sexually abused.

1. Ask if that is the 1st time they have shared that information
2. If it’s NOT the 1st time, find out with whom and when they shared it and what the outcome was. If it has been reported already, then you are now free to focus on walking them through their journey to find healing and wholeness.
3. If it has not been reported then follow up is needed. This follow up should not be done in a group setting. A separate meeting should be scheduled with the student, yourself and the youth leader or director in charge. Be sure that a leader of the same gender is always present.
4. Dig deeper. It’s important to ask some questions or request more information to help decipher if it was in fact abuse that took place. Sadly, false claims can often be made. Sometimes it is simply because the student doesn’t clearly understand what sexual abuse is. It is very important to not lead the students during this time. You don’t want to put ideas or words into their mouths as that could damage an investigation and prosecution that could be to come.

Here are some examples of what is appropriate....

What does \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ mean? (if they say… raped, molested, attacked, or another general term)

Describe to me what exactly happened (the incident)

Can you give me more details? (If they are vague)

Can you explain that to me? (If they are unclear)

* This will be uncomfortable and they will be scared but remember they reached out for help by sharing in the first place.

You only need to get more information until you feel you have enough to suspect an actual sexual abuse occurred. You may not need a ton of detail for that. Once you confirm it could be a valid claim you MUST report!

1. Explain to the student what is coming next. They will be upset but as long as you are honest with them about who you’re going talk to you and what you’re going to do, they won’t be upset with you.
2. Contact Parents. The only exception to this would be if it is unsafe to do so. For example, if one of the parents are the abuser. Then let the law enforcement make contact.
3. Contact law enforcement. They will need to interview the student as well as you. This can be done by taking student to the local station or law enforcement will come out to any location if needed. (Home, church, etc.)
4. On occasion, a report made will result in a trial. Be prepared to cooperate with law enforcement in any way needed.
5. Be willing to stay by student’s side for any of these conversations as long as it’s possible to do so. Even after legal issues are handled, the student is going to need you to walk with them as they make the journey toward healing. You are not their counselor or healer and your job is not to save them. All you need to do is be a consistent and loving presence in their lives and help direct them to the One who can heal and make them whole again.