



GUIDEPOST SOLUTIONS REPORT

Observations and Guidance Regarding Recommendations

By Gregory Love & Kimberlee Norris
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The [Guidepost Solutions Report](#) ('Report') was made public on May 25, 2022.

In Paragraph VII: Recommendations, Guidepost Solutions provides a list of 'proposed recommendations intended to provide a comprehensive framework for the SBC to improve its response to sexual abuse and misconduct allegations.' Section EC-1 recommends the creation of a Commission to oversee responsibilities, including the development or identification of sexual abuse prevention resources (see Section EC-2(c), Page 260-261). Section EC-1(d) recommends the consideration of outside experts in furtherance of the Commission's responsibilities.

As the leading child sexual abuse prevention resource for *all* denominations – including Southern Baptists – the principals of MinistrySafe provide significant expertise and experience related to the issues outlined in the Report. Many of the prevention recommendations referenced in the Report are already developed and are in use by Baptist seminaries, LifeWay, NAMB, most state conventions and hundreds of SBC churches – that number grows daily.

ABOUT MINISTRYSAFE

MinistrySafe provides comprehensive training (live and online) and assists ministry organizations in the design and implementation of safety systems that reduce the risk of child sexual abuse. Gregory Love and Kimberlee Norris, founders of MinistrySafe, are frequent speakers addressing national and regional audiences for organizations such as The Church Network, National Council for Adoption (NCFA), Christian Camp and Conference Association (CCCA), American Camp Association (ACA), Presbyterian General Assembly (PCA), Youth Ministry Institute (YMI), Society for Classical Learning (SCL), USA Track & Field, US Youth Soccer, Assemblies of God, Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS), Young Life and Hawaiian Islands Ministries.

Through MinistrySafe, Love and Norris provide curriculum and training resources to seminaries across the country, including Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS), New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS), Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS), Midwestern Theological Seminary (MBTS), Gateway Seminary, Rockbridge Seminary, Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS), Denver Seminary, Liberty School of Divinity and Bob Jones Seminary. Love and Norris serve as Visiting Faculty at Dallas Theological Seminary, where they teach the only 3-hour graduate level course currently in existence limited to child sexual abuse: *Preventing Sexual Abuse in Ministry Contexts*.

MinistrySafe is endorsed by Philadelphia Insurance Companies, GuideOne Insurance, Church Mutual Insurance, the Christian Camp and Conference Association and the American Camp Association. MinistrySafe’s Sexual Abuse Awareness Training is approved by the Texas Department of State Health Services and the Departments of Insurance for Texas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Washington. MinistrySafe’s Sexual Abuse Awareness Training is an approved CEU for the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI).

DEFINITION OF ‘SEXUAL ABUSE’

The recommendations section of the Report incorporates a definition of ‘sexual abuse’ (page 260), which creates the potential for confusion in understanding and creating the resources described thereafter. ‘Sexual Abuse’ is used as the umbrella term for ‘sexual abuse, sexual assault, harassment and related misconduct.’ Given the legal implications and mandatory reporting requirements related to child sexual abuse allegations that *do not* apply to assault, harassment and ‘related misconduct’, precision is critically important. We recommend that this definition be revisited at the outset: ‘Sexual Misconduct’ is the better umbrella term.

In discussing Sexual Misconduct, language is key. Within ‘Sexual Misconduct’, terms are not interchangeable. When we teach in seminary contexts, we delineate the following framework, giving rise to meaningful discussion.

Umbrella Term: Sexual Misconduct.

There are several forms of ‘sexual misconduct’, but the following four categories are definitive.

Sexual Misconduct

1. **Sexual Assault:** **adult-to-adult** inappropriate *criminal* sexual behavior (often characterized by force, threat or violence)
2. **Sexual Harassment:** **adult-to-adult** inappropriate sexual behavior in the workplace (not necessarily characterized by force or violence)
3. **Sexual Abuse** (or Child Sexual Abuse): **adult-to-child** inappropriate (and criminal) sexual behavior
4. **Peer Sexual Abuse** (or Peer-to-Peer Sexual Abuse): **child-to-child** inappropriate sexual behavior

Child Sexual Abuse and Peer Sexual Abuse

In categories 3 and 4 above, mandatory (legal) reporting requirements exist in every state; failing to report allegations or suspicions of child abuse isn’t simply unethical, it’s a *crime*.

Sexual Assault

Sexual Assault is likewise criminal, but rarely occurs in the workplace. All nonconsensual sexual behavior is criminal, but sexual assault occurring *between adults* does not create a mandatory reporting requirement incumbent in child sexual abuse cases.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual Harassment is the most common form of adult-to-adult inappropriate sexual behavior. Sexual harassment typically occurs in the workplace, and does not create a mandatory reporting requirement incumbent in child sexual abuse cases. Though reporting requirements may exist

under Title IX and its state law equivalents, due process and investigation of sexual harassment are entirely different from due process and investigation of child sexual abuse.

When ‘Sexual Abuse’ is used as an umbrella term, defined to include abuse, assault, harassment and ‘related misconduct’, the stage is set for error.

EC-3(d), for example, calls for a Resource Toolbox to provide guidelines and guidance in conducting a competent, thorough and trauma-informed child or adult sexual abuse investigation. ‘Adult Sexual Abuse’ is not defined, and it is unclear whether this term relates to *sexual assault* or *sexual harassment*. ‘Adult Sexual Abuse’ is not a defined criminal offense with corresponding legal processes. Child sexual abuse, however, is *always* a crime.

It is inappropriate to expect non-law enforcement individuals to perform child sexual abuse investigations. Law enforcement and child protection agencies have dedicated and trained teams who perform forensic investigations to support criminal prosecution. In fact, a common criticism from law enforcement agencies is that ministries attempting to investigate child sexual abuse allegations tend to ‘muddy the water’ – tainting evidence and witness testimony needed to criminally prosecute the sexual abuser.

Training related to adult-to-adult Sexual Misconduct is appropriate. At the same time, precision in language is key.

CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION RESOURCES

The founders of MinistrySafe have created child abuse prevention resources and provided prevention guidance and consultation for decades. The recommendations in the Report are not novel or innovative; the Report simply identifies tools and resources useful in addressing sexual abuse risk.

In Sections EC-3 through EC-5 (page 263-266) and EC-C (pages 275-276), the Report outlines recommended resources for SBC Churches. The majority of these resources already exist and are available to SBC Churches (and other ministries) through MinistrySafe. Currently, hundreds of SBC Churches employ MinistrySafe preventative resources, while most Baptist State Conventions have partnered with MinistrySafe to provide discounted access to resources. Resources corresponding to Report recommendations are outlined below, followed by commentary related to Report recommendations that may present a challenge.

RESOURCE TOOLBOX

The Report recommends the creation of a ‘Resource Toolbox’ that includes sexual abuse trainings¹, protocols, best practices, curriculums and templates.

¹ *MinistrySafe’s live and online Sexual Abuse Awareness Training (SAAT) focuses on ‘child abuse’: e.g. child sexual abuse and peer sexual abuse. SAAT does not address adult-to-adult behavior – sexual assault and sexual harassment – which are covered in separate trainings. Given the confusing definitions incorporated within the Report, it is unclear which training categories are anticipated within the proposed Resource Toolbox.*

Trainings

We believe effective training provides a fundamental element of an effective safety system meant to prevent child sexual abuse.

Currently, MinistrySafe offers the following trainings, supported with an online system to track and refresh:

Sexual Abuse Awareness Training (SAAT)

Sexual Abuse Awareness Training covers these key topics:

- Facts v. Misconceptions
- Abuser Characteristics
- The *Grooming Process* of the Offender
- Common *Grooming Behaviors*
- Peer Sexual Abuse
- Short-term and Long-term Impacts of Abuse
- Reporting Requirements and Best Practices

Our Awareness Training provides ministry-specific versions for youth ministry, children's ministry, daycare, youth sport, Christian education and camp.² Each version covers *legal standards of care* specific to that service provision, as well as best practices. Awareness Training is closed-captioned in English and nine other languages.

MinistrySafe currently trains over 50,000 staff members and volunteers *per month* and has issued over 2 million certificates of completion. MinistrySafe is the primary provider of Sexual Abuse Awareness Training to Baptist churches, seminaries, colleges, state conventions, disaster relief programs, NAMB, BCM, and camps (including LifeWay camps/programs).

[Access Sexual Abuse Awareness Training](#)

Skillful Screening Training (SST)

MinistrySafe is the exclusive provider of Skillful Screening Training™ (live and online), discussing high-risk indicators and offender characteristics culled from 40 years of offender studies, and supported by sample screening forms, including an employment application, volunteer application, reference checks and interview questions.

[Preview Skillful Screening Training](#)

Parent Training

MinistrySafe recently completed a 2-Part Parent Training, which ministries provide to congregational members. This training is designed to equip *parents* with information and strategies to prevent sexual abuse *of their own child*. As with all training content, Parent Training may be provided through training links initiated from the MinistrySafe Control Panel.

[Preview Parent Training](#)

² MinistrySafe provides the backbone of the Christian Camp and Conference Associations' Camper Protect Program, serving Baptist member camps.

Protocols / Templates

The Report does not explicitly define what is meant by ‘protocols’ and ‘templates’, but likely refers to sample policy forms and screening forms.

Policies & Procedure Forms

As sexual abuse experts and litigators, we believe the key to prevention is an understanding of the sexual offender’s ‘*grooming process*’: the process by which an abuser creates access to children, selects a specific child (or children), introduces nudity and sexual touch, then keeps the victim *silent*.

Almost without exception, abusers *groom* children for sexual abuse: 90% of children who are sexually abused are victimized by someone they *know and trust*, *NOT* a stranger³.

In addition, molesters *groom the gatekeepers* – fellow staff members and parents – to believe they are helpful, trustworthy individuals. The Church is particularly vulnerable to this reality, as we tend to believe that the motivations of those seeking ministry positions related to children are honorable. The offender’s *grooming process* unfolds differently depending on the type of program or population served. As a result, MinistrySafe offers various sample Policies & Procedures forms as templates; each rooted in the *grooming process* and dovetailing with Sexual Abuse Awareness Training.

Sample Policy forms include:

- Children’s Ministry
- Youth Ministry
- Daycare/Mom’s Day Out
- Day Camp and Overnight Camp/Retreat Centers
- Youth Sports
- Education (with Athletic Supplement)
- *more

All sample forms are available to MinistrySafe members in the MinistrySafe document library, and are periodically updated to reflect current *legal standards of care* and *best practices*.

Screening Forms

Skillful Screening Training provides a critical element of protecting children from sexual abuse. Ministry leaders *must* become conversant with abuser characteristics and *high risk indicators*. An effective screening process requires excellent training *and* screening forms: without training, *forms are just paper*.

MinistrySafe provides sample screening forms utilizing *questions meant to elicit high-risk responses*. Sample screening forms in the document library include:

- Employment Application
- Volunteer Application
- Teen Application (for minors seeking volunteer positions)
- Reference Check Form/Questions
- Interview Form/Questions
- *more

³ For purposes of these recommendations, ‘child’ refers to any ministry participant under 18 years of age.

Best Practices

Ministry leaders must understand *best practices*, particularly in topics or areas that may not be intuitive. We've provided sexual abuse prevention and reporting guidance to ministries (including Baptists) for decades: sexual abuse issues comprise *100%* of our law practice, training content and ministry consultation. We are intimately familiar with current *standards of care*, industry *best practices*, changes in the law, proposed legislation, legislative trends and insurance requirements.

We follow changes in the law giving rise to *new* standards of care and legal requirements for child-serving organizations (i.e., California and Pennsylvania).

MinistrySafe provides LiveStream instruction and video tutorials outlining industry *best practices*, including:

- Criminal Background Checks – Removing the Mystery
- Creating Policies & Procedures
- Reporting Child Sexual Abuse
- Child Safety Workshop

[*Preview all Best Practice video tutorials \[scroll down\]](#)

Curriculum

As Visiting Faculty at Dallas Theological Seminary, we created and teach the only graduate level 3-hour course: *Preventing Sexual Abuse in Ministry Contexts*. Obviously, DTS undertook a significant vetting process of the two of us, our CVs, past work, personal ethics and training content, *before* asking us to serve in this capacity. The core content of the course is organized into a six-module video program with documentary support – known as [MinistrySafe Institute](#).

MinistrySafe Institute (MSI)

The course content is 16 hours in length and covers the following topics:

- Module 1: Understanding Sexual Abuse in Ministry Contexts
- Module 2: Creating an Effective Safety System
- Module 3: Skillful Screening Processes and Training
- Module 4: Abuse Reporting Requirements
- Module 5: Allegations of Sexual Abuse – Preparation and Response Plan
- Module 6: Legislation Related to Sexual Abuse / Changes in the Law
- Additional Resource: Creating a Model of Care for Abuse Survivors

[Preview MSI Module 1 \[scroll down\]](#)

MinistrySafe provides SAAT, SST, MSI curriculum and other training resources to seminaries across the country, including Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS), New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS), Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS), Midwestern Theological Seminary (MBTS), Gateway Seminary, Rockbridge Seminary, Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS), Denver Seminary, Liberty School of Divinity and Bob Jones Seminary.

SELF-CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Within EC-4(a) and EC-C(10), the Report recommends the consideration of ‘Self-certification programs’. See pages 264 and 275.

EC-C(10): We recommend that the SBC EC’s Sexual Abuse and Prevention Staff facilitate and create written model criteria for the voluntary self-certification programs for churches and seminaries. See page 276.

In general, legal experts are hesitant to use the word ‘certification’, which has legal significance and implies that an individual or organization is ‘certified’ or ‘certain’. It is unclear from the Report whether a church would be ‘certified’ as: (1) safe from abuse; or (2) free from abusers. In general, it can be problematic to allow or promote a system of SELF-certification. Generally, certification is valuable coming from an outside entity or individual that creates criteria and measures compliance – much like accreditation.

Self-assessment, as an alternative, can be valuable, allowing a church or ministry to evaluate existing preventative protocols and abuse response plans, and identifying areas for improvement. This pathway is being explored by many insurers for purposes of insurance coverage or renewal.

MinistrySafe’s Online Self-Assessment Tool

As standard of care experts, we provide training and guidance to underwriting and loss control representatives in the insurance industry. Through work with insurance carriers and other sexual abuse experts, MinistrySafe has developed an online Self-Assessment Tool that allows an organization to undertake a self-evaluation of these areas:

- Section 1: Abuse Training
- Section 2: Screening Practices
- Section 3: Policies & Procedures
- Section 4: Criminal Background Checks
- Section 5: Monitoring and Oversight
- Section 6: Abuse Reporting

Once complete, the online system provides an overall score, as well as sub-scores for each Section, followed by question-by-question analysis addressing strengths and weaknesses. Finally, the Self-Assessment provides specific recommendations for improvement in each area. [Sample MinistrySafe’s online Safety System Assessment](#)

BACKGROUND CHECKS

In Section EC-C(4), the Report makes recommendations related to criminal background checks: *We recommend that the SBC EC’s Sexual Abuse and Prevention Staff establish written model criteria, create resources, and make recommendations for screening, background checks, for state conventions, local associations, and churches ... facilitate an economical option for in-depth background checks.* See page 275.

Though not a stand-alone solution, the criminal background check is an important element of an effective safety system. The majority of conventions, associations and churches are currently performing background checks, but most misunderstand the role or efficacy of the background

check; it's *not* a silver bullet. Academic studies indicate that less than 10% of sexual abusers will *ever encounter* the criminal justice system. Several years ago, The Department of Justice opined that less than 4% of offenders would be criminally prosecuted. This results, first and foremost, because two out of three child victims *don't tell* until adulthood.

Criminal background checks have become a standard of care, but the Church greatly benefits from training to better understand what the background check does or *does not* accomplish, and to get better value from background checks by understanding common *plea-down, stair-step* or *grooming* offenses.

MinistrySafe's Background Check Training

MinistrySafe provides training related to criminal background checks: *Criminal Background Checks – Removing the Mystery*, providing in-depth instruction regarding the following:

- How Criminal Records are Created
- How Criminal Records are Stored
- How Criminal Records are Searched
- The Criminal Process Related to Sexual Abuse Crimes/Convictions
- Federal and State Legislation Impacting the Availability of Criminal Records
- Strategies and Best Practices in Use of Background Checks
- Adverse and Pre-Adverse Action Process Requirements

This training is currently available to Baptist state conventions, associations and churches.

[*Criminal Background Checks – Removing the Mystery*](#) [scroll down]

MinistrySafe's Background Check Service

MinistrySafe provides criminal background checks, currently serving hundreds of Baptist churches and many Baptist state conventions. MinistrySafe offers a full range of criminal and civil searches through an online platform managing all other safety system elements: training, screening, background checks, policies and more. Discounted pricing is available to the majority of Baptist ministries through their respective state conventions, associations or insurance carriers.

OFFENDER INFORMATION SYSTEM (OIS)

Section EC-5(b) outlines a recommendation for an Offender Information System 'to alert the community to known offenders.' The recommendation describes a web-based searchable system providing names, photographs, pastoral files and other information for someone credibly accused of 'sexual abuse' (as broadly defined).

MinistrySafe does not provide an Offender Information System.

The creation of an Offender Information System must occur with great care and precision. The law firm (Love and Norris) assisted the United States Olympic Committee and the US Center for Safe Sport in creating the infrastructure and due process protocols for a similar system related to youth sport. If an Offender Information System is created, the Safe Sport model should be evaluated, and we are willing to discuss an OIS as 'outside experts'.

SUMMARY

For three decades, we have created and refined sexual abuse prevention resources supported by an online management system allowing churches to implement an effective safety system. MinistrySafe constitutes the current resource of choice for the majority of SBC ministries, and we are eager to continue this work to further equip SBC conventions, associations, churches, camps and ministries.

Kimberlee Norris and Gregory Love are partners in the Fort Worth, Texas law firm of [Love & Norris](#) and founders of [MinistrySafe](#), providing child sexual abuse expertise to ministries worldwide. After representing victims of child sexual abuse for more than two decades, Love and Norris saw recurring, predictable patterns in predatory behavior. MinistrySafe grew out of their desire to place proactive tools into the hands of ministry professionals.

Love and Norris teach the only graduate-level course on Preventing Sexual Abuse in Ministry Contexts as Visiting Faculty at Dallas Theological Seminary.