

Emotional and Spiritual Safety



Meeting a standard for children's and youth physical safety is not only a good thing; it is also required by law! (Be sure to know and practice your church's protection policy.) Safety in the emotional and spiritual realms is equally important, but it may be overlooked, assumed, or minimized—even at church. For the church, emotional and spiritual safety should be a priority, for it is an integral part of helping students know Jesus and grow in Him.

THE MESSAGE

Emotional and spiritual safety sends a message: every student who participates in a children's or youth ministry deserves and needs to know that he or she is valued, loved, and protected.

Everything we say and do as leaders should communicate that message. Our goal is not only for children and youth to gain book knowledge, but also that their lives be transformed through understanding God's Word and applying it to their daily lives. Because we have the world's highest goal, we must be sure that our behavior delivers the world's highest message—a biblical message of love and care.

CORE BELIEFS

When adults hold the following core beliefs, they are ready to foster emotional and spiritual safety for children and youth:

- **Servanthood.** Believing that we are all here to love and help each other.
- **Value.** Believing that each child is valuable as a person, both to God and to us. Children will know they matter to God only when they see that they matter to us.
- **Faith.** Believing that every child can have a bright future in God's family. Children need for us to see their spiritual potential.
- **Trustworthiness.** Believing that a student's trust is a delicate gift that must be treated with care.
- **Honor.** Believing that when we honor a student, we honor Jesus.

Our students' daily lives can be hurried, complicated, and confusing. They may come to our programs carrying far greater burdens than we can imagine! The church should be a place where it is emotionally safe for children and youth to talk about what is going on in their lives. And the church should be a place where it is spiritually safe for them to ask hard questions and be heard, acknowledged, and answered.

Actions that nurture emotional and spiritual safety include: (1) listening with interest to what a student has to say and (2) making sure no student ever receives a negative label but does receive words of love, encouragement, and blessing. Beyond just knowing the material to be taught, Christian teachers are called to live in ways that genuinely display Christlike character and concern.