



Screening Standards

Understanding and using the Kids Hope USA Five-Step Screening Standards is an extremely important part of your role as a director. While it is designed to help you identify potential threats to your program, it is also the best way for you to provide quality mentors for your partner school. While each of the components helps screen for potential predators, they also help attract and retain individuals who have the sensitivity, commitment, and sense of responsibility to be great mentors. Take the time to be curious, ask follow-up questions, and record your responses. Following best practices now will help you build a safe and thriving program.

As outlined in training, the Kids Hope USA Screening Standards must be followed for everyone in your program who will have access to children—including your pastor, spouse, and best friend. In other words, there are no exceptions.

The Screening Standards have FIVE components:

1. The Application
2. The Interview
3. Reference Checks
4. Criminal History Check
5. Pastoral Review

Screening to Prevent Sexual Child Abuse

We cannot rely on background checks to identify predators – only 10% have a criminal history.

This is why the Application, Interview, Reference Checks, and Pastoral Approval are all critical components of the Screening Standards. Each of these steps will help discourage predators from applying and will help you identify them if they do.

It is important to note that many abusers gain access to children by appearing trustworthy, helpful, and outgoing to those who are 'in charge.' As the program director, a potential abuser may work to gain your trust. By being aware that predators manipulate and deceive, you are in a better position to keep an abuser out of your program.



Characteristics and High-Risk Indicators of Predators

Because sexual predators cannot be identified visually, we must review the application carefully and listen attentively during the interview and reference checks for high-risk or evasive responses. Paying attention on the front end, and having the mindset, 'not my kids, not on my watch,' will go a long way to protecting your students.

Use the information below to help you identify any red flags on the application or while conducting the interview and reference checks. Male offenders, who are 90% of all abusers, may have the following characteristics or risk indicators:

- Unstable work history
- Frequent or abrupt relocations
- Gaps in employment or residence history
- Job requiring frequent travel out of country
- Poor or remote relationships with references
- References that are much older or younger
- Past employers/supervisors are not identified
- No references in "kid context" for those with experience working with youth
- Lives far out of service area
- Applied/was not accepted by another program
- Expresses concern/discomfort regarding information sought
- Evasive or non-answers to direct questions regarding abuse
- Frequent activities with children, usually of a specific age and gender
- Skilled at meeting a child's needs
- Provides special privileges or gives gifts
- Has 'kid-magnet' hobbies, toys, activities; knows what's popular with preferred age & gender
- Photographs or videotapes children
- Unwilling to accept role as adult, instead identifies and prefers interaction with children
- Describes child as 'close' or 'best' friend • Describe children as possessions - 'that one is mine,' 'she belongs to me,' etc.
- Unrealistic beliefs concerning children (commonly uses words like 'pure,' 'innocent')
- History of extreme abuse/neglect as child, alcohol or drug abuse, depression
- Narcissistic, 'me-oriented' perspective, rarely a team player
- Asks questions about overnight trips
- Interested in establishing 'trusted time alone'
- Extreme behaviors
- Very secretive, unable to answer questions
- Impatient with the process; unusual anxiety to get started
- Inappropriate questions/comments/jokes
- Skillful at gaining trust of adults
- Exhibits exceptionally helpful and willing behavior
- Pattern of dating single moms
- Limited or shallow social interaction with peers
- Wants immediate access to organization gear/'swag' such as t-shirts
- Fails to honor appropriate program boundaries, often testing program guidelines and rules
- Playful but inappropriately 'touching' with children, pushes back on physical boundaries guidelines by engaging in tickling, wrestling, or rough housing



Kids Hope USA Screening Standards

1. **Application** – Give this to a potential mentor and set a date for its return. Follow up as needed but also give space for a person to self-select out of the process. A person may know they are not a good fit for mentoring, because they cannot pass the screening standards or other personal reason, yet do not wish to share this information with you. When the application is returned, make sure it is signed.
2. **Reference Checks** – Send the Personal Reference Form directly to the names provided on the application, either by mail or email. These should be returned to you directly at the church address. Or, you may fill out the form by calling the personal reference. You must verify and follow up with each reference.
3. **Interview** – To prepare for the interview, review the person's application and note anything you want to follow up on. During this time with the potential mentor, you will emphasize the training and other requirements for every mentor, the time commitment (one hour per week for one year), and your role as the director. The interview will take about an hour and will be invaluable both to the screening and matching process.
4. **Criminal Background Check** – Because every church and every school district have different requirements, consult with your school principal on the school district's policy for volunteer background checks; some school districts have their own background check process that will need to be followed. Also, discuss with your supervising pastor the level of background check the church desires for the mentors; most churches check at the same level as volunteers in your children's ministry, and this may be higher or lower than the school's requirements. Regardless, make sure to meet or exceed whatever policy is in place for the school, and recognize that the associated costs may need to be covered by the church.
5. **Pastor Review** – Share the names of the potential mentors with your supervising pastor using the Pastor Review Form. Their signature serves as a final reference and approval of a person's participation in the program.

As a reminder, whether a person is approved or declined as a mentor, you must keep the above documents in a locked file for 10 years, or the length established by your state.