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**ARTICLES**

# Caring Well for the sexually abused in the era of COVID-19

**ERLC Staff** ([https://erlc.com/multi\\_author/erlc-staff/](https://erlc.com/multi_author/erlc-staff/))

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When the COVID-19 crisis struck America it caused a disruption in all of our churches. It also has drawn attention away from another crisis that we were just beginning to address: the crisis of sexual abuse in our churches.

Last year, in response to the abuse crisis, the Southern Baptist Convention launched the Caring Well Challenge (CWC). The goal of the CWC is to equip churches to be safe for survivors and safe from abuse. The program provides churches with an adaptable and attainable pathway to immediately enhance their efforts to prevent abuse and care for abuse survivors.

The eight steps involved in the CWC are: **Commit, Build, Launch, Train, Care, Prepare, Share, and Reflect**. Here are some ways you can implement these steps during the pandemic.

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### 1. **Commit** (<http://caringwell.com/challenge/commit>): Commit to the Caring Well Challenge

The first step is to sign up for the Caring Well Challenge to ensure your church receives updates and resources throughout the year for accomplishing the next steps. If you haven't done so already, you can sign up [here](http://caringwell.com/challenge/commit) (<http://caringwell.com/challenge/commit>).

### 2. **Build** (<http://caringwell.com/challenge/build>): Build a Caring Well Team to lead your church's effort

The next step is to build a "Caring Well Team" to coordinate your church's efforts. This team should be composed of a small group of key leaders from your pastoral staff, student ministry, children's ministry, women's ministry, or marriage ministry.

You might also include church members with a background in fields experienced in responding to abuse such as social work, law enforcement, counseling, or education, and church members who have experienced abuse and are far enough along in their recovery.

Having a Caring Well team will ensure that a dedicated group within the church is committed to achieving the remaining steps and to long-term care and prevention.

### 3. [Launch](http://caringwell.com/challenge/launch) (<http://caringwell.com/challenge/launch>): Launch the Caring Well Challenge

Your entire congregation needs to know your church is taking the Caring Well Challenge, so the third step is to set aside time during your Sunday services to do five things:

1. **Acknowledge** the need for your church to grow in their awareness about, prevention of, and response to incidents of abuse. For survivors in your church, this may be the first time they've heard people in leadership acknowledge the need to grow in an area that has so radically impacted their life.
2. **Explain** the Caring Well Challenge so that your church knows what you will be doing over the next year.
3. **Introduce** your Caring Well team so that your church knows who will be leading the effort over the next year.
4. **Pray** for (a) those who are processing their own experience of abuse, (b) your church's Caring Well team, commissioning them, and (c) for the church at large to grow in this area.
5. **Share** resources related to the CWC. (See more on this below.)

Other resources that may be helpful during the CWC launch session include:

- [Video Announcement with Russell Moore \(https://vimeo.com/348686014\)](https://vimeo.com/348686014)
- [Video Announcement with J.D. Greear \(https://www.dropbox.com/s/b5czcra7bbhzq5j/JD%20Caring%20Well%20Challenge%20dl=0\)](https://www.dropbox.com/s/b5czcra7bbhzq5j/JD%20Caring%20Well%20Challenge%20dl=0)
- [Sharing the Caring Well Challenge with Your Church \(PDF\) \(https://caringwell.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ERL0049\\_CaringWellChallengePDF\\_072120.pdf\)](https://caringwell.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ERL0049_CaringWellChallengePDF_072120.pdf)
- [Bulletin Inserts \(ZIP\) \(https://caringwell.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Caring-Well-Bulletin-Insert.zip\)](https://caringwell.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Caring-Well-Bulletin-Insert.zip)
- [Prayer of Lament \(PDF\) \(https://caringwell.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/ERL9058\\_CaringWell\\_LamentPDF\\_Final\\_071719.pdf\)](https://caringwell.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/ERL9058_CaringWell_LamentPDF_Final_071719.pdf)
- [Preparing for Disclosure \(PDF\) \(https://caringwell.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/ERL9066\\_CaringWell\\_DisclosurePDF\\_081619.pdf\)](https://caringwell.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/ERL9066_CaringWell_DisclosurePDF_081619.pdf)

#### 4. [Train \(http://caringwell.com/challenge/train\)](http://caringwell.com/challenge/train): Train your team

Before your church begins to implement changes, it is important to ensure that your leaders are well trained on the issue of abuse.

The ERLC hosted a Caring Well Conference to provide teams with the opportunity to listen to survivors, learn from experts, and be equipped with an understanding of the full spectrum of abuse issues. The conference speakers covered a wide range of perspectives, and you may not agree with everything you hear. But we trust that the training you receive will be helpful and beneficial overall.

Although you can complete the training in a number of ways, we've outlined a [suggested calendar for training \(https://caringwell.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ERL0045\\_TrainSchedulePDF\\_FINAL\\_061620.pdf\)](https://caringwell.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ERL0045_TrainSchedulePDF_FINAL_061620.pdf) if you decide to meet four times for two-hour blocks. While you can complete the training individually, we recommend your Caring Well Team meet together online to discuss what you learn. Here are some possible discussion questions to ask during the group session:

- How were you challenged by the survivor story?
- What were your top takeaways from this week's sessions?
- How does this help us better prevent abuse in our setting?
- How does this help us better care for those among us who have been abused?
- How does this change the way we talk about abuse at our church?
- Of the sessions we watched this week, are there any that it would be helpful to have individuals or groups of individuals in our church watch (ex. elders, pastor, student pastor, children's pastor, pastoral team, children's ministry volunteers, etc.)?
- Are there changes that need to be made at our church?

If you complete these sessions and want to learn more, further videos are available here (<https://vimeo.com/showcase/6383529>).

5. [Care \(http://caringwell.com/challenge/care\)](http://caringwell.com/challenge/care): Equip leaders through *Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused* (<https://churchcares.com/>)

When a survivor of abuse is ready to confide his or her experience to someone in your church, that individual will talk with whomever he or she trusts most. That is why the entire leadership structure of your church—paid staff and key volunteers—needs to be equipped to care well.

Step five is for your pastoral staff to go through the *Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused* curriculum. This is a free 12-video curriculum. Each video is 20 minutes and is available in English and Spanish. At the conclusion of the training, your pastoral staff will be advised to send select videos to key lay leaders in your church.

Read more (<https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/what-is-the-becoming-a-church-that-cares-well-for-the-abused-curriculum>) about the *Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused* curriculum.

**6. Prepare** (<http://caringwell.com/challenge/prepare>): Enhance policies, procedures, and practices related to abuse

This sixth step in the challenge seeks to prepare your congregation to prevent abuse. The Introductory Guide to Caring Well (<https://caringwell.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Intro-Guide-to-Caring-Well.pdf>) can help you evaluate your church's policies designed to prevent abuse—both the policies you have on record and the actual implementation of those in practice.

Faye Scott has also written a helpful guide to implementing protocols to help protect against sexual abuse while meeting virtually (<https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/protocols-to-help-protect-against-sexual-abuse-while-meeting-virtually/>).

Churches want to hire well and want to protect the vulnerable in their midst. To aid this effort, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, in partnership with the Sexual Abuse Advisory Group, has created the Caring Well Hiring Guide (<https://caringwell.com/hiring/>) to provide a resource for churches to protect and care for their congregations well as they hire staff and select volunteers.

## 7. [Share](http://caringwell.com/challenge/share) (<http://caringwell.com/challenge/share>): Share CWC resources during the launch

Your congregation needs to know what came from the Caring Well Challenge they heard about on Launch Sunday. Step seven is to dedicate your Sunday services, on a date that works for your church, to focus on the subject of abuse and highlight the results of your efforts in the Caring Well Challenge.

While it isn't recommended to hold your Share Sunday if you are still meeting online, this season of meeting remotely can provide a unique opportunity to share resources on this topic. For example, you could share aspects of the training you received that would be helpful to the broader church congregation. You can also encourage members to download resources from your church's website since they are already online. Sharing resources can help to ensure they will engage with the material.

When your church is meeting in person and hosts a Share Sunday, a plan for how to utilize that opportunity and helpful resources for that day are available at [caringwell.com. \(https://caringwell.com/challenge/share/\)](https://caringwell.com/challenge/share/)

## 8. [Reflect](http://caringwell.com/challenge/reflect) (<http://caringwell.com/challenge/reflect>): Reflect on how God is using this time of pandemic to allow the church to focus on the abused among us.

COVID-19 has had a radical impact on our churches, affecting everything from where we meet to how we worship. Yet while much has changed, abuse is still a danger and may still be happening even behind the scenes. During this season God has forced us to reevaluate many of our priorities. But one priority we must not stop focusing on is preventing sexual abuse.

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## Related Resources

**SEXUAL ABUSE**

**How churches can avoid shaming survivors  
(<https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/how-churches-can-avoid-shaming-survivors/>)**

By ANONYMOUS

**SEXUAL ABUSE**

**What is the Caring Well Hiring Guide?  
(<https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/what-is-the-caring-well-hiring-guide/>)**

By TRAVIS WUSSOW

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## Initiatives



Stand for Life (<https://www.standforlife.org/>)

Psalm 139 Project (<http://psalm139project.org/>)

Global Hunger Relief (<http://www.globalhungerrelief.com/>)

Caring Well Initiative (<https://caringwell.com>)

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