



Child Protection Training Required Reading: Excerpts from *SafeGuards* by Julie Lowe

The following paragraphs are quoted from *SafeGuards: Shielding Our Homes and Equipping Our Kids* by Julie Lowe, a former counselor with CCEF (Christian Counseling Education Foundation). Although these are directed at parents, we consider it relevant for us as we teach, watch over, and care for children in our classes and activities. To aid in applying this we have added *volunteer worker* and other applicable words in italics where parents and parenting are named.

Intro

"For over twenty years I have worked with numerous churches, ministries, and families when the children under their care experienced abuse and mistreatment. I have met with many parents who ask heart-wrenching questions. They wonder how their child could have gotten caught up in online bullying, sexting, pornography, or grooming by a pedophile...

The alarming statistics related to child sexual abuse, online predation, severe bullying by peers, and more lead thoughtful parents (*volunteer workers*) to ask: How do we protect children and young people from such things happening? How do we proactively put in place safeguards to protect our children from the dangers of this world?" (pg.1)

Foundational Principles

"The foundation for all that is written in this book is threefold.

First, we live in a broken, fallen world. There is danger and evil, sickness and disease, corruption, deception, and temptation... "Evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." (2 Timothy 3:13)

Dangerous people prowl upon the weak and naïve. Evil is cunning; it deceives and entices. It promises pleasure but delivers brokenness. Evil is both done to us and seduces us from within. Accepting this reality means that we must raise children who can navigate and respond to potential dangers. (pg. 2)

Second, we teach our children to navigate this world by giving them the ability to discern good from evil and right from wrong. Our culture is pressing in on our children, indoctrinating them with false views of romance and love, morality and truth, sexuality and identity. Our world calls intolerant what is good and holy, and calls good what God calls wicked...

Keeping our children safe means we teach them God's ways – how he created us to live following him. Safety is built on the foundation of discerning right from wrong. Our children cannot safely navigate this world without the ability to distinguish good from evil.... Knowing good from evil, right from wrong is primary; safety skills are secondary. Safety skills are a fruit of the way we parent (*teach, care for*) our children." (pg. 3-4)

"The third foundation of this book is the understanding that our safety ultimately rests in the hands of our God. Psalm 37:39-40 reminds us, "The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; he is their stronghold in time of trouble. The Lord helps them and delivers them, he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him." Our ultimate hope is in a sovereign God who is our high tower, our very present help in trouble...

We are not to be passive in our engagement with injustice, danger, mistreatment, and evil. We must respond to it, while resting in our ultimate Protector." (pg. 5-6)

Unique Dangers in Our Modern World

"All it takes is less than an hour of watching the local news to become aware of the dangers that our children confront every day as they go out into the world...

With the entrance of social media and personal electronic devices, a world of new possibilities – carrying with it both blessings and dangers – have poured into our children's lives...

Peer pressure and influence is not a new thing. We can trace it back to Adam and Eve as they listened to the voice of evil pressuring them to not believe that God is good and for them...

We live in a world that is distinctly self-oriented. Consider these cultural clichés: "Look out for number one;" "You do you;" "The greatest love of all is self-love;" "Do what's right for you;" "Live your truth." The list can go on and on. Our kids are inundated with a version of moral relativism that seeks to sweep them away with the current of their peers.

Wise parenting (*teaching*) also helps children understand that there is also danger from within. Sin resides in the heart and is not easily visible. Every person – loved ones, trusted friends and acquaintances, respectable individuals with whom we live and work – is capable of being led astray into destructive choices. This includes our own children.

We can try to keep evil far from us, but we will fail because of the pervasive nature of sin and evil. Your children will be tempted by their own wrong desires. Just like you, they will sometimes fall. They will sometimes go in the wrong direction. But this is the very issue that the gospel of Jesus Christ addresses. Jesus died on a cruel cross because we are all sinners. On that cross, all of our sins were forgiven – the sins of parents (*volunteer workers*) and children alike... We have been rescued from ourselves – and continue to be. We and our families have been given a Helper and Comforter who transforms hearts and minds – places that no one else can go." (pg. 9-16)

Helping Parents (*volunteer workers*) to Recognize and Protect Children

“The pervasiveness of child sexual abuse can be difficult to verify since many instances are not reported. However, it is agreed upon by many that it is far greater than we might expect...One in four girls and one in thirteen boys are victims of child sexual abuse. The median age range of reported sexual abuse varies from age nine to as young as age two. Nearly 70% of reported abuse happens before the age of seventeen. In more than 90% of reported cases of child sex abuse, the children were victimized by someone they knew well.” (pg. 38)

“Parents (*volunteer workers*) tend to think of sexual offenders as some unknown individual “out there” prowling behind the schools and dark corners of society... If we believe a stranger, a hideous looking being, an obvious outrageous act, or an easily recognized “bad guy” is the primary threat, we may be lured into a false sense of safety when you don’t see anyone like that in their lives. But the sad reality is that evil intentions often hide in plain sight. Evil can and does masquerade as good, impersonates the upright; even the moral and virtuous. All the while, a person bent on sexual predation is often a master at concealing his or her intentions to gain access to a child for their own sexual gratification.” (pg. 39)

“Over and over, it is most often the people children know and interact with that will molest and harm, not the stranger. It is an aunt or uncle, a grandparent or older cousin, a babysitter you love and trust, or a youth volunteer you admire. It is crucial that we break down the mentality that the danger is “out there” somewhere. That belief prevents us from taking seriously the need to safeguard our children and our homes. You as a parent (*volunteer worker*) will also be targeted. Those who wish to prey upon your children will seek you out and gain your trust. They will hold respectable jobs, look clean cut, and speak well. They will be nice, friendly, approachable, and charming. They will do everything to present as non-threatening, honest, and respectable as possible. They will build relationship and trust (with both you and your child) to gain access into your child’s life. They work hard at gaining not only your child’s trust, but also your trust and confidence. Our initial response might be denial: “No way, not buying it. I would know,” However, our confidence can blind us from accepting the nature of deception.” (pg. 40)

“We do not always know the reason someone deceives us, but we can become more discerning to the signs of deceit. We can pay closer attention to people’s words and actions. We can begin observing patterns and behaviors that do not match up. We can notice when we feel uncomfortable or uncertain and stop to ask ourselves why. An adult who sexually abuses a child does not wake up one day and decide to abuse a child. It is not an impulsive act, but evil desires that have been fostered and developed until one conspires to act. There are often years of corrupted desires that have gone unchecked and unaddressed...Temptation and desire exist within each of us. We cannot see inside a person’s heart to know what temptations threaten to entice them, but we know that giving in to and fostering temptation gives birth to all types of destructive appetites and behaviors. The Bible explains it like this: “But each person is

tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire, then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (James 1:14-16)...Take, for example, a young person who is exposed to pornography. They do not know what to do or think, but it has elicited feelings and reactions they are ill-equipped to manage. If they don't go to an adult for help and interpretation, they will be left to make sense out of it themselves. Often, they slide into a struggle with lust. At what point will this be exposed? Will a parent be made aware? Now imagine that same child goes weeks, months, even years without anyone knowing – what does that do to him or her in the meantime? In many cases, a young person who has been enticed by pornography searches for ways to act out the sexual acts they are viewing. This may be with a willing peer, it may be with a sibling whom they have immediate access to and can easily persuade. It may be with an adult they meet online who is seeking them out. The danger is not “out there;” it can even reside within us. Understanding this will help us accept the possibility that someone close to you is capable of being corrupted.

We cannot know what goes on in another person's life and heart, but we can choose not to be naïve to it. You can choose to seek to understand the nature of self-deception, grooming, abuse, and a heart bent on evil. Once we are willing to consider such things, we can begin to prepare and prevent such things. The reality of danger, mistreatment, and abuse can cripple us with fear or push us to be equipped to recognize and respond. I want to encourage you to choose the latter...” (pg. 41-42)

“...the following are examples of grooming:

- Gradual use of affection
- Treating a child like a peer
- Crossing of physical boundaries
- Bribes or gifts
- Special favors or attention
- Manipulation
- Filling or creating a role in the child's life
- Flattery, inflating a child's self-esteem
- Isolation and control over a child
- Increased reasons for spending time with a child

At first, some of these behaviors appear to be genuine acts of kindness. Any respectable, well-intentioned adult may do a number of these things: make a child feel special, compliment, build trust, etc...However, there are many things you and I would not (or should not) do: inflate a child's self-esteem, isolate or control a child, cross physical boundaries, etc...You might notice it is the third time your niece asked to take your son to the park alone. You notice the uncle holding your child on his lap more often than before, and how he seems a bit overly affectionate. You begin noticing and feeling less comfortable because you have given yourself permission to notice.” (pg. 43-44)

“Consider how many times you and I feel uncomfortable with something that is happening, yet because we can't fully articulate why, we are quick to dismiss it as illegitimate. We tell ourselves that our concerns are unfounded. Our willingness to discount concerns because we cannot explain motive can lead to nothing more than an anticlimactic end to an interaction...but it could possibly lead to tragic outcomes. It is far better to take steps to avoid a

potentially harmful situation when you wonder what someone's intentions were, than to live with the regret of ignoring your concerns and finding out they intended harm... You do not want to be an alarmist, nor do you want to overreact. Perhaps the best approach is to start with a willingness to notice. This means being willing to step back and observe what is happening. We don't need to immediately assign value, good or bad; we are simply willing to pay attention and ask more questions." (pg. 53-54)

Children with Disabilities

"By virtue of age, size, and development, all children are vulnerable. But children with disabilities are even more vulnerable to sexual predators... Every child with a disability has different needs, vulnerabilities, strengths, and weaknesses... Whatever our children's situation there are precautions we can take to decrease children's vulnerability and keep them safe... Being proactive, not fearful, will help both us and our children feel confident about safety." (pg. 44)

God – Our Refuge

"When you are uncertain, pursue help; God will give you wisdom and equip you for every good work. As you do so, remind your children (and yourself) that we are called to be wise and discerning, but at the same time to trust that God is our ultimate safeguard. Pray with and for your children that the Lord will give them discerning hearts and protect them from all kinds of evil. Making these issues a matter of prayer will teach your children (and you!) who to turn to for the help we need to wisely navigate our world." (pg. 47)

"It is important to remember that although we would all like to believe that we can keep our children completely safe, that is not our guarantee. Our children are moral responders, and they will be facing many of the things mentioned in this book; they will have to make choices to discern what is wise and to do what is right and good... The truth is that, at some point, you are likely to experience the heartbreak and discouragement that comes with loving your children through their temptations, struggles, choices, and suffering... We cannot possibly know all that lies before us and before our children, but we can know who goes with us. Our refuge must always be in God's presence through the hard times. God does not guarantee that we will not face trouble, but he does promise that he will be our refuge and strength in the midst of trouble... He specializes in bringing beauty out of ashes, and he is able to do good even in the hardest of situations (Isaiah 61:3)." (pg. 194,195)

Ask the Spirit for Help

"God has given us his Spirit as a helper to equip us, and as we ask, the Holy Spirit will give us discernment and guidance in difficult moments. It is the Spirit of God who opens our eyes to perceive what is happening before us and it is the Spirit who gives direction.

Divine hope is the certainty of God's faithfulness despite what we are going through. It is the certainty that no matter what our children might face, God is up to something good in their lives. Our God is familiar with suffering and well-acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3). But the sorrow of the cross was wiped away on Easter morning. Because our God suffered and died for us, we know he understands and sympathizes with our suffering. We know that he forgives our many sins. We know that our children can always turn to God and receive forgiveness and help in their time of need. The resurrection is our guarantee that our hope will not be disappointed.

I opened this book with Psalm 4:8 "In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety." In closing, I want to remind you to dwell in the One who is your source of safety and your child's source of safety. He is your refuge and strength and, come what may, will be your refuge and strength. The Lord will be your safeguard and he will be your children's safeguard." (pg. 196-198)

SafeGuards: Shielding Our Homes and Equipping Our Kids by Julie Lowe, published by New Growth Press, copyright 2022. Available in the church library.

Note From LCC Staff

Thank you for taking the time to read this summary. If you have any questions or if you are struggling in thinking about these things, please talk them over with us. Andrew Gerber, Jenna Bahler, Charity Stutzman and Davett Coffman have all helped in gathering this training. They can help you sort through the fears and uncertainties this topic can bring. We are all keeping our eyes open together; you're not doing it alone.