

This resource is one of many available to you through the *Second Step* Child Protection Unit, a comprehensive school-based child protection program, which includes staff training, student lessons, and family resources. Access additional free resources on child sexual abuse prevention for parents at earlyopenoften.org.

Screening and Hiring Procedures

Consistent use of a thorough screening and hiring procedures helps ensure all employees and volunteers working with children are the best candidates for their positions. Implementing the components described below can also deter potential abusers since it communicates your school or program's commitment to protecting its children from all forms of abuse.

Written Application

This should include the following:

- Space for them to sign to give permission to contact personal references and conduct background checks
- A self-disclosure statement, which is a space for them to declare past criminal activity

Caution: Providing space to declare past criminal activity involving child abuse is no guarantee that an applicant will do so. But including it demonstrates your commitment to protecting children and may deter a past offender from seeking employment.

Policy Statement Of Receipt and Agreement

This ensures that applicants read your safe environment policy and code of conduct. Applicants' signatures indicate they've understood the policies and will comply with them if hired. Do this during or soon after the personal interview. You can find a sample of this in the Staff Code of Conduct PDF on SecondStep.org.

Reference Check

Applicants should be required to provide two or three professional references who can verify their work experience and comment on their job performance.

Caution: If the information provided during the check is limited to verification of an applicant's length of employment and job duties, this is a possible red flag. You may need to check if company policy limits their ability to discuss the applicant.

Criminal Background Check

The three cautions below limit the effectiveness of a criminal background check, but it remains an important component to ensure due diligence in your screening and hiring process.

Cautions

- Cases of abuse and neglect often go unreported and, therefore, do not result in a conviction.
- Open arrests—cases in which a conviction has not been made—will also not usually appear in a criminal record. However, in some background checks, pending criminal cases are listed.
- The U.S. does not have one criminal database that includes every criminal record.

Screening and Hiring Procedures, continued

Note: Your administration may have a current policy about screening applicants and may handle criminal background checks for both certificated and non-certificated staff working with children. It may be their responsibility to ensure criminal background checks comply with the federal and state laws that protect an applicant's privacy. These laws may stipulate the types of background checks permitted, the process for conducting a check, the cost and turnaround time, and what convictions may disqualify an applicant. Your administration should also have a procedure for reviewing the background checks and storing them in a secure location.

Your Responsibility

Regardless of your administration's screening policy, it is ultimately your responsibility to verify a criminal background check has been completed and the applicant has been cleared before he or she is hired and allowed to interact with children. The same follows for any adults who may have access to children, including volunteers and contractors. You should also reserve the right (and in many states are required) to conduct background screening at any time after employment or volunteer service has begun, and to do so again periodically.

Sex Offender Registry Check

This verifies that an applicant is not a registered sex offender and so is an important check for preventing staff sexual misconduct. It may be included in some criminal background checks (for example, an FBI criminal background check).

Note: Most states have sex offender registries available online, but what constitutes a sex offender varies from state to state. The U.S. Department of Justice National Sex Offender Public Website provides public access to each participating state-level sex offender website. A few states will allow you to check their child abuse registry, which can include complaints of abuse that did not result in arrest or conviction and would not show up in a criminal background check.