

## 8. Procedures if Abuse is Disclosed or Discovered

### 8.1 Types of abuse

a) **Physical abuse** - where children are physically hurt.

This may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. 90% of children who are abused have visible injuries. Physical abuse should be suspected when the explanation of the injury does not fit the facts or if the child is reluctant to say how the injury happened. However, it is important to remember that children do sometimes hurt themselves accidentally. It is when the same event seems to occur more than once that you should be wary.

b) **Neglect** - the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs or where a child's basic needs (e.g. food, warmth, clothing, medical care, shelter) are not met.

c) **Emotional abuse** - the persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development and behaviour, and where a child suffers as a result of a constant lack of affection, verbal attacks, bullying, racial and other harassment which undermine a child's confidence.

d) **Sexual abuse** - where adults (and sometimes other children) use children to satisfy their sexual desires and where children are exploited by others to meet their own sexual needs. This may be sexual intercourse, fondling, masturbation, oral sex and exposure to pornographic material including videos.

### 8.2 Signs of abuse

Knowing whether a child is being abused or neglected may be difficult to judge. However, those working with young people should be alert to the potential indicators.

a) **Physical abuse**

- repeated injuries;
- unexplained or hidden injuries;
- lack of medical attention;
- injuries for which the explanation seems inconsistent.

b) **Neglect**

- consistently looking uncared for and unhappy;
- being withdrawn or aggressive;
- having lingering injuries or health problems.

c) **Emotional abuse**

- change in behaviour pattern;
- reverting to younger behaviour;
- wetting during the day;
- nervousness;
- sudden under-achievement;
- attention-seeking;
- running away;
- turning to drink or drugs.

#### d) **Sexual abuse**

- preoccupation with sexual matters evident in work, play and drawings;
- being sexually provocative with adults;
- disturbed sleep;
- nightmares;
- bed-wetting;
- secretive relationships with adults or children;
- tummy pains with no apparent cause;
- lack of confidence and self-esteem.

It should be recognised that this list is not exhaustive and the presence of one or more indicators is not in itself proof that abuse is actually taking place. It is also important to remember that there might be other reasons why most of the above are occurring. It is also important to recognise that young people can be subject to abuse in any and every setting where they have contact with adults.

### **8.3 What should be done if abuse is suspected or disclosed**

#### a) **Individuals should:**

- not take responsibility for deciding whether or not child abuse is actually taking place;
- not act alone;
- not take sole responsibility for what has been shared or any concerns they may have;
- not start to investigate.

#### b) **Individuals must:**

- discuss concerns without delay with the Responsible Person. In the first instance, it will usually be appropriate to inform their Principal Leader. One of them should then consult with the Responsible Person, the Youth Co-ordinator or the Minister, who will take the appropriate action. Information about abuse may need to be passed to the relevant agencies. Remember that any information given must be regarded as confidential. It must not be discussed in front of young people or parents collecting their children. The nature and severity of concerns that a young person or an adult may share will vary considerably. The response expressed by a young person or worker in the Church will be determined by the seriousness of what has been shared.

#### c) **Recording concerns and disclosures of abuse**

When a young person tells you about the abuse, or an incident takes place that gives rise to concern, a written record should be made and forwarded to the Responsible Person immediately. The record should:

- be legible;
- state the facts accurately;
- be made as soon as possible after the disclosure/incident.

Written record should include:

- the young person's name, address and date of birth;
- the nature of the concern/allegation/disclosure;
- a description of any visible bruising or other injuries;
- an exact record of what the young person has said, using his or her own words. A young person's behaviour and demeanour might also give some indication of what he or she means to say, and these should also be noted.
- what was said by the person to whom the concerns were reported;
- any action taken as a result of the concerns (eg. who was spoken to and resulting action, including any contact with parents or the Responsible Person within the Church.).

Records should be:

- signed and dated;
- kept secure and confidential, and made available only to the Minister and either the Responsible Person or the Youth Co-ordinator, as well as representatives of professional agencies as required by them.

If concerns involve the Minister, the Responsible Person or the Youth Co-ordinator, the deacons should identify another person with whom the concerns can be discussed.

#### **8.4 The role of the Responsible Person if abuse is disclosed or discovered**

When there is an incident, it is the role of the Responsible Person to consider how best to respond to the reported concerns. He or she should be aware of limitations in assessing the seriousness of the concern and be ready to consult with people who have greater experience and expertise.

The Responsible Person will need to make decisions about the following:

1. Do I consult with someone outside the Church?

- Unless the Responsible Person is confident that other advice need not be sought in any given instance, the presumption should be to consult.
- At this stage, care should be given not to identify the young person or others involved.
- A Responsible Person who has professional expertise in child protection will be more competent to judge the seriousness of concerns and to act accordingly.

2. Do I inform the parents/carers?

- In situations where abuse from outside the immediate family is suspected, all agencies and organisations working with young people are encouraged to inform parents/carers of actions that are taken or concerns that are raised.
- The Responsible Person should share with the parents/carers if it is his/her intention to consult with or refer to Social Services, unless this puts the young person at further risk. The advice of Social Services should be sought on how best to proceed.
- When it is believed that a parent/carer may be physically or sexually abusing a young person, a referral should always be made to Social Services and the Responsible Person should not inform the parents/carers that the referral has been made.
- After a referral is made to Social Services, the Responsible Person will be advised about what action to take to respond to the concerns.
- When the cause for concern has been dealt with, an Incident Report Form (see Appendix 13) should be completed for the purpose of keeping records.

#### **8.5 How to care for the people involved**

Once concerns, suspicions or disclosures of abuse have been addressed appropriately, the Church continues to have a responsibility to offer support to all those who have been affected.

#### **8.6 How to care for an offender in the Church**

Those with convictions for harming children or young people should be welcomed into the Church. However, they should not be involved with the youth work or have direct contact with them for any reason.

An open discussion must be held with the person concerned in which clear boundaries are established for their involvement in the life of the Church. A written contract should be drawn up which identifies appropriate behaviour and the person should be asked to sign this (ref. Page 29 section 3.11 of the Baptist Union's *Safe to Grow* book). Consideration should be given as to who is present at such a meeting. It is likely to include a small number from the following: Minister, Responsible Person, an independent person, Deacon(s), Youth Co-ordinator. There may also be someone not included in this list who could lead the meeting and keep everyone in focus.