

Keeping Children Safe in Church (Child Protection)

“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”

Matthew 18:5-7

Definition

To ‘protect’ means to defend from trouble, harm or attack (Collins English Dictionary).

Key Concepts

Key concepts relating to keeping children safe in church centre on:-

- The recognition and acknowledgement of the safety of children being of paramount importance, and relevant national standards of the Children Act 1989 are met, i.e. registration is required for activities taking place more than five days a year and more than 2 hours a day for under eights
- The recognition and acknowledgement that no community is exempt from child abuse – churches, therefore, have a responsibility to prepare themselves to have a well-thought out response
- The recognition and acknowledgement that children, as well as adults, have certain rights, namely:-
 - To stay safe from maltreatment, neglect, violence, and sexual exploitation
 - To stay safe from accidental injury and death
 - To stay safe from bullying and discrimination
 - To stay safe from crime and anti-social behaviour in and out of school (whether this is supplementary school, Sunday school, or other places of learning)
 - To have security, stability and are cared for
- The recognition and acknowledgement that the law, particularly in the area of the physical punishment of children, is unclear and depends on circumstances. Parents may claim a defence of ‘reasonable chastisement’ if they hit their child, but:
 - Physical punishment is unlikely to be seen as reasonable chastisement if there is a mark on the child, or if the child is hit with a cane, stick, belt or other implement.
 - Parents can be prosecuted even if the chastisement takes place at home or at church
 - It is illegal for teachers, (including those in supplementary schools) nursery workers and childcare workers to hit another person’s child, even if the parent has given permission

Specifically

Keeping children safe in church should include the following:-

- The recognition and acknowledgement that churches need to provide a safe environment, with a child-centred, open atmosphere that aims to minimise the risk of harm to children and young people
- The recognition and public acknowledgement that all are equal in the sight of God, and as such it is the responsibility of the church to ensure that safety and justice be available to all its members, both young and old, black and white, able-bodied and disabled, etc.
- The need to have guidelines when appointing people to work with children or young people in any capacity

- A named person specifically appointed by the church to be responsible for Child Protection
- The need to provide regular training on child protection for:-
 - Those with overall authority, i.e. pastors, elders, etc
 - Those who have the responsibility of appointing children's workers
 - Those who work directly with children i.e. Sunday School teachers, youth workers, etc
- Paying for CRB (Criminal Record Bureau) checks on staff and volunteers who work directly with children or young people
- The need for the issue of keeping children safe 'live' within the church, by undertaking the following:-
 - Continuing to mention the Biblical and moral importance of safety for children in preaching, teaching, etc
 - Ensuring the church is "child friendly", i.e. having posters up from Kidscape and Childline, as well as eye-catching home-made (by children) posters on saying "no", etc.
 - Displaying a photograph of the person responsible for Child Protection in a prominent position in the church, so that they can be recognised by the children.
 - Talking about this issue in less formal settings, i.e. house groups.
 - Having resources available in the church to borrow, both for children and for adults, i.e. "Secrets" and "My Book, My Body", both available from The Children's Society

Possible Discussion Statements

The following statements could form the basis for discussion within house groups, Bible study or children's church, etc:-

- It is very painful to have to believe that abuse of children may occur within our own church but it is not impossible ...
- "Spare the rod and spoil the child" Pr 13:24 "Anyone who harms any one of these little ones ... millstone round his neck". What do these mean today?
- Abuse is the opposite of caring for and being sensitive to the needs of others – a deliberate over-riding of the needs of one individual to meet the needs of another.
- Many adults have experienced abuse in some form. Discussion about this issue may bring back old memories in a painful way. Is your church equipped to cope with this in a spirit of humility and sensitivity?

Key Agencies/Resources

- **Barnardos**, Tanners Lane, Barkingside, Ilford, IG6 1QG. Tel 020 550 8822. A national charity which provides a wide range of support services for children, young people and their families.
- **Churches Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS)**, PO Box 133, SWANLEY, Kent, BR8 7UQ. Tel: 0845 120 4550. Provides professional child protection advice and support to churches and organisations
- **National Children's Bureau**, 8 Wakely Street, London, EC1V 7QE. Tel: 020 7843 6000. A national charity which provides a wide range of information on the current and future agenda for children's services, including anti-bullying alliance, HIV forum, etc.
- **Kidscape**, 2 Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0DH. Tel: 020 7730 7081. A national organisation which is committed to keeping children safe from abuse
- **4Children** (formerly Kids Clubs Network), City Reach, 5 Greenwich View Place, London E14 9NN. Tel: 020 7512 2112. A national charity dedicated to offering strategic Support on a wide range of children's issues

- **National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)**, Weston House, 42 Curtain Road, London, EC2A 3NH. Tel: 020 7825 2500. A national organisation which aims to end cruelty to children.
- **The Children's Society**, Edward Rudolf House, Margery Street, London WC1X 0JL. Tel: 0845 300 1128. A national Christian organisation involved in social justice for children and child-centred issues.

Useful Websites

- <http://www.barnardos.org.uk> – Barnardos
- <http://www.ccpas.co.uk> – Churches Child Protection Advisory Service
- <http://www.kidscape.org.uk> – Kidscape
- <http://www.ncb.org.uk> – National Children's Bureau
- <http://www.kidsclubs.org.uk/> – 4Children
- <http://www.nspcc.org.uk> – National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children
- <http://www.childrensociety.org.uk> – Children's Society
- <http://www.diochi.org.uk/cp/guide> – Anglican Diocesan child protection procedures
- <http://www.parentsonline.gov.uk> – a guide to keeping children safe on the internet