

SECTION 5**WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

This section gives practical guidance on how to act when working with children and young people

It is for **all** those working with children and young people, whether paid or unpaid

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5.1 Basic principles about working with children

Our ways of working with children are shaped by our own experiences of being children, and of raising or caring for children, by our culture and beliefs, and by the community and the state.

Our theological and Christian understanding about children and our practice is a profound influence (see Section 1).

The Children Act 1989 states that the welfare of the child is paramount and that when considering a child's needs issues of race, religion, language and culture must be taken into consideration.

The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Act 1998 address, among other things, issues of gender, disability and sexual orientation of children.

5.2 Good working practice

A quote from the Diocese of Sheffield Balance advice card

- *Treat all children and young people with dignity and respect*
- *Respect personal privacy*
- *Be sensitive to others*
- *Provide access for young people to talk to others about their problems*
- *Follow accepted guidelines relating to contact with children and young people*
- *Challenge unacceptable behaviour eg bullying*
- *Plan activities appropriately*
- *Do not rely on your good name to protect you*
- *Provide an example for others to follow*
- *Do not show favouritism to any individual*
- *Remember that your actions may be misinterpreted by others*
- *Regularly review your work with others*
- *Never exaggerate or trivialise child abuse issues*

5.3 Responding to a child

Please see Section 4.1 – “Responding when a child confides in you” and what action to take - and Appendix I about recording.

- Listen, and keep listening
- Don't ask probing questions
- Accept what you hear without passing judgement
- Tell the child what you are going to do
- Write down the facts as soon as possible and keep a copy
- Contact the Diocesan Child Protection Adviser (DCPA)
- Refer to the clergy or the Archdeacon. In their absence, take action yourself
- Don't talk to others or contact the person involved

5.4 Working with black children

Please see Section 1.5 for a definition of racism. The Report (2003) by Lord Laming of the Inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié comments on the role of people in voluntary agencies, including the church, and their duty to report concerns about a child and to work with statutory agencies in the care and protection of children.

When working with a black child and their family, there needs to be awareness of the impact of racism upon the family, and particular attention paid to institutional racism, alongside any deep-rooted personal prejudices or stereotypes held by the worker. Black children and adults are often reluctant to talk about abuse, as they are afraid of stigmatisation and betraying their community. Churches with black workers and volunteers who are listened to and respected by black and white children and adults are rich in resources which will promote the safety of all children.

We in the Church who want to help a child feel safe enough to confide in us if they are being, or have been, abused, and to help them overcome the effects of abuse, need to understand the effects of racism on that child. It is not uncommon for a black child who has been abused to start to deny being black. The black child's identity is usually only positively reinforced within the home, so if this is where the abuse is taking place, then the abuse mirrors for them the negative societal images of being black. In responding to black children, we need to be aware of this and seek advice and guidance from black workers with expertise in their area. We should not, however, leave it to black workers but address the issues in ourselves in order to be helpful to children.

All churches should receive training that includes some race awareness, and have accessible contact points for advice and support (see Appendix A).

5.5 Children and adults with learning disabilities

By learning disability, we are referring to those adults and children with significant lifelong difficulties in intellectual development and the adaptive behaviours involved in everyday living skills. Learning disability is the term generally preferred in official legal and medical circles and is commonly used in adult services. Educational services often use the term "learning difficulties", although this encompasses a wider range of children than those specifically addressed here.

Abuse of all types happens to children and adults with learning disabilities much more often than was initially realized. Research is beginning to reveal the enormity of a crime specifically committed against people with learning disabilities. Mencap has highlighted in a recent campaign the high incidence of bullying experienced by people with learning disabilities. There is also some evidence to suggest that some perpetrators of sexual abuse may target people with learning disabilities.

It is important that special consideration is given to the possibility of abuse of those who may be **especially** vulnerable. This includes both children and adults with a learning disability. It is important to stress that such adults should not be considered or treated in any way as children, but may be vulnerable and require protection from abuse. Hence our particular concern. People with learning disabilities over the age

of eighteen do not have the same legal protection offered to children through the Children Act and Child Protection Procedures.

Our instinctive reaction to the fact that children and adults with learning disabilities may be abused can be an unwillingness to contemplate it. It seems inconceivable that such a vulnerable group should be submitted to abuse. Abuse is often not recognised, or is denied in this group due to our unwillingness to recognise it or as a result of the difficulties we experience in communicating with people with learning disabilities. Our feelings may include those of distaste, intense anger, or guilt. As we know, the enormity of feelings associated, particularly with sexual abuse, can result in our turning away from the survivor's needs. In the face of so much pain, it becomes easy to deny the existence of abuse. We must not pretend that the presence of a learning disability somehow protects the individual from the impact of his/her abusive experience.

There are indeed many reasons why this group of people may in fact be more vulnerable to abuse. It is well recognised that many children and adults with learning disabilities may have a greater than usual belief in the power of others. They may be more vulnerable to the bribes and threats of perpetrators, which can make it more frightening to reveal that they are being abused. Some people with learning disabilities remain dependent on others for care, including intimate care, throughout their life, which may make it difficult for them to distinguish appropriate and inappropriate behaviour from others. The distress and trauma caused by the abuse may not always be shown when disclosed, thus giving an impression of a lack of concern or distress in the victim. We must be extremely cautious in how we interpret this apparent lack of distress. This is particularly important when it is possible to ask a person a question that they understand but to which they are unable to respond verbally.

Communication Issues

It is now recognised that a learning disability, especially if accompanied by significant communication difficulties makes a person more vulnerable to the possibility of abuse. The communication difficulties encountered may be:

- experienced by the person with learning disabilities. They may have difficulties in either understanding what is being said to them or in expressing themselves in a way that others understand. It is important to remember that not being able to speak is not the same as having nothing to say
- encountered by those in contact with the person. They may lack the appropriate personal communication skills themselves (eg using appropriate spoken and non-verbal language or using particular forms of communication, such as signing or symbol systems). They may also have limited ability to interpret attempts to communicate made by the person with learning disabilities.

Support

Communicating what has happened to them may be especially difficult for the person with learning disabilities. If they do disclose abuse, others may find it hard to

interpret both their verbal and non-verbal communication. The provision of additional support – such as individuals who are familiar with the person's methods of communication, visual aids and the use of specialised communication methods such as signs and symbols – will be especially useful. There may be people in the congregation and local community with particular skills to share in this area, such as speech and language therapists, or special needs teachers and tutors.

Action

As we may have difficulty in both identifying abuse and in hearing and believing a disclosure, advice should be sought as soon as there is the slightest concern about someone. To protect, it is necessary to be vigilant and err on the side of caution if necessary (see Section 4).

Such are the concerns about this group of people that a national organisation – The Anne Craft Trust (formerly NAPSAC) exists to highlight the issues, promote research, train staff and others, and provide advice and resources where appropriate (See Appendix K).

NB In July 2001 the House of Bishops agreed that a paper entitled “The protection of vulnerable adults: the mistreatment of adults by those authorised by Bishop's Licence to leadership positions in the church” should be sent to all Diocesan Bishops in order that they might consider how the paper could provide resource material for those concerned with continuing Ministerial education, adult education and anyone developing codes of conduct eg a parish.

For more resource material about the protection of vulnerable adults, please contact the Diocesan Social Responsibility Officer (see Appendix A).

5.6 Dealing with physical contact

The question of physical contact with children is often emotionally highly charged. The principle at stake is not whether touching/physical contact should be allowed or forbidden, but how to ensure that physical contact is safe – safe primarily for the child, but also for the helper.

Any physical contact should reflect the child's needs, not the adult's, and should

- be appropriate to the age and understanding of the child and generally be initiated by the child rather than the adult
- only take place in public

as adults, we do well to check what is motivating us to reach out physically to a youngster. Do we need this contact for our own comfort or reassurance? Always ask “whose needs am I meeting in this situation?”

Remember also that:

- any physical activity which is, or may be thought to be, sexually stimulating to the adult or the child should be avoided; thus in offering physical contact, it is not appropriate to hold the youngster face to face. An arm around the shoulder when the youngster is alongside is more appropriate
- whilst children have the right to decide how much physical contact they have with others, there are exceptions eg when they need medical attention
- it is appropriate for helpers to monitor one another. They should be free to help the other by pointing out anything which could be misunderstood. If a worker persists in inappropriate behaviour, this must be challenged. If they are concerned about an adult's contact with a young person, they must seek advice immediately, either from the Named Person or the DCPA
- any guidelines on physical contact should be discussed with parents/carers and confirmed in writing with them. The wishes of parents/carers in relation to physical contact should always be respected.

5.7 Coping with difficult behaviour

Coping with difficult behaviour perhaps causes the most anxiety for people working with children and young people. Handling difficult behaviour is stressful. Increasing awareness of child protection issues means that "old fashioned" ways of dealing with children and young people may be inappropriate.

The important thing is to be prepared but you can be caught unawares. Managing difficult behaviour can be an ongoing problem. Whether the difficult behaviour is one-off or ongoing, dealing with it can leave you feeling exhausted and, in the long term, disillusioned. When difficult behaviour arises:

- assess what response is appropriate. Difficult behaviour can range from mild rudeness to placing people in danger or to damaging property. Depending on the circumstances, it might be appropriate to ignore it, delay dealing with it, or deal with it immediately
- you should not be left to deal with difficult behaviour alone. Other workers should be prepared to provide appropriate support, but you should avoid ganging up on a young person
- if conflict arises out of the difficult behaviour, don't react off the cuff but try to create space to think. You could:
 - take a deep breath and count to five
 - take note of their feelings. Don't let feelings override what you know to be good practice, in your own interests as well as that of the child
 - try to engage with the child without putting them down, to help them work through what's happening. Asking them questions may help, eg "What do you think other people feel about what you are doing?"

- try to take the heat out of the situation. For example, avoid eye-to-eye contact, avoid physical contact, but do try to negotiate a resolution. Remember that conflict situations can be learning opportunities
- if difficult behaviour is part of a group's culture, then the leaders should meet to plan how to deal with it
- similarly, when difficult behaviour arises, leaders should meet to debrief after a meeting. They can learn from any mistakes and identify the good practice. They should record what happened and what action was agreed
- inform someone who is outside the situation, preferably a representative of the PCC or PCC sub group or the Incumbent
- if difficult behaviour is persistent and unmanageable, then you should seek further support. This is available from the Diocesan Children's Officer and the Diocesan Youth Officer at Church House, and the DCPA who will also have information about the training offered in some local authorities.

5.8 Physical Restraint

In certain circumstances a child may become violent or uncontrollable to the extent that they threaten to cause harm to themselves or to another person. In this situation it may be necessary to exercise physical restraint. The same may be true if a child is damaging property.

Leaders need to be prepared to deal with such situations by agreeing a protocol in advance. Leaders must consult with parents/carers of a child who is known to be violent or uncontrollable about appropriate physical restraint in exceptional circumstances.

Such a protocol should be agreed between the leaders, the Incumbent and put in writing with the parents/carers knowledge and agreement is at all possible.

It is important for everyone to know that in the case of assault and/or criminal damage the Police will be contacted.

See "Good Working Practice" card – supplies available from Diocesan Church House or the DCPA.

Reference:

David Pearson – "Don't Touch the Children", Caring Magazine, Summer 2001
Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS)

Caring for Young People and Vulnerable Adults: guidance for preventing the abuse of trust. Proposals issued by the Archbishops' Council, 2001