

FAQ's

Why doesn't CCPAS...



At CCPAS we regularly find that a current event or area of concern prompts a deluge of enquiries from the people we meet and those contacting us via our helpline. This is the new FAQ page where we will address the issues you raise. This information will also be displayed on the FAQ page of our website.

CCPAS is an independent Christian-based organisation working with the whole spectrum of churches, other faiths and non faith-based organisations throughout the UK. Our primary concern is the security and safety of children and it is not within our remit therefore to challenge specific beliefs and practice unless they are harmful to children. The abuse of children in any form is rigorously opposed by CCPAS and allegations or concerns are immediately reported to the proper authorities.

In Eleanor Stobart's report for the government, "Child Abuse linked to accusations of 'possession' and 'witchcraft'", she stated that belief in 'possession' and 'witchcraft' is widespread. She identified cases worldwide from a variety of backgrounds, including African, South Asian, and European. The report analyses 38 known cases involving abuse in a 5-year period in England. This compares with more than 72,000 child protection investigations in England in a single year. Of course, like any other form of abuse, only what is known about can be reported on, but the evidence shows that abuse

Why doesn't CCPAS challenge the belief that children are demon possessed?

occurs when attempts are made to 'exorcise' children.

The Stobart report highlights the fact that social factors make a child more vulnerable to an accusation of 'possession' or 'witchcraft'. These include family stress, change of family structure, disability, a child with a difference, and a weak bond of affection between carer and child. The report also stresses that police and social workers are unlikely to be able to change the belief systems of carers. This is where our work has proved invaluable because of our experience and understanding of faith issues.

Belief in possession does not in itself, in the vast majority of cases, result in abuse. In western society it is not unusual for spirits, supernatural forces or even bad luck to be blamed for things that go wrong. These beliefs or superstitions occur in many walks of life with us hardly noticing. How many hotels do not have a room number 13?

Having said this, telling a child that they have been, or are, a witch etc is completely different. In our view this is abusive and totally unacceptable. Some concerned groups and individuals have lobbied to make such practice a legal offence but this

would be a legislative minefield and impossible to enforce. For example, would you bring charges against a parent who makes a passing comment to a child, 'You've got a devil in you'? Does such a single statement constitute an offence that is actionable? Surely the real issue relates to the effect that such verbal statements have on the child. If children are being emotionally harmed through such behaviour, action is already possible both through criminal and civil proceedings. The difficulty always is proof – a problem that arises with most forms of emotional abuse.

So what is the answer? In the view of CCPAS, the solution in the majority of cases is an emphasis on educating church leaders, workers and parents and developing sound policies and good practice. This essential preventive work coupled with building good working relationships between churches, community organisations and statutory agencies will not only lessen the possibility of abuse but also identify abusive practice where it occurs, and make it more likely that the necessary evidence to take action is forthcoming. To challenge beliefs as opposed to behaviour can cause barriers to engaging with some communities which can in turn prevent access

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to the provision of training, education and services available through voluntary and statutory agencies.

Faced with a situation therefore, where it is suggested a child has a demon or is a witch and needs deliverance, we seek to bring an understanding of the situation through dialogue, and demonstrate an alternative way of responding to the issues, as illustrated in the case studies here.

We stress the fact that children are easily frightened and very susceptible to suggestion. They may also be upset by shouting and will easily believe they are bad, wicked etc. A child should never be told that they are demonised, possessed or oppressed.

Following a recent consultation across a number of church groups, CCPAS proposed a model for praying with children. This is based on acceptance and respect of the child, non-judgemental listening, showing sensitivity, discernment and patience. These guidelines can be found in the most recent update of our child protection manual 'Guidance to Churches' and on the CCPAS website (Caring - Spring 2005).

As an organisation we promote good care of children and challenge poor and abusive practice. Within a Christian context we often use the model Jesus portrayed in the Gospels as an example. In all his dealings with children, he was

approachable, gentle and never frightening.

Whatever the views of a faith group, the interests and welfare of children are paramount. Helping parents, carers and leaders understand and appreciate the needs of a child and giving practical advice on parenting is a priority. A ministry based on such principles will be fruitful, effective and enrich the lives of those children.

CASE EXAMPLES

Case No 1

When CCPAS and the Metropolitan Police provided training for Congolese leaders at the beginning of 2006, a woman told the group that in Congo she had been experiencing difficulty with her son. She was told that he had a demon and a pastor prayed for deliverance. She came to England and was told that he was autistic and he was sent to a special school. In his teens he became difficult again and in particular quite unmanageable in the car. The woman related how she took her son to her 'wise Congolese pastor' to ask him to pray the demons out. He told her that the lad did not have a demon, but raging hormones. He was like any other young person of his age, but was not able to express himself. She went on to describe how the pastor gave her a practical behaviour management programme, which helped with the problem.

Case No 2

A parent, recently arrived in the UK from a war-torn African country, asked a pastor to pray for 'deliverance' for her child. The 3-4 year old had no speech, though he had been heard to speak with his mother. It was explained that recent events in the family's life had affected the child and he was referred to SureStart (government support programme for the under 5s) and following attendance at a nursery where he received one-to-one attention he soon began to communicate. The pastor offered general prayer for the mother and the child, together with reassurance and care.

Case No 3

A mother asked the pastor to pray for deliverance because her child was having nightmares and was possessed. What was important to the pastor was to hear what the child had to say. He spoke gently to the child, asking about the nightmares. The pastor talked reassuringly about Jesus and how he would be with the child at night to look after him. He gently prayed that God would bless him and give him pleasant dreams. The pastor assured the mother that the child was not possessed and that given traumatic events in the family's life, the nightmares were hardly surprising. He then gave the mother some practical tips on how she could deal with the matter.