

*Help...*

**how to respond to  
an allegation of  
abuse**

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## how to respond to an allegation of abuse

The thought of having to deal with an allegation of abuse, or responding to a concern, may be something that fills you with fear and trepidation. What if I get it wrong, you worry? I might be making a mountain out of a molehill. Maybe I'll forget what they said. We have written this 'Help' booklet in order to steer you through the process, so stay calm, you can do this!

### What is your role?

Your responsibility for reporting concerns will depend on your role. A worker with children, young people or vulnerable adults will need to:

- Listen carefully if someone is telling you about abuse – physical, sexual, emotional or neglect
- Not ask questions – it could prevent them from saying more or you might put things in their mind that were not already there
- Show acceptance of what you are told – even if it seems unlikely or too awful to be true
- Reassure the person that they have done the right thing in telling you and you are taking the information seriously
- Not promise to keep the matter secret but explain that you may have to share what they say with others on a 'need to know' basis only. It will be the named people in your safeguarding policy
- Explain what you intend to do and don't delay in taking action
- Ensure the immediate safety of the individual
- Write notes stating what the person said, what you said in response, and an

explanation of how the conversation took place.  
Include the date, time and your signature

- Keep the notes, even if typed up, as they could be used as material evidence in court.

If the concern is about what has been observed, for example bruises, marks, suspicions of neglect or sexually explicit/abusive behaviour, then it is important to write a full account of what was seen. Include:

- Size, shape, colour, position on the body of any bruises or marks
- Person's appearance eg ragged or dirty clothing, smell, emaciated body, pain or difficulty in moving
- Description of sexually explicit or abusive behaviour
- The date and time of your report and your signature.

### **What constitutes an allegation of abuse?**

This is not always clear. You can always ring the CCPAS helpline for advice.

### **The role of the safeguarding co-ordinator** (see 'Help'...I'm a safeguarding co-ordinator)

The safeguarding co-ordinator must be informed as soon as possible so that the appropriate action can be taken. All workers should know how to contact him or her.

If the matter is urgent eg there is a need for medical intervention, it is unsafe for a child to return home or there is an allegation of sexual abuse, take immediate action.

This action would include taking a child to hospital if necessary because of physical injury, informing Children's Services (Children's Social Care) or the Police if concerned about sexual abuse, neglect or physical abuse, or contacting Adult Social Services where the person concerned is a vulnerable adult.



*See other booklets in our Help series - particularly this one designed to help Safeguarding Co-ordinators.*

## **Extracts from the government publication 'What to do if you're worried a child is being abused'.**

Everyone working with children and families should:

- Be familiar with and follow your organisation's procedures and protocols for promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children and know who to contact in your organisation to express concerns about a child's welfare
- Remember that an allegation of abuse or neglect may lead to a criminal investigation so don't do anything that may jeopardise a police investigation, such as asking a child leading questions or attempting to investigate the allegations of abuse
- Refer any concerns about child abuse or neglect to Children's Services or the police. If you are responsible for making referrals, know who to contact.
- Seek to discuss your concerns with the child, as appropriate to their age and understanding, and with their parents and seek agreement to make a referral to Children's Services unless you consider such a discussion would place the child at risk of significant harm.
- When you make a referral, agree with the recipient of the referral what the child or parents will be told, by whom, and when.
- If you make a referral by telephone, confirm it in writing within 48 hours. Children's Services should acknowledge your written referral within one working day of receiving it, so if you have not heard back within three working days, contact Children's Services again.

If unsure whether or not something needs to be referred to Children's Social Services or the Police, or you just want support in doing so, contact CCPAS. We will give advice over the phone and will confirm this to you in writing.

\*NB Applies to England but similar principles operate elsewhere in the UK.

## **Who should be informed?**

It is important to deal with allegations and suspicions of abuse in a confidential manner. The safeguarding co-ordinator should not inform the parents of a child or young person in any matter of sexual abuse or where there is concern that by doing so you place that child at risk of significant harm. The problem of the co-ordinator speaking to the parents beforehand is that parents could, quite understandably, become very upset and angry. They might confront or inadvertently alert an alleged abuser which might result in a child being silenced and an investigation by the authorities disrupted or ruined. Always check with Children's Services as to whose task it will be to tell parents. Where a vulnerable adult is not capable of making an informed decision then their relatives may be involved before contacting Adult Social Services, or contact directly if the relatives are implicated in some way.

## **If you're not sure what to do...**

- Have you looked at your safeguarding policy?
- CCPAS manual 'Safe and Secure' has a flow chart for action
- You can always ring CCPAS' 24 hour helpline – 0845 120 4550 - if you need advice
- Don't delay when there are serious concerns
- Once you have contacted the authorities (probably by phone initially) confirm your concern in writing

## **Giving support**

Whatever action you may have to take, and even if the authorities are involved, don't lose sight of the person or persons at the centre of the concern. Ensure that there is someone to whom they can turn for support but do not question the person concerned. If they give further information, then go through the process of listening and recording as already described. Usually a child will seek support and disclose to someone they trust. It will save the child having to repeat a disclosure if they have support

from the person they initially disclosed to. (See 'Help...how can I support a child.') Don't forget that abuse can affect many people – friends, families, workers and leaders too – and they may need some help.

Remember CCPAS is available to offer advice and support as you deal with these difficult areas. You may also have people in your organisation or denomination who can assist you or provide a listening ear.

***It is important to ensure that workers are themselves given adequate support when dealing with allegations of abuse.***

### **Ongoing involvement by the church/organisation**

If the authorities are involved in investigating a child or adult protection matter, it will be important for the safeguarding co-ordinator or leader to co-operate fully in the inquiry. The notes and observations of workers could be used in any court proceedings and they might need to attend court to give evidence.

Social workers might want the church or organisation to be part

of any care plans that are made for the individual particularly where there is significant contact or input by them.

### **What do I do about historic abuse?**

Suppose you are told by someone that when they were little they were sexually abused, but it doesn't happen any more. This is still a matter of concern. The person has alleged that someone has committed a sexual crime against them. You have to think about the consequences of doing nothing – could other children be at risk now from this person?

You will also need to consider the age of the alleged victim. If they are an adult, they may or may not choose to make a formal complaint to the police. If you are concerned that the alleged abuser could pose a risk to children now, then you should point out to the person that they could decide to give the information to the police child protection team (or similar name). Even if they decide not to make a formal statement, action can still be taken which would help to protect children. If the person is unable or unwilling to make a formal complaint to

the police, then the safeguarding co-ordinator should speak to an officer in the police child protection team.

### **What do I do about an allegation against a worker or leader?**

You are doing everything right – measures are in place to deal with allegations of abuse, workers are trained to listen and pass on concerns, there are procedures for reporting concerns and suspicions of abuse to statutory agencies and, of course, you might well use the CCPAS helpline for additional advice and support. However, in spite of all your best efforts, no one can rule out the possibility of an allegation being made against a worker.

Government guidance in ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children’ (para 2.192) published in 2010 in England states:

“Churches, other places of worship and faith organisations should report all allegations against people who work with children to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and notify the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) of any relevant information

so that those who pose a risk to vulnerable groups can be identified and barred. In addition, where they are a charity all serious incidents need reporting to the Charity Commission.”

In addition the church insurance company (and your denominational safeguarding officer, if appropriate) is likely to want to know as well. In this sort of situation you might wish to take immediate advice from CCPAS who will help you deal with the matters appropriately and guide you in whom to contact and when. Indeed, the role of CCPAS in supporting faith organisations in such circumstances is emphasised in ‘Working Together’.

### **The role of ‘LADOs (children)**

Where immediate action is needed to protect a child or investigate a serious allegation, an immediate referral will need to be made to the Police or Children’s Social Care, after which the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) needs to be informed. In other less urgent situations contact the LADO first. Where appropriate the LADO will refer to police or Children’s Social Care if they

have not been informed. Some less serious situations may not warrant police or Children's Social Care investigation. LADOs are responsible for providing advice, liaison and monitoring the progress of cases to ensure they are dealt with as quickly as possible, consistent with a fair and thorough process. 'Working Together' stresses that procedures need to be applied by LADOs with 'common sense and judgement'. If an allegation is substantiated then the LADO will advise whether a referral to the Independent Safeguarding Authority is required or advisable, and the form and content of the referral.

### **"Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) (children and adults)**

The task of the ISA is to make decisions as to whether an individual poses a risk to children and/or vulnerable adults, based on a full picture of all the circumstances relating to the person concerned. The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 stipulates that organisations are under a statutory duty to refer relevant information to the ISA in certain circumstances. There is a requirement to inform the

scheme where an individual (paid or volunteer) has been dismissed, or resigned (either prior to or following the conclusion of a disciplinary investigation), because they harmed, or may harm, a child or vulnerable adult. The ISA will assess each situation and if they are minded to bar (the person from working with children or vulnerable adults) the individual will be given the information and the opportunity to make representations.

Workers should be assured that there are criminal sanctions that could be applied where there are malicious allegations. These could include offences related to wasting police time, perverting or attempting to pervert the course of justice, conspiracy and perjury. However, churches have nothing to worry about if they have passed on information received in good faith.

If a worker is convicted of certain of the most serious offences then they will be automatically barred from working with children/vulnerable adults, without being able to make any representations. In less serious cases there is an auto-bar with the ability to make

representations to the ISA for the situation to be reviewed. In other cases the ISA will consider information (not just in relation to convictions) and can bar based on individual case assessment. In such cases the ISA considers cumulative behaviour and risk of harm based on:

- Finding of a competent body (eg one of the regulators)
- Gathered information - including cautions and convictions
- Referral information

Individuals would be informed that the ISA is 'minded to bar' and would be able to see all available information and be able to make representation (unless of course it is an autobar offence). A barred person loses their ISA registration and cannot engage in 'regulated activity'.

### **<sup>iii</sup>Charity Commission (children and adults)**

Any incident that has taken place in a charity is considered serious and should be reported to the Charity Commission if it has resulted, or could result, in a significant loss of funds or a significant risk to the charity's

property, work, beneficiaries, or reputation. Suspicions, allegations and incidents of abuse or mistreatment of beneficiaries include incidents whilst under the care of the charity or by someone connected with the charity, such as a trustee, member of staff or volunteer. Such concerns must be reported if there are grounds to suspect that an incident may have occurred, whether or not the matter has been proved. Such matters would always be given immediate attention by the Charity Commission. The role of the Charity Commission is to assist the trustees where possible in restoring faith in the charity and other charities within the same sector (eg other places of worship).

### **Regulators**

If you have a project regulated and inspected by a government department or agency (eg OFSTED, Care Quality Commission in England, or equivalent elsewhere in the UK), there is an expectation that all safeguarding matters will be reported to them, especially if it involves the suspension of a worker. So if you provide a nursery, crèche or other early years provision or other social

care service the matter will need to be reported.

(i) applicable in England

(ii) applicable in England, Wales & Northern Ireland. A similar protecting vulnerable groups scheme operates in Scotland.

(iii) applicable in England & Wales

NB This is only a brief outline of an organisation's responsibilities and although they do not all apply to every country of the UK, the expectations of each nation are broadly the same. It is important to remember that the church/ organisation's insurance policy is also likely to have similar reporting expectations. Social Care services for children and adults and other agencies will be known by different names across the UK.

CCPAS is happy to advise places of worship and other organisations who contact our helpline as soon as concerns are raised. We will provide the necessary advice and support in responding appropriately to allegations and concerns and help you to ensure that the relevant authorities are contacted.



## Tick list - Allegation of abuse

- Have I contacted the Safeguarding Coordinator in my church / organisation?
- Have they: Spoken to the statutory agencies as appropriate:
  - Police?
  - Children's Social Care?
  - Adult Social Services?
  - Or taken advice from CCPAS
- Have they confirmed the referral in writing to the relevant agency?
- Have they contacted someone from the denomination or organisational structure been informed (e.g. Bishop's Adviser) where appropriate?
- Have they contacted our insurance company?
- Where concerns involved a worker (paid or voluntary):
  - Does the matter suggest the ISA 'harm test' has been met and following an internal inquiry the person has been suspended or removed from regulated activity? Has a referral been made to the ISA?
  - Has the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) been informed?
  - Where our activities are regulated and inspected by agencies such as OFSTED, Care Quality Commission etc, have they been informed?
- Where there is a serious incident (such as child abuse) has the charity informed the Charity Commission?
- Despite the number of agencies that may need to be informed, has everything been kept on a need to know basis, maintaining confidentiality?

**NSPCC**, Weston House, 42 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3NH  
Help for children/young people:  
0800 1111  
Help for adults: 0808 800 5000

**ChildLine** – free and confidential number: 0800 1111

**Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA)** helpline – 0300 123 1111

**Charity Commission** – 0845 300 0218  
or email directly from their website  
[www.charity-commission.gov.uk](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk)

**CCPAS**, PO Box 133, Swanley, Kent, BR8 7UQ:  
Helpline: 0845 120 4550  
Email: [info@ccpas.co.uk](mailto:info@ccpas.co.uk)

**Care Quality Commission**,  
CQC National Correspondence,  
Citygate, Gallowgate, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 4PA  
Telephone: 03000 616161

**OFSTED** have a whistleblower hotline. There may be times when council employees and those working with young children will want to report to us concerns about practices and procedures for the safeguarding of children and young people.  
Telephone: 0300 123 3155 (Monday to Friday from 8.00am to 6.00pm).  
Email: [whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk).  
WBHL, Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD.  
<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/>

**This is one of an expanding series of help booklets published by CCPAS, many of which are particularly relevant to workers.**

**See CCPAS website for more details [www.ccpas.co.uk](http://www.ccpas.co.uk)**



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