

Help...



My disabled child needs to be safe

A guide for helping children with
disabilities learn personal safety skills

Help... My disabled child needs to be safe

As parent or carer of a child with special needs, you may well be up to date with information about your child's condition as well as childcare provision and other resources available to you. It is less likely however that you will have received any advice on how your child can acquire personal safety skills for their day-to-day lives.

It is not uncommon for a parent, carer or family member of a child with disabilities to believe that there is no risk of abuse because their disability acts as a safeguard i.e. keeps potential abusers away. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Children with disabilities can be more at risk if they are not encouraged or able to find ways to protect themselves and speak out (verbally or otherwise) about what is happening to them. A recent study of 50,000 children found that disabled children were on average over three times more likely to be abused or neglected than non-disabled children.

They are also more likely to be judged by their disability, in terms of what they can't do rather than who they are and what they can achieve. Being de-personalised in this way has the effect of

lowering self esteem and makes a child more vulnerable to being abused.

This booklet aims to help parents and carers develop their child's personal safety skills, to distinguish between signs of abuse and disability-related problems and find appropriate ways to alert those looking after them if something is happening to them that is distressing or abusive.

Children with disabilities:

- can be taught to resist attempts to abuse them
- **are credible witnesses to their own experiences**
- can be empowered to communicate these experiences



What is child abuse?

Child abuse occurs when someone causes physical, sexual, emotional or psychological harm or neglect to a child, or places them at serious risk of harm. Child abuse always involves the misuse of power.

Why are children with disabilities more at risk of abuse and of it going unnoticed?

One factor is attitudes. Here are some myths surrounding children with disabilities:

- Abuse of disabled children is not as harmful as other children.
- It is impossible to help prevent abuse of disabled children.
- Disabled children are more likely to make false allegations of abuse.
- Where a disabled child has been abused it is best to leave well alone once the child is safe.

A significant number of disabled children use British Sign Language (BSL) and Makaton, or other communication technologies such as touch talkers and light writers. A worker or carer may not possess the appropriate skills to understand what the child is trying to communicate.

There is often a lack of opportunity to develop appropriate social skills and become 'street-wise' to help prevent bullying and intimidation both from adults and their peers.

Disabled children can feel inhibited about complaining due to a fear of losing the services and people they depend on.

There can be a greater dependency on others for intimate care as well as a general expectation that a child will comply with a request or instruction from an adult; for example in the classroom or at the doctor's. This can make it difficult for any child, let alone a child with disabilities, to differentiate between legitimate and abusive adult demands or behaviour.



How are children with disabilities at greater risk of sexual abuse?

There are a number of reasons:

- People may believe, wrongly, that a child with a disability can't be sexually abused because they are seen as asexual
- They have more physical contact with people like carers, therapists etc. which can include greater levels of personal/intimate care
- A sense of isolation – as we have already said the child may not be able to or have the capacity to tell anyone because of their disability. It is also likely they spend more time in the company of adults than other children

In the past many of us taught our children to be wary of strangers but now understand that most children are abused by people known to them. However, for a child with a disability there can actually be a greater risk of being abused by people they don't know because they are likely to come into contact with relative strangers, people like volunteer drivers and assistants at school or day centre. They are also at greater risk of abuse from their peers, and from others with disabilities who may not understand behavioural boundaries.



How can you protect your child from abuse?

Learning to listen is vital, especially if your child has a communication or learning disability. Observing your child's response to care-givers is a useful tool. Be aware your child may communicate about abuse in indirect ways, for example, through regressive behaviours, resistance, or angry "acting out" behaviour. You can help prevent sexual abuse in a number of ways:

- Make it clear to your child that though personal care and hygiene is important, their body belongs to them and not anyone else's to do with as they please.
- Encourage your child to express how they feel about personal care and explain in a way they will understand, the difference between a good and bad touch.
- Provide sex education appropriate to your child's age and understanding.

Confidence Building

Children with disabilities, like all children, need to know that they have a right to be protected and be able to tell a trusted adult if this isn't happening or their needs are not being met. They also need to understand that they are entitled to be treated with universal respect in

whatever situation or social environment they find themselves.

Even though your child may require additional carers to help to meet their needs, it is important to encourage them to be as independent and confident as possible.

Confidence building can be achieved by:

- Emphasising your child's strengths.
- **Allowing your child to make choices and decisions.**
- Encouraging independence in dressing, hygiene and cleanliness.
- **Developing appropriate social skills e.g. meeting and greeting others.**
- Recognising your child's need for dignity and privacy by ensuring they are comfortable with any arrangements for intimate care (It should always be explained to your child what is being done and why).
- **Discussing 'what if' situations with your child. Children with disabilities may need specific guidance for specific situations and the confidence to say 'No!' if necessary. Practicing their response to a scenario will also build confidence.**
- Ensuring your child knows how they can tell you when they are upset, e.g. if your child has speech difficulties, have an agreed alternative that will enable both of you to communicate effectively.



How can the church help?

We have already said that one of the key factors in teaching children personal safety is to build self esteem so they can be confident in their value as human beings and their right to be listened to. This applies even more to children with disabilities, and the church can play a vital role in helping both parents/carers in the many additional challenges they have to face.

1. Make sure there are members of the congregation who are trained in disability issues (including sign language) to welcome and be ready to assist those who attend services and meetings
2. In compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act ensure there are suitable ramps for wheelchair access, an accessible toilet, hearing loop etc...

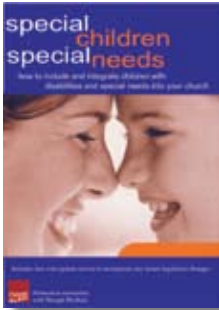


3. Offer support and respite care to those caring for children with disabilities in recognition that it can be physically exhausting and emotionally draining. Those recruited to do this must be trained and recruited following CCPAS (or e.g. denominational) safeguarding standards. A couple of hours' break from the child and an empathetic listening ear can prove invaluable to any parent/carer in this situation.

4. Children's workers should be suitably trained and encourage children with disabilities to become fully integrated into children's groups and activities run by the church. Children's workers can also build personal safety skills into these activities.

5. The church should consider how other forms of respite can be offered such as individual care for the child during the church services (e.g. buddying) and even consider installing facilities such as a sensory room where children can play and explore in safety.

CCPAS Resources



Special Children, Special Needs DVD

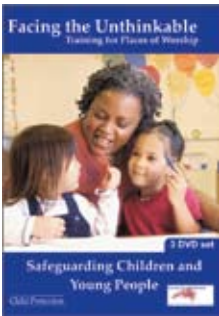
This DVD, made with 'Through the Roof', will help churches respond to children with disabilities and special needs in practical and inclusive ways. Sessions include how to make church welcoming, advice on specific disabilities and special needs, the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and a church that has tackled the issues. This DVD comes with the Special Children, Special Needs book free! **£30.00 plus p&p**

Special Children, Special Needs

by Simon Bass (CCPAS)

A practical and comprehensive guide to integrating children with disabilities and special needs into church life.

£5.95 plus p&p



Facing the Unthinkable DVD Workpack

'Facing the Unthinkable' is a comprehensive child protection distance learning course for individuals and group study. The pack has been designed for flexibility so that tailor-made courses of anything between four and fifteen hours can be run over a number of evenings or days. Full support available from CCPAS website, email and telephone. The pack comes with Trainer's/ Trainee's notes, participants' handbook and the CCPAS manual 'Guidance to Churches'.

The Facing the Unthinkable DVD has several 'specialist tracks' including one on children with special needs.

CCPAS Members £80.00 plus p&p

Non-members £110.00 plus p&p (Includes CCPAS membership for one year)

You can order any of the resources online at www.ccpas.co.uk or by phone on 0845 120 45 50.

Useful Organisations



CCPAS, PO Box 133,
Swanley, Kent, BR8 7UQ.
Helpline: 0845 120 4550
Email: info@ccpas.co.uk
Web: www.ccpas.co.uk



% Council for Disabled Children
National Children's Bureau
8 Wakely Street, London, EC1V 7QE
Tel: 020 7843 6448
Email: info@edcm.org.uk
Web: www.edcm.org.uk



Triangle
Unit 1, The Knoll
Business Centre
Old Shoreham Road,
Hove, East Sussex, BN3 7GS
Tel: 01273 413 141
Email: office@triangle-services.co.uk
Web: www.triangle-services.co.uk



Through the Roof
PO Box 353, Epsom,
Surrey, KT18 5WS
Tel: 01372 749955
Minicom: 01372 737041
Email: info@throughtheroof.org
Web: www.throughtheroof.org



Care for the family/Another
Way. Garth House, Freepost
(CF4636), Cardiff, CF15 7GZ
Tel: 029 2081 0800
Web: [www.careforthefamily.org.uk/
anotherway](http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/anotherway)



Childline: A 24 hour helpline
for children.
Helpline: 0800 1111
Web: www.childline.org.uk



NSPCC
Cruelty to children must stop. FULL STOP.
Helpline: 0808 800 5000
Email: help@nspcc.org.uk
Web: www.nspcc.org.uk



Kidscape,
2 Grosvenor Gdns, London,
SW1 0DH
Helpline: 08451 205 204
Email: webinfo@kidscape.org.uk
Web: www.kidscape.org.uk

**This is one of an expanding
series of Help... leaflets.**

**See CCPAS website for more details
www.ccpas.co.uk**



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