

NARARA VALLEY
BAPTIST
CHURCH

Child Abuse Awareness
Handout

Introduction

In recent years the community has become aware of the reality of child abuse be it physical, emotional, sexual or neglect. The immediate and ongoing consequences for the victims of such abuse are heartbreaking. At its core there is a betrayal of trust - by a parent, family friend, a doctor, a pastor or whoever.

Children have a right to be safe all the time. It is the aim of Narara Valley Baptist Church to do all that is possible to provide a safe and secure environment for children and youth coming into our care through our various activities.

To help us in achieving this aim we ask firstly that you fill in the application forms for working with children and youth. One of these forms is a legal requirement under the Child Protection (Prohibited Employment) Act 1998, one is required by the Baptist Union and the other is required by the Narara Valley Baptist Church child protection policy instituted in 1998. Secondly, we ask that you read this handout carefully. It will provide a broad outline of what abuse is and some indicators of abuse. **Please retain this booklet for your information.** It will also give guidelines for procedures to ensure your protection from vulnerable situations, as well as protection for the children under care. Thirdly we will undertake to provide periodical training covering in more detail the outlines in this handout.

What Is Abuse?

There have traditionally been four main areas of abuse, with a fifth added recently. These are physical abuse; emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and exposure to domestic violence. The indicators listed below are NOT always proof of abuse, however, they may be sufficient to warrant further investigation. All indicators and behaviours need to be placed in age and situational context. Training will be provided on this. If you have any questions at all, please do not hesitate to contact the Designated Child Protection Officer or Narara Counselling Centre for advice.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse happens when a physical injury is inflicted on a child by an adult or bigger person. Most physical abuse of children comes from someone in their immediate family. Physical abuse occurs when children are deliberately beaten, shaken, burnt, cut, poisoned, choked, tied up, held under water, or given alcohol or other drugs.

Signs of physical abuse include bruising, welts, burns, bites, scalds, broken bones, sprains, cuts and abrasions, or internal injuries, old or inconsistent injuries in relation to age (eg. bruises on babies who are not mobile), bruising or scars of varying ages, as well as flinching from adults, displays of aggression or withdrawal.

Physical abuse happens across all social and cultural groups in our society.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is behaviour by a parent or carer which destroys children's confidence in themselves. Here are some examples of actions which may result in emotional abuse:

- children constantly told they are not good enough, no good or worthless
- children continually rejected and shown no affection
- children subjected to constant verbal abuse and threats
- children punished by being locked up alone or not allowed to have friends or social activities.

Excessive or unreasonable demands and scapegoating could also be considered emotional abuse. It can also be seen as the failure to provide the psychological nurturing necessary for a child's physical and emotional development. Situations where an adult's behaviour harms the child's wellbeing - for example drug or alcohol abuse- also fall into the category of emotional abuse. Emotional abuse can exist on its own, but often accompanies the other forms of abuse.

Emotional abuse can be difficult to identify because it does not leave any physical injuries. It often goes unrecognised until a child shows signs of emotional problems. Signs can include changes in behaviour, lying and stealing, destructive or violent behaviour, rocking or sucking, being very withdrawn or depressed, being aggressive and constantly seeking attention, low self esteem, poor social skills, inability to trust, sleep disturbances. The same signs can also indicate other forms of child abuse.

Sexual Abuse

The term sexual abuse defines a range of sexual behaviours perpetrated on a child, including sexual assault, sexual ill-treatment and exposure to sexual behaviour. Sexual abuse can range from an offender deliberately watching a child undress, suggestive behaviour or comments, exhibiting his/her genitals to a child, directing a child to perform a sexual act, touching the child sexually, particularly on or near the anus or genitals, masturbating in the child's presence, using the child's body in a sexual way for masturbation, intercourse, anal or oral sex, exposing the child to sexual acts or pornography, penetration of the vagina or anus by a finger, penis or any other object.

Child sexual assault involves an abuse of power and betrayal of trust. When child sexual assault occurs, fear, shame and confusion make it very hard for a child to tell what has happened.

Signs to watch for include sexual knowledge too great for the child's age, soiling, smearing of faeces, excessive sexual talk, forcing other children to play games related to sex and sexuality, touching adults, simulated intercourse, interest in watching bathroom functions, genitals may stand out as a prominent feature in drawings, being overly familiar with strangers.

Neglect

Neglect occurs when a child is harmed because a parent or carer fails to provide adequate supervision, food, shelter, or clothing, or is responsible for unhygienic living conditions. Neglect also applies to homes where dangerous substances such as poisons or alcohol and other drugs are left lying around. Poverty doesn't constitute neglect, although it may be a contributing factor. Some parents do not mean to neglect their children, but this can result from their own problems, such as disability, drug and alcohol problems and other situations which result in the parent not having a child focus.

Things to look for include developmental lags, poor growth, underweight, being left unsupervised for periods of time, stealing food and a child that assumes an adult responsibility and is overly self-sufficient for their age.

In understanding neglect it is particularly important to be sensitive to cultural and social differences. Do not assume a child is neglected just because a family does not live according to your standards.

Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence is violent, abusive or intimidating behaviour carried out by an adult against a partner or former partner to control and dominate that person. Domestic Violence has a profound effect on children and young people and constitutes a form of abuse.

In homes where domestic violence occurs:

- 90% of the children witness the violence
- 50 - 70% of the children are also victims of the violence
- there is 15 times the rate of child abuse and neglect found in non- violent families

Domestic violence is a form of emotional abuse of children, and increases the risk of other forms of child maltreatment occurring. Children learn from domestic violence that violence is best way to gain control over someone and that it is OK to use physical force and manipulation to get what you want, even against someone you love.

What To Do

Reporting abuse is the first step in stopping the abuse. A child who is being abused needs the abuse to stop. As an adult in a position of responsibility, children may come to you to stop this abuse.

If a child or young person chooses to confide in you that abuse has taken place, BELIEVE WHAT YOU ARE TOLD. Be very sensitive to their needs, but also tell them that as an adult in a position of responsibility, you have an obligation to report the matter to the Designated Child Protection Officer. Assure them of confidentiality and that the disclosure will only be made available to the appropriate people. If the child or young person seeks your confidence, you should (in all decency) inform the child AT THIS TIME and before he/she discloses any information to you, that you have a moral (and in some cases, legal) obligation to report the matter.

Children may also choose to alert you to abuse in non-verbal ways. If you suspect abuse talk with the Designated Child Protection Officer, or Narara Counselling Centre, about your concerns. Often children need you to be their voice.

If a child tells you about abuse or neglect, there are some important messages you can give:

- immediately say you believe them
- stress that what has happened is not their fault
- say you are glad they told you
- say you know some grownups do wrong things
- do everything you can to comfort and reassure the child
- seek professional help as soon as possible

Care must be taken not to question the child or plant suggestions in their mind as this may affect any investigations that the Department of Community Services needs to undertake. Contact the Designated Child Protection Officer, (Craig Corkill) as soon as you possibly can for support and advice

You can also approach members of the Child Protection Team and Narara Counselling Centre for advice if you have concerns for any child in your care. Members can advise whether further action needs to be taken and will give whatever support they can in working with a child in your care.

Avoid Vulnerable Situations

It is important to avoid vulnerable situations wherever possible, but use common sense to make sure the child's needs are met. This is not only for the protection of the child, but for your protection from false allegations. The situations listed here is not exhaustive. Further training will be given in this area.

- Do not be alone with a child out of sight of other people
- When taking small children to the toilet, or nappy changing, do not be alone, if at all possible. If a child needs assistance and it is not possible for another adult to accompany you, then inform another adult of where you are going and then let them know when you return
- Wherever possible, do not drive children home unless you are accompanied by another adult. Make sure you have the parent's permission to drive their child
- Do not initiate close physical contact. As a general rule, open displays of affection initiated by children in the presence of others are acceptable. Exceptions to this would be situations such as a female adolescent initiating affectionate contact with a male youth group leader or male adolescent/female youth group leader.
- No corporal punishment administered, not even in fun. The only form of physical restraint appropriate is to protect child from harm or injury