

RESPONDING TO CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse is an act by parents or caregivers that endangers a child or young person's physical or emotional health or development. Child abuse is not usually a single incident but takes place over time. In Victoria, a child is a person under eighteen years of age. Commonly recognized forms of child abuse include the following:

- **Physical abuse** occurs when a child suffers or is likely to suffer significant harm from an injury inflicted by a child's parent or caregiver. The injury may be inflicted intentionally or may be the inadvertent consequence of physical punishment or physically aggressive treatment of a child
- **Emotional abuse** occurs when a person repeatedly rejects the child or uses threats to frighten the child and creates an emotional environment which significantly damages the child's physical, social, intellectual or emotional development
- **Sexual abuse** occurs when a person uses power or authority over a child to involve the child in sexual activity and the child's parent or caregiver has not protected the child. Physical force is sometimes involved. Child sexual abuse involves a wide range of sexual activity
- **Neglect** is the failure to provide the child with the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, shelter, medical attention or supervision, to the extent that the child's health and development is, or is likely to be, significantly harmed

The following is a table of examples and indicators of this behaviour. These lists are **not** intended to be exhaustive but rather to give **some** examples and indicators: **Form of abuse**

	Examples	Indicators *
Physical abuse	Excessive discipline, severe beatings or shakings.	Unexplained bruises, burns, bites, broken bones, scars. Extreme aggression or withdrawal, inappropriate clothes for weather conditions to cover body, complaints of soreness, discomfort with physical contact and emotional problems.
Emotional abuse	Constant criticizing, belittling, insulting, rejection, providing no love, support or guidance.	Passive and aggressive behavioural extremes, habit disorders.
Child sexual abuse	Sexual touching, exposure to pornographic material, child prostitution, oral sex, intercourse.	Physical signs of injuries, poor self-esteem, lack of confidence, peer problems, unusual aversion to physical contact, excessive seductiveness, inappropriate age sexualized play, inappropriate expressions of friendship between a child and an adult.
Neglect	Failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, medical care, attention, hygiene or supervision.	Consistently hungry, malnourished, tired, inappropriately dressed for weather conditions, inadequately supervised.

It is important that all Ministry leaders be aware of:

- Behaviour that may be perceived by a child as intimidating or harassing
- Deliberate behaviour by adults that intimidates or harasses a child
- All forms and indicators of child abuse

What should I do if a child tells me about abuse?

- Look at the child directly
- Accept what the child says and tell them that you believe them
- Be aware, while you listen, that the child may have been threatened
- Tell the child that they are not to blame
- Do not press the child for information
- Reassure the child they are right to tell and that you take what they say very seriously
- Let the child know what you are going to do next, who you are going to tell and why, and roughly what will happen
- Let the child know if you intend to make a report to the appropriate authorities
- Finish on a positive note and tell the child that you are pleased that they told you
- As soon as possible afterwards, make handwritten notes of exactly what the child said and the date and time of the meeting (use form CSP005c Child Safe Anecdotal Record)

If an allegation of abuse is made, your Ministry Team Leader must be notified immediately. If the allegation is made against a Ministry Team Leader, then the Senior Pastor of Church By the Bay must be contacted. In all situations where abuse is alleged, the Senior Pastor of CBtB must be contacted. If the allegation is made against a Pastor of CBtB, then the Professional Standards Worker of the Baptist Union should be contacted (03 9880 6103)

Responding to suspicion of abuse

Where a complaint of abuse comes to the notice of a Ministry leader in the form of hearsay or rumour, it should be investigated promptly and discretely by the Ministry Team Leader. If the suspicion involves a Ministry Team Leader, the Senior Pastor of CBtB must be notified.

Responding to an Allegation of Abuse

In the case that abuse is disclosed or discovered it is most important that the following occurs:

- If the child is in immediate danger, call the police on 000
- Do not delay
- Do not act alone
- Do not start to investigate
- Consult with the Ministry Team leader, who will also contact the Senior Pastor of Church By the Bay.
- The Senior Pastor will conduct all further investigations, and take any action, in consultation with the ministry leader and Ministry Team leader, ensuring relevant record keeping is carried out (Forms CSP005c, CSP005d)

Church By the Bay Inc. is committed to promoting and protecting the interests and safety of all children in our care. We have zero tolerance for child abuse, and our policy is to investigate all allegations of abuse or mistreatment.

Carers of children should be warm, understanding people who have a positive attitude towards children. They need to be sensitive towards children and be flexible to the demands of child supervision and they need to be reliable. Children will feel more comfortable and relate better to a leader who does what they have indicated they will do.

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