

# Our Children Matter

Our statement of policy on communicating the Gospel to children and young people in a safe and supportive environment, with guidelines and procedures for good practice.

## **Contents**

<b>1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2 Clarification of terms.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3 Statement of Principles.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4 Aims of Working with Children and Young People... </b>	<b>6</b>
<b>5 Practical Guidelines.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>6 Selection and Responsibilities of Workers.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>7 Types of Abuse.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>8 Procedures to Follow.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>9 Referral Action.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>13</b>

# 1 Introduction

One of the privileges we have as Christians is to communicate the Gospel to children. It is also a great responsibility. Parents entrust their children to us for nurture, safe care and wise leadership. We need to ensure that we do all we can to honour this.

Children are vulnerable members of society who need special care. We must take seriously the charge given by the Lord Jesus:

- to welcome little children (Luke 9:48),
- to protect them (Matthew 18:6),
- to allow them free access to Him (Mark 10:13-16).

The Bible teaches moral behaviour of the highest standard. By following this teaching we have an expectation that malpractice will not occur (Ephesians 5: 3).

The purpose of this document is to:

- make sure that children in our care are protected from harm;
- state our aims and describe how we attempt to achieve these;
- give advice on avoiding situations which have the potential to be misconstrued;
- Give procedures to follow should abuse be discovered or disclosed.

## **2 Clarification of terms**

Titles used by different groups vary. For the purposes of this document the following terms are used:

### *Child/Young Person*

A person under the age of 18 – when either term is used in the text, both are intended.

### *Worker*

Anyone engaged in children or young people's work.

### *Church Leadership*

The church leaders collectively.

### *Children's Safety Co-ordinator (CSC) - if appointed*

A person appointed by the church leadership to be the point of contact with the statutory authorities and to see through any referral action.

### **3 Statement of Principles**

We, at Blyth Community Church, are committed to providing a safe environment in which our children and young people can grow in the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We recognise that each child or young person is an individual with much to give as well as to receive. As a church we promise to nurture them in worship, in learning, in growth and in faith, helping them to be a valued member of our Christian family. We will listen to our children and young people and treat their wishes and feelings with respect.

We acknowledge that our work with children and young people is the responsibility of the whole church; to protect them and prevent any physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect.

To this end, each worker with children and young people must make themselves aware of and promise to observe, the following guidelines accepted by Blyth Community Church. These are based on the guidelines and procedures published by the Baptist Union of Great Britain in its booklet "*Safe to Grow*" and by Crusaders in their leaflet "*Best Practice Guidelines for Assistant Leaders and Helpers*".

## **4 Aims of Working with Children and Young People**

- To tell young people about the reasons for, and the way to, a personal relationship with Jesus.
- To introduce children and young people to Scripture and enable them to enjoy, understand and apply it to themselves.
- To equip children and young people to serve God and tell others about him.
- To help children and young people to think through issues relating to their faith for themselves.

## 5 Practical Guidelines

The church leadership should....

- Be aware of those who work with our children and young people, recognising their gifts and suitability for this work and redirecting those whose gifts are in another area.
- Ensure that as far as possible a worker is not alone with a child where their activity cannot be seen. This may involve leaving doors open or having two groups in the same room.
- Make sure parents know where their child is, and obtain written consent for non-routine visits.
- Ensure that in an interview situation with a young person, where privacy is important, another person knows that the interview is taking place and with whom, and that the young person knows that other persons whereabouts. The adult and young person should be of the same sex.

The worker should...

- Seek always to glorify God in their contact with children and young people and be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, seeking wisdom for particular situations.
- Be careful if unavoidably alone with children and young people that no actions could be misinterpreted, e.g. inviting them to your home or offering a lift.
- Report any concerns over abuse disclosed or suspected to the Children's Safety Co-ordinator (if appointed) or to a member of the leadership team.
- treat all children and young people with respect and dignity
- Learn to control and discipline children without using physical contact or aggressive, intimidating behaviour.
- Ensure another adult presence where such contact may be necessary e.g. in the case of very young children.
- Not let youngsters involve themselves in excessive attention seeking.
- Not engage in rough physical games.
- Not ridicule or make suggestive comments about or to a young person or use inappropriate touching of any form, even in "fun".

- Not invade the privacy of children when they are toileting unless this is essential, when another adult should be present-both adults should be of the same sex as the child. The only exception to this should be in cases where parents give consent for reasons of practicality.

Colleagues should...

- Be prepared to speak to any other workers seen to be acting in ways which might be misconstrued, and then to the church leadership if necessary.

Church leadership should...

- Encourage an atmosphere of mutual support and care which allows all workers to be comfortable enough to discuss inappropriate attitudes or behaviour (Matthew 18: 15-20).

## **6 Selection and Responsibilities of Workers**

We will not rely entirely on a person's name/reputation to guarantee that he/she is suitable for children's work.

- All workers must be committed Christians, attending Blyth Community Church or a similar fellowship.
- Workers must be personally known to at least one member of the church leadership for a minimum of 6 months, or be able to supply a written personal recommendation/ references.
- Workers must have read and agreed to the Aims and Statement of Principles before working with children.
- The church leadership is responsible for establishing the facts about a potential worker's previous experience, e.g. whether there is a past criminal record, or a particular skill that may be utilised.
- The roles of all workers should be established and clearly explained by the group leader/church leadership.
- Workers will be supervised and accountable to the church leadership.
- Workers will not be expected to perform duties for which they are inadequately trained or experienced.

## 7 Types of Abuse

Blyth Community Church is committed to the protection of children from physical, sexual and emotional abuse or neglect. Such behaviour is entirely opposite to Biblical teaching (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10).

### Definitions of Abuse

- *Physical* where children's bodies are hurt or injured.
- *Emotional* where children do not receive love and affection, may be frightened by threats or taunts, or given responsibilities beyond their years.
- *Sexual* where adults (or sometimes other children) use children to satisfy sexual desires.
- *Neglect* where adults persistently and severely fail to care for children and protect them from danger, seriously impairing health and development.

Note that abuse does not necessarily involve physical contact, for example where children are exposed to materials or to situations which are inappropriate to their age and development.

## 8 Procedures to Follow

If abuse is disclosed or suspected....

- Do not promise confidentiality - let them know that you will need to tell someone else, who it is, and why.
- Do not delay.
- Do not start to investigate.
- Do tell the child what steps you are going to take.
- Do make notes as soon as possible after the disclosure, recording as well as possible the circumstances, what the child said, and your response as to what happens next, along with the date and time.
- Do inform the Children's Safety Co-ordinator (if appointed)/a member of the leadership team, as soon as possible - it is the function of the CSC to refer the matter to the statutory authorities and see the process through, carrying out the referral action below.
- Do not talk to anyone else about it unless the CSC (if appointed) is not available, in which case talk to a member of the leadership team.
- Only if neither the CSC (if appointed) nor a member of the church leadership team is available and you believe that immediate action is required because the child is at risk, carry out the referral yourself.
- Any worker accused of abuse will be suspended from their work and contact with children in church activities and groups while the referral action is undertaken

## 9 Referral Action

- refer the matter to the Social services, having explained to the child that you are going to do this and assured them that you are acting in their best interests - once names etc. have been passed to the Social Services they are obliged by law to investigate.
- do not talk to the parent(s) or alleged abuser
- Find out from Social Services what you will need to do next, and what may be required of you later.

If a child wants to talk about abuse...

- do not promise confidentiality - let them know that you will need to tell someone else, who it is, and why.
- look at the child directly.
- keep calm and do not appear shocked.
- never push for information or ask leading questions.
- be aware that the child may have been threatened.
- reassure the child that they are not to blame, and that they are right to tell.
- accept what the child says.
- end on a positive note.

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