

Cityside Baptist Church Children and Youth Responding to and Reporting Suspected Abuse or Concerns About Well-Being Policy

Reviewed December 2016

Purpose

To provide guidance in the event of suspected mistreatment or abuse or concerns about a child or youth's well-being.

Guidelines

There are different types of abuse:

- 1. Sexual abuse occurs when someone uses his or her power over the child or youth, or takes advantage of their trust and respect, to involve them in sexual activity. This includes inappropriate touching or kissing, suggestively sexual comments, obscene exposure or display of pornographic material.*
- 2. Physical abuse is non-accidental injury by somebody and also includes abusive administration of drugs or alcohol.*
- 3. Emotional abuse is when a child or youth's self-esteem is attacked by somebody to coerce them into doing what the abuser wants them to do. It includes prolonged mean teasing and shunning.*
- 4. Neglect is a denial of the basic needs and rights of nurturing, food and shelter, so that the child or youth fails to thrive.*
- 5. Spiritual abuse is misleadingly claiming the authority of God or the church to exert abusive power over another person.*

- 1. Children and youth are encouraged to talk with their parents or an adult leader if they are ever concerned about their own personal safety and well-being.**
Leaders are asked to be vigilant and alert to put-downs, teasing, leaving out, and all other types of abuse, and act to stop and/or report anything they become aware of.
 - 1.1. If an issue is of a short-lived, minor nature such as a one-off instance of name-calling, pushing or leaving out, a leader should act to address it straight away, and to resolve it with the people involved. Leaders should use their discretion as to when to inform and involve parents, holding in balance the need for close and transparent relationship with parents as well as the autonomy, agency and privacy of the children and youth involved.
 - 1.2. The leader should follow up by reporting the incident and resolution process to the people responsible for the leadership of children and youth if they feel the behaviour needs to be monitored over the following weeks, or if they think strategies need to be put in place to support the child or youth in future.

The parents should be included if further support strategies are needed, so they are part of the process of developing them. The responsibility for this liaison would usually be carried out by a person responsible for the leadership of children and youth.

- 1.3. More serious concerns or those that are not resolved easily are to be shared as soon as possible with a person responsible for the leadership of children and youth, Cityside's Minister or a member of Cityside's Council, who will then proceed as outlined in Cityside's *Concerns and Complaints Policy* or as outlined below for reporting suspected sexual, physical or emotional abuse or concerns about well-being.

2. Reporting Suspected Abuse

Section 15 of the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989 Section 15 provides that:
"Any person who believes that any child or young person has been, or is likely to be, harmed (whether physically, emotionally, or sexually), ill-treated, abused, neglected, or deprived may report the matter to a Social Worker or a member of the Police."

- 2.1. If a child or youth tells you that they have been abused or if you suspect that this is the situation, you must first act to ensure that they are currently safe.
You then need to report what you have been told or suspect immediately. If in doubt, it remains important to take this step. It is also important not to assume that other people are aware of the situation and taking appropriate action.
- 2.2. If a child or youth does share with you that something abusive has happened to them, show your care and concern by:
 - Listening carefully to what they say.
 - Do not press for details. The child/youth should not be prompted or asked closed or leading questions (such as "Did he/she touch you there?").
 - During initial disclosure, a child or youth will usually be very apprehensive and will monitor your reactions. Stay calm.
 - Tell the child/youth that you believe them.
 - Tell them you are glad they told you (abusers may threaten or manipulate children/youth to prevent disclosure).
 - Say you're sad it happened.
 - Tell them it's not their fault, they are not responsible for the abuse.
 - Acknowledge it is hard to talk about these things.
 - Do not make promises you are not able to keep, such as confidentiality. If a child or youth asks you to keep a secret, let them know that while they can trust you to respect whatever they tell you, you cannot keep a secret if it is about someone being hurt.
 - Tell them that certain adults need to be informed who can protect them so the abuse can stop.
 - Assure the child/youth you will support them and help them where you can.
 - Do not attempt any form of counselling.

- 2.3. Record written notes at the earliest opportunity, including dates and times, and anything that was heard or seen, as well as details of any conversations.
- 2.4. As soon as you can, inform the parents/caregivers of the child or youth if it is appropriate and possible, as well as a person responsible for the leadership of children and youth, minister or a member of the Cityside Council. Informing the parents at this stage is a judgement call you may wish to consult on with the Citysider-in-leadership who you report this to, as you may not feel comfortable with being the person who communicates with the parents, or if the allegations are about the parent it may not be appropriate.
- 2.5. At least three Citysiders should act together to navigate the process through the next stages: ideally this group would be at least one person responsible for the leadership of children and youth, the Minister and an elected member of Cityside's Council (or a second member of the Cityside Council if the allegation involves member of the pastoral staff). Whoever is first informed needs to contact at least two others from this pool of people.
- 2.6. Next, this group together should talk with the parents of the child/youth (as long as the allegation does not involve them), and also to the Police and/or Child, Youth and Families (CYF) for advice on what to do next. It is vital to involve professionals at Police or CYF so they can make the judgement calls using their professional expertise and provide guided support through the next stages.
- 2.7. The full Council should be informed of what has happened as soon as possible, but care should be taken to hold confidentiality beyond this group as long as is appropriate and as advised by the police or CYF.
- 2.8. If the allegation involves a member of the pastoral, leadership or Children and Youth Ministry leaders or helpers, the alleged abuser should be withdrawn from any programme or event immediately and suspended from their role pending investigation, as outlined in Cityside's policies related to concerns and complaints.
- 2.9. All steps taken should be documented in writing and kept confidential in a secure location at Cityside. Access should be strictly limited and on a 'need to know' basis according to Cityside's policies related to privacy.

3. Reporting concerns about a child or youth's well-being and mental health

- 3.1. If you are concerned about a child or youth's emotional safety or well-being, first act to make sure they are currently safe. This may involve speaking with the parents, a member of pastoral staff, a person responsible for the leadership of children and youth or Cityside council for advice and support.
- 3.2. If you become aware that a child or youth is self-harming or at risk of this, show your care and concern by:
 - Checking in with them directly: "How's it going for you at the moment?"

- If they don't open up in response to a general question, telling them what you've noticed that is causing you concern, and giving them an opportunity to respond: "What I've noticed is..., and I'm concerned for you. What are your thoughts and feelings about this?"
- If appropriate, sharing the same noticings and concerns with their parents: "I've noticed... and I'm concerned and wanted to let you know."

3.3. If a child or youth discloses to you that they are self-harming or considering it:

- Listen carefully to what they say. Record what they share in written form as soon as possible afterwards to help you keep the information clear.
- Acknowledge it is hard to talk about these things, and that they are brave to do so now.
- Do not make promises you are not able to keep, such as confidentiality. If a child or youth asks you to keep a secret, let them know that while they can trust you to respect whatever they tell you, you cannot keep a secret if it is about someone being hurt.
- Assure the child/youth that you will support them and help them where you can.
- Ask them if there is a responsible adult (such as their parent) in their life who they could tell, perhaps with your support, who could help them get effective professional help.
- If appropriate, help them to make a short-term safety plan until they can get further help from a professional. This plan might include a series of steps:
 1. Ideas for how they can manage their feelings when they first notice them, such as distraction activities, writing, exercise or seeking out company – explore what works best for them.
 2. Making a list of the people they can really trust and could tell if they get to a point of wanting to hurt or kill themselves.
 3. Giving them Youthline's crisis number (0800 376 633 call 24/7 or text 8am-midnight) or Kidsline (0800 54 37 54 – staffed by youth volunteers 24/7) or the Auckland District Health Board's Auckland-wide 24/7 Mental Health Crisis number (0800 800 717) – they can ring them for free if they can't tell one of the people in their list when they are in crisis, or they can just ring them anytime for a listening ear, empathy and advice.
 4. Ringing the police on 111 if they feel they are in emergency danger of hurting or killing themselves or have already done something to hurt themselves.

4. Supporting access to professional therapeutic care

- 4.1. As Citysiders, we are there to walk alongside our children and youth and help them where we can. It is however important to remember that we are in a pastoral relationship with them, not a therapeutic role. Our children and youth need the expertise of experienced helping professionals to help them in an on-going way with the situations covered in this policy.
- 4.2. There are a wide variety of agencies that offer support for children, youth and families. Please see the associated forms referenced at the end of this policy for contact details.

4.3. The following support agencies will accept referrals from pastoral staff, as long as the parents/caregivers of the child or youth are in agreement with this action being taken:

- **The Kari Centre** is a community based mental health service for children and young people aged 0-18 years and their families/whanau. It is part of Auckland District Health Board, is based at Greenlane Clinical Centre, and the service is free of charge to New Zealand residents in living in the area Avondale to Panmure and Otahuhu to the Harbour Bridge. They do not take self-referrals. Please see Appendix 2 for more information.
- **Marinoto North and West Child and Youth Mental Health Services** provide mental health assessment and therapy for children and young people from 0-19 years who live in the Waitemata District Health Board area. They are based at various venues in West Auckland. They are open to receiving self-referrals from families as well as via professionals such as doctors, teachers, counsellors and pastors. Please see Appendix 3 for more information.
- **Whirinaki Child, Family and Youth Mental Health** is a specialist mental health service for children and young people aged 0-17 years old and living in the Counties Manukau District Health Board region. They are based at 7 Springs Road in East Tamaki. They decide on a case-by-case basis if they would accept a self-referral; normal practice is for the referral to come from a professional such as a teacher, doctor, counsellor or pastor, but in some cases this step can be by-passed. Please see Appendix 4 for more information.
- **Child, Youth and Family (CYF)** is a NZ-wide service of the Ministry of Social Development. Anyone can refer children and young people to CYF. Please see Appendix 5 for more information.

Associated Forms

Agencies That Offer Support to Children, Youth and Families

Kari Centre Child and Youth Mental Health Service Referral Information

Marinoto North and West Child and Youth Mental Health Services Referral Information

Whirinaki Child, Family and Youth Mental Health Referral Information

Children, Youth and Family (CYF) Referral Information