SC015 - TYPES & INDICATORS OF CHILD ABUSE & NEGECT

The following definitions are taken from the Australian Institute of Family studies (https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/what-is-child-abuse-and-neglect) and provided as a guide.

The signs and indicators are taken from the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/families/Protecting-kids/reporting-child-at-risk/harm-and-neglect/chapters/signs-of-abuse)

Please refer to the following state and territory government websites for up-to-date information about the types of child abuse:

- ACT - Child & Youth Protection Services (Mandatory reporting - *Children and Young People Act 2008*)
- NSW - Department of Communities and Justice (Mandatory reporting - Child and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998)
- VIC - Department of Health and Human Service (Mandatory reporting - *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic.)*
- QLD - Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (Mandatory reporting - *Child Protection Act 1999 (Qld)*)
- WA - Department of Child Protection (Mandatory reporting - *Children and Community Services Act 2004)*
- SA - Department for child protection (Mandatory reporting - *Children's Protection Act 1993)*
- NT - Child Abuse Hotline (Mandatory reporting - *Care and Protection of Children Act 2007 (NT)*)
- TAS - Department of Health and Human Services (Mandatory Reporting)

Note that the focus of child protection is to report concerns about risk of harm, and focus on the needs of the child in our decision making.

To assist in decision making about risk of harm it is important to be aware of the behavioural and emotional indicators of each type of child abuse and also the indicators in parents and care givers. It is important to note that just because you identify one or more indicators do not necessarily mean a child is being abuse but it is a cause for concern to be responded to.

In responding to concerns about children at church it is important to remember that the church has legal, pastoral and organisational responsibilities to fulfill and as such please report all concerns according to procedure.

In a ministry situation it is highly likely that you will continue to have contact with the child after a disclosure. It is important to recognise that the child has disclosed to you because they trust you and feel safe with you. As you continue to nurture and minister to the child it may be useful to be mindful of the following: create a calm environment, engage in appropriate relationships, continue to include the child, provide an ordered program, foster appropriate behaviours, focus attention on the safe space.

a) NEGLECT

According to WHO (2006, p. 10):

Neglect includes both isolated incidents, as well as a pattern of failure over time on the part of a parent or other family member to provide for the development and wellbeing of the child – where the parent is in a position to do so – in one or more of the following areas:

- *health*
- *education*
- *emotional development*
- *nutrition*
- *shelter and safe living conditions.*

Examples: failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, medical care, attention to hygiene or supervision, inability to respond emotionally to a child or young person, depriving of or withholding physical contact or stimulation for prolonged periods, absence of social support from adults.

Indicators/ Signs in children or young people

- low weight for age and failure to thrive and develop
- untreated physical problems, such as sores, serious nappy rash and urine scalds, dental decay
- poor standards of hygiene, for example child or young person consistently unwashed
- poor complexion and hair texture
- child not adequately supervised for their age
- scavenging or stealing food and focus on basic survival
- extended stays at school, public places, other homes
- longs for or indiscriminately seeks adult affection
- rocking, sucking, head-banging
- poor school attendance.

Indicators/ Signs in parents or caregivers

- unable or unwilling to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing, medical attention, safe home conditions
- leaving the child without appropriate supervision
- abandons the child or young person
- withholding physical contact or stimulation for prolonged periods
- unable or unwilling to provide psychological nurturing
- has limited understanding of the child or young person's needs
- has unrealistic expectations of the child or young person

b) PHYSICAL ABUSE

The WHO (2006, p. 10) defines child physical abuse as:

The intentional use of physical force against a child that results in – or has a high likelihood of resulting in – harm for the child's health, survival, development or dignity. This includes hitting, beating, kicking, shaking, biting, strangling, scalding, burning, poisoning and suffocating. Much physical violence against children in the home is inflicted with the object of punishing.

Examples: beating, shaking, lacerations, burns, fractures, poisoning, attempted suffocation, physical mutilation.

Indicators/ Signs in children

- bruising to face, head or neck, other bruising and marks which may show the shape of the object that caused it eg belt buckle, hand print
- lacerations and welts
- drowsiness, vomiting, fits or pooling of blood in the eyes, which may suggest head injury
- adult bite marks and scratches
- fractures of bones, especially in children under three years old
- dislocations, sprains, twisting
- burns and scalds, including cigarette burns
- multiple injuries or bruises
- explanation of injury offered by the child or young person is not consistent with their injury
- abdominal pain caused by ruptured internal organs, without a history of major trauma
- swallowing of poisonous substances, alcohol or other harmful drugs
- general indicators of female genital mutilation, such as having a 'special operation'.

Indicators/ Signs in parents and caregivers

- frequent visits with the child or young person in their care to health or other services with unexplained or suspicious injuries, swallowing of non-food substances or with internal complaints
- explanation of injury offered by the parent is not consistent with the injury
- family history of violence
- history of their own maltreatment as a child
- fears injuring the child or young person in their care
- uses excessive discipline.

c) EMOTIONAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

Emotional abuse is also sometimes called ‘emotional maltreatment’, ‘psychological maltreatment’ and ‘psychological abuse’.

Emotional abuse refers to a parent or caregiver's inappropriate verbal or symbolic acts towards a child and/or a pattern of failure over time to provide a child with adequate non-physical nurturing and emotional availability. Such acts of commission or omission are likely to damage a child's self-esteem or social competence (Bromfield, 2005; Garbarino, Guttman, & Seeley, 1986; WHO, 2006).

Indicators/ Signs in children

- constant feelings of worthlessness about life and themselves
- unable to value others
- lack of trust in people
- lack of people skills necessary for daily functioning
- extreme attention-seeking behaviour
- is obsessively eager to please or obey adults
- takes extreme risks, is markedly disruptive, bullying or aggressive
- is highly self critical, depressed or anxious
- suicide threats or attempts
- persistent running away from home.

Indicators/ Signs in parents or caregivers

- constant criticism, belittling, teasing of a child or young person, or ignoring or withholding praise and attention
- excessive or unreasonable demands
- persistent hostility and severe verbal abuse, rejection and scapegoating
- belief that a particular child or young person in their care is bad or ‘evil’
- using inappropriate physical or social isolation as punishment
- domestic violence.

d) SEXUAL ABUSE

The WHO (2006, p.10) defines child sexual abuse as:

The involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Children can be sexually abused by both adults and other children who are – by virtue of their age or stage of development – in a position of responsibility, trust or power over the victim.

Examples: sexual touching, sexual intercourse, sexual suggestions to children, including exposure to pornographic material, use of children in the production of pornographic videos or films, exhibitionism, child prostitution

Indicators/ Signs in children or young people

- bruising or bleeding in the genital area
- sexually transmitted diseases
- bruising to breasts, buttocks, lower abdomen or thighs
- child or young person or their friend telling you about it, directly or indirectly
- describing sexual acts
- sexual knowledge or behaviour inappropriate for the child's age
- going to bed fully clothed
- regressive behaviour, such as sudden return to bed-wetting or soiling
- self-destructive behaviour, such as drug dependency, suicide attempts, self-mutilation
- child being in contact with a known or suspected paedophile
- anorexia or overeating
- adolescent pregnancy
- unexplained accumulation of money and gifts
- persistent running away from home
- risk taking behaviours, such as self harm, suicide attempts.

Indicators/ Signs in parents or caregivers

- exposing a child or young person to prostitution or pornography or using a child for pornographic purposes
- intentional exposure of a child to sexual behaviour of others
- previous conviction or suspicion of child sexual abuse
- coercing a child or young person to engage in sexual behaviour with other children
- verbal threats of sexual abuse
- denial of adolescent's pregnancy by family

e) EXPOSURE TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

Children and young people are often a hidden population within the family violence literature and discourse. Richards (2011, p. 1) refers to them as 'silent, forgotten, unintended, invisible and/or secondary victims'. Forcing a child or young person to live in an environment where a primary caregiver experiences sustained violence is in and of itself emotional and psychological abuse (Goddard & Bedi, 2010). Children and young people who are forced to live with violence are at increased risk of experiencing physical and sexual abuse (Dwyer & Miller, 2014; Goddard & Bedi, 2010; Mitchell, 2011). These children and young people tend to experience significant disruptions in their psychosocial wellbeing, often exhibiting a similar pattern of symptoms to other abused or neglected children (Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003; Mitchell, 2011).

Domestic violence can include:

• physical assault (including punching, hitting, kicking, pushing, slapping, choking, or the use of weapons)
• sexual assault (being forced to have sex or participate in sexual activities, either by watching or physically
participating)
• emotional abuse (making someone feel worthless, criticising their personality, their looks, the way they dress,
constantly putting someone down, threatening to hurt them, their children or pets)
• verbal abuse (including yelling, shouting, name-calling and swearing at someone)
• social abuse (being stopped from seeing friends and family, isolating someone socially or geographically)
• damaging property such as furniture, the house or pets in order to threaten or intimidate someone
• financial abuse (taking control of money, not giving someone enough money on which to survive, forcing someone to
hand over their money, not letting them have a say in how it is spent)

(adapted from "Domestic and family violence", Department of Communities and Justice, NSW, https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/domestic-violence - Accessed 7 April 2020)

Indicators/ Signs in children or young people

- displays of aggressive behaviour
- development of phobias and insomnia
- displays of anxiety
- symptoms of depression
- diminished self-esteem
- poor academic performance and problem-solving skills
- reduced social competence skills, including low levels of empathy
- displays of emotional distress
- physical complaints

There are other types of abusive behaviour which may cause harm to children, that may or may not be reportable to government child protection agencies such as medical, bullying, grooming on the internet, and spiritual abuse. In responding to concerns about children, the church will need to consider its legal, pastoral and organisational responsibilities.

f) SEXUAL GROOMING

Sexual grooming and sexualised online interactions (including crossing of professional boundaries)

Sexual grooming is a pattern of behaviour aimed at engaging a child, as a precursor to sexual abuse. In some cases where positional power exists, this can be a reportable matter. In most cases it is non-sexual, and a precursor to the abuse.
Includes: persuading the child that a 'special' relationship exists; spending inappropriate special time with the child; inappropriately giving gifts; showing special favours to the child, but not to other children; allowing the child to overstep the rules; testing boundaries – undressing in front of the child; allowing the child to sit on lap; talking about sex; 'accidental' touching of genitals, etc. In isolation, such behaviours may not indicate risk of abuse occurring, but if there is a pattern of behaviour occurring, it may indicate grooming.

Note that in some states and territories some types of 'sexual grooming' are also considered either criminal activity or sexual misconduct reportable for the protection of children. For example:

NSW: The scope of grooming has been extended to cover any adult who offers a child a material or financial benefit with the intention of making it easier to access the child for unlawful sexual activity, like giving a child gifts or money to gain a child's trust and to include grooming of another adult to gain access to a child. Additionally, any workplace disciplinary findings from investigations into allegations of sexual misconduct - sexual grooming against children's and youth leaders are subject to reporting to the Office of the Children's Guardian (visit www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au). Further, the Reportable Conduct scheme also includes sexual grooming in its definition of sexual misconduct, and as such, all concerns about a worker should be reported.

VIC: The criminal offence which targets 'grooming' is aimed at offenders who seek to cultivate a child or their family in order to facilitate sexual abuse of the child. The offence prohibits any grooming of either a child or their parents or carers, and carries a penalty of up to 10 years in jail. The Attorney General states that the grooming laws apply to any communication with a child, parent or carer intended to facilitate involving the child in a sexual offence. It will apply to both grooming through personal contact and grooming using the internet or any other means. (VIC Justice and Community Safety).

QLD: The Queensland Criminal Code, Section 218B relates to the crime of sexual grooming of children under 16. *"It states: (1) Any adult who engages in any conduct in relation to a person under the age of 16 years, or a person the adult believes is under the age of 16 years, with intent to; (a) facilitate the procurement of the person to engage in a sexual act, either in Queensland or elsewhere; or (b) expose, without legitimate reason, the person to any indecent matter, either in Queensland or elsewhere; commits a crime."* (http://www.legislation.qld.gov.au)

Electronic sexualised interactions and grooming on the internet

The explosion of electronic communication has seen a sharp increase in the number of internet-based and telecommunications-based allegations of abuse and bullying. This involves a perpetrator using any form of telecommunication, or electronic communication to: sexually groom, bully, suggest an inappropriate relationship be formed, or engage a child in sexual language or behaviours. In some cases these interactions have led to people being charged with online grooming, or procurement of a child for sexual purposes.
We acknowledge that the use of electronic media for communication is part of everyday life, however, we need to be mindful of the position of trust and power we have been entrusted with as leaders.
We recommend that those working with children, young people, and other vulnerable persons are provided with a set of guidelines for the use of electronic communication.

g) SPIRITUAL ABUSE

In most cases it is not reportable to a government child protection agency, although in extreme cases can be classed as emotional abuse. This may include any or all of the pre-stated abuse types. It involves the perpetrator inappropriately using their position of authority in the church to satisfy their own needs, or using children for their own benefit. Pressuring people through use of guilt language may result in feelings of guilt, shame, a strong *works* based framework for faith. For example, “If I do this, then God will love me” or “God will be happy with you if you do this for me”.

h) BULLYING BEHAVIOURS BETWEEN CHILDREN

In a church context bullying must not be tolerated. Instead of being laughed at, it should be reported according to church procedure.

In a children’s ministry context, parents of children involved need to be informed, consulted with and included in decisions relating to their child/ren. Targets of bullying need to be loved, valued, respected and restored as appropriate to the situation. Those who demonstrate bullying behaviours must be called to account in a loving way.

i) ELECTRONIC SEXUALISED INTERACTIONS & GROOMING ON THE INTERNET

We acknowledge that the use of electronic media for communication is part of everyday life, however, we need to be mindful of the position of trust and power we have been entrusted with as leaders. With the explosion of electronic communication there has been a sharp increase in the number of internet-based and telecommunications-based allegations of abuse and bullying. This involves the perpetrator using any form of telecommunication, or electronic communication to; sexually groom, bully, suggest an inappropriate relationship be formed, or engage a child in sexual language or behaviours. In some cases, these interactions have led to people being charged with online grooming, or procurement of a child for sexual purposes. In NSW the Office of the Children’s Guardian includes

“inappropriate personal communication (including emails, telephone calls, text messaging, social media and web forums) that explore sexual feelings or intimate personal feelings with a child” as part of its extended definition of sexual misconduct.

It is recommended that those working with children, young people, and other vulnerable persons are provided with a set of guidelines for the use of electronic communication.