

Chapter 2: Guidance in recognising abuse

Aim of this chapter

- i. To describe forms of abuse and indicators of same
- ii. To provide specific cultural and faith-based considerations
- iii. To outline abuse of position of trust
- iv. To outline reasonable grounds for concern

All those who contribute to the life of Joymount Presbyterian Church have a part to play in keeping people safe. We do this in the arrangements we make in Joymount through well planned, safe environments and with clear procedures for volunteers and staff.

All our leaders play an important role in responding effectively and compassionately when someone comes forward to share concerns or to disclose abuse, or when we believe a child may be at harm or risk of harm.

‘Not reporting a relevant offence to the police, including those against children, is an offence in Northern Ireland.’ (*Criminal Law Act (NI) 1967*)

Everyone must be alert to the possibility that children with whom they are in contact may be experiencing abuse or neglect.

One of the main ways in which we can remain alert is to ensure that we can **recognise the main signs of abuse**. This chapter outlines the main types and signs of abuse.

This is a written guide and it is mandatory that all leaders and staff engaged with children and/or young people’s work in any manner undertake the appropriate level of training, alongside reading this procedure.

Recognising abuse in this document is not defined in legal terms but written in line with legislation for the ordinary reader to understand.

Recognising abuse: A broad look

Child abuse can occur any time, any place and to any child.

Child abuse is not necessarily always through physical contact; children can be abused by omission, failure to act or via non-contact online abuse.

Additional risk circumstances

The likelihood of abuse can be affected by a number of other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that could make children more vulnerable to the potential for abuse and harm. These include but are not limited to:

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- substance misuse in the household
- parent in jail
- domestic violence
- divorce and other family separation
- parental mental illness
- children in armed forces families
- poverty
- social/racial discrimination
- disability
- refugee families

There are also some stages in a child's own life that could make a child more vulnerable to the potential for abuse and harm. These include but are not limited to:

- age
- disability
- sexual identity
- mental health issues
- communication difficulties
- care-experienced children/care leavers
- young carers
- previous experiences of abuse

There are other factors that could affect the damage to a child's health, development and welfare. These include but are not limited to:

- frequency of the neglect/abuse
- consistency of the neglect/abuse
- positive influences in a child's life

It is important to note that in circumstances where there are additional risk factors, this does not necessarily mean that a child is being abused.

Abusers and those who may cause harm to a child

Those who harm may be an adult known to the child or a stranger.

It can be anyone who has contact with the child, in person or online, regularly or as a one off.

It can include paid staff, volunteers and include families and friends. Abuse can occur in any setting or organisation.

Children and young people can also cause harm and this should be considered a child welfare and protection issue for both parties. The reporting procedures should be followed for both children involved.

Recognising abuse and harm: A focused look

Child abuse is defined below as per the Department of Health's Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, October 2024

Types of Abuse

Harm can be suffered by a child or young person by acts of abuse perpetrated upon them by others. Abuse can happen in any family, but children may be more at risk if their parents have problems with drugs, alcohol and mental health, or if they live in a home where domestic abuse happens. Abuse can also occur outside of the family environment. Evidence shows that babies and children with disabilities can be more vulnerable to suffering abuse.

Although the harm from the abuse might take a long time to be recognisable in the child or young person, professionals may be in a position to observe its indicators earlier, for example, in the way that a parent interacts with their child.

Effective and ongoing information sharing is key between professionals.

Harm from abuse is not always straightforward to identify and a child or young person may experience more than one type of harm or significant harm.

Harm can be caused by:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Neglect
- Exploitation
- Ill treatment of another, or abusive behaviour directed at another

Physical abuse is deliberately physically hurting a child. It might take a variety of different forms, including hitting, biting, pinching, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning or suffocating a child.

Sexual abuse occurs when others use and exploit children sexually for their own gratification or gain or the gratification of others. Sexual abuse may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside clothing.

It may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in the production of sexual images, forcing children to look at sexual images or watch sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via e-technology).

Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

Contact sexual abuse

Contact sexual abuse is where an abuser makes physical contact with a child or forces the child to make physical contact with someone else. This can include but is not limited to:

- forcing a child to take part in sexual activities (including touching, kissing and oral sex)
- making a child undress or touch someone else
- using a body part or an object to rape or penetrate a child
- any form of sexual touching of a child, clothed or not
- involving a child in an act of masturbation
- inviting or coercing a child to engage in the production of child abuse images (this includes any modelling, posing or exhibition for the purposes of sexual arousal, gratification or sexual acts)

Non-contact sexual abuse

Non-contact sexual abuse is where a child is abused without being touched by the abuser. This can be in person or online and can include but is not limited to:

- any sexual act performed in the presence of a child
- masturbation in the presence of a child
- making a child masturbate
- showing a child any sexually explicit material
- exposing a child to inappropriate or abusive material online, or making them share such material
- coercing a child to take part in sexual activities or sexual conversations via a smart phone or other device (*see Chapter 11: Guidelines for online safety*)

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child. It is also sometimes called psychological abuse and it can have severe and persistent adverse effects on a child's emotional development.

Emotional abuse may involve deliberately telling a child that they are worthless, or unloved and inadequate. It may include not giving a child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. Emotional abuse may involve bullying – including online bullying through social networks, online games or mobile phones – by a child's peers.

Neglect is the failure to provide for a child's basic needs, whether it be adequate food, clothing, hygiene, supervision or shelter that is likely to result in the serious impairment of a child's health or development. Children who are neglected often also suffer from other types of abuse.

Exploitation is the intentional ill-treatment, manipulation or abuse of power and control over a child or young person – to take selfish or unfair advantage of a child or young person or situation, for personal gain. It may manifest itself in many forms such as child labour, slavery, servitude, engagement in criminal activity, begging, benefit or other financial fraud or child trafficking. It extends to the recruitment,

transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of children for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation can be sexual in nature (see section 7).

Ill treatment of another or abusive behaviour directed at another means that a child could be harmed by virtue of witnessing the ill-treatment or domestic abuse of another person. However, it is not necessary for the child to have witnessed such treatment or behaviour or, indeed, to have been present when it happened. Abusive behaviour is behaviour that falls within section 2 of the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (NI) 2021.

Specific forms of abuse

(As defined in Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, October 2024)

Complex child abuse

The PSNI/HSCNI Joint Protocol defines Complex Child Abuse as 'complex, organised or multiple abuse, whether sexual, physical, emotional or by neglect occurs as part of a network of abuse across a family or community, within residential homes or schools and within an 'on or off line' networked groups of sexual offenders'.

Abuse within communities

Within some communities, there can be an acceptance of the use of violence as a response to perceived anti-social behaviour, crime committed by individuals or as a method of control over children and young people. Children and young people within these communities may be threatened with violence or forced expulsion from their homes and local areas by those linked to organised gangs or paramilitary organisations or as a result of perceived cultural beliefs. Children may also be abused or exploited by adults who hold power within their communities, where fear is used to coerce the child or young person into compliance.

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

FGM involves procedures that include the partial or total removal of the external female genital organs for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons. The practice is medically unnecessary, extremely painful and has serious health consequences, both at the time when the mutilation is carried out and in later life.

FGM is a criminal offence in Northern Ireland. *Serious Crime Act 2015 (Sections 72 and 73) as amended, and the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003*

Forced marriage

A forced marriage is a marriage conducted without the valid consent of one or both parties and where duress is a factor. Forced marriage is a criminal offence in Northern Ireland. *Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007*

Honour based violence (HBV)

The term 'honour based violence' is used to refer to a range of violent practices used to control behaviour within families or other social groups to sustain or promote perceived cultural and religious beliefs and/or honour.

Fabricated or induced illness (FII)

Harm may be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

Online sexual exploitation of children and young people / Abusive images of children / Risks of misuse of digital technologies (see Chapter 11: Guidelines for online safety for specific information)

Bullying

Bullying causes physical and/or emotional harm and can result in significant problems of low self-esteem, social isolation, anxiety and depression for the children and young people subjected to it. Bullying occurs in a variety of settings and can take place off and online. All church settings in which children are provided with services or participate in activities must be aware of bullying and tackle this at an early stage. In serious cases it may be necessary to make a referral to social services or the police.

Cultural and faith-based considerations

There are a number of additional risk factors that should be considered in recognising abuse in a faith context, like ours.

These risks can cause barriers to disclosure or reporting and include but are not limited to:

- strong beliefs can prevent children, young people and adults from reporting concerns
- a sense of honour or shame can prevent children and young people from seeking help or reporting concerns
- strong cultural or religious belief in the sanctity of marriage may dissuade children, young people and adults from reporting concerns
- opinions expressed by faith communities around children, regarding sex outside marriage, can cause a barrier for children and young people to speak up about abuse
- social isolation can occur if an individual or family are seen to have acted outside of the community of faith in some manner
- religion or faith can be used as an explanation for abusive behaviours or can be used as a distraction, for example, used to accuse professionals of discrimination
- some professionals lack knowledge about specific cultures and religions and do not feel confident in challenging harmful practices

- professionals want to be respectful of families' cultural and religious practices but the desire to be culturally sensitive can result in professionals accepting lower standards of care (*Culture and faith: learning from case reviews, June 2014, NSPCC*)
- some extreme cases mean that children who are seen as 'disobedient' or 'different' are believed to be possessed by a spirit controlling their behaviour. The children can be physically and emotionally abused in an effort to 'exorcise' the spirit
- harmful or unhealthy cultures or ministry practices can be created around the character and personality of a charismatic leader, giving opportunity to abuse a position of trust individuals can believe the reputation of the Church is the most significant risk so do not respond appropriately to knowledge of abuse; the welfare of the child is paramount

Abuse by a person in a position of trust

The Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, as amended in 2022 by the Justice Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims (NI) Act, outlines the legal framework for offences against children under the age of 18, even if they are aged 16 (the age of consent for sexual activity), if the adult occupies a position of trust in the child's life.

In our setting that would include, but is not limited to, Elder/pastoral worker/youth leader.

Cooperating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland (October 2024) states:

Abuse can be perpetrated by adults working in a position of trust, either in an employed or voluntary capacity, in a variety of settings or within an organisation that has responsibility for, or provides services or activities for, children.

We must recognise, unfortunately, that this may apply to roles in Joymount Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. *These should be dealt with in the same way as allegations against leaders or other volunteers in term of referral to statutory agencies and in taking immediate protective steps in line with this guidance.*

Reasonable grounds for concern

It is everyone's responsibility to protect children and young people and do their best to keep them safe.

If anyone has **reasonable grounds for concern** that a child may have been, is currently, or could become at risk of being abused or neglected, they should always inform Social Services via the Trust Gateway Team.

It is never necessary for any individual to prove that abuse has occurred, is occurring or could occur. It is the role of professional experts in Trust Gateways Teams to

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assess the concerns and make decisions based on this and any other information they have available to them.

The safety and well-being of the child must take priority over concerns about adults against whom allegations are made.

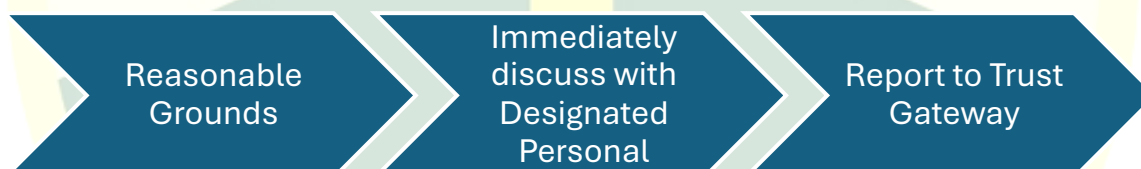
If what could be symptoms of abuse are ignored, it could result in ongoing harm to a child.

Reasonable grounds for concern include but are not limited to:

- Evidence that is consistent with abuse and is unlikely to have happened any other way (for example, injuries)
- Any concerns that are about possible sexual abuse
- Consistent signs that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect
- A child saying or indicating by other means (for example, by drawing a picture) that they have been abused
- Admission or indication by an adult or a child of an alleged abuse they committed
- An account from a person who observed the child being abused

Chapter 3 will look in more detail at Recording and Reporting. In summary

Reasonable grounds for concern:



Mid & East Antrim Trust Gateway 0300 123433 or 028 94424459
Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm

Immediate Concern:



In summary

- Any child with whom you come into contact could be experiencing harm or abuse
- **Doing nothing is not an option; you must always act**

CHAPTER END

