

Child Protection Policy of the Sheffield Christadelphian Ecclesia

Amended September 2016

INTRODUCTION

Our overall aim in all our dealings with children is that they should learn of, and develop relationships with, God and the Lord Jesus Christ, in an environment which is safe, loving and enjoyable. This policy document is part of a wider aim to enable and encourage children to grow in their faith.

It has been discussed with parents, youth leaders and trustees. The trustees reviewed and approved the original document in September 2011. Revisions were made in September 2015 and September 2016.

It has been created as part of our duty to ensure children are properly cared for, guided and protected, and because the ecclesia itself *should* act responsibly in these matters. All those involved with youth work will be provided with a copy and will be expected to be familiar with its content. The policy will also be displayed on our website.

CONTENTS

SECTION 1: General Notes, Ecclesial and Members' Responsibilities

- 1.1 Definitions of terms
- 1.2 The Disclosure and Barring Service
- 1.3 The Ecclesial Responsibility for a Safe Environment
- 1.4 Suggested Good Practice for the Ecclesia
- 1.5 Training
- 1.6 Signs of Abuse
- 1.7 How to respond to a child who tells you about abuse
- 1.8 If you hear from someone else that a child is being harmed.

SECTION 2: Youth Leaders and Designated Leaders

- 2.1 Guidance notes for youth leaders and teachers
- 2.2 Roles and Responsibilities of the Designated Leaders
- 2.3 Passing Information to Social Services, NSPCC or the Police

Appendix 1. Ecclesial Policies for the Handling of DBS Checks and for the Recruitment of Ex-offenders.

Appendix 2: Useful Contacts/Support Organisations

SECTION 1: General Notes, Ecclesial and Members' Responsibilities

1.1 Definitions of Terms

- The terms “**children**” and “**young people**” will be synonymous and include everyone under the age of eighteen.
- A “**Youth activity**” means any activity organised by the ecclesia in which children are supervised in the absence of their parents. “**Youth leaders**” are those in a position of leadership during those activities.
- “**Parents**” should be taken to include anyone in a position of parental responsibility.
- The use of the word, “**should**” does not mean that the action is optional. It means that the youth leader will do their utmost to carry it out.
- “**Designated Leader**” is now the recognised term used in child protection for the person to be informed of concerns. To avoid confusion it is the term used in this document.
- “**Neglect**” is where adults fail to care for children and protect them from danger, seriously impairing their health and development.
- “**Physical abuse**” is where injury is caused non-accidentally either maliciously or as a result of over chastisement.
- “**Sexual abuse**” is where adults, (and sometimes other children) use children to satisfy sexual desires.
- “**Emotional abuse**” is where children don't receive love and affection, may be frightened by threats or taunts, or are given responsibilities beyond their years. Also where children witness domestic violence.

1.2 The Disclosure and Barring Service

The government provides a service (the ‘Disclosure and Barring Service’ or ‘DBS’) to make checks as to the suitability of people to work with children or vulnerable adults. Checks for children are co-ordinated by the Christadelphian Sunday School Union but there is an appointed ‘checker’ for the Sheffield ecclesia who issues forms and guidance, handles completed forms and reviews and records the disclosures returned to applicants by the DBS. The usual level of check required is an ‘Enhanced Check’, but an ‘Enhanced Check for Regulated Activity’ (ECRA) may be required for some activities. The ecclesial policies for the handling of DBS checks and recruitment of ex-offenders are attached below as Appendix 1.

1.3 The Ecclesial Responsibility for a Safe Environment

The safety of children is everybody's responsibility and so everybody should be aware of our procedures. It has to be recognised that abuse can happen in any situation and where no problem is suspected. Also, the very nature of ecclesial life with its close and trusting relationships could create an environment in which problems could arise. A failure to act appropriately may not only damage those involved but may harm the reputation of the ecclesia, the community and, more seriously, the name of the Lord Jesus.

- Youth activities should be regarded as the responsibility of the ecclesia as a whole, not just of youth leaders.
- Those who work with children should be carefully selected, (in line with the principles of safe recruitment) trained and supported. Their work should be considered by the Trustees on a regular basis.
- The ecclesia must abide by the expectations of the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) or any future replacement of this body.
- Those working with children should have DBS checks, at least once every three years, if they are working with children frequently, intensively or without another adult present.
- Two Designated Leaders should be appointed to watch and advise on Child Protection matters. At least one should be involved regularly in Sunday School work.
- Buildings and materials should be assessed for safety, especially with regard to fire, and maintained in safe conditions. Evacuation procedures should be agreed and displayed and published in the Newsletter at least once annually. Access to the building should be safe and well lit.
- Public Liability insurance should be taken out by the ecclesia and reviewed annually.
- All vehicles used to transport children must be appropriately insured and fit for the task. If necessary there will be a check by the Sunday School superintendant.
- A record should be made of all significant accidents, incidents and near misses. Procedure should be agreed for responding to a child's accident or illness.
- A first aid kit should be kept in a designated place and maintained. Ideally a trained First Aider should be present at all youth activities.
- Every youth leader should be given their own copy of the guidelines.

1.4 Suggested Good Practice for the Ecclesia

Children have the right to feel safe, to be understood and to say, “No” to doing something that they feel is wrong. Parents should recognise the responsibility of youth leaders, co-operate with them and encourage children to treat them with respect.

- Treat all children with respect and dignity befitting their age.
- Provide an example you would wish young people to follow.
- Remember that another person can misinterpret your actions no matter how well intentioned.
- Do not use physical discipline at any time.
- Do not engage in inappropriate physical contact or conversation.
- Do not let young people engage you in excessive attention seeking, crushes or inappropriate language or behaviour.
- Do not show favouritism
- Do not invite children or young people into your house alone or visit them when they are alone.
- If it is unavoidable to carry a young person in your car alone arrange for them to sit in the back.
- Do not meet alone with a child where others cannot see you. If possible keep the door open when in a room with a child.

If you have any concerns about the welfare of a child contact the Designated leaders.

1.5 Training

Refresher training in Child Protection should be provided every three years for all those with responsibilities for children and all trustees. When new teachers, leaders and trustees are appointed their training needs should be assessed.

1.6 Signs of Abuse

Having taken all possible precautions within the ecclesia and its activities for the children's safety, it needs to be acknowledged that children may be significantly harmed within their homes, their schools, their community or even within the ecclesia. Those working with children should be aware of types and signs of abuse. The signs described below may indicate abuse but there could also be other explanations. Their presence does not mean a child is definitely suffering abuse and their absence does not mean a child is not suffering abuse.

A child or young person may:

- Have injuries, bites, burns, bruises, fractures, for which there is no explanation or the explanation is inconsistent with the injury.
- Be unresponsive, nervous, watchful, lethargic, or, conversely, be demanding of attention, aggressive, stealing or lying.
- Behave like a much younger child
- Harm themselves
- Confuse affection with sexual behaviour, or seek to have relationships with adults which are secretive.
- Display sexual behaviour through their actions, words, play, and writing or appear to have sexual knowledge beyond their age.
- Look ill cared for and unhappy, become withdrawn or depressed.
- May run away from home or carers
- Act in a way that is markedly different from their normal behaviour.

A child showing any of these signs is in need of support, but it could be the result of a number of different events such as bereavement or family illness. Abuse is only one possibility. Do remember that abuse is most likely to be caused by someone close to the child who has control over them.

1.7 How to respond to a child who tells you about abuse

- Allow the child to speak in their own words
- Listen but do not push for information or ask leading questions. Note well, it is not important for you to hear the whole story.
- Early in the discussion tell the child that you will need to tell someone else. Do not promise to keep secrets.
- Accept whatever the child says. Reassure them that they are right to tell you and not to blame.
- As soon as possible make notes of your discussions. Write down exactly what the child said if you can. Record the dates and times of events and keep the notes in a safe place.
- Be aware the child may have been threatened. Your priority should be the safety of the child.
- Offer the child your continued support and friendship.
- Do not tell the person the child is telling you about. This could lead to the child being threatened or harmed and evidence being destroyed.
- Do not inform the parents unless you are absolutely sure they are not involved. Do not discuss what has happened with anyone except one of the Designated Leaders (see below).
- As soon as possible speak to one of the Designated Leaders, unless they are implicated in which case Social Services should be consulted. There should be a discussion of the facts of the case in an attempt to exclude any false allegations. There should be no failure to act simply because the story seems improbable. Anyone hearing allegations has a duty to take responsibility if the named person is unable or unwilling to act.
- Note that the ecclesia has a duty to refer information about individuals who pose a threat to children. Child Protection agencies will advise on this.

1.8 If you hear from someone else that a child is being harmed

- Take the concern seriously whoever it is from
 - Tell the informant that you will have to share the information
 - Listen carefully to what you are told, take notes at the time or immediately afterwards.
 - Encourage the person who is telling you to talk to one of the Designated Leaders. If they are unwilling tell them that you will inform a Designated Leader. Explain that the matter may have to be referred to a Child Protection Agency.
 - Do not question the alleged victim or abuser.
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SECTION 2 Youth Leaders and Designated Leaders

2.1 Guidance notes for Youth Leaders and Teachers

- A copy of the CSSU Youth Leaders handbook will be made available for Youth Leaders.
- Attendance records should be maintained. Parents' names and contact details should be recorded and be kept available but secure.
- Leaders should be present before children arrive and remain until after they all leave.
- A minimum adequate adult staffing and supervision ratio has been agreed and should be maintained for all events. This equates to at least one adult for every 10 children.
- For day and residential trips parents should be given a programme of events and should sign consent forms. Parents should always know where their child is. N.B. this would include games in the park, picnics and walks as well as more adventurous activities like swimming, ice skating and mountain trekking.
- All activities carried out away from the premises should be risk assessed.
- In the event of an accident inform the parents and take all necessary steps to safeguard the child.
- Take special care if children need to be helped to the toilet. In most circumstances the disabled toilet may be more appropriate and should be used.
- Be alert to the issues of bullying and deal with it promptly and sympathetically.
- Provide opportunities for young people to talk about any concerns they have.
- On Residential trips adults should not share sleeping accommodation with children if it can be avoided (except family groups).

2.2 Roles and Responsibilities of the Designated Leaders

Whilst Trustees have responsibility to maintain effective oversight the day-to-day management of safeguarding is delegated to the Designated Leaders.

- Acquaint yourself with current regulation and legislation and advise Trustees of any action required in order to comply.
- Be available to give advice on matters concerning the safety and welfare of children and protective measures for youth leaders.
- Carry out an annual review of the care provided for children by the ecclesia, in particular the working of this policy, to which all interested parties should be invited.
- Be the first point of contact in the event of any problems during a youth activity.
- Inform and consult with the Recording Brother.
- Act as the person who, in the event of an accusation, would receive information and support the informant (child or adult) in reporting the matter to social services in accordance with child protection guidelines.
- Keep an up to date record of the telephone numbers of the Child Protection authorities. (Social services, police and NSPCC)
- The Designated Leader is NOT the one who investigates concerns or determines outcomes.
- The two should not be closely related. Their names should be published each year in the address roll and displayed prominently in the Sunday School room.

2.3 Passing Information to Social Services, NSPCC or the Police

It would normally be the responsibility of one of the Designated Leaders to contact external bodies about a Child Protection issue. Note that it is our role to pass on information - not to investigate what may be a criminal offence.

Where serious physical or sexual abuse is suspected, or you are not sure if the allegation is serious, Children's services, the Police and the NSPCC recommend that:

- In the interests of the safety of the child the matter should be reported to Social Services or the NSPCC by the person who received the information. If the allegation is of a recent criminal act it should be reported to the Police. This should be done as soon as possible.
- Do not worry about not having evidence. Your role is to report your concerns.
- Give the names, ages and addresses of children concerned, the nature of the complaint and where you received the information.
- Do not tell the accused. This could lead to the child being threatened or harmed and evidence being destroyed.
- Do not inform the parents unless you are absolutely sure they are not involved. Do not discuss what has happened with anyone else. The Child Protection agencies can advise about whether or not to tell the parents.
- The ecclesia has a duty to refer information about individuals who pose a threat to children. Child Protection agencies will advise on this.

Where the allegations are less serious and you do not think a law has been broken it may be appropriate to talk to the parents/carers and offer help and advice. This could be from other Brothers and Sisters, the Christadelphian Support Network or child care agencies. With older children it is important to listen to them too. Great care must be taken when deciding not to pass concerns on to a statutory agency. The natural tendency is to avoid difficult situations. If in any doubt ask for advice.

Appendix 1: Ecclesial Policies for the Handling of Disclosure and Barring Service Checks and for the Recruitment of Ex-Offenders.

The Sheffield Christadelphian Ecclesia has adopted the following policies which were derived from the previous CSSU policy entitled '*Ecclesial Policy for the secure storage, handling, use, retention and disposal of disclosures and disclosure information.*'

A: DBS Checks

The evolution of CRB checks into DBS checks has involved several changes, one of which is that Disclosures are now returned only to the applicant. The ecclesia's appointed 'checker' therefore has to view the copy received by the applicant or an on-line record (if available). Some of the previous policy regarding storage, retention and disposal of documents sent by the CRB to the checker is therefore obsolete.

1. The ecclesia complies fully with the DBS code of practice regarding the correct handling and use of Disclosure information. It also complies fully with the Data Protection Act.
2. **Usage of information.** Disclosure information is only used for the specific purpose for which it was requested and for which the applicant's full consent has been given.
3. **Storage and access.** In accordance with section 124 of the Police Act 1997, Disclosure information is only passed to those who are authorised to receive it. We maintain a record of all those to whom Disclosures or Disclosure information have been revealed and we recognise that it is a criminal offence to pass this information to anyone who is not entitled to receive it.
4. The maximum recommended interval between DBS checks is 3 years.
5. **Applications.** DBS Application forms and supporting information are provided by the appointed ecclesial checker who will also advise and assist with their completion. The appointed ecclesial checker will review the completed form and check all details against approved documents (e.g. passport, driving licence, recent utility bills or bank statements), make a record of the documents checked and forward both to the designated co-ordinator for CSSU as soon as possible.
6. **Handling of Disclosures.** When the Disclosure report is received, the applicant should show it to the appointed ecclesial checker. The latter will record on a spreadsheet the name of the applicant, date, type and serial number of the Disclosure and the outcome (e.g. 'none recorded'). No copies will be made and no other information will be recorded. The recorded information will be shared with the Recording Brother in view of his responsibility to confirm that all Youth Leaders have valid DBS Disclosures.
7. **Online Update Service.** The appointed ecclesial checker will recommend signing up to the On-Line Update Service for ease of future checks. This is currently free for unpaid volunteers and has to be done within 19 days of the date of the Disclosure report.

B: Recruitment of Ex-Offenders

1. All Youth Leaders work as unpaid volunteers
2. We undertake to comply fully with the DBS Code of Practice and to treat all volunteers fairly. We undertake not to discriminate unfairly against any subject of Disclosure on the basis of conviction or other information revealed.
3. Where a Disclosure is required we will explain this in advance to the individuals concerned and obtain their consent (this consent is taken as confirmed when the volunteer completes and signs the DBS application form).
4. We select Youth Leaders based on their skills, qualifications, experience and commitment to the values of the ecclesia. We will not appoint as a Youth Leader anyone who is revealed by the Disclosure process to have a conviction for an offence against a child or to be registered as being unsuited to work with children. As an ecclesia we understand that it is an offence to offer a disqualified person work with children or to allow them to continue in such work. This is in accordance with the DBS Code of Practice 5.4.3. In the case of all other convictions, we will take account of the date, circumstances and background of the offences and will endeavour to act fairly and appropriately.
5. We will make every subject of a DBS Disclosure aware of the existence of the DBS Code of Practice and make a copy available on request.

Appendix 2: Useful Contacts/Support Organisations

If you have concern that a child is being harmed as a result of abuse or neglect, you must not keep these concerns to yourself. Keeping children safe is everyone's responsibility.

You need to ensure that you speak to the appropriate organisations who can listen and record your concern, and then take appropriate action.

In Sheffield, these are the numbers that you can ring for advice and to make a referral:

-During office hours call West Area Office 0114 2734491

-Out of hours 24 hour helpline 0114 2734855

-If you have reason to believe that a child is at immediate risk of harm, contact the police on 999.

NSPCC Child Protection Helpline

The NSPCC Child Protection Helpline is a free 24 hour service that provides counselling, information and advice to anyone concerned about a child at risk of abuse.

Telephone 0808 800 5000 E-mail help@nspcc.org.uk

There is also Childline where the staff are trained in receiving calls from children, again for free, 24 hour advice. Telephone 0800 1111