

Safeguarding Children

Some reflections on our responsibilities for children, especially for TCKs





IT DOESN'T HAPPEN TO US!

Scottish orphanage founder jailed for 20 years for child abuse in Albania - November 2008

A charity worker from Edinburgh has been sentenced to 20 years in jail after he was convicted of sexually abusing children at an orphanage he founded in Albania. Evangelical Christian David Brown was described as a "threat to society" by the judge, who also ordered him to be deported from the country after completing his sentence.



DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE

Discuss together what you mean by the term ABUSE.

What are the key questions in deciding what constitutes abuse and what different types of abuse are there?

How much does this change within different cultural contexts?



DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE

Seek to find common basic definitions of abuse that could be applied in culturally sensitive ways in all contexts where your agency works.

Be familiar with the legislation under which you are working, both in home countries and where people are working. For example in England and Wales this is contained in legislation in the Childrens Act 1989 & 2004 (and in Working Together 2006). Do you know the legislative contexts of all your mission partners?

Use international standards such as the WHO Definitions of Abuse and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).



DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE

The WHO definition includes five areas of abuse

Physical Abuse: Actual or potential physical injury to a child, or failure to prevent injury or suffering to a child (such as hitting, shaking, squeezing, burning, biting or even excessive force in feeding a baby).

Emotional abuse: Actual or likely severe adverse effect on the emotional development of the child caused by persistent or severe ill treatment or rejection. All abuse involves some emotional ill treatment.

Neglect: Persistent or severe neglect of a child or the failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger, including cold or starvation, or extreme failure to carry out important aspects of care, resulting in the significant impairment of the child's health or development, including non-organic failure to thrive.



DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE

Sexual Abuse: Actual or likely involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children or adolescents in sexual activity they do not comprehend or to which they are unable to give informed consent, or which violate the social taboos of family roles.

Exploitation: Commercial or other exploitation of a child refers to use of the child in work or other activities for the benefit of others. This includes, but is not limited to, child labour and child prostitution. These activities are to the detriment of the child's physical or mental health, education, or spiritual, moral or social-emotional development.

Additional one we use in Global Connections - not in WHO definition

Spiritual abuse: Linked with emotional abuse, spiritual abuse could be defined as an abuse of power, often done in the name of God or religion, which involves manipulating or coercing someone into thinking, saying or doing things without respecting their right to choose for themselves



KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE

- It is EVERYONE'S responsibility
- Past teaching and perceptions can cloud our understanding
- what abuse is, who is involved, where it happens
- As Christians, we can take too much on trust
- We have an image of a 'sex offender', 'paedophile' but abuse is MUCH wider
- Very few people will abuse children, but those who do so often do so regularly



WHO ARE THE PERPETRATORS?

- Rarely a stranger - often family members, friends and acquaintances
- Male and female – females involved are increasing
- Children and adults
- Leaders and workers
- All kinds of backgrounds, cultures and situations



UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

- Use statutory authorities at an EARLY stage whenever possible
- You will not always get it right – it is messy - but you can try to do so
- Provide training in safeguarding to ALL, but also appoint and train “specialists” to deal with cases
- You cannot eliminate abuse completely, but you can reduce the chances of it happening
- Share best practice with others



GUIDELINES IN THE UK

In the UK, the Global Connections network has produced a set of guidelines for agencies and churches to use. They are available at:

www.globalconnections.org.uk/safeguarding

The overall statement of intent for those using them is:

“We are committed to safeguarding the welfare of children and young people and protecting them from abuse. We believe that it is never acceptable for a child to experience abuse of any kind and that safeguarding children is everyone’s responsibility within our organisation”.



OTHER GUIDELINES

In the USA, a group of American agencies and international mission agency offices have formed the Child Protection and Safety Network (CSPN). They have also developed some very helpful material.

A copy of their documents are available. Contact mlee@globalconnections.org.uk



UNDERLYING VALUES IN UK

Core value 1: All organisations should have a written policy and procedures for keeping children safe.

Core value 2: Safeguarding policy guidelines must recognise the international contexts in which they need to be applied.

Core value 3: Safeguarding policies should seek to minimise risk.

Core value 4: A formal, thorough and safe recruitment process for mission personnel should be adopted.

Core value 5: Safeguarding training plays a vital part in protecting children within an organisation.

Core value 6: The safety of children is of paramount importance. Allegations of unacceptable or abusive behaviour towards children should always be listened to, taken seriously and reported to the relevant authorities.

Core value 7: Allegations by an adult, of past (historic) abuse of them, from within or outside an organisation, should be taken seriously and responded to as effectively and appropriately as possible.



UNDERLYING VALUES

The starting point should be that the welfare and rights of children are KEY in all policies and procedures.

A child or young person has the right:

- to have their health, safety, well-being and best interests considered paramount
- to have their welfare and development promoted and safeguarded so that they can achieve their full potential
- to be valued respected and understood within the context of their own culture, religion and ethnicity
- to have their needs identified and met within their cultural context and within the context of their family.
- to be listened to and have their views carefully considered
- to be helped to participate in decisions which affect them



UNDERLYING VALUES

Staff and anyone who are in contact with children should:

- At all times treat children with respect and recognise them as individuals in their own right
- Regard them positively and value them as individuals who have specific needs and rights with a real contribution to make
- Work with them in a spirit of cooperation and partnership based on mutual trust and respect
- Value their views and take them seriously
- Work with them in ways that enhance their inherent capacities and capabilities, and develop their potential
- Strive to understand them within the context in which they live.



1. COMMUNICATING POLICY

- The safeguarding Policy should be written clearly, be easily understandable, and be translated as necessary.
- It is not a "one off" matter. The policy and associated procedures should be approved and reviewed on a regular basis in view of continual change in legal legislation, best practice and circumstances.
- The policy and its accompanying procedures should be given to all staff and volunteers and should be an integral part of the staff handbook, orientation and training programme.
- If working with local partners, the local partner should also be encouraged to develop a safeguarding policy.



2. INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

- Ensure child protection is a regular topic at senior management and governance level.
- Identify external professionals who can give professional advice.
- Within your particular structure (national or international), appoint an overall safeguarding coordinator. The views of the national sending offices MUST be taken into account in any international policy and procedures.
- Have trained safeguarding officers in each location, both sending bases and operational ones.
- If working with local partners, the local partner should also be encouraged to develop a child protection policy.



3. MINIMISE RISK

- Develop a clear code of conduct for all staff (and as appropriate visitors).
- Do not assume everyone works to the same standards or knows what is appropriate behaviour.
- Promote a culture that ensures children are listened to and respected as individuals.
- Clear guidance needs to be given to protect children from abuse and staff and visitors from false accusation.



4. RECRUITMENT

- All potential staff and volunteers should be informed of the safeguarding policy at the start of any recruiting process.
- The application process should ensure basic screening of applicants through the use of references and police checks.
- Have robust reference and background checks
- During the interview process, applications should be asked about previous work with children.
- In general, agencies should not employ anyone with a prior conviction for child abuse, paedophilia or related offences.



5. TRAINING

- The safeguarding children policy should be integrated into the staff handbook. Everyone should acknowledge in writing that they have received and understood the safeguarding policy.
- Orientation should be provided for all staff and volunteers relating to recognising abuse and how to deal with it.
- People with regular contact with children (eg youth and children's workers, TCK advisers) should be provided with appropriate additional training.
- The Safeguarding Coordinator and Officers should receive appropriate training from external professionals. They should be provided with continuous professional development.



6. DEALING WITH INCIDENTS

Child abuse is distressing for all concerned and it is often difficult to accept that it may have occurred, to the point that there is denial or that warning signs are dismissed.

- Under-reaction due to this lack of acceptance may mean children remain unprotected and exposed to further abuse
- Over-reaction can devastate the lives of innocent people.
- It is essential that all personnel understand their responsibility and are provided with clear procedures so that any concerns can be raised about the safety of children



6. DEALING WITH INCIDENTS

- Personnel should know what to do if they have any concern, report, incident or complaint and how to inform their local Safeguarding Officer.
- If a child approaches a staff member, the child should be listened to without probing or asking leading questions.
- Written notes should be made as soon as possible of what the child has reported and written on approved forms as records are an essential source of evidence.
- Confidentiality is important, reporting only to those who need to know.



6. DEALING WITH INCIDENTS

- The Safeguarding Officer should be aware of local laws and how allegations should be verified or investigated. How and at what stage an incident of abuse is reported to relevant authorities needs to be clearly defined. It should usually include the country where the abuse occurred and the home countries of the abused and perpetrator.
- The safety, support and counselling for the children alleging abuse and their family should be ensured. As much as possible should be done to minimise any possibility of a recurrence of any abuse.
- Procedures for support of and restricting access to children by the alleged abuser should be clearly defined and implemented immediately. This may include repatriation.



6. DEALING WITH INCIDENTS

- Where no local statutory investigation is possible, procedures for commissioning and producing an external independent investigation should be clearly defined.
- There are potentially enormous legal ramifications in getting it wrong. Though it may cost more initially, use professionally qualified people, not just people from other missions.
- Take care – do not set up verification systems that could make it look like a cover up. Involve statutory authorities when and where possible.
- Protocols should be developed for reporting to relevant passport country authorities and others.



7. HISTORICAL ABUSE

- Sometimes allegations of abuse may only surface after many years after any alleged incident. These are very difficult to handle. Additional procedures need to be in place for how to deal with such historic allegations.
- Where the alleged abuser is still in the employ of the organisation, any suspension should be undertaken in consultation with Children's Social Services / Police Child Protection Team.
- If the alleged abuse occurred outside the UK, then procedures should be in place about report to local statutory authorities or commissioning an external independent investigation
- The organisation should develop procedures for making appropriate apologies.



OTHER ISSUES

- Procedures need to be developed so that technology is not misused which could make children vulnerable to abuse and to exploitation.
- Special care should be taken that educational providers for MKs have their own safeguarding policies procedures – and that these are implemented.
- When working with especially vulnerable children, additional training and procedures may be required.
- What is considered appropriate and proper behaviour in different local cultures must be considered.


