

Children's Ministries Abuse Awareness & Reporting Addendum

Bethany Community Church

The purpose of this document is help give ministry leaders further information and details as they need to better determine the presence of abuse and how to go about reporting it.

Table of Contents

Abuse Awareness	1
Abuse Reporting Procedures	4

Abuse Awareness

It is very important as we care for the kids of BCC to be aware of child abuse. For the purpose of clarity we define terms from the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) as:

- **Child:** any person under the age of 18 years.
- **Physical abuse:** actual or potential physical harm inflicted by another person, adult or child. Examples may include hitting, kicking, shaking, poisoning, drowning, and burning.
- **Sexual abuse:** forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities that he or she does not fully understand and has no choice or legal standing to give consent. This may include, but is not limited to, rape, oral sex, penetration, or nonpenetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing, and touching. It may also include having a child view sexual images, pose or produce sexual images, watch sexual activities, or encourage a child to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.
- **Neglect:** a persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical or psychological needs. It includes the failure to give proper care, supervise, protect from harm, or provide for nutrition, shelter, and safe living conditions.
- **Emotional abuse:** persistent emotional maltreatment of a child. Emotional abuse includes acts such as [overbearing] restriction of movement, degradation, humiliation, bullying, threats, or discrimination. In addition, emotional abuse can also be found where an abuser controls and manipulates information so that the victim carries a distorted view of reality.

Other definitions and signs of these varying forms of abuse taken from DCFS and specific to Illinois and thus BCC are:

- Child Physical Abuse

- **Definition:** Physical abuse occurs when a parent or a person responsible for the child's welfare:
 - Inflicts a physical injury to a child that is non-accidental, including bruises, bites, bone fractures, cuts, welts, and burns;
 - Creates a substantial risk of physical harm to a child;

- Violates a court order that prohibits the perpetrator from having access to the child;
- Deliberately inflicts cruel or unusual treatment which results in physical or mental suffering by the child;
- Inflicts excessive corporal punishment (NOTE: If a parent or caretaker causes physical injury during overly harsh discipline, it does not matter that he or she did not intend to hurt the child.);
- Gives or allows a controlled substance to be given to a child under 18 years of age;
- Exposes the child to the manufacture of methamphetamine.
- Possible Signs:
 - Some children show obvious, outward signs of abuse, such as:
 - Unexplained marks on the body (cuts, bruises, welts, burns, black eyes, fractures or dislocations)
 - Bruises or welts in various stages of healing, or in clusters or patterns in the shape of an object, like a belt or an electrical cord
 - Pattern burns, such as cigarette burns, iron burns, burns in the shape of a specific object, or scald burns in an immersion pattern
 - Marks hidden from typically exposed areas of skin
 - Other children may show more subtle indicators, such as behavioral changes, including:
 - Extreme vigilance or watchfulness
 - Bullying smaller children
 - Poor social interactions with peers
 - Extreme fear of parents or caregivers (e.g. does not want to go home)
 - Harming animals
 - NOTE: You may notice some of these signs after a child has stopped attending for a period of time as well. However, be aware that some children will not display any overt behavioral changes.

- Child Sexual Abuse

- Definition: Sexual abuse occurs when a parent or a person responsible for the child's welfare commits any of the following acts:
 - Sexual penetration. This means any contact between the sex organ of one person and the sex organ, mouth, or anus of another person. Acts include vaginal, anal and oral sex.
 - Sexual molestation of a child. This occurs when the perpetrator touches the child or asks the child to touch him for the sexual gratification or arousal of the perpetrator or the child. Examples include fondling a child or having the child fondle the perpetrator.
 - Sexual exploitation. This is the "sexual use of a child for sexual arousal, gratification, advantage or profit," as defined by DCFS. It includes child

pornography, forcing a child to watch sex acts, or exposing genitals to a child.

- Possible Signs:
 - sexual knowledge beyond what is age appropriate
 - recurring pain or itching in genital or anal areas
 - sexually transmitted diseases
 - frequent bladder or urinary tract infections
 - genital injury
 - unexplained regression or fear
 - sexual acting out behavior:
 - Some examples of sexual acting out behavior include, but are not limited to:
 - A child forcing another person to do things that are sexual in nature. For example, a child telling another person to take off his/her clothes or trying to forcibly undress the other person. Another example is a child who aggressively tries to touch the genitals of adults or other children and gets angry when they are prohibited from doing so.
 - Sexual acts that children do with themselves. These may include exposing their genitals in public and getting angry when told not to do so, or touching/rubbing their own genitals to the point of hurting themselves.
 - NOTE: Some children will NOT display any overt behavioral changes. Sexual predators often abuse children in ways that do not leave physical signs such as fondling the child, exposing themselves to the child, or having the child perform sexual acts on the adult. Even sexual penetration of a child does not always leave obvious physical signs of abuse.

- Child Neglect

- Definition: Illinois enforces “minimum parenting standards.” According to DCFS, neglect occurs when a parent or responsible caretaker fails to provide these minimum requirements for their child:
 - adequate supervision
 - medical care/attention
 - food
 - clothing
 - shelter
 - Neglect may also include significantly delaying the provision of these necessities (such as failing to take a child who has a broken bone for medical treatment). Other forms of neglect include taking illegal drugs during pregnancy, placing a child at risk of harm, or exposing a child to hazardous living conditions. Any child who is present during the manufacture of methamphetamine is considered abused and/or neglected.

- NOTE: Poverty does not necessarily equate with neglect. Most parents are able to provide the minimum requirements for their child.
- Possible Signs:
 - Often hungry in the morning
 - Poor hygiene
 - Evidence of no or poor supervision
 - Underweight, poor growth, failure to thrive
 - Dressed inappropriately for the weather
 - Erratic attendance at school

- Child Emotional Abuse

- Definition:
 - While not technically an illegal form of abuse it is just as prevalent if not more so. These actions still need to be recognized to properly and appropriately care for the child.
 - Emotional abuse occurs when a parent or any person responsible for the child's wellbeing verbally or emotionally takes advantage of the child with the following actions:
 - Humiliates or degrades through name calling and ridicule
 - Characteristically seeks to control with misuse of power
 - Threatens to harm, threatens to leave, does not allow any disagreement
 - Isolates by his/her control of the child's time, activities, friends, or money
 - Blame shifts or acts like they are the victim
- Possible Signs:
 - Being apathetic, depressed, withdrawn, passive
 - Seeming overly anxious when faced with new situations or people
 - Being disorganized
 - Being distrustful
 - Being rigidly compulsive
 - Taking on adult or parental roles and responsibilities
 - Throwing tantrums or seeming impulsive, defiant, antisocial, aggressive, or self-destructive
 - Being fearful or hyper-alert
 - Showing a lack of creativity or exploration
 - NOTE: While individually these signs may not indicate any form of Emotional Abuse the more signs that are present would give stronger indication for concern.

Abuse Reporting Procedures

If a Bethany Community Church staff or volunteer has reasonable cause to suspect child abuse, a timely response is expected with the utmost concern for the victim, parent, or other parties involved. The accused will be treated with dignity and support. Without evidence as described below to the contrary, we will assume such complaints are legitimate. A false claim will be taken seriously as well, with BCC making every effort to clear the name and reputation of the falsely accused. Taking into consideration all circumstances, BCC will deal with the perpetrator of false charges in a polite manner. When it becomes necessary to report actual or suspected child abuse, the protection of children must be the most important concern. It is the responsibility of any staff or volunteer charged with the care of children to report all cases of child abuse he or she observes and to report visible signs of alleged abuse to his or her supervisor.

Failure to report could lead to liability on the part of Bethany Community Church, the volunteer, or both.

Reasonable suspicion means that there is credible evidence, or a discrepancy, or an inconsistency in explaining a child's suspected abuse or claims thereof. A report based on reasonable suspicion does not require proof that abuse has actually occurred or that the reporter witnessed the incident in question. Reporting is not a determination that child abuse has actually occurred.

By Bethany Community Church's guidelines, when a volunteer has reasonable suspicion that child abuse has occurred they must immediately contact their ministry lead and inform them of the circumstances.

The ministry lead will then contact the staff or elder overseeing their ministry to begin the reporting process and that staff or elder along with the help of the ministry lead and/or volunteer will assure the safety and protection of the child(ren) who may have been harmed. We will not confront the accused until the safety of the child or student is secured.

Once a determination is made that abuse has occurred or may have occurred, the staff or elder will immediately notify the parents or guardian. If the parent or guardian is under suspicion, the staff or elder will call DCFS first. The staff or elder will also determine what other numbers should be called as shown at the end of this section. If the child is in imminent danger, 911 will be called.

If the accused serves in ministry at BCC, they will be relieved of their roles until all investigations are concluded and the accused is cleared of wrong doing.

It is appropriate to show concern and offer comfort for the alleged victim as necessary. This should be the objective from the moment the allegation is received. The staff or elder will extend whatever resources are available to the alleged victim, the accused, and their families. The staff, elders, ministry leads, and volunteer should not allow themselves to be drawn into discussions of the truth or falsehood of the allegation, or assign blame, or take any steps to establish or negate the allegation. This could compromise or jeopardize official investigations.

The privacy and confidentiality of all involved will be of primary concern.

Only the official spokesman of Bethany Community Church should comment to media about the situation, including but not limited to: underlying facts, allegations, litigation (or threat of litigation), or related proceedings, and that only after consultation with legal counsel. The Senior Pastor or his designee in consultation with the elders will determine when and what to state publicly.

Important Telephone Numbers:

- Washington Police Department –309-444-2313
- IL Dept. DCFS –1-800-25- ABUSE (252-2873)
- National Child Abuse Hotline –1- 800-4-A-CHILD