



CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICY

WATCH TOWER BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF BRITAIN

and

CONGREGATIONS OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES
IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND IRELAND

CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICY

DEFINITION OF CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse is the abuse of a relationship with a child. It involves a misuse of power and a betrayal of trust. It may include physical, sexual and emotional abuse, or neglect, as defined by law. A child's trust is usually given completely, without reservation. So if that trust is betrayed, it has a devastating impact on an unsuspecting young mind.

Sexual abuse occurs when someone uses a child to gratify his or her own sexual desires. It could include fondling of genitalia, sexual intercourse, oral or anal sex, or fondling of breasts.

POLICY STATEMENT

Children are a sacred trust, an "inheritance from Jehovah."
(Psalm 127:3)

Therefore, the care and safeguarding of children and the promotion of their welfare is of the utmost concern and importance to the congregation. In recognition of this responsibility, our policy objectives are to ensure that if ever a matter requiring the protection of a child should arise within the congregation, it will be dealt with promptly and properly and that children in the congregation will be protected from avoidable harm. This policy is in harmony with the longstanding and widely published religious principles of Jehovah's Witnesses, as reflected in the articles that are set forth at the end of this Policyⁱ.

1

All children have the right to be protected from abuse.

2

Safeguarding children is of the utmost importance. We abhor child abuse and consider it to be a serious sin and a crime.—Romans 12:9.

3

Jehovah’s Witnesses do not condone child abuse under any circumstances or endeavour to shield from the authorities those committing offences of this nature.—Romans 13:1-4.

4

We believe that parents have the primary responsibility for the protection and the safety of their children. Thus, we do not separate children from their parents for the purpose of instruction.ⁱⁱ (Ephesians 6:4) Therefore, parents who are members of the congregation must be vigilant in exercising this responsibility at all times and are expected to:

(a)

have direct and active involvement in their children’s lives;

(b)

appropriately educate themselves and their children about child abuse; and

(c)

encourage, promote, and maintain regular communication with their children.—Deuteronomy 6:6, 7; Proverbs 22:3.

To assist parents to fulfil these responsibilities, the congregation will make use of the abundant information and advice published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

5

The congregation does not and will not provide or sponsor any activities that fall within the scope of “Regulated Activity Relating to Children,” (as defined in the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 and equivalent legislation in other parts of the United Kingdom and Ireland) including such activities as Crèches, Playgroups, Sunday Schools, Youth Groups, Clubs, Choirs, or Camps.

6

We believe that the interests of children are best served by encouraging, promoting, and maintaining good communication between members of the congregation and congregation elders based on trust, a shared respect for Bible principles, and a mutual interest in caring for and safeguarding children.—Galatians 6:5.

7

Conversations with congregation elders relating to spiritual counselling or assistance are confidential and will therefore not be shared with third parties other than other elders and the branch office, as the case may require, based on Jehovah's Witnesses' established religious procedures. However, should such conversations include information which indicates that a child may be at risk of harm then that information will be conveyed to the extent necessary to ensure that the policies and procedures herein expressed shall be properly followed so as to safeguard children.

8

The Branch Committee has appointed elders at the branch office to act as "Safeguarding Elders." These elders will receive initial and periodic training. The role of a Safeguarding Elder is to receive all reports, questions, or enquiries from elders or other members of congregations in the United Kingdom and Ireland in order to give guidance and direction on how to proceed in accordance with our *Child Safeguarding Policy*.

9

The coordinator of the congregation's body of elders is the primary contact in the congregation for matters pertaining to child abuse, although members of the congregation may contact any of the congregation's elders about such matters so as not to delay safeguarding children.

10

For the safeguarding of children and because child abuse is a serious sin, any congregation member who in any way learns of child abuse involving someone who associates with Jehovah's Witnesses should advise the coordinator of the congregation's body of elders or, in his absence, any other elder of the situation as soon as possible (Leviticus 5:1). Congregation elders will comply with any relevant laws.—Romans 13:1.

11

In the event a matter involving the abuse of a child is brought to the attention of congregation elders, the coordinator of the body of elders (who is also the designated coordinator for such matters), or in his absence another congregation elder, will arrange for contact to be made with a Safeguarding Elder at the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses as soon as possible for guidance and direction. This will be done even if the allegation is unsupported.

12

Congregation elders will treat victims of child abuse with compassion, understanding, and kindness. (Colossians 3:12) As patient spiritual and confidential counselors, they will carefully listen with empathy and respect whenever such a victim desires to express himself or herself to them.—James 1:19; Proverbs 21:13.^{iii, iv}

13

As soon as possible, the coordinator of the body of elders or, in his absence, another member of the Congregation Service Committee, will ensure that an alleged incident of child abuse is reported to (1) a parent, (2) a guardian, or (3) another holder of parental responsibility for the child (but in (1), (2), or (3) the report will be made only to a person who is not the alleged abuser). If a parent, guardian, or other person having appropriate parental responsibility for the child is not available, the congregation's coordinator of the body of elders or, in his absence, another member of the Congregation Service Committee, will again contact a Safeguarding Elder at the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses to request situation-specific guidance and direction.

14

If any congregation elder learns of a case of child abuse in which a child may still be at risk of significant harm (as defined by law and decided cases)^v the congregation elder together with the congregation coordinator of the body of elders, or in his absence another congregation elder, are required to contact a Safeguarding Elder at the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses to request situation-specific guidance and direction. A report to the police or other appropriate authorities will be made immediately by the congregation elders if it is determined that a child is still at risk.^{vi}

15

In the case of any discussion with a child abuse victim, an elder will not be alone with the child but will involve another elder and the child's parent, guardian, or another holder of parental responsibility for the child, other than a person who is the alleged abuser. If the child expresses to the elders discomfort in discussing the matter in the presence of a parent or guardian, and the parent or guardian agrees, then the child may be gently told that he or she may choose an adult companion other than a parent or guardian, with whom he or she feels comfortable speaking about the matter, to be present during the discussion.

16

One of Jehovah's Witnesses who is an unrepentant child abuser is expelled from the local congregation as well as from the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses.—1 Corinthians 5:13.

17

A person known to have abused a child in the past, and who continues to pose a risk to children or is not irreprehensible, does not qualify to serve in a position of trust or responsibility in the congregation.—1 Timothy 3:1-7, 10; Titus 1:7.^{vii}

18

While a person known to have abused a child may continue to be a member of the congregation if he is repentant and is under certain restrictions imposed for the protection of children in the congregation, he or she is specifically prohibited and admonished from being alone in the company of children, other than his own when he is legally entitled to do so.

19

If an incident of child abuse is reported to the congregation elders, any information that is kept is done so with a view to safeguarding children. Details retained will include the name of the accused, the date of the alleged abuse, the age of the alleged victim at the time of the alleged abuse and at the time the information is recorded, the date the incident first came to the attention of the elders, the names of elders involved in the discussion, and whether the accused was convicted in a secular court.

20

This policy applies to all charity Trustees, congregation elders, and other members of the congregation.

21

This policy is approved and endorsed by the board of Trustees (for the purposes of this policy, the term “board of Trustees” includes the body of elders of congregations that do not have charity trustees).

22

This policy will be monitored for compliance by the board of Trustees.

23

This policy will be reviewed by the board of Trustees at least once every three years.

24

This policy will be made available to any members of the congregation who make the request.

NOTES

ⁱ Information may be found in the following publications, all published by Jehovah’s Witnesses:

The Watchtower, October 1, 1983, “Help for the Victims of Incest.”

The Watchtower, January 1, 1997, “Let Us Abhor What Is Wicked.”

Awake!, October 8, 1991, “The Innocent Victims of Child Abuse,” “The Secret Wounds of Child Abuse,” and “A Time to Heal.”

Awake!, October 8, 1993, “Your Child Is in Danger!”, “How Can We Protect Our Children?”, and “Prevention in the Home.”

Awake!, October 2007, “A Danger That Concerns Every Parent,” “How to Protect Your Children,” and “Make Your Family a Safe Haven.”

ⁱⁱ *Learn From the Great Teacher*, pp. 57-61, 170-171, also published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

ⁱⁱⁱ Prior to offering counselling assistance, it is recommended that elders review information such as that found in *Awake!*, October 8, 1993, “Consoling Adult Survivors of Childhood Trauma.”

^{iv} Elders can act as “a hiding place from the wind” to those in need, speaking consolingly and praying with them. (Isaiah 32:1, 2; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; James 5:14, 15) By reasoning on the Scriptures and strengthening the victim with words of comfort and encouragement, elders aim to help such troubled ones.—Job 16:5; Ephesians 4:32; Philippians 4:6-9; 1 Peter 5:12.

^v As defined in the Children Act 1989, Section 31, as amended, (and equivalent legislation in other parts of the United Kingdom and Ireland).

^{vi} Helpful local telephone numbers include:

Police: _____

Local Authority Children’s Services: _____

^{vii} *The Watchtower*, January 1, 1997, “Let Us Abhor What Is Wicked.”

[The articles referred to in these Notes are reprinted and attached to form part of this Policy.]