

CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICY OF JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

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. A child’s trust is often given without reservation. So if that trust is betrayed, it can have a devastating impact on an unsuspecting young mind.

Child *sexual* abuse is a perversion and generally includes sexual intercourse with a child; oral or anal sex with a child; fondling the genitals, breasts, or buttocks of a child; voyeurism of a child; indecent exposure to a child; or soliciting a child for sexual conduct.

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 long-standing and widely published religious principles of Jehovah’s Witnesses, as reflected in the articles that are set forth at the end of this Policy.¹

While the following information refers to an accused in the masculine gender and to the victim in the feminine gender, it applies equally when the genders are different. Similarly, references to parents apply equally to legal guardians or other persons who hold parental responsibility for the child.

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, safety, and instruction of their children. 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 these responsibilities 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 spiritual 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, as amended from time to time, 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 a shared respect for Bible principles and a mutual interest in 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 in harmony with paragraph 13 of this Policy.

8

Elders at the Britain branch office of Jehovah’s Witnesses (the “branch office”) provide spiritual guidance and direction to congregation elders on child safeguarding matters. These selected elders at the branch office receive initial and periodic training. Their role 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 spiritual guidance and direction on how to proceed in accordance with our *Child Safeguarding Policy*.

9

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 is encouraged to advise any one of the congregation’s elders as soon as possible. (Leviticus 5:1) Congregation elders will comply with any relevant laws. (Romans 13:1) In addition, a congregation member who learns of child abuse may choose to report the matter to the secular authorities.

10

In the event a matter involving the abuse of a child is brought to the attention of congregation elders, two elders will contact the Legal Department at the branch office as soon as possible for legal advice to ensure that they comply with any relevant laws. This will be done even if the allegation is unsupported. Thereafter, a qualified elder in the Service Department at the branch office will provide spiritual guidance and

direction to congregation elders. In all cases, the victim and her parents have the absolute right to report an allegation to the authorities.—Galatians 6:5.

11

After receiving assistance from the branch office, congregation elders will conduct a Scriptural investigation of *every* allegation of child sexual abuse. Congregation elders will treat victims of child abuse with compassion, understanding, and kindness. (Colossians 3:12) As patient spiritual and confidential counsellors, they will carefully listen with empathy and respect whenever a victim desires to express herself to them.—James 1:19; Proverbs 21:13.^{iii, iv}

12

As soon as possible, the body of elders will ensure that an alleged incident of child abuse is reported to the victim's parent(s). Where the alleged abuser is one of the victim's parents, the elders would not report to him, but would report to the other parent. If a parent is not available, two elders will contact the Service Department at the branch office to request situation-specific spiritual guidance and direction.

13

If any congregation elder learns of a case of child abuse in which a child may still be at risk of significant harm two elders must contact the Legal Department at the branch office for legal advice on compliance. 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.^v

14

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(s), not including a parent who is the alleged abuser. If the child expresses to the elders discomfort in discussing the matter in the presence of a parent, and the parent agrees, then the child may be gently told that he or she may choose an adult companion other than a parent, with whom he or she feels comfortable speaking about the matter, to be present during the discussion. During the investigation process and any subsequent congregation judicial committee hearing, a victim of child sexual abuse is ***not*** required to make her allegation in the presence of the alleged abuser.

15

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.

16

A person who has engaged in child sexual abuse does not qualify to receive *any* privileges or to serve in a position of trust or responsibility in the congregation for many years, if ever.^{vi}

17

A person who has been found (either by a congregation judicial committee or the secular authorities) to have engaged in child sexual abuse might be a member of the congregation. In all such cases, restrictions will be imposed on the individual's activities within the congregation, his participation in the public ministry and his interaction with children for the protection of children. In particular, the individual will be specifically prohibited and admonished from being alone in the company of children, cultivating friendships with children or displaying any affection for children, other than his own when he is legally entitled to do so. In some cases, the Service Department may specifically direct elders to inform parents of minors within the congregation of the need to monitor their children's interaction with an individual who has engaged in child sexual abuse.

18

Information concerning individuals associated with the congregation who are accused of child sexual abuse, whether established or not, will be kept indefinitely in the congregation's confidential file with a view to safeguarding children.

19

This Policy applies to all congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses in Britain and Ireland.

20

This Policy will be monitored for compliance by the Britain Branch Committee.

21

This Policy will be reviewed by the Britain Branch Committee at least once every three years.

22

This Policy will be made available upon request to members of the congregation.

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."

Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work, Volume 1, chapter 32: "How Can I Protect Myself From Sexual Predators?"

Answers to 10 Questions Young People Ask, Question 8: "What Should I Know About Sexual Assault?"

"We Protect Our Children" (https://tv.jw.org/#en/video/VODStudio/pub-jwban_201507_2_VIDEO)

"Protect Your Children" (https://tv.jw.org/#en/video/VODChildren/pub-pk_17_VIDEO)

ⁱⁱ *Learn From the Great Teacher*, pp. 57-61, 170-171; *The Watchtower*, October 1, 2008, "How to Be a Good Father;" *The Watchtower*, November 1, 2010, "Talk to Your Children About Sex;" "How Can Parents Teach Their Children About Sex?" (<https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/parents-teach-children-about-sex/>).

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 Helpful local telephone numbers include:

Police: _____

Local Authority Children's Services: _____

^{vi} *The Watchtower*, January 1, 1997, "Let Us Abhor What Is Wicked."

Many publications of Jehovah's Witnesses on this subject can be read or downloaded on the www.jw.org website.

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