

# Child Protection Policy



## Child Protection Policy

June 2013

Avail has an established children's ministry, and we take seriously our responsibility to protect and safeguard the welfare of children and to ensure our workers are protected from malicious accusation. We recognise that children are a gift from God and consider them worthy of special care. We ask that all applicants read the policy and all appendices before completing the application form. They should make sure they understand both the policy and how it relates to their activities.

Avail is committed to the nurture, protection and safeguarding of children. We will undertake to:

- Help victims of abuse where practicable
- Take all reasonable precautions to ensure the protection of children within Avail activities
- Support parents or guardians who have the primary care of children
- Ensure that children's workers are supported and supervised
- Share concerns of abuse with statutory child-care authorities or appropriate agencies who need to know
- Ensure that child protection issues are addressed in the Avail application form
- Require that all applicants and current workers read the Child Protection Policy and agree to abide by it
- Take reasonable measures to share information about child protection and good practice.

As part of the application to join Avail, we require all applicants to submit themselves to a police check, unless this has been done within the previous year and they already have a disclosure form. Police checks in the UK are undertaken by the Disclosure Barring Service (DBS), formerly the Criminal Records Bureau. Non-UK nationals applying to Avail must seek checks of this kind from equivalent disclosure services in their country of origin. The application of anyone who has a police record for abuse will automatically be refused.

This policy is based on UK law, which may not apply in another country. The trustees are committed to following the Home Office Code of Practice *Safe from Harm* and any other guidance issued by H M Government or contained in the Children Acts 1989 and 2004, and any other relevant Acts. In responding to situations where these laws do not apply we will act in accordance with local laws and regulations that protect children. In addition, or where appropriate laws do not exist, we will seek to apply the spirit of the policy according to our best judgement.

Responsibility for implementing the policy lies with Avail's board of trustees who will take action in the event of any allegation or concerns about abuse.

## What the board promise to do if there is an allegation of abuse

- They will immediately call an emergency meeting in the event of any allegation or concerns about abuse. No one who is implicated in the allegation will be consulted or allowed to attend this meeting.
- They will first discuss the situation amongst themselves and will reserve the right to discuss it with local church leadership, on the condition that confidences are kept and that the leaders do not try to investigate the allegation themselves.
- They will appoint two members of the board to represent them and carry through the decision of the emergency meeting, with the agreement that the other trustees are kept fully informed of the situation.
- If the persons implicated in the allegation are overseas, two trustees, or one trustee and one home church leader, will fly out to the country in question and proceed as if they were in the UK.
- They will share concerns of abuse with statutory child care authorities or appropriate agencies who need to know.

In the event of any allegation against an Avail worker being found true, Avail will seek to ensure that children under their control are no longer at risk and will withdraw from all agreements with the worker to protect the reputation of the mission.

## Appendix 1: Definitions of abuse and how to recognise it

### Definitions

#### Physical abuse

Actual or likely physical injury to a child, or failure to prevent physical injury (or suffering) to a child. This includes deliberate poisoning, suffocation and Munchausen syndrome by proxy.

#### Sexual abuse

Actual or likely sexual exploitation of a child or adolescent; the child may be dependent and/or developmentally immature. Sexual exploitation represents the involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children and adolescents in sexual activities they do not truly comprehend, to which they are unable to give informed consent or that violate social taboos of family roles.

### Neglect

The persistent or severe neglect of a child or the failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger. This includes cold and 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.

### Emotional abuse

Actual or likely severe adverse effect on the emotional and behavioural development of a child caused by persistent or severe emotional ill-treatment or rejection. All abuse involves some emotional ill-treatment; this category is used where it is the main or sole form of abuse.

### Organised abuse

Organised abuse is sexual abuse where there is more than a single abuser and the adults concerned appear to act in concert to abuse children. It may also apply where an adult uses an institutional framework or position of authority to recruit children for sexual abuse.

See also below: Recognising abuse

See also Appendix 2: Responding to abuse

## Recognising abuse

The following signs may or may not be indicators that abuse has taken place, but the possibility should be considered.

### Physical signs of abuse

- Any injuries not consistent with the explanation given for them; injuries which occur to the body in places which are not normally exposed to falls, rough games etc.; injuries which have not received medical attention
- Neglect: undernourishment, failure to grow, constant hunger, stealing or gorging food, untreated illnesses, inadequate care etc.
- Reluctance to change for, or participate in, games or swimming
- Repeated urinary infections or unexplained tummy pains
- Bruises, bites, burns, fractures etc. which do not have an accidental explanation
- Cuts, scratches, or substance abuse

#### Indicators of possible sexual abuse

- Any allegations made by a child concerning sexual abuse
- Child with excessive preoccupation with sexual matters and detailed knowledge of adult sexual behaviour, or who regularly engages in age-inappropriate sexual play
- Sexual activity through words, play or drawing; child who is sexually provocative or seductive with adults; inappropriate bed-sharing arrangements at home
- Severe sleep disturbances with fears, phobias, vivid dreams or nightmares, sometimes with overt or veiled sexual connotations
- Eating disorders: anorexia, bulimia

#### Signs of emotional abuse

- Changes or regression in mood or behaviour, particularly where a child withdraws or becomes clinging; also depression, aggression or anxiety
- Nervousness or frozen watchfulness
- Obsessions or phobias
- Sudden under-achievement or lack of concentration
- Inappropriate relationships with peers and/or adults
- Attention-seeking behaviour
- Persistent tiredness
- Running away, stealing or lying

Many of the indicators above may be caused by other problems. There may be a cluster of signs and symptoms.

#### Racial, cultural and religious patterns

Crucial to any assessment is a knowledge of and sensitivity to racial, cultural and religious patterns. While different practices must be taken into account, it is also important to remember that all children have basic human rights.

### Emotional and spiritual effects of abuse

There can be problems of poor self-image and blame. A child may feel he or she is “dirty” or unlovable. Self-esteem may be affected: “Nobody could love me, I am too bad.” It is important to stress that they are not to blame for the abuse. Sensitive pastoral support can help a child to accept that they are loved just as they are, no matter what. As this truth begins to dawn on them, their self-esteem and confidence may grow. They also need to know that they will not be rejected because of the “shameful” things that have happened to them.

Abused children and adults will often speak of difficulties in relating to God as ‘Father’. This may be because ‘Father’ represents an absent, silent, mocking, violent or sexually abusive person in a position of power and authority. A child or young person needs to understand the truth that God will not treat them as the abuser did, but it may take some time to fully accept.

## Appendix 2: Responding to abuse

### What to do if a child reports abuse to you

- Make notes as soon as possible (preferably within one hour of the child's talking to you), writing down exactly what the child said and when he/she said it, what you said in reply and what was happening immediately beforehand (e.g., a description of the activity). Record the dates and times of these events and when you made the record. Keep all hand-written notes, even if subsequently typed: such records should be kept safely for an indefinite period.
- Report the matter to a board member.
- Be discreet; do not confer with anybody else.
- Fill out the report form (see Appendix 5).

## How to respond to a child wanting to talk about abuse

### General Points

- Show acceptance of what the child says (however unlikely the story may sound).
- Keep calm.
- Look at the child directly.
- Be honest.
- Tell the child you will need to let someone else know; do not promise confidentiality.
- Even when a child has broken a rule, do not blame the child for the abuse.
- Be aware that the child may have been threatened or bribed not to tell.
- Never push for information; if the child decides not to tell you after all, then accept that, and let them know that you are always ready to listen.

### Helpful things you may say or show

- I believe you (or show acceptance of what the child says).
- Thank you for telling me.
- It's not your fault.
- I will help you.

### Things not to say

- Why didn't you tell anyone before?
- I can't believe it!
- Are you sure this is true?
- Why? How? When? Who? Where?
- 'I promise', if you can't fulfill the promise.
- I'm shocked; don't tell anyone else!

### Concluding

- Again reassure the child that they were right to tell you and show acceptance.
- Let the child know what you are going to do next and that you will let them know what happens.

Why you might not act

- Fear you may be wrong
- Doubts about the child's truthfulness
- Fear that intervention will be damaging
- Memories of own similar experiences
- It may not happen again
- It's a minor injury
- Distress/anger on behalf of the child
- What is normal?

Remember that it is important to share concerns with an Avail board member if you even think that a child may be at risk of abuse.

## Appendix 3: Guidelines about touching children

Avail is aware that physical touch often occurs in a completely pure and innocent way. However, you should seek to understand and follow these guidelines to protect both children and workers.

- Keep everything public; a hug in the context of a group is very different from a hug behind closed doors.
- Touch should relate to the needs of the child, not of the worker.
- Touch should be age- and gender-appropriate and generally initiated by the child rather than the worker.
- Any physical activity that is, or may be thought to be, sexually stimulating to the adult or the child should be avoided.
- Any physical form of discipline is unacceptable: workers must never smack a child.
- Children have the right to decide how much physical contact they have with others, except in exceptional circumstances when they need medical attention.

Team members should monitor one another in the matter of physical contact and should be free to help each other by pointing out anything that could be misconstrued. Concerns about abuse should always be reported.

## Appendix 4: General guidelines for workers

- Work together to create a safe environment for all who take part.
- Treat everyone with respect.
- Provide an example that you wish others to follow.
- Ensure all activities are well thought through and safely conducted.
- Plan activities that involve a team, not an individual, whether working with children or adults.
- Provide firm, but kind, discipline so that activities are always safe.

Things that should not be allowed

- Abusive peer activities (e.g., bullying, name calling)
- Exaggeration or trivialisation of child abuse issues
- Undue favouritism towards any individual
- Spending extended time with a child out of sight of others

## Appendix 5

See next page

## Incident Report Form: An Allegation of Abuse

This report form is for the purpose of keeping a record of reports made to Avail.

CONFIDENTIAL

Name of child/young person.....

Address.....  
.....Date of birth.....

Name of person reporting incident.....

Date of incident..... Time.....

Nature of concern.....  
.....

On a separate page, a full factual written account (see Appendix 2) should be made of your observations, including the sequence of events and conversations held (citing actual words used). Your written record should be attached to this report form, signed and dated.

Action taken.....  
.....

Name of person with whom you shared your concerns.....

Has there been any feedback or follow-up?.....

Date of contact..... Time.....

Signature of person reporting the incident.....

Date and time.....

Name and signature of Board Member of Avail.....

Date and time.....