

# The Longcroft Christian Trust



Charity Registration No: 239856

Storeton Lane  
Barnston  
Wirral  
CH61 1BU

0151 648 2042

## **Safe & Secure (Guidelines for Leaders)**

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## 1:1 General Introduction

The Children & Young People who meet at the various groups at Longcroft have a good time together, face up to new challenges and learn more about the love of God for them. But it is just possible that one of those children in your group is carrying a terrible burden of guilt and hurt after suffering abuse at the hands of a family member, another young person or a member of the church.

Over the past decade, legislation and research has highlighted child abuse in its many forms and has culminated in a document entitled "Safe from Harm" which aims to safeguard all young people who are part of groups such as those at Longcroft.

The HMSO Code of Practice "Safe from Harm" could be seen as a challenge to all churches, children's groups and youth work agencies both Christian and secular. If we are to take it seriously at Longcroft we must review the way we work, commit ourselves to good practice and high standards, and take full responsibility for the children in our care. In our church this is our duty to the young people and to God.

These guidelines are specifically for leaders of children's and young people's groups and for church leaders.

The advice given applies to all members of children's and young people's groups up to the age of 18, and the descriptions of "children" and "young people" are interchangeable, as gender references such as "he" and "she". A "Disclosure" is a situation when a child tells someone else, usually an adult (leader) that they are suffering abuse. Whenever forms and documents are mentioned examples can be found in Section 6. All numbers given in brackets refer to sections within this document.

This document is important for the protection of children and young people in your group and church, as well as you as leaders. You will find some background information on this and other guidelines and support agencies, and chapters covering the appointment of leaders, the safe environment in which you should aim to operate and procedures when child abuse is disclosed or suspected.

The issue is not just one of protecting the children and young people in your group. The aim is to protect you from situations which should be avoided and actions which can be misinterpreted. Please do not feel intimidated by what you read on the following pages, rather it is important to take these guidelines seriously, address the issues raised and do all you can to safeguard God's children, however old they are!

## **1:2 Sources and Information**

Safe from Harm

HMSO  
0171 273 3072

Children and Young People First

Southwell Diocese  
01636 814504

Safe to Grow

Baptist Union of Great Britain  
01235 512077

Safeguarding Children and Young People The Methodist Church  
0181 444 9845

Guidance to Churches

PCCA Christian Childcare  
01322 667207

## **Section 2 Appointing Workers**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In many churches there is a constant nagging need for more volunteers to work with young people. As leaders make an open appeal, and then wait, the standard they are seeking can so easily slip. Any volunteer ends up being welcomed with open arms.

It is the aim that all leaders should be suitable, committed and selected following an appropriate and stringent procedure. Evidence suggests that those who are likely to abuse children seek out opportunities to work with them, and that churches and Christian organisations are viewed as “soft targets”. In addition, we have the privilege and responsibility of helping people find the ministry for them. We must therefore behave responsibly in our selection of leaders.

### **2.2 The Role of the Church**

The church as a whole and the church leadership in particular, is responsible for the spiritual and physical wellbeing of the children in their groups. It is recommended that the leadership of the church is fully and actively involved in all appointments and works closely with others in ensuring that those selected are suitable to that area of ministry, and those excluded are cared for and helped as may be appropriate. The forms relating to leader applications, references, approvals etc are retained in confidence by the eldership.

### **2.3 Selecting Potential Leaders**

Leaders should be selected as if they are applying for a job, references must be taken up, and they must fill in an application form. The following process should be followed:

1. Approach individuals who are thought to be suitable and explain the nature of the work. Avoid making open appeals if possible.
2. Ask the applicant to fill out a form giving details of current name, any previous names, date of birth, address, experience, and reason for the application, two referees, names and addresses and any convictions or cautions.

Talk through the form and explain the reasons for the questions regarding criminal convictions etc. Explain that such screening protects the church, the group, the leaders and the children/young people.

3. Send out reference forms, or talk to referees asking questions on the form and filling in the replies. Follow up the reference if it appears vague, hesitant or ambiguous. Ensure that an Endorsement Form has been completed by the Main Leader and the Church Leader responsible for young people's work (Form 6:4)

4. Hold a formal interview with the applicant, talking through past experience and attitudes. Someone who has been a victim of abuse should not necessarily be barred from work with children, but should be able to show evidence of having dealt with it.

5. Discuss with the applicant the "Safe and Secure" document and explain the Good Practice Guidelines (3:3) and the Review and Supervision for Leaders (3:2).

## **2.4 Excluding Potential Leaders**

There may be occasions when things are revealed or there are uncertainties which cannot be resolved. In those situations consider the following points:

1. Do not allow your prior knowledge, status or outward appearance of the applicant to cloud your judgement.
2. Do not appoint if you have ANY doubts.
3. Do not appoint solely in order to avoid hurting feelings.
4. Do not appoint solely to solve a staffing shortage.
5. Do not appoint those with a record of abusing others, or have a record of violent/sexual behaviour. God does forgive and it is the duty of the church to welcome and involve such people without putting them in a situation of temptation.
6. Do not appoint anyone who does not fill in an application form or give two suitable references.

## **2.5 Legal Points**

1. The Application Form question about victims is exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exemptions) Order 1975 and therefore all convictions and cautions must be declared.
2. At the time of writing we are not able to ask for police checks to be made on leaders. However in the light of the “Cullen Report” (Nov 1996) this may change.
3. Any applicants who work in relevant professions such as residential workers or teachers will have been police checked before being appointed to their jobs.
4. It is possible under the Data protection Act for individuals to request any information held by police about them. The police are not always able to help willingly or quickly and charges are involved.
5. The information you collect on an applicant must remain confidential and be kept in a secure place. It **MUST NOT** be discussed or become a matter of gossip or rumour.

## **Section 3 Good Practice in Action**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Many leaders know the feeling of isolation and desperation that comes from time to time. There can be instances of a failure to ensure adequate supervision. Questions to ask would be:

Do church leaders know and accept their responsibilities?

How can leaders be supervised?

Does the group respect and respond appropriately to the trust the parents of the young people put in it and the leaders?

What action should be taken if leader behaviour is unsuitable?

How would a review procedure operate?

Should a leader be on their own with young people regularly?

What Good Practice Guidelines would avoid a lowering of standards?

### **3.2 Review and Supervision of Leaders**

#### **a) New leaders**

Appoint for an initial period of 3 months

Attach the new leader to a more experienced one.

Give them a clear and specific job description.

Review how they feel and you feel about their work after 3 months.

Terminate their involvement or appoint them permanently.

Ensure that you have agreed and signed a Leader Contract (6.5) with the new leader and that an Endorsement Form (6.4) has been completed.

#### **b) All Leaders**

Give clear and specific job descriptions.

Appoint a member of the church leadership to look at the work of leaders and investigate issues and problems as they arise.

Review the individual and team work of leaders every year asking for honest analysis from everyone.

Ensure that leaders are never placed in situations of isolation.

Follow all Good Practice Guidelines (3.3).

Ensure that a Leaders Contract (6.5) has been agreed and signed by all leaders.

### **3.3 Good Practice Guidelines**

Many of these guidelines are obvious and carried out as a matter of course. Some are designed for the wellbeing and happiness of young people and others to avoid leaders being in difficult or compromising situations. It is possible that some may not be suitable to your situation, but it is recommended that each one is considered on its merits.

#### **a) Structure**

- Ensure that there is a declared leadership structure throughout the groups and linking in to the church
- Be clear about areas of responsibility, line management and the sources of help in emergencies
- Appoint one leader to be “Child Safety Coordinator” (section 3.3h)

b) Health and Safety

- There should be adequate heating and lighting in the venue
- Make sure the toilets are hygienic
- Ensure there is enough space and appropriate activities for all children
- Have a first aid kit and phone available
- Check the premises for hazards
- Check equipment for sharp edges or missing parts
- No smoking should be permitted
- Fire drills should be carried out at least annually
- Any food should be prepared hygienically and carefully
- Ensure a sensible ratio of adults to children- 1 leader to 8 children is a good ideal (less for younger children or hazardous events)

c) Administration

- Ensure that all children have brought a completed Consent Form from their parent/main carer (form 7.6). The forms should go with you whenever you go off site. A separate form (7.7) is required for trips and Residential.
- Keep a register of all children
- Keep clear and up to date accounts of all financial matters

d) All Leaders

- All leaders should show a desire to provide warm and consistent care for the children they work with.
- All leaders should be willing to be trained, supported and appraised.
- Leaders should treat all children as valuable individuals, without favouritism or antagonism.
- Leaders should have reasonable physical health, mental stability, spiritual attitudes, integrity and flexibility.
- Leaders should be “listening people” willing to be receptive and seen to make time for young people

e) Contact- Things to avoid

- Never place yourself in a vulnerable situation, or one open to misinterpretation
- Avoid being on your own with a child
- Work in large rooms or in close proximity to others

- Avoid any touching of children in private
- Avoid favouritism and “special” friendships
- Do not develop an exclusive relationship with a group member if you are a leader, however small the age gap
- Do not be over eager to befriend particular children
- Do not invite a particular child to your home or out on a trip without having other adult/s with you, and parental permission
- Never smack or physically discipline except “holding” when endangering himself or others
- Never take a child home on your own, have another leader with you and drop the last two off together
- Do not discuss your relationship with your partner or any sexual activity with young people
- Do not make sexist comments or comment on child’s physical attributes of attractiveness.

f) Contact 2- Things to do

- Avoid situations when you might be tempted, particularly with older young people
- Exercise wisdom and tact in your relationship with children
- Listen to what children have to say without being judgemental
- Think about children’s safety at all times
- Touch is important as part of relationships, but it should be age appropriate and always in public
- Allow children privacy when going to the toilet or changing
- Have 2 adults working with each group and at least 2 when leaving the premises (within the guidelines of ratios advised in section 3.3b)
- Make sure that others can see you if in a counselling situation
- Strongly discourage “crushes” from group members and involve an intermediary if necessary
- Pray about difficult or potentially vulnerable situations

g) Communications with Team Members

- Make sure that the Child Safety Coordinator is informed of any suspicion or disclosure of abuse
- Ensure that you can righteously justify your behaviour and activities
- Meet regularly with other leaders to review procedures and discuss difficulties

- Talk to your leader if you see another worker act in a way that could be misinterpreted
- Discuss any problems you may have in dealing with particular young people
- Always seek advice and wisdom if you have any doubts or concerns

#### h) The Child Safety Coordinator

The person will need to:

- Keep up to date with this document and any amendments, and attend any training necessary
- Be available to respond immediately if a suspicion or disclosure of abuse is made in any of the groups
- Help the leader directly involved in the reporting and liaising with Social Services, Police and other authorities
- Train and inform all leaders about the “Guidelines and procedures” in this document and ensure they are being implemented

The person will need to be:

- A mature and respected member of the church
- Someone who is willing to devote time to the task and take it seriously
- Able to make quick decisions, carry responsibility and offer pastoral and practical support for other leaders as well as young people
- Motivated to put the needs of an abused child before the pressure for secrecy and cover up that may come from other adults
- Willing and suited to communicating with, networking and assisting the outside agencies involved in child safety
- Keen and helpful in assisting in any investigation by the statutory authorities such as Police, Social Services etc

#### i) Helping Children Protect themselves

- Teach and discuss general protection matters such as “Stranger Danger”, good and bad secrets and so on
- Discuss situations when children can feel uncomfortable. Give them ideas as to what to do and who it is safe to go with.
- Encourage children to value touch, but to be aware of touch when it is uncomfortable, under clothes or “rude”
- Create situations where children can be free to express their feelings about everyday things, as well as more personal issues

- Help children to develop their own common-sense rules and to say “No” when they feel that others are breaking the rules
- Examine the teaching of issues such as “Obey your parents” and the nature of “Fatherhood” as our image of such relationships may differ from those of children who have suffered or are suffering abuse.

j) Discipline

- Discipline is necessary to the development of us all-do not be afraid to use it
- Never smack or hit a child
- Be firm, consistent, persistent and patient
- Do not shout or put down a child
- Encouragement and praise can often calm volatile situations
- Walk away and seek help if you feel you are losing your temper or unable to cope
- Lay down simple and clear ground rules which all children should follow
- Develop a procedure that is explained to all the children and followed by all leaders, which may include loss of privileges, exclusion, talking to parents etc
- Never reject the child, but make it clear that the behaviour is not acceptable
- Examine the activities and programme you have – discipline problems often arise out of boredom or frustration
- Remember the problems a child might be carrying around before making judgements
- If there is no way we can persevere with a particular child we should remember that God is in control and He will help the child in some other way

## **Section 4 Child Abuse**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Child abuse may or may not be a growing problem, but the fact is that it is a more aired issue. If we follow the guidelines (3.3) already laid down in this document we will have gone some way to protecting children in our care, but we need to know what we would do if the worst did happen. There has been a tendency in the church of the past to cover up the facts and incidents of child abuse, to “keep it to ourselves” and so to fail to face up to the problem. Hiding and ignoring child abuse only protects the abuser, and opens other young people up to the same risks, the same hurt.

Questions we will be addressing include:

- Are your children’s and young peoples groups or your church a safe enough situation for a child to feel able to talk about abuse?
- Are your leaders open enough to talk and are there opportunities and “space” for it to happen?
- What would you do if a child told you they were being abused?
- Who would you tell and who would you turn to for help and advice?
- Would you respond differently if the allegation were made against a fellow worker or church member?

### **4.2 Areas of Abuse**

For the purpose of this document we are looking at three main areas of abuse- physical, emotional and sexual. The signs of each are listed and the identification of one or more of these signs on a child should alert you to the possibility but not the certainty of abuse. Signs should never be taken in isolation.

#### **a) Physical abuse**

**DEFINITION:** likely or physical injury to a child, or a failure to prevent such injuries. Actions such as hitting, shaking, throwing, squeezing, burning, biting, cutting, drowning, suffocation or administering poisonous substance. Neglect may fall into this category and is self explanatory.

**SIGNS:** Injuries not consistent with the explanation given or in parts of the body which do not normally sustain bruising or other injury; Injuries which have not been adequately treated, or are unlikely to be accidental (i.e. cigarette burns); excessive caution or flinching when approached by adults; unwilling to change for swimming or games, or to remove outer clothing; consistent poor health, hunger, tiredness and withdrawn behaviour.

b) Emotional abuse

**DEFINITION:** Persistent and/or severe emotional development in the child. All abuse has an emotional aspect

**SIGNS:** Withdrawn behaviour, clinging and excessive need for security and routine; nervousness, persistent tiredness and attention seeking behaviour; inappropriate relationships with peers and/or adults.

c) Sexual Abuse

**DEFINITION:** Sexual activities which involve dependent, developmentally immature young people who do not fully comprehend what they are doing or give informed consent.

**ACTS** may include sexual intercourse (oral, anal, vaginal), the showing of pornographic material, sexual touching and the exposure of sexual organs.

**SIGNS:** An allegation or disclosure made by a victim; a child with an age inappropriate knowledge and/or preoccupation of sexual activity reflected in conversation, play or drawings; inappropriate bed sharing arrangements at home, and regular sleep disturbances including vivid dreams and nightmares.

Any form of abuse consists of damage to a child or young person. The abuser is operating from a position of power which may be due to age, home hierarchy, relationship, gender, intellect, physical strength or emotional maturity. The victim may suffer degradation, rejection, violation, neglect, hurt, guilt, hopelessness, inferiority, physical injury, and enforced maturity, theft of childhood or youth and severe emotional damage.

### 4.3 Abuse Disclosures and Suspicious Action

#### a) Confidentiality

- You should never promise to keep what a child wants to say to you totally confidential, as you may need to take it further. More advice comes on what to say later
- You should never keep a matter of abuse “in house”, even if you think that there is evidence of true sorrow and repentance on the part of the abuser. The needs of the abused child and other possible victims must come first, and it is the duty of leaders to ensure that this is so.
- You should seek help from the Child Safety Coordinator immediately, and work with them to address the problem. Work on a “need to know” basis, never telling any other leaders or church members.
- You may need to keep written records of suspicions or disclosures. Keep all written records safe and do not let others, apart from agencies such as Social Services read them. Written records could in the long term be used for evidence in court- take them seriously.

#### b) Talking to the Child

If a child wants to talk to you about some form of abuse, follow the following guidelines as much as is possible and appropriate to your situation.

General points:

- Accept what the child says
- Keep calm
- Be honest
- Look at the child directly
- Do not appear shocked
- Let them know that you may need to tell someone else
- Assure them that they are not to blame for the abuse
- Never ask leading questions
- Do not fill in words, finish their sentences, or make assumptions
- Be aware that the child may have been threatened

Things to say:

- Repeat the last few words in a questioning manner
- “I believe you”
- “I will help you”
- “I am glad that you told me”
- “You are not to blame”

Things not to say:

- “You should have told someone before”
- “I can’t believe it”, “I’m shocked!”
- “No, not....- he’s a friend of mine”
- “I won’t tell anyone else”
- “Why? How? When? Who? Where?”

At the end

- Reassure the child that it was right to tell you
- Let them know what you are going to do next
- Immediately seek help, in the first instance from the Child Safety Coordinator, or seek advice from PCCA
- Make notes as soon as possible (within an hour would be ideal), of what you and the child said, and record all dates and times mentioned. Notes, dates and times are essential in helping the Police and Social Services assess the best for the child and as evidence if necessary.

## b) The Next Step<sup>1</sup>- Physical and Emotional Abuse

If there are signs of abuse:

- Tell your Child Safety Coordinator immediately
- Speak to the parent/main carer and suggest that medical attention is sought. It maybe appropriate to suggest that help is also sought from Social Services.
- Offer to go with them to Social Services or to their GP
- If you still have concerns contact Social Services directly (via your Child Safety Coordinator) and inform them of your concerns.
- Contact PCCA and ask for their advice as to how proceed
- Keep a note of your observations, as well as dates and times

If there is a disclosure of Physical or Emotional Abuse:

- Tell your Child Safety Coordinator immediately and contact PCCA if unsure
- Contact Social Services and inform them of your concerns
- Keep a written record of the disclosure, signed and dated

c) The Next Step 2 –Sexual Abuse

If there are signs of abuse:

- Discuss the matter with your Child Safety Coordinator. Involve PCCA unless you are absolutely sure as to how to proceed
- Inform Social Services of your concerns
- Keep a written record of your concerns, dates and times

If there is a disclosure of Sexual Abuse:

- Inform the Child Safety Coordinator. (If the allegation is against the Child Safety Coordinator talk to PCCA and inform Social Services directly)
- Do not talk to the parent/s or alleged abuser, as they may be involved or may be innocent but panic
- Check that the notes from the disclosure are accurate, dated and signed
- Do not attempt any form of fact-finding or investigation
- Inform Social Services as soon as possible and ask PCCA for advice and support
- Ask Social Services what role you will now have to play. This could involve giving written evidence about the young person's background, attending the Initial Child Safety Conference and being on hand to help the police

#### **4.4 The Cycle of Abuse**

People who abuse children and young people are usually known to their victims. They may be friends, family members or youth group leaders. They appear to be “normal” members of society and “normal” members of our churches

- Abusers may sometimes be in a caring capacity over the child (child-minder, older family member, sibling) or in some position of authority (teacher, group leader, church leader)
- Abusers are in need and require help. They are often victims of abuse themselves and have failed to recognise or come to terms with their own pain
- Abusers are 90% male and almost always older than the victim. Some may be well-organised and very devious members of paedophile groups
- Abusers come from any and all social backgrounds and live in a range of family situations. Essentially it could be someone just like you.
- Abusers are known to seek out opportunities to work with children and young people and appear very plausible
- Abuse rarely just happens. It is often a build up of tension, fantasy and temptation, and is meticulously planned. Some abusers make long term career or family planning decisions in order to obtain access to young people
- The temptation to write off all men in order to protect children is very strong. However, young people need good role models and healthy relationships with older people of both sexes.

A potential sexual abuser may follow this pattern:

1. He fantasises about a sexual act with a young person and plans how to achieve it.
2. He minimises the potential harm and sees it in terms of his physical needs
3. He targets his victim and attempts to form a relationship
4. He grooms the child into believing that this is a good, caring and attentive friend
5. He starts to abuse, suggesting that the child caused it, must be enjoying it, and that it is the loving thing to do.
6. He bribes or threatens the child in order to keep the abuse a secret

7. The abuser justifies his actions in his own mind, and minimises the damage.

8. Even if caught, helped, converted, reformed and counselled it is likely that the cycle of abuse will begin again.

The victim of abuse needs the immediate situation to be changed and to feel that they are safe and unlikely to suffer in the same way again. However, they will also need a great deal of help, support and counselling which may last a long time. Social Services and Health Services may be able to provide this. Leaders do not have the knowledge or expertise necessary to help in depth, despite our willingness to do so. All information on counselling and long term support should be sought from PCCA.

An adult making a disclosure of abuse comes under a different framework, and while needing your support should be encouraged to make contact with the Police direct. PCCA will be able to help and advise in this situation. The implication for the group is that the victim may be in close and unsupervised contact with children himself, and it is possible that he feels tempted to abuse. While this would be a sensitive and difficult situation, we suggest that it would be best to withdraw the adult from the group until the matter is cleared up and he has received help and counselling to come to terms with the abuse he has suffered.

## **Section 5 People Who Can Help**

### **5.1 Statutory Agencies**

#### **a) Social Services**

On suspecting abuse is taking place, or on hearing a disclosure from a young person, the local Social Services should be informed. They have the lead responsibility to take action under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989. All areas have a Duty Officer available 24 hours a day who must take any action they consider suitable if they are contacted. The Social Services will take the lead in caring for the young person's immediate and long-term needs.

#### **b) NSPCC**

The NSPCC have child care officers and teams throughout the country, and they work as an accepted and respected part of the support agencies. You may prefer to contact NSPCC in the first instance rather than Social Services, although all procedures followed will be essentially the same.

#### **c) Police**

The Social Services will involve the Police, particularly if they suspect that an offence has taken place. If the child needs interviewing it is now usual for this to be done by a Social Worker and a trained Police Officer. The Police will take the lead in investigating the allegations and taking statements.

#### **d) Health Agencies**

A young person who alleges abuse may have to be examined by a doctor or attend hospital for treatment, and information from their GP may be sought. The Health Agencies may also be involved in longer-term support and counselling.

#### **e) Childline**

Childline is a national helpline set up to advise and offer support to children and young people facing difficulties, including the pain of abuse. Their number is 0800 111.

f) Victim Support

This national agency offers help, understanding and counselling for victims of many types of crime including abuse. They have local offices throughout Great Britain.

g) Other Local Agencies

There is a national network of organisations and agencies which help and support those who are victims of abuse. Your local library or Social Services office will have details of them.

## **5.2 PCCA (i.e. CCPAS)**

“PCCA” is a registered charity and a leading organisation in the field of child abuse, safety and counselling. They run training sessions on child abuse, individual counselling for children, adults and families who have been damaged by abuse and run a respite care home in the West Midlands.

PCCA is willing to directly help groups, Child Safety Coordinators and other leaders in the implementation of these guidelines.

The PCCA office staff will offer support and advice on how to respond if there is a suspicion or disclosure of abuse. Their help is confidential and is based on many years of experience. **IT IS SUGGESTED THAT PCCA ADVICE IS ALWAYS SOUGHT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE IN ANY CASE OF SUSPICION OR DISCLOSURE OF ABUSE.**

The PCCA Helpline will offer advice on how to help the young person once the abuse situation has been dealt with. They may be able to help themselves, but more likely will give you local contacts and sources of help.

CCPAS c/o PCCA, PO Box 133, Swanley, Kent, BR8 7UQ

PCCA Office Phone 01322 667207

PCCA Office Fax 01322 614788

PCCA Helpline 01322 660011