

Section 3

Taking Action

This section describes in detail what action must be taken when there are concerns about children and young people. It provides clear procedures to follow at a time often characterized by high anxiety.

It includes information on what happens when social services and the police pursue a matter reported by the church. This is included in order to clarify the roles of the statutory organizations involved and the role of the church.

Parishes must ensure that both those who are in direct contact with children and young people, and other leaders are aware of these procedures.

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3.1 When you have concerns or suspicions about the welfare of a child

You may have concerns about the welfare of a child or suspicions about the behaviour of an adult, because of something a child tells you, because another adult voices concerns, and/or because of the behaviour or appearance of the child.

An **allegation** is when someone, who may or may not be the child concerned, makes a direct statement that abuse has taken place.

All allegations of child abuse, from whatever source, should be referred to Social Services as soon as possible.

A **suspicion** is where there are indicators that child abuse may have taken place but where there is no direct allegation or disclosure to confirm this.

Indicators may include:

- The behaviour or appearance of a child;
- The emotional responses or reactions by a child to a particular situation;
- Physical signs, such as the presence of unexplained injuries;
- Environmental factors, e.g. knowledge of domestic violence within the family, the presence of a known abuser in contact with the family, parents experiencing significant stress;
- Worrying behaviour of an adult.

Please see Section 2 of this Policy for some guidelines on how to **recognise abuse**.

Responding to a suspicion of abuse or neglect tends to be less straight forward than when a direct allegation has been made. It is important, however, that the absence of an allegation does not deter someone from taking action when they are concerned about the welfare of a child.

The protection of children is a shared responsibility and, regardless of our position within the church, we should never feel that as an individual we have to adopt sole responsibility for making decisions. It is important that concerns or suspicions are shared on a strictly 'need to know' basis at Parish or Diocese level. When procedures are being followed and information is being shared appropriately, we are then able to feel confident that carefully considered decisions are being made about children.

Share responsibility

Share information

Making an initial decision about how to respond to concerns or suspicions will depend on a number of factors. For example, in some situations it will be necessary to take immediate action to ensure a child's safety and there may not be the opportunity to consult with

designated people within the parish/ Diocese. For example, the following situations would require immediate action:

- When a child has sustained injuries as a result of abuse that require urgent medical attention (ensure that the child sees a doctor);
- When a child is refusing to return home because of the abuse (contact Social Services or the Police);
- When a child has disclosed that there is a likelihood of them suffering significant harm on returning home (contact Social Services or the Police).

If a child is in need of urgent medical attention as a result of being abused, arrangements should be made for the child to be seen by a doctor and the medical staff made aware of any concerns about the child's welfare. Health service staff have a duty to refer concerns about child abuse to Social Services or the Police.

Most situations will not require such urgent action. Where there are suspicions of abuse but where no allegation of abuse has been made, you should share your concerns with, and seek guidance from, the incumbent, and/or the Parish Child Protection Co-ordinator, and/or from the Bishop's Child Protection Advisor (BCPA).

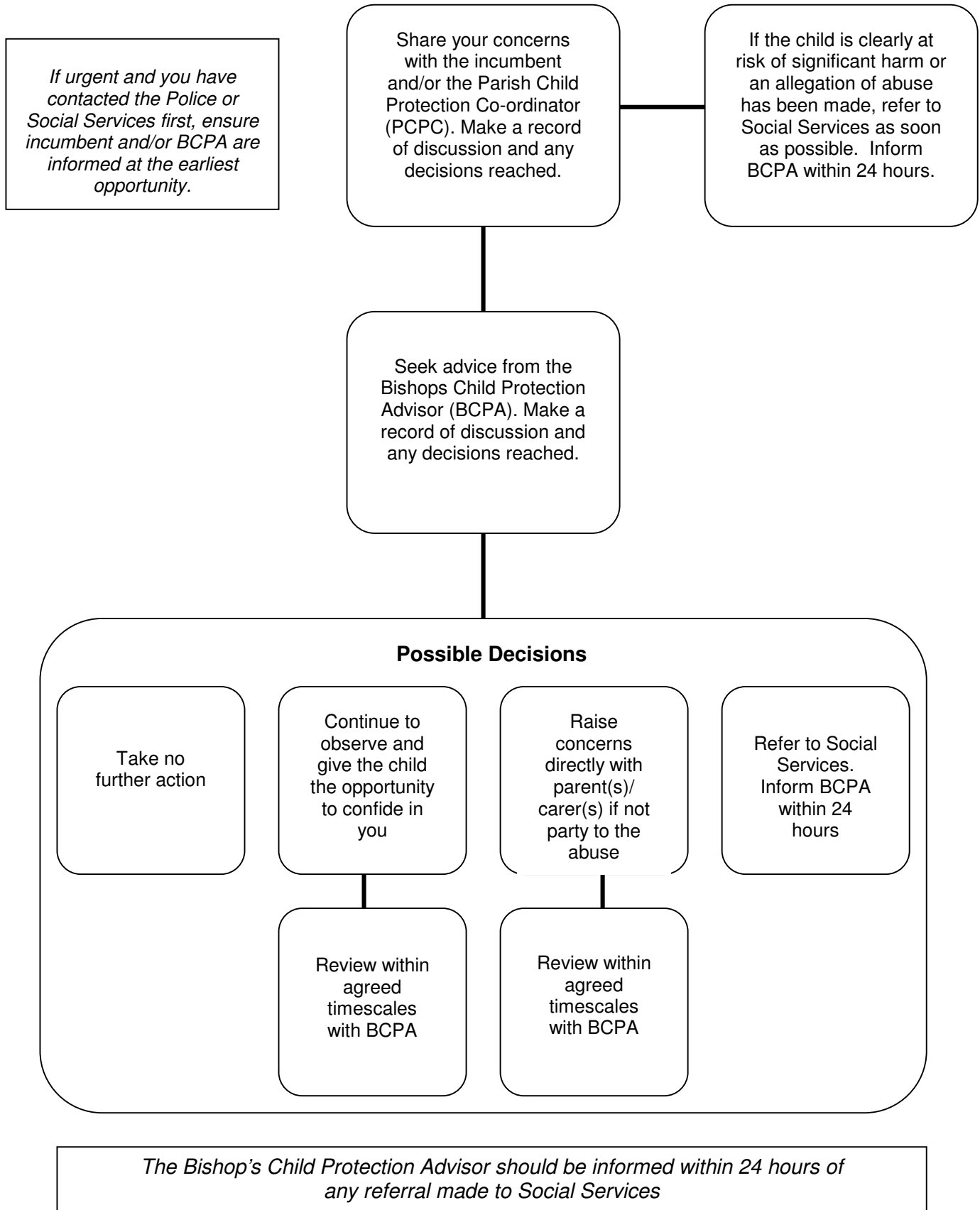
If there is uncertainty about whether the Bishop's Child Protection Adviser should be consulted, then the Bishop's Adviser for Children's Ministry, who has significant experience in these situations, could be contacted for further advice.

If you are unhappy with the advice provided by Diocesan staff and believe that a child continues to be at risk of significant harm, then you should consult directly with Social Services. You do not have to give the child's specific details at this stage and you would need to be clear when speaking with the social worker that you are seeking advice as to the appropriateness of making a referral. If you subsequently decide that it is in the child's interests to make a referral to Social Services in your own right, contrary to advice provided by designated Diocesan staff, then the Bishop's Child Protection Adviser should be informed immediately.

Whatever the circumstances, it will be necessary to make a judgement about the extent to which a child may be at continued risk of significant harm as a result of any delay in taking further action.

Share responsibility
Share information

When you have Concerns or Suspicions about the Welfare of a Child



You must make a written note of these discussions and of the decisions you reach (see Appendix P on record keeping). Given the sensitive nature of the records you keep in all child protection matters, such records must be securely kept, preferably in a locked cabinet or safe, access to which is restricted to the incumbent and one or two other named people in responsible positions.

The action will be:

- a) to continue to monitor the situation closely; and/or
- b) to speak to the parent(s)/carer(s) about your concerns;
- c) to report the matter to Social Services (see Section 3.3); or
- d) to take no further action

Note of Caution: If you suspect that the parent or carer is the abuser or has allowed the abuse to take place (for example from the parent's partner/spouse, relative or friend), you should not speak to the parent without first consulting the Bishop's Child Protection Adviser and/or Social Services and/or the Police. See also Section 3.2 below.

If the decision is to continue to monitor the situation, opportunities should be given to the child/young person to confide in an adult. Set a time-frame for further review. The following timeframes are suggestions only and shorter time-frames may be better to protect the child.

Within two weeks, the situation should be reviewed with the Parish Child Protection Co-ordinator and/or incumbent. If after three months there are no further concerns, then a decision should be made with the Parish Child Protection Co-ordinator to discontinue monitoring, and the BCPA informed. However, the record of the original concern should be retained. There is no time limit on how long the record should be kept, because it may be significant if concerns arise in the future. The record could then provide information about patterns of behaviour. Records should be maintained in the designated place in the parish. This place must be safe and secure.

If concerns and suspicions continue to grow, the situation should be reviewed with the Parish Child Protection Co-ordinator, and advice sought from the BCPA. Advice will be given about talking to parents/carers. This advice will include who talks to the parents/carers and how and when this happens (see 3.2). If the concerns are significant, this may result in a decision to report the matter to Social Services.

As soon as the decision to report your concerns to Social Service is made, you must advise the BCPA, if not already involved. She/he will liaise with Social Services, the parish and the Bishop while the matter is being pursued.

Clergy or lay people may hear about concerns regarding their church school or uniformed organizations or other groups (including non-church groups using church premises). These concerns should be reported using the school's or the organization's child protection procedures. Where a child makes allegations about an adult who is not part of the church community (e.g. a family member, teacher, scout leader), this must be referred to the social services. Social Services will be responsible for informing the relevant organization.

Where non-church organisations using church premises involve children in their activities, it is essential that you check that organisation's Child Protection Policy to ensure that it is effective. This should be done before agreeing to the organisation's use of church premises.

When an adult confides concerns, and if the child is within the church community, the incumbent and the Parish Child Protection Co-ordinator should be consulted. The BCPA must also be informed. If the child is not part of the church community, the adult should be supported to seek advice from Social Services. If the adult is unwilling to take this action, the BCPA will contact Social Services for guidance.

3.2 When a child or young person confides in you

If a child or friend of the child tells that abuse has taken place, this must be taken seriously. Having reassured the child that they have been right to tell you, you should immediately record the exact details of this conversation - what the child said - what you said. Whilst it is not always possible or appropriate to record what a child is saying as they are talking, a written record of the conversation should be made as soon possible after the conversation has finished. If it is necessary to make initial notes on a piece of rough paper, then these should be retained along with the formal written record completed at a later time.

When recording allegations made by a child or young person the following advice should be followed:

- Record the time the conversation took place, the setting and those present;
- Record accurately what the child said using his/her own words and remember to record what you said in response;
- Keep your report factual and guard against making judgements;
- Ensure that any opinions expressed by you are identified as such;
- If you have seen injuries, sketch where they are and describe them (approximate size, shape, colour]. Do not try and examine the child);
- Record how the child presented during the conversation and immediately afterwards;
- Record any subsequent relevant incidents or conversations up to the point that the child is no longer in your care;
- Remember to date, time and sign all reports.

Guidance for responding when a child wants to confide in you is provided in section 4.3.

It is vital that:

- you do not speak to **anyone implicated in the allegation**
- you do not attempt to obtain further information from the child/young person
- you only talk to those people in your parish who have a responsibility for these matters
- you reassure the child and tell them what you will do next.

Having reported the matter to Social Services, you must now advise the BCPA within 24 hours. She/he will arrange support and advice for you, keep the Bishop informed if appropriate, and liaise with the statutory agencies.

Confidentiality

In all areas of Child Protection, the highest degree of confidentiality must be maintained at all times, and information only passed to others who need to know in order to protect children from significant harm. This personal information is exempt from the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Children or adults who disclose significant harm will need to know that the information **will** be passed to a statutory agency, usually the Social Services Department, so that it can be properly investigated and help obtained. This will also be necessary where significant harm is

suspected. If there is conflict of interest between the needs of a child who is suspected of suffering significant harm and the needs of an adult, **the welfare of the child is paramount.**

In general, we would seek to establish agreement from a parent with parental responsibility before making a referral to an agency such as Social Services. In addition, if the child or young person is of sufficient age and/or understanding we would usually seek to inform him/her of such a referral.

However, we need to recognise that there are some situations where it may not be in the child's interests to attempt to seek such agreement, or even to inform the parent/carer.

Examples of such situations might include:

- Risk of parent/carer alerting deliberately or inadvertently the abuser or of taking matters into their own hands, thus compromising a possible criminal or child protection investigation;
- If made aware, the risk of the alleged abuser attempting to silence the child with bribery or threats;
- If made aware, the risk of the alleged abuser removing incriminating evidence;
- Increased risk of harm to the child if the parent/carer does not believe them or if they feel angry with the child for disclosing;
- Risk of pressure being put on the child to retract allegations or to change their version of events.

There may also be the need to consider any risk of harm to the church member making the referral.

The Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service suggests that the decision to advise the parent/carer should be left to Social Services or the Police. Clearly, care should be taken to consider fully the implications of someone from the church informing a parent/carer at an early stage. Advice should be sought from the BCPA if possible. If an urgent referral to Social Services is in the child's interests, then advice should be taken directly from them as to who should inform the parent/carer and the appropriate timing of this.

When a decision is made to disclose information to Social Services without parental consent then the justification for this should be recorded in writing.

When considering how we share information with parents/carers, it is necessary to distinguish between situations where we need to consult with parents in order to establish agreement about the action to be taken and those where we merely need to inform parents about the action we plan to take (regardless of whether consent is forthcoming).

When a family are in need of services, but where the child is not yet at risk of significant harm, we should always seek to consult with parents/carers and secure their agreement to the making of a referral to a professional agency.

However, if a child is clearly at risk of significant harm it may be necessary for parents/carers to be advised that the church has a duty to make a referral to Social Services regardless of their wishes.

When children and young people are of sufficient age and understanding they should also be consulted and informed in the same way.

3.3 Making a referral to Social Services

If a referral to Social Services is necessary, you should contact the Social Services Area for where that child lives. See Appendix U. If information about a suspected child abuse situation is obtained out of normal working hours, you will need to contact Social Services Emergency Duty Team. Contact number and address of both the emergency duty teams and the Daytime Social Services Department are found in Appendix U.

If there is immediate danger to the child, or if Social Services cannot be contacted, you must inform the Police. Contact number and address are found in Appendix U

When you contact Social Services, have your written account of the incident to hand. State clearly and assertively your name and role in the parish, and the matter you want to refer. Ask for the name and role of the social worker you are speaking to, and note this. Some suggested referral forms appear as Appendices K and L to this Policy.

Be prepared for the social worker to ask for information about the following areas. This is the normal procedure. Do not be concerned if you cannot provide answers to all the questions.

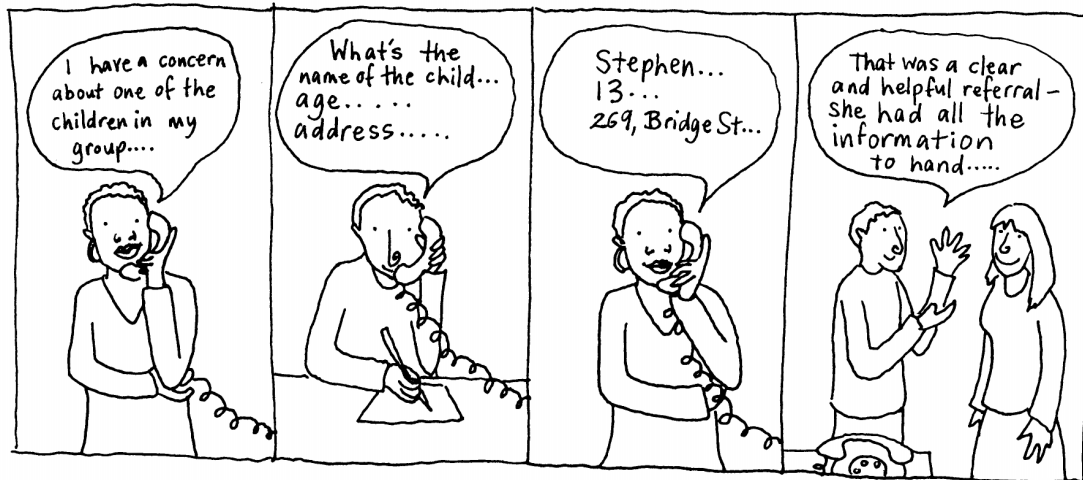
Questions you may be asked:

The reason for the referral, including:

- have you discussed your concern with the parent/carer? If not, why not?
- nature of the alleged or suspected abuse
- date and frequency of the abuse (if known)
- name of the child,
- age / date of birth of the child
- address of child or current whereabouts
- ethnicity of the child
- gender of the child
- disability / special needs of the child.
- names and addresses of parents
- brothers and sisters in the family
- name and address of school or nursery attended
- name of General Practitioner
- how long you have known the child / family
- details of why you are making this referral.

Having given as many details as you can (even if the details to hand are vague), you should then ask the social worker what will happen next. Give the social worker the name, telephone number and address of the BCPA, and explain that he/she is the liaison person in the Diocese. Clarify what should be said to family members at this stage, if anything.

Having made the referral, record the date and the name of the social worker, details of any guidance given to you, and information about what Social Services will now do. Government guidance 'What to do if you are worried a child is being abused' recommends that you then confirm the referral in writing within 48 hours.



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Social Services should now send you a letter acknowledging receipt of the referral.

It is quite common for the referrer to be filled with doubt about whether he/she has done the right thing, so he or she too will need support and advice.

Remember:

- the child's welfare is the paramount consideration
- if abuse is happening it needs to be stopped
- you are clear that what you have learned is a cause for concern. It is now for others – the professionals in the statutory sector – to determine what happened and what to do next.

Police and Social Services may identify you as a trusted adult, and may ask you to support the child or otherwise ask you to assist with their enquiries.

3.4 What happens when Social Services receive your referral?

When the department has "reasonable cause to suspect that a child in their area is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, then they must make such enquiries as they consider necessary to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare". ACPC Procedures/Section 47 Children Act.

When there is suspected actual or likely significant harm, the following action will now take place;

Initial Enquiries

Initial enquiries and checks will be made within 24 hours, which can result in:-

- No further action being taken, as the concerns have not been substantiated;
- Services to the family being arranged;
- An initial assessment of the needs and circumstances of the child, which may be followed by a child protection investigation (Section 47 of the Children Act 1989);

- Immediate child protection investigation (Section 47 of the Children Act 1989).

Strategy Discussion

Government guidelines expect there to be an early strategy discussion between statutory agencies to plan a child protection investigation, particularly where there is to be a joint investigation between Social Services and the Police. The purpose of this meeting is to share information and to make decisions about the action to be taken. This discussion may take place by telephone or there may be a meeting convened. When the referral has been made to Social Services by a member of the church it is likely that the BCPA will be invited to attend the strategy meeting. The BCPA will take advice from Social Services and the Police as to the role of church members during the course of a child protection investigation.

Initial Child Protection Conference

Following the completion of a child protection investigation the Social Services Department may conclude that a child or young person is at continuing risk of significant harm and an initial child protection conference will then be convened to consider whether a child protection plan is required for the future.

The conference is a formal meeting which brings together family members, sometimes including the child or young person themselves, and a group of professionals representing a range of statutory and voluntary agencies.

The purpose of the conference is to share information, to make judgements about the likelihood of the child suffering significant harm in the future and to make plans to protect the child or young person.

A decision will be made about whether the child's name should be put on the Child Protection Register and recommendations will be made about what further action is required to safeguard the child and promote his or her welfare. It is possible that a church member or church leader is identified to adopt a specific role in supporting the family or child in the future.

A decision not to put a child's name on the Child Protection Register should not restrict the provision of services if these are required to meet the child's needs.

Core assessment

When the decision is made for Social Services to co-ordinate a more in-depth assessment of the child's circumstances, known as a Core assessment, the involvement of a range of agencies is essential. The church may have a contribution to make to this assessment.

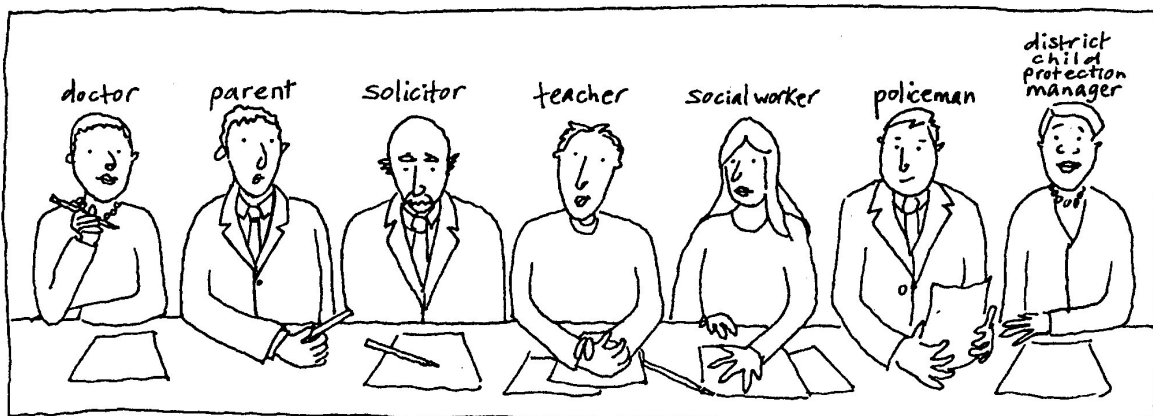
In general, social services departments work very hard to enable children to remain living with members of their birth family, even after abuse or neglect has occurred. Many families benefit from the additional support provided to them following a child protection investigation and the majority of children named on the Child Protection Register will remain living with their parents/carers.

3.5 Involvement of statutory workers

It is important that the leaders in the congregation understand and respect the purpose and nature of the involvement of the statutory workers.

- a. It will be clear that those offering pastoral support should not unwittingly undermine the intervention and goals of the agencies working with the family.
- b. However, it is recognized that statutory agencies are under considerable pressure to meet all the demands made upon them by their child protection duties. Informed, co-operative and sensitive pastoral support is now seen as part of the resources required to support the family.
- c. The statutory agencies, likewise, increasingly recognize, respect and reinforce the unique contributions of the church; particularly as this involvement by the church will continue after the enquiries have been concluded.
- d. The BCPA will provide a liaison role between the church and the statutory agencies.
- e. Any treatment/direct work with the alleged perpetrator by the statutory authorities may often depend on:
 - i. the alleged perpetrator having admitted he/she is responsible; and/or
 - ii. being found guilty by a court, and then being willing to accept full responsibility for their actions and to co-operate with a treatment plan; and/or
 - iii. the resources being available to provide such treatment.

In some circumstances, treatment work can be undertaken with abusers in denial but such work is very specialist and needs an initial professional assessment to consider the likely outcomes.



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3.6 Outcome and implications for the Diocese and the Parish

A Child Protection incident may have far reaching implications (both short-term and long-term), not only for the child, the immediate and extended family, but also for the life of the church community. It is important that the right kind of support is provided. Different groups and individuals will have different needs at different times (see section 7).

While the Bishop/Archdeacon will have overall pastoral oversight, he will need to be able to call upon other people, particularly the Area Deans, with skills to offer at different times. This is likely to involve the expertise of the Bishop's Director of Communications (BDC). It is the role

of the BCPA to facilitate communication between those in positions of authority in the Diocese and their counterparts in the statutory agencies.

House of Bishops' Policy 2004 contains guidance on responding to allegations of child abuse made against both ordained and lay staff and volunteers – see Section 10.2 of this Policy.