

Dealing with Disclosures of Abuse Governance Paper

Aim

- To help guide all people of NBBC in how to respond once they become aware that someone is or may be experiencing any form of abuse.
- To help reduce the ongoing risk of abuse within or through NBBC, thereby increasing the safety of the ministry of NBBC.

Biblical Position

- Abuse in any form is not tolerated at North Beach Baptist Church. Every person has the right to live free from abuse and neglect (Genesis 1:27).
- The Bible clearly teaches that all forms of abuse are wrong. In direct contrast, love, other-person centredness and care are the hallmarks of the believer (Galatians 5:19-26). Furthermore, Jesus' life & words teach that those in positions of power are to humbly serve others (Mark 10:42-45). King Jesus, possessor of all authority in heaven and earth, embodied and exemplified this teaching by becoming a servant who suffered and died in the place of sinful humanity (Philippians 2:1-11).

Scope

- This policy applies to anyone who receives a disclosure of abuse from an adult who is associated with NBBC or has any reason to suspect abuse is happening to an adult who is associated with NBBC.
- Where someone receives a disclosure of abuse from a child (someone under the age of 18) who is associated with NBBC or has any reason to suspect abuse is happening to a child who is associated with NBBC – state legislation (including mandatory reporting) and NBBC's Church Safe Policies and Procedures should be followed immediately.
- This policy applies to everyone at NBBC - but especially to those serving in positions of spiritual oversight (including staff, deacons, elders, ministry leaders and growth group leaders).

Overview

- This policy seeks to ensure any individual with knowledge or suspicions of an abuse situation has a clear path for both reporting and seeking support, and that no one person is required to respond alone.
- These processes shall be focused on the safety and protection of all individuals involved – including upholding natural justice, confidentiality of information where appropriate, protection of the vulnerable and presumption of innocence for accusers.

Accountabilities

- The Senior Pastor and the Chair of Elders jointly are the primary point of accountability when concerns of abuse are reported. This ensures:
 - Concerns of abuse are immediately elevated to a senior level within our church governance structure for oversight and consideration.
 - Concerns of abuse are reported centrally and considered by the same people to properly identify trends.

- Two people are always receiving and considering a concern of abuse jointly.
- For additional accountability and oversight - both the Senior Pastor and Chair of Elders should provide de-identified information on all matters considered and actions taken to the Eldership Board at the next scheduled Eldership Board meeting. This information presented may need to be partially redacted at the discretion of both the Senior Pastor and Chair of Elders to ensure confidentiality in particularly sensitive matters.
- If a concern of abuse involves either the Senior Pastor and/or Chair of Elders – or if the Senior Pastor or Chair of Elders is unavailable, they are to be replaced by the eldership with other member(s) of the eldership who are not involved in the concern of abuse. If no other members of the eldership are available, the Director of Ministries of the Baptist Churches of WA (BCWA) or their delegate, is to take the role.
- In addition to the above - if a concern of abuse involves either a Pastor, Elder or Deacon - the Baptist Churches of WA (BCWA) is to be involved immediately and the initial report should be provided to the Ministry Standards Pastor at BCWA. This is in line with BCWA's advice that they should be involved in any allegation made against a person at a governance level.
- Upon being reported - all concerns of abuse should be confidentially shared with the Ministry Standards Pastor or Professional Standards Officer at Baptist Churches of WA (BCWA). This allows BCWA to maintain a central database of concerns raised regarding individuals, which can be particularly helpful where people can be transient across a variety of churches and congregations.

Confidentiality

- All records related to concerns of abuse will be handled in a confidential manner.
- Sensitive information received shall remain confidential unless:
 - the person in question gives permission for the particulars to be disclosed; or
 - retaining such information could potentially result in significant harm to themselves or another person; or
 - disclosure is required by law; or
 - information is received that discloses that a criminal offence may have occurred or is likely to occur, or
 - the information is shared or discussed with the pastoral carer's supervisor as part of regular supervision

Definitions:

- Abuse
Any intentional or reckless action that harms or injures another person. In other words, someone who purposely or recklessly harms another person is guilty of abuse. There are many kinds of abuse, and these are normally defined by the type of harm and the type of victim:
- Physical abuse
Physical abuse involves intentionally or recklessly using physical force in a way that *may* result in bodily injury or physical pain. It also includes actions that lead to harm – such as refusing someone sleep or medical care.

- **Emotional abuse**
Emotional abuse, which can also be categorised as mental, verbal, or psychological abuse, is a pattern of behaviour that promotes a destructive sense of fear, obligation, shame, worthlessness or guilt in a victim. Emotionally oppressive people seek to dominate, and they do so by employing a variety of tactics. They may neglect (*neglect has also been defined as a form of abuse in its own right*), frighten, isolate, belittle, exploit, play mind games, lie, blame, shame, or threaten.
- **Sexual abuse**
Also referred to as molestation, sexual abuse is normally considered to be undesired sexual behaviour from one person toward another. Usually this involves force or taking advantage of a position of power to coerce the other person. Victims of sexual abuse can suffer physical and psychological damage. Sexual abuse includes but is not limited to unwanted sexual comments or touch, taking or distributing sexual images without consent (if this involves a minor it is a criminal offence even if underage “consent” was offered), sexual assault and rape (including within marriage).
- **Spiritual abuse**
This form of abuse occurs when one person uses spiritual or religious beliefs to hurt, scare or control another. Spiritual abuse often involves an oppressor establishing control and domination by using Scripture, doctrine or their “leadership role” as a weapon. This form of abuse can be subtle because it can be masked as religious practice. Signs of potential spiritual abuse include: a husband or wife exhibiting control-oriented leadership over their spouse, lording power over their spouse, demanding submission from their spouse or using Scripture in shaming and punishing others, it is likely that there is at least an element of spiritual abuse.
- **Institutional abuse**
Institutional abuse is the maltreatment of people who receive care within a system of power. Examples of institutional abuse settings include children within state care, a school environment, home care environment (such as a foster home), or aged persons within a nursing and/or aged care environment. This type of abuse can include neglect, sexual abuse, or physical abuse such as using harsh methods to modify or control behaviour.
- **Elder abuse**
Elder abuse includes both the lack of appropriate action, as well as a single or repeated **harmful** action that occurs within a relationship between a younger and older person, where there is an expectation of trust – whether that action is physical, chemical, emotional, sexual, or financial. It can also include intentional or unintentional behaviour. The idea of someone being an older person is a relative concept without a precise definition, with age, relationship status and cultural heritage all potentially being relevant. An older person is usually but not always someone aged 65 or over.
- **Financial abuse**
This form of abuse occurs when one person has control over the economic resources of another person which then forces that person to rely on the abuser for support. Financial abuse includes the illegal use of a person’s money, property, and possessions. Changing someone's will to include the abuser as a beneficiary and/or evicting the victim from their own home are also forms of financial abuse. Financial abuse sometimes occurs between

spouses/partners, or between a guardian and a dependent. This form of abuse is often accompanied by domestic violence. Financial abuse of the aged is often referred to as Elder Abuse.

- **Domestic Abuse**
An incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in most cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer.
- **Victim**
A person who has been subjected to violent, threatening, or other behaviour used to coerce or control them or cause them to be fearful.
- **Perpetrator**
Any person who uses violent, threatening, or other behaviour that coerces or controls a person or causes that person to be fearful.
- **Grooming**
Grooming is when someone builds a relationship of trust and emotional connection with someone so that they can manipulate, exploit or abuse them. Grooming can include manipulation of a wider circle of people to turn them against or to disbelieve the victim of their abuse, deterring them from accessing resources to stop the abuse.

Process Steps:

[A] Identifying and Responding - applies to everyone at NBBC

Be prepared to accept that abuse may be happening at NBBC and be aware of the signs of abuse, following the process below whenever anyone associated with NBBC has an abuse situation disclosed to them, or they have reason to suspect an abuse situation is taking place (regardless of how confident they are that abuse is/isn't taking place).

1. Recognise

- If you suspect someone associated with NBBC of being in an abuse situation, but have not had this disclosed, then proceed to step three (Record).
- If someone starts to disclose an abuse situation to you, gently interrupt them & let them know you cannot keep this a secret. Say something like, "I'm thankful you want to share this with me. Before you go on, however, I need you to know that because I care about you, if you've been harmed, I will need to report this information to our leadership - then proceed to the next step (Respond)
- If you witness someone associated with NBBC in a situation you believe to be an abuse situation, then proceed to step three (Record).
- If there is any evidence or suspicion of immediate danger to the victim - please contact the Police immediately (there is no need to confirm this with the victim first).

2. Respond

- Respond with empathy and acceptance.
- Do not agree to secrecy or confidentiality - to do so may cause more harm.
- Take care not to challenge the person's experience.

- Do not try to 'explain' the behaviour of the alleged perpetrator.
- Respond calmly (responses of shock, anger or grief are often unhelpful).
- Do not try to gather more information by asking questions, but steer conversation toward steps which need to be taken (such as reporting and referring).
- It may be wise to give them contact details for **1800 RESPECT** - this is a 24-hour national sexual assault, family and domestic violence counselling line for any Australian who has experienced, or is at risk of, family and domestic violence and/or sexual assault.
- If you are able and willing, offer to pray with them.
- It is important to inform the person that you will pass this information onto the church leadership. Check if they are willing to be contacted by the church leadership.
- Continue to pray for the person after referring.

3. Record

- Soon after any conversation, succinctly write down what was said, using the person's own words as much as possible. Use the attached Report Form provided, which is also available on the NBBC Website.

4. Refer

- Provide a copy of this Report Form confidentially via the following means -
 - Email - to Senior Pastor and Chair of Elders via "AbuseReports@nbbc.org.au"
 - In Person - directly to the Senior Pastor or the Chair of Elders.
 - If the report is received individually by the Senior Pastor or the Chair of Elders - they should immediately circulate details of the report to the other for accountability.

[B] Responding with Safety and Support – applies mainly to the Senior Pastor and Chair of Elders

This process is to be followed by the Senior Pastor and Chair of Elders (or their substitutes) once a Report Form has been received to assess the information and decide what next steps should be taken.

By mutual agreement between the Senior Pastor and Chair of the Elders - other parties may be used to assist in this process for advice or to assist with Pastoral Care (e.g.: as a rule of thumb - it is better for Pastoral Care of an alleged victim who is a woman to be done by a godly Christian lady). NBBC's "Ministry Boundaries Protocol" should also be followed. Any third party used should be first made aware of this policy and their obligations of strict confidentiality.

All decisions on actions to be taken should be agreed with the Senior Pastor and the Chair of Elders jointly. The Eldership Board may be consulted if required. An audit trail of all considerations, actions taken, and justifications should be kept.

1. Recognise

- Assess the Report Form and consider if there is enough detail to take any further action.

2. Respond & Refer

- If there is evidence of a threat to the person's safety - contact the Police (if not done already).

- Then:
 - If there is not enough detail and:
 - the potential person is willing to be contacted, delicately follow up with the person to seek further context to inform next steps.
 - If they are not willing to be contacted, file the Report Form and continue monitoring the situation for further developments.
 - If there is enough detail and:
 - the situation is likely one of abuse, and they are willing to be contacted, refer to an appropriate individual at NBBC to further support that person. If further information on the situation is subsequently disclosed - this should be documented and inform next steps.
 - the situation is likely one of abuse, but they are not willing to be contacted, file the Report Form and continue monitoring the situation for further developments.
 - the situation is not likely one of abuse, but they are willing to be contacted, then refer to an appropriate individual at NBBC to further support that person. If further information on the situation is subsequently disclosed - this should be documented and inform next steps.
 - the situation is not likely one of abuse and they are not willing to be contacted, file the Report Form and continue monitoring the situation for further developments.
- If the alleged perpetrator is a church leader - due consideration should be given to whether this leader should be removed from ministry whilst the matter is further investigated. Such decisions should be carefully considered and made by the full Eldership.
- In situations where it is substantiated that abuse is taking place - any actions taken against individuals should be carefully considered and decided by either the Eldership Board or the Eldership (as directed in the NBBC Constitution).

3. Record

- Record all steps taken above.
- Dated email records saved on the secure NBBC email account of the Senior Pastor (or another NBBC email account) will be sufficient.
- As well as emails between parties (e.g.: Senior Pastor/Chair of Elders) - records of verbal deliberations and actions should also be kept. These should be kept in the form of a simple email sent to one's self which summarises all the relevant information at hand.
- At this stage - it is not expected that a separate diary note or tracking database be maintained. If the regularity of Report Forms increases - this may be reconsidered.
- Where there is a change of personnel between the Senior Pastor / Chair of Elders - a handover of all relevant information, including this policy, should be completed to ensure information is not lost.

<p>DOCUMENT CONTROL: Adopted by Eldership 4 April 2023</p>

CONFIDENTIAL

ABUSE INCIDENT REPORT FORM

This form is to record details of an abuse concern, incident or allegation.

To be submitted to “AbuseReports@nbbc.org.au” (preferred) or provided in person to the Senior Pastor or Chair of Elders

Date of report lodgement:

Date of incident(s):

Type of incident being reported (tick all that apply)

- Concern of potential abuse.
- Disclosure of potential abuse.
- Witness of potential abuse.
- Personal experience of potential abuse.
- The alleged perpetrator is in an NBBC position of spiritual oversight (including staff, deacons, elders, ministry leaders and growth group leaders).
- Police were called.

Name of person making this report:

Email & phone number of person making this report:

Relationship to person potentially being abused:

Details of incident:

(Please describe the incident including alleged perpetrator/s behaviour, name (where possible), sighted injury or other indicators of abuse, conversations had).

Action undertaken (if any):

Did anyone else see it happen or know about it? If so, details:

Report lodged to:

Signature of person making this report: