



Improving our understanding of the scourge of Child Abuse

1. Introduction

In our last article we provided information on GenBased Violence and indicated that in this month's article we will broaden your understanding of Child Abuse. We believe that a greater understanding will strengthen your role in preventing and identifying child abuse; as well as provide guidance regarding the necessary actions to be taken, should an alleged child abuse incident be reported to you.

I thought it best to premise this article by looking at what the Bible says about different aspects that relate to children and I looked at this through the lens of World Vision.

2. What does the Bible say about Children

As Christians, we rely on the Bible as our guide for living. It has much to say about spiritual things, and an abundance of insight and guidance on practical matter. So we can ask: "What does the Bible say about children?"

2.1. Children are part of God's creative plan.

'God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. ...'—Genesis 1:28 (NIV)

After creating Adam and Eve, God commanded that they be fruitful, or have children. The original design included families and children. Children were not an afterthought. Everything about creation was pronounced good, including his design for children.

2.2. Children are gifts from God to families.

'Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring, a reward from him'—Psalm 127:3 (NIV)

The word "heritage" comes from the root meaning "to get or inherit." It is an honour and responsibility to be entrusted with 'a little one' from God. We stand beside him, to shepherd their growth and development, to advocate for them, and provide for their needs while they're in our care.

2.3. Children need nurturance and guidance.

'Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it.'—Proverbs 22:6 (ESV)

When planting vines and some bushes, gardeners will attach them to a framework, like a pole or trellis, to keep them from spreading out of control. Children need structure to support their physical, emotional, social, and spiritual growth. This means we need to be **present in their lives**, supporting their growth and development, and leading by our godly example.

2.4. Children need discipline.

'Discipline your children, and they will give you peace; they will bring you the delights you desire.'—Proverbs 29:17 (NIV)

There is no question about it, disciplining children is hard work. It takes the fruit of the Spirit — love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, spoken of in



Galatians 5:22-23. Parents who love their children will discipline them, as God disciplines us (Hebrews 12:7). This does not refer to harsh responses, but rather a gentle approach with the goal of leading them in the ways of the Lord. This type of gentle, firm, loving leading/ guiding, focuses on encouraging them to be what God created them to be.

2.5. Orphans, displaced and refugee children, and children living in poverty need special care.

'Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor ...'—Zechariah 7:10 (NIV)
All children are vulnerable by nature, in comparison to adults, based on their dependence upon adults for adequate care and protection. Furthermore, a child that experiences poverty or violence, is more critically vulnerable, with each negative experience placing them further at risk of suffering negative outcomes. The Bible makes a specific reference to *orphans*, a grouping which we must assist. They do not have a social or financial safety net, i.e. they lack support regarding their physical and socio-emotional needs. Therefore, God asks people who worship him, to care for **vulnerable children**.

2.6. Children need protection.

'... Meanwhile our women and children will live in fortified cities, for protection from the inhabitants in the land.'—Numbers 32:17 (NIV)

We live in a world corrupted by evil. Child labour, physical abuse, child exploitation, and child marriage are only some of the challenges that children may encounter. Further challenges they may confront include: drug and alcohol addiction, bullying, or gang involvement. God is our deliverer from trouble and enemies. Therefore, we as Christ's followers are called to protect children from people who seek their harm as an expression of our love for him.

2.7. Children are blessed by God.

'And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.'—Mark 10:16 (NIV)

In blessing the children while here on earth as God incarnate, Jesus shows his heart toward little ones. In verse 13 of this passage, the disciples rebuked the people for bringing their children to Jesus, probably because he was talking with self-important religious leaders. His response was anger at his followers' ignorance and pettiness. Their actions were unkind and unworthy of disciples. This parable portrayed that Children are important and worthy of God's undivided attention. And God's desire is to bless them in every way.

3. What is child abuse?

Child abuse is when a parent or caregiver, whether through action or failing to act, causes injury, death, emotional harm or risk of serious harm to a child. There most common forms of child abuse are neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, exploitation and emotional abuse.

3.1. Neglect

3.1.1. What is neglect

Child neglect is the ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs and the most common form of child abuse. It is defined as any confirmed or suspected egregious act or omission by a parent or other caregiver that deprives a child of basic age-appropriate needs and thereby results, or has reasonable

potential to result, in physical or psychological harm. Younger children are neglected most, and more girls suffer from neglect than boys.

Child neglect encompasses abandonment; lack of appropriate supervision; failure to attend to necessary emotional or psychological needs; and failure to provide necessary education, medical care, nourishment, shelter, and/or clothing.

Child neglect places children and young people at risk. It can also result in long term effects on their physical and mental wellbeing.

Child neglect includes:

- Physical neglect and inadequate supervision
- Emotional neglect
- Health neglect (or neglect of the child's health)
- Educational neglect

3.1.1.1. Physical Neglect

Children need enough care to be healthy and enough supervision to be safe. Adults that care for children must provide for their basic physical needs which includes: clothing, nutrition (food and drink), a safe and healthy shelter, and adequate supervision.

Examples of physical neglect:

- Deserting a child or refusing to take custody of a child who is under your care
- Repeatedly leaving a child in another's custody for days or weeks at a time
- Failing to provide enough healthy food and drink
- Failing to provide clothes that are appropriate to the weather
- Failing to ensure adequate personal hygiene
- Not supervising a child appropriately
- Leaving the child with an inappropriate caregiver
- Exposing a child to unsafe/unsanitary environments or situations

3.1.1.2. Emotional Neglect

Children require enough affection and attention to feel loved and supported. If a child shows signs of psychological illness, it must be treated.

Examples of emotional neglect:

- Ignoring a child's need for attention, affection and emotional support
- Exposing a child to extreme or frequent violence, especially domestic violence
- Permitting a child to use drugs, use alcohol, or engage in crime
- Keeping a child isolated from friends and loved ones

3.1.1.3. Health Neglect

Parents and caregivers must provide children with appropriate treatment for injuries and illness. They must also provide basic preventive care to make sure their child stays safe and healthy. If so required Government may go so far as to get a court order to protect the child's life.

Examples of health neglect:

- Not taking the child to hospital or appropriate medical professional for serious illness or injury
- Keeping a child from getting needed treatment
- Not providing preventative medical and dental care
- Failing to follow medical recommendations for a child

3.1.1.4. Educational Neglect

Parents and schools share the responsibility of ensuring that children have access to opportunities for academic success.

Examples of educational neglect:

- Allowing a child to miss too much school
- Not enrolling a child in school (or not providing comparable home-based education)

3.1.1.5. Signs and symptoms of child neglect shown by the child?

- Shows sudden changes in behaviour or school performance.
- Has not received help for physical or medical problems brought to the parents' attention.
- Has learning problems (or difficulty concentrating) that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological causes.
- Is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen.
- Lacks adult supervision.
- Is overly compliant, passive, or withdrawn.
- Comes to school or other activities early, stays late, or does not want to go home.
- Medical care the child needs is not being provided
- Abuses drugs and/or alcohol • Appears to have received no dental care
- Begg for food and or money
- Is consistently unsuitably dressed for the time of year
- Misses school a lot
- Needs glasses but never has them
- Says nobody looks after him/her at home

3.1.1.6. Signs and symptoms of child neglect shown by the parent?

- Shows little concern for the child.
- Denies the existence of or blames the child for—the child's problems in school or at home.
- Asks teachers or other caretakers to use harsh physical discipline if the child misbehaves.
- Sees the child as entirely bad, worthless, or burdensome
- Demands a level of physical or academic performance the child cannot achieve.
- Looks primarily to the child for care, attention, and satisfaction of emotional needs
- Appear not to care about the child's happiness or general well-being
- May be depressed and/or apathetic
- Has bizarre and/or irrational behaviour
- May abuse drugs or alcohol
- May be unemployed or workshy

3.1.2. General effects of neglect in young children

- Subdued crying, whimpering, or not crying when hungry, wet or needy
- Unattended diaper rashes or skin abrasions
- Dirty or unkempt
- Flat head or bald spot from laying in crib for long periods
- Poor dental development, decayed teeth or ear infections from propped bottles
- Inability to be comfortable, inconsolable, crying fussy
- Fearfulness, anxious, clingy
- Speech difficulties and delays
- Headbanging or rocking for stimulation
- Poor eye contact, detachment

- Delays in gross motor (failed attempts at sitting or crawling); in social areas (seeking eye contact, smiling, cooing); and in speech (babbling, responding to a parent's voice)
- Minimal weight and height gain, failure to thrive
- Cognitive delays due to poor nutrition
- Independent. Does not look to caregiver for comfort or guidance
- Hyperactive behaviour, inability to concentrate or complete small tasks, impulse control

3.2. Physical Abuse

Physical abuse of a child is when a parent or caregiver causes any non-accidental physical injury to a child. There are many signs of physical abuse. If you see any of the following signs, please seek help immediately.

Physical abuse includes striking, kicking, burning, biting, hair pulling, choking, throwing, shoving, whipping or any other action that injures a child. Even if the caregiver didn't mean to cause injury, when the child is injured it is abuse. We should always seek non-violent alternatives to discipline a child.

3.2.1. Signs and symptoms of physical abuse in parent or caregiver:

Signs of physical abuse in parent or caregiver:

- Can't or won't explain injury of child, or explains it in a way that doesn't make sense
- Displays aggression to child or is overly anxious about child's behaviour
- Indicates child is not trustworthy, a liar, evil, a troublemaker
- Delays or prevents medical care for child
- Takes child to different doctors or hospitals
- Keeps child from school, church, clubs
- Has history of violence and/or abuse

3.2.1.1. Signs of physical abuse in a child:

- Physical:
 - Bruises, blisters, burns, cuts and scratches
 - Internal injuries, brain damage
 - Broken bones, sprains, dislocated joints
 - Emotional and psychological harm
 - Any injury to a child who is not crawling yet
 - Visible and severe injuries that can lead to lifelong injury or even death
 - Injuries at different stages of healing
 - On different surfaces of the body
 - Unexplained or explained in a way that doesn't make sense
 - Distinctive shape
 - Frequency, timing and history of injuries (frequent, after weekends, vacations, school absences)
- Behavioural:
 - Aggression toward peers, pets, other animals
 - Seems afraid of parents or other adults
 - Fear, withdrawal, depression, anxiety
 - Wears long sleeves out of season
 - Violent themes in fantasy, art, etc.

- Nightmares, insomnia
- Reports injury, severe discipline
- Immaturity, acting out, emotional and behaviour extremes
- Self-destructive behaviour or attitudes

3.2.2. Effects of physical abuse in young children

3.2.2.1. General effects of physical abuse in young children

Physical abuse can have long lasting effects on children and young people. It can lead to poor physical or mental health later in life, including:

- anxiety
- behaviour issues
- criminal behaviour
- depression
- drug and alcohol problems
- eating disorders
- issues at school
- obesity
- risky sexual behaviour
- suicidal thoughts and/or attempts.

3.2.2.2. Effects of shaking a baby or infant

If a baby or infant is shaken or thrown, they might suffer head or brain injuries, causing:

- fractures
- internal injuries
- long-term disabilities
- learning problems
- seizures
- hearing and speech problems
- sight issues or blindness
- behaviour issues
- brain damage
- death.

3.3. Emotional Abuse

3.3.1. What is emotional abuse?

Emotional abuse is any type of abuse that involves the continual emotional mistreatment of a child. It's sometimes called psychological abuse. Emotional abuse can involve deliberately trying to scare, humiliate, isolate or ignore a child.

Emotional abuse is often a part of other kinds of abuse, which means it can be difficult to spot the signs or tell the difference, though it can also happen on its own.

Emotional or psychological abuse involves damage to a child's psychological wellbeing through behaviours like rejection, isolation and humiliation.

Emotional abuse includes:

- humiliating or constantly criticising a child

- threatening, shouting at a child or calling them names
- making the child the subject of jokes, or using sarcasm to hurt a child
- blaming and scapegoating
- making a child perform degrading acts
- not recognising a child's own individuality or trying to control their lives
- pushing a child too hard or not recognising their limitations
- exposing a child to upsetting events or situations, like domestic violence or drug taking
- failing to promote a child's social development
- persistently ignoring them
- being absent
- manipulating a child
- never saying anything kind, expressing positive feelings or congratulating a child on successes
- never showing any emotions in interactions with a child, also known as emotional neglect.

3.3.2. Signs or symptoms of emotional abuse

There may not be any obvious physical signs of emotional abuse or neglect. And a child might not tell anyone what's happening until they reach a "crisis point", therefore it is vital that we observe and take note of signs in the child's behaviour.

As children grow up, their emotions change, and it can be difficult to identify if they are being emotionally abused. But children who are being emotionally abused might:

- seem unconfident or lack self-assurance
- struggle to control their emotions
- have difficulty making or maintaining relationships
- act in a way that is inappropriate for their age.

3.3.2.1. Signs in babies and toddlers

Babies and pre-school children who are being emotionally abused or neglected might:

- be overly-affectionate to strangers or people they don't know well
- seem to lack confidence, are wary or anxious
- not have a close relationship or bond with their parent
- be aggressive or cruel towards other children or animals.

3.3.2.2. Signs in older children

Older children might:

- use language you wouldn't expect them to know for their age
- act in a way or know about things you wouldn't expect them to know for their age
- struggle to control their emotions
- have extreme outbursts
- seem isolated from their parents
- lack social skills
- have few or no friends.



Both fathers talk with their children using their hands. What kind of parent are you? Are you disciplining children in love or always shouting, threatening, hitting, swearing or even assaulting children?

3.3.3. Effects of emotional abuse

Children and young people may experience a range of emotional, psychological and physical problems as a result of being harmed, including:

- Unhealthy coping strategies or habits (sucking, biting, rocking, self-harm)
- Mental health disorders (anxiety, depression, phobias)
- Inability to trust or difficulty forming relationships
- Destructive, aggressive or anti-social behaviours
- Drug and alcohol use
- Developmental delays
- Sleep or eating disorders
- Difficulty expressing themselves
- Learning or speech disorders
- High-risk sexual behaviour
- Behavioural problems or disorders
- Difficulty regulating emotions
- Physical disorders or health issues
- Suicidal thoughts or attempts
- Overly adaptive behaviours (e.g. very compliant or defensive)
- Low confidence, self-esteem or self-worth

3.4. Sexual Abuse

3.4.1. What is sexual abuse?

When a child or young person is sexually abused, they are forced or tricked into sexual activities. They might not understand that it is abuse or that it is wrong. And they might be afraid to tell someone. Sexual abuse can happen anywhere – and it can happen in person or online.

It is never the child's fault that they were sexually abused – and it's important to make sure children know this.

Child sexual abuse covers a range of illegal sexual activities, including:

- possessing images of child pornography



- forcing a child to strip or masturbate
- engaging in any kind of sexual activity in front of a child, including watching pornography
- taking, downloading, viewing or distributing sexual images of children
- encouraging a child to perform sexual acts in front of a webcam
- not taking measures to protect a child from witnessing sexual activity or images
- inappropriate sexual touching of a child, whether clothed or unclothed
- penetrative sex
- Both boys and girls can be victims of sexual abuse, but girls are more likely to be abused.

Types of sexual abuse

There are 2 types of sexual abuse – contact and non-contact abuse. And sexual abuse can happen in person or online.

Contact abuse is where an abuser makes physical contact with a child. This includes:

- sexual touching of any part of a child's body, whether they're clothed or not
- using a body part or object to rape or penetrate a child
- forcing a child to take part in sexual activities
- making a child undress or touch someone else.

Contact abuse can include touching, kissing and oral sex – sexual abuse is not just penetrative.

Non-contact abuse is where a child is abused without being touched by the abuser. This can be in person or online and includes:

- exposing or flashing
- showing pornography
- exposing a child to sexual acts
- making them masturbate
- forcing a child to make, view or share child abuse images or videos
- making, viewing or distributing child abuse images or videos
- forcing a child to take part in sexual activities or conversations online or through a smartphone.

3.4.2. Signs and symptoms of Sexual Abuse

Children often do not talk about sexual abuse because they think it is their fault or they have been convinced by their abuser that it is normal or a "special secret".

Children may also be bribed or threatened by their abuser or told that they will not be believed.

A child who is being sexually abused may care for their abuser and worry about getting them into trouble.

3.4.2.1. Here are some of the signs you may notice:

- Changes in behaviour – a child may start being aggressive, withdrawn, clingy, have difficulties sleeping, have regular nightmares or start wetting the bed.
- Avoiding the abuser – the child may dislike or seem afraid of a particular person and try to avoid spending time alone with them.
- Sexually inappropriate behaviour – children who have been abused may behave in sexually inappropriate ways or use sexually explicit language.
- Physical problems – the child may develop health problems, including soreness in the genital and anal areas or sexually transmitted infections, or they may become pregnant.
- Problems at school – an abused child may have difficulty concentrating and learning, and their grades may start to drop.

- Giving clues – children may also drop hints and clues that the abuse is happening without revealing it outright.

3.4.2.2. Signs of children being sexually abused online

If a child is being or has been sexually abused online, they might:

- spend a lot more or a lot less time than usual online, texting, gaming or using social media
- seem distant, upset or angry after using the internet or texting
- be secretive about who they're talking to and what they're doing online or on their mobile phone
- have lots of new phone numbers, texts or email addresses on their mobile phone, laptop or tablet.

3.4.3. Effects of sexual abuse

Sexual abuse can have both short and long term effects. The impact of sexual abuse can last a lifetime. Children, young people and adults may experience:

- anxiety and depression
- eating disorders
- post-traumatic stress
- difficulty coping with stress
- self-harm
- suicidal thoughts and suicide
- sexually transmitted infections
- pregnancy
- feelings of shame and guilt
- drug and alcohol problems
- relationship problems with family, friends and partners.

4. What to do if a child reveals abuse

A child who is being abused might not realise or perceive their situation as wrongful, furthermore they may even blame themselves for their experience. If a child talks to you about neglect it is important to:

- listen carefully to what they are saying
- let them know that they have done the right thing by telling you
- tell them it is not their fault
- tell them that you believe them and that you do take them seriously
- do not confront the alleged abuser
- explain what you will do next (the actions that you plan to take)
- report what the child has told you to the nearest Child Protection Organisation (for example Child Welfare, SAVF, Badisa, ACVV, Tutela) as soon as possible.

5. How to report child abuse and or neglect

The post below, taken from Childline SA's website explains the step by step process which should be undertaken by the Pastor/Assembly Leader if Child Abuse is suspected or reported (In Childline's

Website they refer to Educators – To make it applicable to Pastors/Assembly Leaders I have changed the word Educators to Pastor/Assembly Leaders).

To assist Pastor/Assembly Leaders when they have to report abuse or suspected abuse in such a way that the child can be helped, the following steps can be followed:

STEP 1: PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING:

Make a note of the following:

- Child's name, address and telephone number.
- Parent's or guardian's name and telephone numbers.
- Reasons for concern, any documentation of indicators and any relevant statements made by the child.

STEP 2:

The Pastor/Assembly Leader should contact Childline SA (on their toll free no. 080 005 5555) Social Worker from a Child protection organization such as a Child Welfare Society, Badisa or the Department of Social Development, or for urgent cases at night, the nearest Police Station and when you do ask him/her to report it to their Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Unit. The following should be noted:

- the name of the person reporting the alleged incident;
- the name of the person receiving the report on the incident;
- the date and time when incident was reported; and
- the action proposed by the person to whom the abuse has been reported.

STEP 3:

A request should be made that a social worker (and the police in some cases) will interview the child as soon as possible.

STEP 4:

- A Social Worker and/or the Police (especially someone from their Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Unit) should interview the alleged abuser and sometimes family members as well, as soon as possible.
Report the abuse to Childline SA on their toll free no. 080 005 5555 or contact your nearest DSD office or nearest Child Protection Organisation (for example Child Welfare, SAVF, Badisa, ACVV, Tutela). In extreme cases, especially after hours contact your nearest Police Station (SAPS)
- A decision concerning the child's safety will be made by the Social Worker at this time.
- If the response is slow and particularly if the child remains at risk, the referring person should follow up until the child is safe.

STEP 5:

At the end of the investigation the school personnel, the family or the parents and the Social Worker should meet to discuss the steps the school could take to assist the child.



6. What else can Pastors/Assembly Leaders do

Children are being abused every day. What role are you playing to prevent this indictment against all of us. All you have do to is become a child protection champion by:

- Protecting your own children
- Reporting any incident of child abuse to DSD or any Designated Child Protection Organisation
- Opening your church building to serve as an After-School Centre or Drop-in Centre
- Finding out what services are available for children living on the street before you befriend them and encourage them to go for help,
- Encourage congregants to make a difference in the life of a vulnerable child - one child at a time
- Invest in the future of a child - buy the school uniform for a child in need or offer to pay their school fees
- Encouraging children to participate in recreational activities such as sports

Remember - The Only Thing Necessary for Evil to Triumph is that Good Men Do Nothing

7. Important Contact Numbers

If you or someone you know become aware of a victim of Gender-Based Violence/Domestic Violence or Child Abuse the **following numbers are useful to keep:**

SAPS Emergency Services:

10111

Childline South Africa

Report child abuse to Childline South Africa's toll-free line:

0800 055 555

GBV Command Centre:

Contact the 24-hour Gender-based Violence Command Centre toll-free number **0800 428 428** to report abuse

South African Police Service:

Report all cases of rape, sexual assault or any form of violence to a local police station or call the toll-free Crime Stop number:

086 00 10111

Legal Aid South Africa:

Call the toll-free Legal Aid Advice Line **0800 110 110** for free legal aid if you who cannot afford one

Commission for Gender Equality - Report Gender Discrimination and Abuse:

0800 007 709

South African Human Rights Commission:

Call **011 877 3600** to lodge a complaint about human rights violations.

Domestic violence Helpline:

Stop Women Abuse: **0800 150 150**

AIDS Helpline:

Need help or advice: Call **0800 012 322**

Sources:

- Childhelp
- NSPCC UK
- Psychology Today SA
- The Alaska Centre for Resource Families
- Childline SA

- SaferSpaces South Africa
- KidsHelpLine Australia
- theirworld
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- Dr. John DeGarmo Contributor (leading Expert in Parenting and Foster Care)

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