

E10 MISTREATMENT AND ABUSE OF ADULTS BY ADULTS

In 2003 the diocese published a policy and code of practice. Copies were circulated to all clergy, readers and PCCs. The Definition of abuse and the diocesan policy is reproduced below. Full copies of the “Policy and Code of Conduct” can be obtained from Churchgates House.

Policy

God the Creator loves and values all human beings equally and without distinction. This is the witness of Scripture and of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The fullest disclosure of who God is and how God acts is, according to Christian belief, given us in Jesus, in his life, death and resurrection. In him we see God at work, powerfully and compassionately. Jesus heals, reconciles and reshapes relationships; he challenges injustice, divisiveness and the oppression of the most vulnerable. The Gospel of Jesus not only reveals God to us but also suggests how we should respond to God and to each other.

The Church as a whole is called to live as the Body of Christ. As members of the Body we are called to create and maintain relationships which express mutual respect, trust and care, and which avoid causing pain. Accredited ministers and others who hold office within the Church have a particular responsibility in this regard. However, we recognise that the Christian calling is to a process of growth and learning, as yet incomplete. No-one is infallible, or above reproach. When abuse or mistreatment takes place, we also have a responsibility to reconcile and to act against injustice.

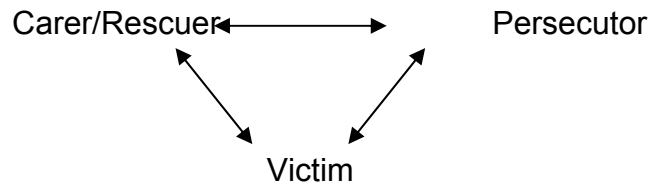
Therefore lay and ordained members of the diocese share responsibility for creating and maintaining relationships and structures which demonstrate people’s equal value in God’s sight, so that the possibility of abuse is reduced. We are also jointly responsible for recognising abuse when it occurs, and for responding appropriately in such situations.

The following definition describes in greater detail what ‘abuse’ means and the varied forms such mistreatment can take. The code of practice then sets out guidelines for good practice in our everyday dealings with one another at every level of church life, including a procedure to be followed where abuse is found.

Definition

What is Abuse? It is a misuse of power which leaves another person feeling damaged – uncomfortable, or distressed, or hurt, or confused and vulnerable, or a combination of these things.

Mistreatment, or abuse, of adults, as of children, takes place in situations where unequal power and secrecy can be found. Any imbalance of role or position can trigger it. This may be due to a position of leadership, or appointment within the ecclesiastical hierarchy, within natural or elected authority, or may develop among apparently equal communities. Psychological theory tells us that there is an ability to abuse in all of us, although the preferred position is that we are carers or rescuers, and that others are the persecutors. An assumption of the victim role is also inbuilt in us, though not always activated, and fear of assuming this role can push us into either of the other positions.



Mistreatment or abuse may be conscious or unconscious. The latter is, by definition, the more difficult to recognise without a good personal awareness of self.

Abuse can be evident between clergy and laity, non-stipendiary and stipendiary clergy, church officials and the clergy, church officials and members of the congregation. It can work in different directions. It can also become a way of behaving that is reinforced by all concerned, as they collude in the process, lacking the knowledge or understanding which would enable them to tackle the problem.

Abuse and mistreatment are expressed through physical, sexual, emotional, spiritual, or intellectual means, sometimes given legitimacy as “working conditions”.

- Physical abuse may be bullying, with or without actual force being used, or angry and aggressive shouting
- Sexual abuse is the non-consensual contact, or not totally understood contact, between two or more people, in an act that should result only from equal adult choice
- Emotional, spiritual and intellectual abuse may be through the misuse of theology, by exploiting such Christian concepts as obedience and sacrifice. Lack of respect for another’s ideas, or repudiation of suggestions without due consideration, may both be seen as misuse of power

Awareness of racial, cultural and gender issues, as potential areas for mistreatment of adults, needs to be constantly monitored, especially where people believe themselves to be free from prejudice.