

---

# **National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief**

Executive summary

**The National Working Group on  
Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief**

---

## National Action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief

### Executive Summary

*Child abuse is never acceptable wherever it occurs and whatever form it takes. Abuse linked to belief, including belief in witchcraft or possession, is a horrific crime which is condemned by people of all cultures, communities and faiths.*

This action plan is intended to help raise awareness of child abuse linked to faith or belief and to encourage practical steps to be taken to prevent it. The plan has been developed through partnership of the National Working Group between central government and local statutory partners, faith leaders, voluntary sector organisations and the Metropolitan Police.

Our top priority is the protection of children and young people. This plan makes absolutely clear the importance of identifying children who are suffering or are likely to suffer harm and of taking action to keep those children safe.

#### Scope

This is not about challenging people's beliefs, but where beliefs lead to abuse that must not be tolerated. This plan aims to address certain kinds of child abuse linked to faith or belief. This includes belief in witchcraft, spirit possession, demons or the devil, the evil eye or djinns, dakini, kindoki, ritual or muti murders and use of fear of the supernatural to make children comply with being trafficked for domestic slavery or sexual exploitation. The beliefs which are the focus of this action plan are not confined to one faith, nationality or ethnic community.

This plan does not include in scope child abuse within culture or faith contexts in general, for example female genital mutilation or forced marriage. Nor does this plan consider child abuse in faith settings which are incidental to the abuse, for example, sexual abuse by paedophiles in a religious community.

#### Background

Following a Roundtable meeting chaired by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families, Tim Loughton, in February 2011, a National Working Group was set up, chaired by the Department for Education, to develop a national action plan for England. The plan encourages activity nationally and locally to raise awareness and understanding of abuse linked to faith or belief, to develop the skills of practitioners and to support communities to prevent such abuse.

The plan is organised into four themes: engaging communities; empowering practitioners; supporting victims and witnesses; and communicating key messages. The full action plan identifies key problems and solutions under each of the 16 actions and includes a number of short case studies profiling some of the work already being undertaken to tackle abuse linked to faith or belief. A summary of the actions is given on the next page.

## **National Action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief**

### **Summary of actions**

#### **Engaging Communities**

1. Conduct further research and learning that informs practice and involves communities
2. Promote and hear the voice of children and young people as part of existing broader work on this agenda
3. Develop a network of faith leader champions and a network of community leader champions
4. Build resilience in families, communities and among faith leaders
5. Encourage safeguarding training for parents and communities
6. Encourage community grants for awareness raising work

#### **Empowering Practitioners**

7. Encourage initial social work training providers and providers of CPD to cover culture and faith safeguarding issues in their courses. Signpost them to further advice
8. Engage with front line practitioners in universal services on a range of faith and culture safeguarding issues, including abuse linked to faith or belief
9. Encourage LSCBs to provide strategic leadership and to work to secure the meaningful engagement of local and faith communities
10. Raise awareness so that robust, comprehensive multi agency initial assessments are carried out, leading to informed decisions in this type of case
11. Develop approaches to support and re-integration for victims – including psychological and therapeutic support
12. Develop an understanding of underlying issues and indicators of abuse
13. Improve understanding among inspectors and thus impact of inspection on children at risk of, or being harmed by, abuse linked to faith or belief

#### **Supporting Victims and Witnesses**

14. Encourage provision of community support for witnesses
15. Promote more join-up between criminal justice and safeguarding

#### **Communicating Key Messages**

16. Develop communications and messages shared across the partners

## National Action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief

### Key Principles

Child abuse is never acceptable wherever it occurs and whatever form it takes. Abuse linked to belief, including belief in witchcraft or possession, is a horrific crime which is condemned by people of all cultures, communities and faiths.

#### Key messages

- Child abuse is condemned by people of all cultures, communities and faiths, and is never acceptable under any circumstances.
- The National Working Group applauds the work being done in communities to tackle this form of abuse and to stand up to the perpetrators.
- Everyone working or in contact with children has a responsibility to recognise and know how to act on evidence, concerns and signs that a child may be suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.
- Standard child safeguarding procedures apply in all cases where abuse or neglect is suspected, including those that may be related to particular belief systems.
- The number of cases of child abuse linked to faith or belief in spirits, possession and witchcraft is believed to be small, but where it occurs it causes much distress and suffering to the child. It is likely that a proportion of this type of abuse remains unreported.
- Abuse linked to faith or belief may involve a wider context, where the child is treated as a scapegoat in circumstances of family stress, deprivation, domestic violence, substance abuse and mental health problems.

### Members of the National Working Group

**Jeanette Pugh** (*until 24.7.2012*) **Alan Reiss** (*from 24.7.2012*) (Chair, Department for Education), **Dr Joe Aldred** (Churches Together in England), **Debbie Ariyo**, **Justin Bahunga** and **Teamirat Seyoum** (Africans Unite Against Child Abuse - AFRUCA), **Thomas Bikebi** and **Romain Matondo** (Congolese Family Centre), **Simon Bass** and **Bob Pull** (Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service – CCPAS), **Mike Box** (Home Office), **Dr Ash Chand** and **Naureen Khan** (NSPCC), **Christine Christie** (Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse - CAADA), **Mor Dioum** and **Stephanie Yorath** (Victoria Climbié Foundation), **Andy Elvin** (Children and Families Across Borders - CFAB), **DCI Sue Inwood** and **DS Terry Sharpe** (Metropolitan Police Service), **Pastor Jean Bosco Kanyemesha** (Peace International), **Reverend Nims Obunge** (The Peace Alliance), **Michael Mackay** (Association of Directors of Children's Services - ADCS), **Elaine Ryan** (London Safeguarding Children Board) and **Rachael Takens-Milne** (Trust for London).