

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

REV. DR. TIM LECROY [Chairman] is a teaching elder in Missouri Presbytery. He is a visiting instructor of historical theology at Covenant Theological Seminary and has served the General Assembly on various committees.

REV. CAL BOROUGHS is a retired teaching elder from St. Elmo Presbyterian Church in Chattanooga, TN. He has served as moderator for his presbytery and was part of the working group that brought to the Assembly the overture for a study committee on domestic abuse and sexual assault.

DR. KELLY DEHNERT [Secretary] is a ruling elder and Assistant to the Pastor at Covenant Presbytery Church in Lander, WY. He researches and teaches on abusive leadership in Christian organizations and is on the national board of Refuge Ministries.

BOB GOUDZWAARD is a ruling elder and helped develop a domestic abuse online training video for the Institute for Biblical Counseling and Discipleship. He serves as director of Care Ministries at Christ Covenant Church in Charlotte, NC.

DR. DAVID HABURCHAK, PCA ruling elder, is a doctor of internal medicine and was a professor of medicine at the Medical College of Georgia at Augusta University. He recently authored "Kingdom Work: Redeeming Child Sexual Abuse."

REV. DR. LLOYD PIERSON works with abuse survivors and perpetrators through Refuge Ministries, a national domestic abuse ministry founded in Kalispell, MT. He is a teaching elder at Faith Covenant PCA in Kalispell.

REV. SHANE WALDRON is lead pastor of Rocky Mountain Presbyterian Church in Denver, CO. He is also the founder of Refuge Ministries, which helps families impacted by domestic abuse find healing in Christ. He teaches on the subject of domestic violence at churches and parachurch organizations.

ADVISORS

RACHAEL DENHOLLANDER became known internationally in 2016 as the first woman to pursue criminal charges and speak publicly against USA Gymnastics' team doctor Larry Nassar, one of the most prolific sexual abusers in recorded history. She is an attorney, author, advocate, and educator.

ANN MAREE GOUDZWAARD is the Executive Director of Help[H]er. In addition, she trains counselors at RTS Charlotte, Eternity Bible College, and PeaceWorks University. She is a biblical counselor with an M.Div. / counseling emphasis and a D.Min. candidate.

DR. DIANE LANGBERG attends Calvary PCA in Willow Grove, PA and is a psychologist of over 50 years. She is a well-known speaker and author of multiple books about abuse and trauma.

DR. BARBARA SHAFFER is a psychologist with nearly 40 years of experience, much of which involved working with survivors of sexual and domestic abuse. She attends Faith PCA in Wilmington, DE.

DARBY STRICKLAND teaches Counseling Abusive Marriages at WTS Philadelphia. She is the author of the book "Is It Abuse?" and two booklets for churches and survivors of abuse. She attends Cornerstone PCA in Center Valley, PA.



RESOURCE PAMPHLETS

The Ad Interim Study Committee on Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault report includes chapters on Biblical and Confessional Foundations for Understanding Abuse, Domestic Abuse, Women Who Abuse, Adult Sexual Abuse, Child Abuse, The Misuse of Spiritual Authority, an extensive Appendix, and an Annotated Bibliography.

It is the committee's desire to help the PCA respond well in cases where abuse is reported within the church.

Each of these pamphlets include summary statements included in the report to give the reader a general idea of each section of the report. For help in understanding and responding to the different types of abuse, readers should refer to the Report document.

Read the Report:
<https://pcaga.org/aic-report-abuse>

Ad Interim Study Committee on
Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault

Child Abuse



PCA[®]

Established by the
General Assembly of the
Presbyterian Church in
America in 2019



CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse occurs when an authority figure, whether through action or failing to act, causes injury, death, emotional harm, sexual abuse, exploitation, or risk of serious harm to a child.

1. SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

There are many forms of child maltreatment, neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, spiritual, and emotional abuse. In this section the report helps church leaders and members recognize, respond to, report, and redemptively shepherd when there is a case of suspected child abuse.

2. EXPRESSING GOD'S HEART

In Scripture, the care of children is very important. God equates "receiving" children with "receiving" Him (Matt. 18:5-6). God's word showcases He has a particular concern for the weak and vulnerable (Mic. 6:8; Isa. 61:1), and children are among the most vulnerable entrusted to our care.

Safeguarding the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of young people and other vulnerable individuals is among the most important responsibilities of the local church (*WCF* Q:138,139).

3. RECOGNITION

According to a study, on average there are seventy allegations of child abuse in the United States in churches each week. One in seven children experienced child abuse or neglect in the past year.

People tend to view the church as a safe place, especially for children and youth. It is difficult for church members to believe there are those working, volunteering, and attending our churches who abuse children. Often there is also a mistaken belief that abuse is perpetrated by someone the child or community does not know. Statistics point to a different reality and even highlight that many children are abused by other children.

An estimated 30-50% of reported cases of child sexual abuse are perpetrated by

individuals under the age of 18. As many as 40% of children sexually abused are abused by older or more powerful children.

Often, children are reluctant to disclose abuse. Inherent to this difficulty is that an abuser may be in an intimate relationship with the child and/or someone the child wants to protect. When a child discloses abuse, it is typically a gradual revelation.

4. RESPONDING

Churches are not qualified to conduct investigations of child abuse. Local authorities are specifically trained; therefore, all suspicion of abuse must be reported immediately.

Reasonable suspicion of child abuse is sufficient for engaging expert investigation. Conducting an "in-house" investigation prior to reporting not only jeopardizes the child and the chain of evidence, it may also fail at detecting the actual abuser.

When a child discloses abuse, it is important to listen and act in a way that supports the child and keeps him or her protected.

5. REPORTING

Knowing when and to whom to file a report, and what to include may be overwhelming during a crisis. A section of the report addresses these questions as well as what to do if victims and/or families hesitate to report.

It is critical for church leaders, staff, and

volunteers to be well-versed in the warning signs, indirect disclosures, reason to believe, red flags, and common behaviors of trauma.

6. SHEPHERDING THE VICTIM

Working with victims and the dynamics of abuse presents an incredible opportunity to bring redemption and light, and to display the gospel to hurting members of the flock. Research shows children rarely report false abuse, particularly sexual abuse. Therefore, take the steps necessary to restrict the alleged abuser's access to children, report the allegations, and notify the church.

Law enforcement should always be notified and supported in the investigative process, but shepherding is not dependent on the result.

7. PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE

There are actions a church can take to safeguard and protect children in their care. As parents are the primary caretakers of their children, church leaders may encourage the parents in their teaching, protecting discipline, and training (Deut. 6:7; Eph. 6:4). Since most child abuse occurs inside the victim's home, the church can help parents who may struggle to parent wisely, discipline lovingly, recognize abuse, or provide for their children.

The church protects the reputation of Christ when we seek to protect children from abuse as it showcases our desire to live in a manner that is above reproach and in line with our faith.