

CHILD PROTECTION TEAMS

What is a Child Protection Team?

A Child Protection Team is a group of two, three, or more devotees (depending on size of temple or project), chosen by the local ISKCON community, who have initial responsibility for responding to reported child abuse. They are reasonably knowledgeable on what to do and what not to do, can offer guidance to parents and other community members, and will follow-up to insure proper procedures have been followed.

Why Is a Child Protection Team Needed in Each Community?

1. Child Protection Teams are required by GBC resolution. In 1990, the GBC resolved. “The local governing authority of each ISKCON school or community is responsible to appoint two or three devotees to investigate and follow up on all expected or confirmed cases of child abuse.

2. The CPT is a focal point. When there is suspicion of child abuse, community members know they can speak to the devotees of the Child Protection Team. There is no confusion about where to go and what to do.

3. The CPT knows what to do in advance. Rather than waiting for an incident to occur, the CPT knows ISKCON policy, local legal requirements, and general procedures to follow. This helps avoid over-emotional or irrational actions by parents and others. By making sure that correct procedures are followed, the CPT can:

- Help minimize psychological harm to victims and others.
- Help protect the reputations and privacy of those effected.
- Guarantee proper professionals are brought in to help.
- Avoid actions that might jeopardize future legal actions against abusers.

4. The CPT can help insure risks to the community are minimized:

- Prompt and appropriate action decreases the chance of further abuse to victims, as well as minimizing risk to other children.
- The CPT can help decrease the potential of liability for the local ISKCON community.

Choosing CPT Members

Responsible, mature devotees, willing to put in a little time are required. A team of one parent, one teacher, and an ISKCON administrator is ideal. Some experience in this area is desirable, but not necessary. A good team is one that’s makes it likely that community members will feel comfortable revealing their suspicions to at least one team member. Diversity in membership also minimizes the possibility of cover-ups.

Duties of the Child Protection Team

1. The Team should be knowledgeable of ISKCON policy and recommendations on dealing with child abuse. Specifically, members should read *Preventing Child Abuse in ISKCON: A Manual for ISKCON Schools and Communities*, published by the ISKCON Board of Education.

2. The existence and function of the CPT should be made known to all community members.

3. The CPT should meet and establish procedures for dealing with child abuse incidents, as outlined in *Preventing Child Abuse in ISKCON*.

4. The Team should research and know thoroughly the local legal requirements for reporting child abuse incidents. Usually, this requires informing local police and/or social services. In most cases, this information is easily available by contacting these departments.

5. One of the Team's primary goals is to make sure a "risk assessment" is done. This is usually accomplished by a professional. After all relevant parties have been interviewed, a determination is made as to whether the victim or other children are at risk of further molestation by the abuser or suspected abuser. In some countries, where professionals are not available, the CPT may have to use its own best judgment in this regard.

6. On the basis of the risk assessment, steps should be taken to minimize risk to the victim and others. Again, this will usually be done by professionals, or in conjunction with them.

7. The CPT should help arrange counseling for all effected. Professional agencies will usually be of assistance. The Team should try to find local counselors who are sympathetic to the Krishna Consciousness Movement and understand our lifestyle.

8. The Child Protection Team must follow-up and insure that all local legal requirements have been met.

9. The CPT should also follow through on all GBC-mandated requirements. (A copy of the relevant GBC resolutions is attached.)

Summary

In general, the Child Protection Team should follow these basic steps in dealing with suspected abuse:

- Listen with patience to the adult or older child making the complaint.
- Determine if there is a reasonable suspicion abuse may have taken place.
- Gather only enough information to indicate there is a suspicion. Avoid questioning the children.
- Avoid direct confrontation between the suspected perpetrator and the victim (or his or her parents). When the abuse involves two minors, avoid confrontation between the two sets of parents.
- Try to convince the parents of the victim to make a report to the appropriate professional agencies. If the parents are unwilling to do so, the CPT should be prepared to make the report itself. This is required by ISKCON regulations.
- If the suspected abuser is a minor, the CPT may also want to meet with his or her parents to inform them of the accusation and familiarize them with the steps that will probably be taken.
- If the suspected abuser is an adult, the CPT should not attempt to confront him or her, but should see that a report is made to the police as soon as possible.
- When an incident of past abuse comes to light, sometimes the victim and/or the perpetrator is no longer living in the community. In this case, advice should be sought from police, social services, or a qualified professional counselor how to best deal with the accusation—especially in connection with evaluating risk to other children and informing other concerned parties who may have been effected. A more detailed description of other follow-up action is given in *Preventing Child Abuse in ISKCON*.

On the recommendation of the Board of Education, the following was adopted as GBC Resolution 119 at the 1990 Mayapur GBC meeting. It is the official policy of ISKCON for dealing with incidents of child abuse.

NOTE: The function of the Board of Education, in child protection matters, has been superseded by the Child Protection Office, as per the 1998 GBC approval of the Task Force Report.

- 1) The local governing authority of each ISKCON school or community is responsible to appoint two or three devotees to investigate and follow-up on all suspected or confirmed cases of child abuse.
- 2) Suspected or confirmed cases of child abuse must be reported to local government authorities for investigation and/ or prosecution.
- 3) All suspected or confirmed incidents of child abuse must be reported immediately to the local GBC secretary, and within thirty days, to the ISKCON Board of Education. The ISKCON Board of Education shall review the investigation and give a finding as to the status of the alleged perpetrator as confirmed, suspect, or innocent/not-suspected.
- 4) The perpetrator or alleged perpetrator must be immediately segregated so that he has no possible contact with the victim or other children. This segregation may take the form of relocating the perpetrator to another part of the project, away from children; banishment from the project (and possibly from other ISKCON projects with children); or in severe cases, banishment from all ISKCON projects. The degree of segregation will be determined by the nature and severity of the offense; the attitude of the perpetrator; the feasibility of protecting the children from further abuse or intimidation; and the sentiments of the local devotees, especially the parents. The local government authorities and/or the ISKCON Board of Education will make the final determination of the appropriate degree of segregation.
- 5) Any confirmed child abuser may never again serve in association with children in any ISKCON project. The board will also make available to all ISKCON educational projects and temples the names of all accused, admitted, confirmed or convicted child abusers.
- 6) Abused children must get appropriate professional counseling so that the serious ill-effects of the abuse can be minimized.
- 7) All ISKCON educational projects must have preventative programs which train children how to avoid and report child abuse incidents.
- 8) The local GBC man (or men) are directly responsible to implement the measures outlined above. Should the GBC Body find a GBC man or other ISKCON manager responsible for suppressing or covering-up complaints of child abuse, or supporting intimidation of those who might complain, the GBC man shall be open to censure or probation, and the ISKCON manager shall be open to appropriate disciplinary action.