



Close to Home Study Guide

Dealing with Child Abuse

1. Opening (2 minutes)*

Acknowledge that this is a difficult subject which touches people in different ways; and it's okay to leave the room if necessary. If possible, have someone prepared to accompany those who need to walk out.

Ask someone to read Luke 18:15-17 and another person to read Matthew 18:1-6, 10.

2. Story-telling (7 minutes)

Review Sam's story and the types of abuse he experienced. What was most damaging to him? What helped him on the road to healing? What role did the church play?

3. Review of pamphlet (10 minutes)

- Review the definition and forms of abuse given on pages 4-5. What questions arise? For additional information, go to the MCC website on abuse at: <http://mcc.org/abuse/en/child> or the Child Welfare Information Gateway at: <http://www.childwelfare.gov/>.
- Point out the facts and figures on page 5. What is most surprising or troubling about them?
- Discuss the "duty to report." Has anyone ever reported an abuse situation? How did they do it? What happened? What feelings did they have at the time, or later?
- If appropriate, make available copies of the article, Child Abuse Reporting by Alison Iser at: <http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/index.php?p=Articles&cs=182>
- If possible, provide specific information on laws in your state or province.

4. Reading of Scripture text (15 minutes)

Invite the group to read silently the first three paragraphs on page 6, and highlight what stands out to them. What do they affirm or question? Also discuss these questions:

- How does Jesus' birth as an infant show God's regard for children?
- Refer back to the Matthew text read at the beginning of the session. What stumbling blocks exist for children today? Why did Jesus use such strong language about those who put stumbling blocks before children?
- How do you understand Paul's warning to parents not to provoke their children?

Ask the group to now read the last three paragraphs on pages 6-7. Again, what stands out to the group? What do they affirm or question? Also, discuss:

- Why might children assume they are responsible for abuse?
- What is your primary image of God? A harsh God waiting to "whip people into line"? Or a God who "fiercely protects children"? How would children in your family or congregation answer this question?
- How do the fruits of the Spirit provide guidance with regard to children? How does your congregation encourage members to cultivate these fruits?

*The suggested time frames are for a 45-minute session. With more discussion and storytelling, you will need to adjust upward, and possibly extend to a second session.

Refer to the side-bar, “Spare the rod and spoil the child.” How do you understand what is meant by “the rod”? Note that in Psalm 23, David saw the rod as a comforting tool, used for correction and guidance. For more on this, see the “The Rod of Guidance” by Sue Hille, at: <http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/index.php?p=Articles&cs=182>.

- How do you understand the difference between punishment and discipline?
- What are some positive ways to discipline children? For example, this might include logical consequences, time-outs, giving encouragement, involving your children in decisions, etc. Brainstorm as many as options as possible.

5. Steps toward healing (10 minutes)

- Review the “Steps toward healing” on pages 8-9. What questions or additional suggestions does the group have?
- Highlight step #3. Do these patterns ring true? How does one avoid falling into these patterns? How does one learn healthy behaviors?
- Look at step #4. To what extent is your congregation a safe place for abuse survivors? What support is available for them? Are there additional ways the group would like to provide care and support?
- Go over the suggestions for church communities in the green box on page 10. Are there any questions or additional suggestions?
- Who in the congregation pays special attention to children and would notice signs of child abuse? Are there others who should receive training and support in this area?
- Look at the blue box on page 9. Emphasize that people can change, but it is not a simple step. It requires a willingness to look at one’s beliefs, assumptions, and experiences and take full responsibility for one’s behavior. Stress that it is important to find a counselor with experience in dealing with child abuse. Also, stress that asking for help is not a sign of weakness but a sign of maturity and strength.
- Bring information about local resources, therapists, and support groups which can assist in healing from child abuse.
- Encourage your church library to purchase the books listed on pages 10-11.
- Pray together for all those who’ve experience abuse, and for their family and friends, that all would find peace, strength and healing. Pray for those who are abusing others, that they would find courage and help to make the necessary changes.

6. Closing (1 minute)

Dear God, You promise to fill us with your Spirit and produce in us the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Help us to receive these gifts and cultivate them with care. Amen.



This study guide is written by Linda Gehman Peachey, Director for Women’s Advocacy in the Peace and Justice Ministries section of Mennonite Central Committee US. It is one of a series of free downloadable study guides for the Close to Home pamphlets, which can be ordered from the Mennonite Publishing Network of the Mennonite Church (see www.mpn.net/closetohome) or the Mennonite Brethren Kindred Productions (www.kindredproductions.com/closetohome).