

Faith abuse: information for staff

Issue

[Faith abuse](#) is child abuse linked to faith or belief. This includes:

- Belief in concepts of witchcraft and spiritual possession, demons or the devil acting through children or leading them astray, the evil eye or djinns and dakini
- Ritual or muti murders where the killing of children is believed to bring supernatural benefits or the use of their body parts is believed to produce potent magical remedies
- Use of belief in magic or witchcraft to create fear in children to make them more compliant when they are being trafficked for domestic slavery or sexual exploitation
- Belief that children's bad behaviour has brought about bad fortune

What to do

- You should speak to your designated safeguarding lead if you are concerned that a child is experiencing or is at risk of faith abuse.
- If you believe that a child is in **immediate danger**, you should make a referral to the police, or your [local authority children's social care team](#)
- Seek advice if you are dealing with a culture or set of beliefs that are unfamiliar to you (see 'where to go next' below)
- Make sure pupils are aware that they should not be harmed, regardless of their beliefs or faith and how to seek help if they are worried about something

[Insert local procedures here]

What to look for

[Common features](#) where faith or belief is a factor in abuse include:

- A wider social or community consensus that witchcraft exists
- A faith leader or other influential figure promoting the belief or methods of resolving the supposed problem by harming children

Context and prevalence

Faith abuse is not limited to one faith, nationality, or community. Examples have been recorded worldwide and across Christian, Muslim, Hindu and pagan faiths.

Only a small minority of people who believe in witchcraft or spirit possession go on to harm children.

- A belief that the child is the victim of a supernatural force and that abuse is a means of saving the child or saving others from harm. Parents/carers can be key perpetrators and may believe they are doing the right thing
- Children being scapegoated for misfortune that has happened in the family, for example, unemployment or poverty and accused of having caused the misfortune by supernatural means

Children are [most likely to become victims](#) if they are already vulnerable, unprotected, or can be identified as outsiders. These include those:

- With a disability including autism, epilepsy, dyslexia
- With albinism
- Living away from home in private fostering situations, domestic servitude situations, or with a step-parent (with one of the natural parents absent or dead)
- Whose parents have been branded as witches
- Who are seen as “naughty” or have challenging behaviour
- Who are precocious and/or left handed
- Living within a polygamous setting

Where to go next:

- [The Victoria Climbié Foundation UK](#) is a charity which addresses child abuse linked to faith or belief across all ethnicities.
- [CCPAS](#) is an independent Christian charity which works to safeguard children and adults at risk of harm. It has a helpline which you can contact Monday-Friday 9am-5pm on 0303 003 1111
- [Africans Unite against Child Abuse \(AFRUCA\)](#) is a charity which works to advocate for the rights and welfare of African children in the UK

Questions for staff

- What role can the school play in supporting the wider community in relation to faith/belief abuse? What factors should be taken into account where this is attempted?
- How does our wider relationship with parents and carers factor into cases involving faith or belief abuse? What might jeopardise otherwise positive relationships and how can we mitigate against this?
- Why are children with some disabilities more likely to become victims?
- Are there any pupils you view as particularly vulnerable to faith abuse in our setting?
- What more would you like to know about this topic?
- Were you surprised by any of the information in the context and prevalence section? What might this tell you about your own set of beliefs and values in relation to this topic?

Sources

The information in this factsheet is based on the following sources:

- [National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith and belief, GOV.UK – Department for Education \(Adobe pdf file\)](#)
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175437/Action_Plan_-_Abuse_linked_to_Faith_or_Belief.pdf
- [Tackling child abuse linked to faith or belief, Africans United Against Child Abuse \(AFRUCA\) \(Adobe pdf file\)](#)
<http://www.afruca.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/ECJ-3-4-Faith-based-abuse.pdf>