

**JEHOVAH'S
WITNESSES
AND THE
SCHOOL**

Jehovah's Witnesses and the School

General Advice and Good Practice

Any school with Jehovah's Witness children needs to be conscious of their distinctive religious position. Their parents will hold opinions on several issues that are relevant to their children's school life. **Schools should make every effort to affirm their place in the community avoiding any potential embarrassment that might be caused by the requirements of their faith.**

Jehovah's Witnesses recognise the right of others to hold their own views and practices and schools should therefore as a matter of course respond with the same degree of respect towards them. Therefore if a school is uncertain about anything concerning Jehovah's Witness children, their parents should be contacted at an early stage so that possible misunderstandings can be avoided.

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society makes the following statement in *Jehovah's Witnesses & Education* p29: '**Jehovah's Witnesses feel that their children are better served when parents co-operate with educators taking an active, helpful interest in their children's education.**'

Religious education

- Jehovah's Witnesses believe that "*religious education*" is the responsibility of the parents. Parents have the legal right to withdraw their child from religious education in school. On this issue in particular prior consultation with parents is most important on the content of the lessons to be taught. Following discussion with the school Jehovah's Witness parents might agree for their children to be present in some of the lessons.

Collective Worship

- Jehovah's Witnesses have no objection to their children attending a general school '*assembly*' as long as it is not for the purpose of '*collective worship*'. They will exercise their legal right to withdraw their children. It might be helpful where a significant number of Jehovah's Witness children are withdrawn from collective worship for an alternative activity to be planned perhaps with the help of their parents.

Citizenship

- Schools should be aware that, because Jehovah's Witnesses believe that all honours should be paid only to God, they do not salute a national flag or stand during the national anthem. Neither do they take part in political activities such as voting.

Charitable activities

- Jehovah's Witness parents may be willing to allow their children to take part in the school's general charitable activity. However, they would not want them to participate in *religious* based charities or any involved in the remembrance of war. For example, they would never wear the red poppy. (See later reference para 3, page 18). If there is uncertainty, the school must check with the parents.

Festivals

- When lessons are about the festivals of world faiths Jehovah's Witness parents would not want their children to be involved. For example Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate Christmas and Easter believing that there is no scriptural justification for them and that they are rooted in paganism. Many of the key activities, which might take place in school such as a Nativity Play or making Christmas cards or decorating Christmas trees, would be unacceptable. Painting a snow scene as an alternative in these circumstances would be acceptable. There are also objections to the symbol of the cross as Jehovah's Witnesses believe in accordance with Deuteronomy 21:23 and Galatians 3:13 that Jesus was nailed to a tree. However if references to these festivals is incidental, such as in an art lesson, Jehovah's Witness parents would probably not be too concerned.
- **'Children of Jehovah's Witnesses are taught to be tolerant and respectful, and this includes recognising the right of others to celebrate Christmas. In turn, they appreciate it when their decision not to participate in Christmas celebrations is respected'**. *Jehovah's Witnesses and Education 1995 p18*

Birthdays

- Jehovah's Witness do not recognise secular anniversaries such as Birthdays and Mother's Days or Father's Days. They would not want their children to participate in birthday celebrations. It would be insensitive, for example, to require a Jehovah's Witness child to participate in the singing of "Happy Birthday". They would also be likely to object if stories were used which advocated the celebrating of birthdays. However schools should not become anxious that Jehovah's Witness parents would be concerned about incidental references to such occasions in the normal course of teaching or school life.

Sex Education

- Jehovah's Witness parents are unlikely to object to those aspects of sex education that are included in National Curriculum Science. As the law permits, however, they may choose to withdraw their children from other topics of sex education such as contraception and abortion, which, they consider, is a matter for the family. However, they accept that incidental references to such matters are unavoidable and would not want the school to become over-anxious about this. Indeed, individual families will vary in their particular approach to these matters, so again it is best to seek parental views.

Physical Education and Extra-curricular activities

- Jehovah's Witness parents would generally be happy for their children to join in games and sports activities. However because they place considerable emphasis on family activity, in connection with both worship and recreation, this might limit a child's involvement in extra-curricular activities such as inter-school competitions. Therefore the parents should be consulted.

Medical Issues

- Jehovah's Witnesses refuse blood transfusions on scriptural grounds (*Acts 15: 28-29*) and also believe that there are inherent medical dangers in the procedure. An Identity and Advance Medical Directive/Release card is carried by Witnesses in case of emergency (see Exemplar p21). Jehovah's Witness children should have such a card in their possession at all times which also bears the names of two people to be contacted in the event of a medical emergency. Hospitals are aware of the existence of such cards. Schools are encouraged to request a copy of the Advance Medical Directive/Release card to be kept in the pupil's file.

Background Information on History and Core Beliefs

History

- ◆ The movement that became the Jehovah's Witnesses began in the early 1870s in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, with Bible study classes involving people from various Christian backgrounds. It was known at first as the Russellite movement, after its founder Charles Taize Russell, then as the Bible Students, but eventually Jehovah's Witnesses became the name that was accepted world-wide. In the 1880's there were scores of congregations in nearby states, and the magazine, later to be called *The Watchtower*, was used to assist in the weekly Bible Class discussions. Publication and distribution of Bible literature is seen as fulfilling the commission of Jesus to preach to the entire world (*Matthew 24:14*) and has remained a major objective to the present day. By 1909 the headquarters had moved to New York. The first representatives were sent to Britain in 1881 with a London Branch opened in 1900.
- ◆ During the two World Wars, many Jehovah's Witnesses were imprisoned in different countries (including Britain) because of their belief in Christian Neutrality. They were persecuted because of this during the 1930s and 1940s particularly for their refusal to participate in armed warfare or the giving of allegiance to national symbols (such as a flag). Many died in Nazi concentration camps. They do not participate in remembrance events of the Wars.
- ◆ Today, there are over six million Jehovah's Witnesses world-wide; nearly one million of these are in the USA and over 130,000 in the U.K. The circulation of *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines has now reached 43 million translated into 139 languages.

Core Beliefs

- ◆ Jehovah's Witnesses believe that God created the earth and will preserve it. They further believe that Jehovah is God's personal name.
- ◆ Jehovah's Witnesses regard themselves as part of a continuous line of Witnesses for God that started with Abel, the son of Adam and Eve.
- ◆ They believe that the Bible is the Word of God, divinely inspired and historically accurate. They prefer to use their own 'New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures' that was first published in 1961. However they also use other translations.
- ◆ Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus is the Son of God and Chief Witness; therefore they reject the doctrine of the Trinity. They believe that Jesus is God's only direct creation, that all other creation was through him and that he suffered a sacrificial death. They believe that Christ came to rule in 'Kingdom Power' in the heavens in 1914. (Revelation 12 : 7-12)
- ◆ They believe that Satan is an active force in the world and that is why there are so many problems in the world today (1 John 5:19). Soon, at the Battle of Armageddon, Jesus will extend God's Kingdom rule to include the whole earth. Jehovah's Witnesses therefore attempt to lead blameless lives in preparation for the millennial rule of Christ (Revelation 20). They nevertheless recognise that their salvation is not by works but rather by Jehovah God's undeserved kindness "through Christ Jesus".
- ◆ The family is seen as the cornerstone of the God-ruled society. The father is recognised as the head of the family just as Christ is the head of humankind. Male leadership is recognised within the congregation; women also have a vital role to play.
- ◆ The place of worship is called a Kingdom Hall and members are encouraged to be active propagators of the faith, which includes the distribution of literature. Children of Witnesses are encouraged to serve and make a personal commitment before qualifying for baptism, which is by total immersion. Baptism takes place after a person has gained understanding of God's Word and thus can make an informed decision.
- ◆ Jehovah's Witnesses celebrate an annual event known as The Memorial Celebration that commemorates the death of Jesus and follows the events of the Last Supper recorded in Luke 22 v.12-20. They observe the memorial on Nisan 14, which they believe can be calculated from a first century Jewish Calendar. This is the most important event of the year for Jehovah's Witnesses and their families.

Sources of Information

Organisations

To consult Jehovah's Witnesses on issues relating to their beliefs contact :

Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Britain

The Ridgeway, London NW7 1RN (Tel 0208-906 2211)

Also the Jehovah's Witness official web sites are at <http://www.watchtower.org> and also <http://www.jw-media.org>.

Further understanding on matters relating to 'minority' religious groups in general can be sought from:

Information Network Focus on Religious Movements (INFORM)

Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE (Tel 0207-955 7654)

Further reading

- *Jehovah's Witnesses and Education*, a 32-page booklet (1995) written for non-Jehovah's Witness educators; available from Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Britain.
- *Questions Young People Ask*, a 320-page book (1989) consisting of chapters on issues like 'School and Work' and 'Sex and Morals', written for younger Jehovah's Witnesses.
- *Jehovah's Witnesses and the School*, 1997, 12 pages £2.50
Redbridge Briefing Paper 2, Education Service, Lynton House, 255-259 High Road, Ilford, Essex IG1 1NN

Nearest Kingdom Halls (Places of Worship).

Thornbury Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses
at Crispin Lane, Thornbury, BS35 2AY.

Yate Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses
at North Road, Yate. BS37 7PR

To make contact with these congregations for visits or talks, schools are advised to go through Mr Curtis Wheatley, Local Representative. Email wheatley.curtis@virgin.net or Tel 01633-889035 OR direct to Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, London as above.

Exemplar
Copy of an 'Advance Medical Directive/Release' card
carried by Jehovah's Witness children

Kindly supplied by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Britain

IDENTITY CARD

Child's Name: _____

Parents: _____

Address: _____

_____ Telephone: _____

IMPORTANT MEDICAL INFORMATION
ON OTHER SIDE

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As holders of parental responsibility we are deeply interested in the welfare of our child. Because of our family's convictions as Jehovah's Witnesses **we do not accept blood transfusions**. We do accept non-blood expanders and other medical treatment. We likely can provide information as to doctors who respect our religious convictions and may already have provided medical care for us.

SEE INSIDE

Allergies: _____

Current medication: _____

Medical problems: _____

ADVANCE MEDICAL DIRECTIVE/RELEASE

(Child)

I, the undersigned, _____, a holder of parental responsibility for _____, born the ___ day of _____ 19___; being one of Jehovah's Witnesses with firm religious convictions have resolutely decided to obey the Bible command "Keep abstaining . . . from blood" (*Acts 15:28,29*). With full realisation of the implications of this position **I HEREBY:**

1. **CONSENT** (subject to the **exclusion of the transfusing of blood or blood components**) to all such necessary emergency treatment including general anaesthesia and surgery as the doctors treating the child may in their professional judgement deem appropriate to maintain life.

2. **DIRECT** (a) that such consent is temporary and only effective until such time as I am contacted and am able to discuss further proposed treatment and give informed consent;

(b) that such consent and any subsequent consent that I may give **EXCLUDES the transfusions of blood or blood components** but includes the administration of non-blood volume expanders such as Saline, Dextran, Haemaccel, Hetastarch and Ringer's solution;

(c) that this express refusal of blood is absolute and is not to be overridden in **ANY** circumstances by a purported consent of any person not holding parental responsibility. Such refusal remains in force even though the doctor(s) treating the child consider that such refusal may be life threatening;

and (d) that this Advance Statement shall remain in force unless and until I expressly revoke it in writing.

3. **ACCEPT** full legal responsibility for this decision.

Dated the ___ day of _____ 19___

Signed: _____

Witnesses to Signature:

Signature: _____ Relationship: _____

Signature: _____ Relationship: _____