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# Memories of abuse to be reappraised

by **Bill Bowder**

A REVIEW by the Church of England of its child-protection policies is to consider the claim by the British False Memory Society (BFMS) that false- memory syndrome does exist, the Bishop of Hereford and chairman of the Central Safeguarding Liaison Group, the Rt Revd Anthony Priddis, said this week. BFMS believes that people can "recall" memories of child abuse that never took place.

We will be taking their thoughts into account as we will be giving consideration to all the representations made to us, Bishop Priddis said on Tuesday.
BFMS wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury last month to challenge the Church's apparent rejection of the idea of false memory and the retention of a book, *The Courage to Heal*, in a list of resources in its child-protection policy, *Protecting All God's Children* (2004). BFMS maintains that the book contains misleading or even harmful advice to people who have no memory of sexual abuse.

The letter from BFMS, signed by 16 academics and clinicians from the UK and the United States, says: 'Sexual abuse is an extremely important issue and it is vital that you consult with experts who know about this field, so that misleading and harmful information does not appear in the Church literature.'

The signatories were concerned that the Revd Pearl Luxon, Safeguarding Adviser to the Methodist Church and the C of E, in response to an email from the BFMS, had denied that false memories exist. They quoted from Ms Luxon's email: "According to specialists working in child protection in the statutory sector and with survivors of abuse there is no such thing as 'false memory'. It is either a memory or it is not. It is quite common when people have suffered severe trauma for memory to be patchy and disjointed. This is now recognised by the police as well."

In its letter to Dr Williams, BFMS contested those claims: 'False memories do indeed exist. There is a wealth of experimental evidence showing that a range of suggestive techniques can lead normal, healthy adults to remember entirely fictitious events.'

A spokesman for the C of E said: "It is important to recognise that the C of E is not an investigating body for child-protection issues. Clergy and staff are not involved in training clergy and officers to filter out disclosures. Any reports of abuse are referred immediately to the relevant statutory authority, usually with the involvement of the Diocesan Child Protection Officer.

"*The Courage to Heal* is one of a range of resources suggested as extension material within the version of the Church of England's child-protection policy published in 2004. That guidance is currently undergoing a major review as part of the Church's ongoing commitment to best practice in safeguarding vulnerable children and adults.

We acknowledge that opinions on false-memory syndrome differ within and beyond the scientific community and will take into account that range of views when deciding whether *The Courage to Heal* should remain on the list of resources in the new version, due to be published later this year."