

Witness Support Unit head on child abuse:

Don't ignore warning signs

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As two suspects appeared in court on Monday to answer charges of abusing a child, head of the Victim and Witness Support Unit, Margaret Sampson-Browne, is appealing to parents and guardians not to take warning signs for granted.

She said that was especially the case when children and babies were dropped off at day care centres, especially for lengthy periods.

Dexter Gobin, 32, and his Jamaican wife, Yanique Taylor-Gobin, 21, who were allegedly caught on camera beating an infant girl, appeared in court on Monday charged with assault.

Both were granted bail but the woman was taken away to prison and it appeared unlikely the man would be able to secure his bail documents.

They appeared on two counts of the charge of wilfully assaulting a child, who the court referred to

as "Baby Esha" to protect her identity.

On October 16, policeman Ramesh Ramnath left his 11-month old son, Mikyle, at a day care centre in Sangre Grande and was called a few hours later to be told he was unresponsive.

The baby was subsequently pronounced dead.

On Friday October 23, Tiffany Phillip, 25, left her three-month old daughter, Anastacia, at a day care centre run by a couple in Diego Martin. Four-and-a-half hours later, she was told her baby was not breathing. The baby had died.

Assuring the public that all had not been lost, Sampson-Browne said her unit played the role of a support agency but the police still had full authority to enter any premises, including day care facilities, if it was believed a child was in danger.

"We can't categorise whether it is day care centre or night care centre. Once a child is requiring an intervention

by the Victim and Witness Support Unit, through the Child Protection Unit, we will support.

"But we do not have the authority to enter a day care and make checks and all of that. The Child Protection Unit does that," Sampson-Browne said.

Asked if she believed in light of recent incidents at day care centres, whether the Child Protection Unit was fully functional, she said the ultimate responsibility lay with the Children's Authority.

"The Children's Authority has the ultimate power to enter and remove... they have a lot of power but we must understand that the power of the police has not been replaced.

"It still exists where a police officers can enter any premises which they believe that a child is being ill-treated, abandoned or neglected," Sampson-Browne added.

She appealed to parents and guardians to continue to be vigilant,

saying it could mean a matter of life and death.

"Parents have to be a whole lot more vigilant. I know there are some parents who would drop their child and call to find out how the child is going," Sampson-Browne said.

She added that parents must also talk to their children daily to find out what transpired at the day care and also observe their actions.

"Ask you child, 'How things went today? What you did today?' In their own language they would tell you and when they tell you, you as the parent needs to listen, interpret and analyse so that the next day you need to ask the day care person, 'My child told me so and so... what happen?'

"You need to continue to evaluate how your children spend the day.

You are handing over your child for eight or ten hours a day to persons who are not blood relation so you have to be able to keep that emotional thread with your child," Sampson-Browne said.

"There is an operational policy that requires in these day care centres and I know the Children's Authority has that power to even close down if deemed necessary... the systems are there... we just have to have it running," Sampson-Browne added.

Contacted yesterday an official at the Children's Authority assured that several meetings have been taking place with respective stakeholders to regulate day care centres, adding that plans were also in the works to have the legislation come into force.