

A young girl with dark hair tied back, wearing a red superhero mask and a red cape. She is holding a large, wrapped gift in red paper with a white star pattern. She is wearing a blue t-shirt with white stars and denim overalls. The background is a dark, textured stone wall.

Walking Together Safely

Safeguarding Policies, Procedures and Practice

**for Children, Young People and Adults at Risk
in the Free Church of England**

Revised April 2026



FOREWORD (2026 EDITION)

It has often been observed that the words *safety* and *salvation* share a common linguistic root. That connection is not accidental. At the heart of the Christian gospel is God's concern for the dignity, worth and protection of every human being. Safeguarding, therefore, is not an administrative necessity added to the Church's life; it is an expression of faithful discipleship.

The Free Church of England affirms unequivocally that the safeguarding of children, young people and adults at risk is both a gospel imperative and a statutory responsibility. Those to whom the Church ministers, and those who minister in its name, are entitled to safety, respect, and protection from harm. Safeguarding is integral to our worship, governance, pastoral care and mission, and must shape the whole culture of the Church.

This 2026 edition of the Safeguarding Manual reflects current national safeguarding legislation and statutory guidance and sets out clear expectations for accountability, transparency and good practice across the denomination. It recognises that safeguarding is a shared responsibility, requiring vigilance, humility, and a commitment to work constructively with statutory safeguarding partners. Where harm or risk of harm is identified, the welfare of the child or vulnerable person must always take precedence over institutional reputation, pastoral discomfort, or misplaced loyalty.

Engaging in ministry with children, young people and adults at risk is both a privilege and a serious trust. That trust is honoured only when safeguarding concerns are recognised promptly, responded to appropriately, and handled with integrity and independence. Survivors of abuse must be listened to with compassion and believed with seriousness; their experiences call the Church continually to repentance, learning and renewal.

It's my hope and expectation that this Manual will support every church, minister, officer and volunteer within the Free Church of England to act confidently, lawfully and faithfully in safeguarding practice. In doing so, we bear witness to the character of Christ, who calls us to protect the vulnerable, speak truthfully, and walk humbly in the light.

The Revd Canon Mark Spiers BA (Hons)

Denominational Safeguarding Adviser
Free Church of England

Introduction

A Christian approach to safeguarding calls both individuals and faith communities to create and sustain environments in which children, young people and adults at risk are protected from harm, treated with dignity, and enabled to flourish. Safeguarding is therefore an expression of love of neighbour and a concrete outworking of the Church's responsibility to care for those who are vulnerable. It requires readiness to recognise risk, to respond promptly and appropriately to concerns, to support those who have been harmed, and to manage responsibly those whose behaviour may present a risk to others.

Safeguarding practice within the Free Church of England takes seriously the realities of human failure and abuse, while also affirming the call to act justly, compassionately and wisely. This requires humility, vigilance and accountability, together with a willingness to work openly with others and to learn from experience. Safeguarding is not an isolated activity but part of the whole culture of church life, shaping leadership, ministry, governance and pastoral care.

The safeguarding of children, young people and adults at risk is a complex and evolving field. Some issues affecting welfare and safety, such as domestic abuse, substance misuse, harmful sexual behaviour, mental ill-health, criminal exploitation, online abuse and grooming, or harm occurring outside the immediate church context, may not always be addressed in detail within this Manual. Nevertheless, where any such factors may be affecting a child or vulnerable person, **the overriding principle remains that the welfare of the individual is paramount**, and action must be taken in line with statutory guidance and professional advice.

Those involved in ministry or church life are not expected to have all the answers. They are, however, expected to **seek advice early**, to share concerns appropriately, and to avoid managing safeguarding matters alone. Where there is uncertainty, complexity or risk of harm, consultation with the Church Safeguarding Officer and the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser is essential. Safeguarding concerns must never be minimised, delayed, or addressed solely through informal or pastoral means.

Support, guidance and professional advice are available to assist all who carry safeguarding responsibilities within the Free Church of England. No one should hesitate to seek advice, raise concerns, or ask for support in relation to safeguarding practice or decision-making.

If you require advice or support at any stage in relation to safeguarding responsibilities or the application of this guidance, please contact the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser on 07900 912754.



Contents

Subject	Page Number
Forward	2
Introduction	3
Speedy Guide for Dealing with Child Protection Concerns	5
Safer Recruitment / Disclosure and Barring	8
Useful Definitions	15
Child Protection and Safeguarding Responsibilities	17
The Church Safeguarding Officer	19
Definitions of Abuse	21
Types of Abuse of Vulnerable Adults	24
Responding to Concerns	27
Reporting Alleged Abuse	31
Procedure for the Handling of Safeguarding Concerns, Incidents and Allegations	33
Working Together – Local Safeguarding Partnerships	45
Guidelines for Work with Children and Young People	47
Appointment of Youth Workers	49
Ministering to People who Might Pose a Risk to Children	51
Ministering to People who are known to have Sexually Abused Children	52
Child Protection and Mixed Age Groups in Church	55
Communicating Electronically	57
Information about the Sexual Abuse of Children	61
Risk Assessments for Activities for Children and Young People	65
Checklist for implementing or reviewing - The church safeguarding policy	70
Sample Documents and Forms	73
Contacts and References	94

Speedy Guide for Dealing with Child Protection Concerns

'GOLDEN RULE – A CHILD'S SAFETY IS PARAMOUNT'

(A child is anyone who is under the age of 18 years.)

Immediate Risk or Emergency

If you believe that a child is in immediate danger of harm, you must act without delay.

- Telephone the Police (999) and/or local Children's Social Care immediately.
- You may make a report without giving your name if necessary.
- Do not confront or alert the person you believe may be causing harm, as this may increase the risk to the child or others.
- Take steps to ensure your own safety.

As soon as this has been done, inform your Church Safeguarding Officer (CSO). The CSO must then notify the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser (DSA) at the earliest opportunity. These contacts will provide advice and support and ensure that information is shared lawfully, proportionately and appropriately.

General Child Protection Concerns

If you have concerns that a child may be experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect, you must share those concerns promptly.

- Discuss the matter without delay with the Church Safeguarding Officer (CSO).
- Concerns should be shared on the basis of need to know, and information must not be kept to yourself.

If, following initial discussion, the CSO concludes that no further action is required, this decision must be clearly recorded, and advice may still be sought from the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser. Advice can be requested without identifying the child or family where appropriate.

If the CSO determines that safeguarding thresholds may be met, they must make a referral to Children's Social Care as soon as possible. Where required, this must be confirmed in writing within 24 hours, in line with local safeguarding partnership procedures.

- All safeguarding records must be factual, dated, and stored securely (locked storage or password-protected electronic systems).
- The Denominational Safeguarding Adviser must be informed that a referral has been made.

Children's Social Care will determine the appropriate response and provide feedback to the CSO as necessary.

Key Principles to Remember

- If in doubt, seek advice early. Contact the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser. If they are unavailable and the matter is urgent, contact your Minister in Charge or Bishop.
- Never promise confidentiality. If a child's safety may be at risk, information must be shared, even without consent.
- It is safer to refer than not to refer. Children's Social Care would always prefer to assess concerns rather than risk harm.
- Do not investigate concerns yourself. This may compromise a statutory investigation.
- Record accurately and promptly. Use the words of the person sharing the concern wherever possible and store records securely.

If a Child Tells You About Abuse

If a child discloses abuse:

- Listen carefully and calmly.
- Do not express disbelief, shock, or judgement.
- It is not your role to decide whether the child is telling the truth.
- Reassure the child that they have been taken seriously.
- Do not promise secrecy. Explain, in age-appropriate language, that you will need to tell people who can help keep them safe.
- Record what the child says using their own words as soon as possible.
- Contact the Church Safeguarding Officer or Denominational Safeguarding Adviser immediately.
- If there is immediate danger, contact the police or Children's Social Care directly.

If an Adult Shares Abuse They Experienced as a Child

If an adult discloses abuse that occurred during their childhood:

- Listen respectfully and supportively.
- Be clear from the outset that if the alleged abuser may still have contact with children, confidentiality may need to be breached to protect others.
- Adults retain control over how much information they choose to disclose; however, safeguarding duties may override confidentiality where current risk is identified.
- Offer reassurance and appropriate pastoral support.
- Recognise that supporting such disclosures can be emotionally demanding and seek support for yourself where needed.
- Always discuss the disclosure with the Church Safeguarding Officer or Denominational Safeguarding Adviser for advice and guidance.

Concerns About Church Officers, Staff or Volunteers

If you are concerned that anyone working within the church, paid or voluntary, has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed or may have harmed a child, or
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child, or
- Behaved in a way that suggests they may be unsuitable to work with children,

you must immediately contact the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser on 07900 912754.

If they are unavailable, contact your Bishop without delay.

Do not speak to the person of concern or attempt to manage the matter internally. Allegations against church officers must be handled in line with statutory guidance and referred to external safeguarding authorities as required.

Role of the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser

The Denominational Safeguarding Adviser provides specialist safeguarding advice, guidance and support. They must be consulted promptly where safeguarding concerns arise, particularly where matters involve complexity, uncertainty, professional boundaries, or potential statutory intervention.

SAFER RECRUITMENT TO PAID AND VOLUNTARY POSTS IN THE FREE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

Introduction

Working with children, young people and adults at risk is a privilege that brings fulfilment, responsibility and challenge. It also carries a clear safeguarding duty. Everyone appointed to work with these groups must do so safely, competently and with integrity, ensuring that those in their care are protected from harm. Safer recruitment is a critical part of creating and maintaining a culture in which safeguarding is embedded throughout the life of the Church.

Safe Recruitment and Selection

All recruitment and selection processes involve the exercise of judgement, and no process can entirely remove risk. However, by following safer recruitment principles, many of which are legal or statutory requirements, the risks of unsuitable appointments can be significantly reduced. Safer recruitment also promotes fair, transparent and consistent decision-making.

Safer recruitment applies equally to **paid staff and volunteers**. The level of scrutiny required will depend on the nature of the role, the degree of contact with children or adults at risk, and whether the role constitutes regulated activity.

Responsibility for Appointments

In local churches, responsibility for approving and appointing paid staff and volunteers rests with the **Church Council (or equivalent governing body)**. Ultimate accountability for safer recruitment cannot be delegated away.

Responsibility for elements of the recruitment process may be delegated to individuals or sub-groups, provided that:

- They have themselves been safely recruited,
- They are competent to carry out recruitment tasks,
- They understand safeguarding responsibilities, and
- They can handle sensitive and personal information appropriately and confidentially.

Where there is any uncertainty about who holds responsibility for an appointment, advice **must be sought before proceeding** from the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser.

Role Descriptions

All roles paid or voluntary must have a clear and up-to-date role description that explains:

- The purpose of the role,
- The key responsibilities and activities involved,

- The skills and experience required, and
- Whether the role is eligible for a **Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check**, and at what level.

Paid roles must have a formal job description and person specification. Voluntary roles may use a simpler role outline, but this must still clearly describe safeguarding expectations and boundaries.

Application Forms and References

An application form is **mandatory for all paid roles** and is considered best practice for voluntary roles. Application forms help assess suitability and provide a consistent basis for decision-making.

At least **two references** must be obtained and followed up before any appointment is confirmed. Referees should be specifically asked about the applicant's:

- Suitability to work with children and/or adults at risk,
- Relevant experience,
- Reliability and conduct.

Application forms and references must be carefully checked for consistency. Any gaps in employment, volunteering or service, or any discrepancies in information provided, **must be explored and satisfactorily explained**. Where references raise questions or are unclear, referees should be contacted for clarification.

The Confidential Declaration

Where an individual is seeking to work or volunteer with children or adults at risk, they must complete a **Confidential Declaration** at the outset of the recruitment process. This declaration enables early identification of issues that may affect suitability and allows for appropriate risk assessment and advice.

If information is disclosed on a Confidential Declaration, the applicant must provide details in writing. This information must be treated as **strictly confidential** and referred to the **Denominational Safeguarding Adviser** for advice. Disclosure of past information does not automatically preclude a person from appointment; each case must be considered carefully, proportionately and with professional safeguarding advice.

Having a criminal record does **not necessarily** prevent someone from working with children or adults at risk. Decisions must be informed by the nature of the role, the relevance of the information disclosed, evidence of change, and safeguarding risk.

Interviews and Discussions

All shortlisted candidates must take part in a face-to-face interview or discussion (or an equivalent remote interview where necessary). Interviews must be structured, with pre-planned questions designed to assess suitability for the role and understanding of safeguarding responsibilities.

The interview process must include:

- Exploration of the applicant's motivation and values,
- Discussion of attitudes to working with children and adults at risk,
- Confirmation that the applicant is not aware of any reason why they should not undertake the role.

Identity must be verified through photographic identification and, where appropriate, evidence of qualifications and the **right to work in the UK**.

If any safeguarding-related information emerges during the interview that may affect suitability, the appointment process must be paused and referred to the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser for advice.

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Checks

It is the policy of the Free Church of England that **all those who work regularly with children and/or adults at risk**, including those working on a rota, must undergo a DBS check **where the role is eligible**.

- Most such roles will require an **enhanced DBS check**, with a check of the relevant barred list where appropriate.
- Individuals who supervise or manage others working with children or adults at risk, or who hold leadership responsibility for safeguarding, will also require a DBS check where they meet eligibility criteria.

DBS checks form **one element** of safer recruitment and must never be regarded as a guarantee of suitability. Appointment decisions must be based on the **whole recruitment process**, not on DBS clearance alone.

If an applicant declines to apply for a DBS check where one is required, the appointment **must not proceed**, and the recruitment process must be ended.

DBS checks must be renewed and re-approved at appropriate intervals in line with Free Church of England policy and safeguarding guidance.

THE DISCLOSURE AND BARRING SERVICE (DBS)

The Disclosure and Barring Service is an executive agency of the Home Office. Its primary purpose is to help employers and voluntary organisations make safer recruitment decisions. It is an offence to appoint a person who is banned from working with children (Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 Part 2 s35) to work in any capacity with children or young people (i.e. those below 18 years of age). The DBS is a national agency, which gives the opportunity for all who work with children to be checked through a consistent disclosure service. It became operational in the spring of 2013, replacing the Criminal Records Bureau and the Independent Safeguarding Authority, and provides a 'one stop shop' for ascertaining whether an individual has a criminal record, has been under police investigation, has been banned from working with children by the courts or has had his/her name placed on the lists of those unsuitable to work with children and young people held by the Department for Education and Skills or the Department of Health.

Although it is not a legal requirement for the Church to use the DBS service, the Bishops regard it as a mandatory element in the recruitment process (of both paid and unpaid workers) and DBS checks have been adopted in the Free Church of England as a necessary prerequisite for posts involving work with children or vulnerable adults.

All activities that involve work with children must be based on a clear understanding of how and when DBS checks should be undertaken. If in doubt, advice can be sought from the Denominational Safeguarding Advisor.

The DBS does make a charge for checking people who will be paid employees, but not for volunteers. However, Thirtyone:eight formally known as CCPAS do charge an administration fee. For the purposes of definition, anyone receiving payment for a position, other than reimbursement of expenses, is deemed to be employed.

The DBS offers two levels of check: standard and enhanced. The Free Church of England requests the enhanced level check for any post where there is the expectation of regular contact with children (or vulnerable adults); this will also be requested for any posts that offer the workers public credibility and unsupervised access to children because of their roles within the Church. The enhanced level check searches not only records of criminal convictions but also checks for non-conviction information from local police intelligence records which a senior police officer thinks may be relevant e.g. where someone has been questioned about, or involved in, a crime but not charged.

Positions that involve substantial or unsupervised access to children are exempt from the provisions of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. This means that the DBS check will disclose ALL criminal convictions and intelligence, regardless of how long ago the offence was committed or intelligence gathered, or whether it is relevant to the particular post. The check may also reveal dealings with police/social workers from many years ago. For this reason, it is always best for those undergoing a DBS check to disclose to the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser who checks the form, anything that might come up on the search. A criminal record does not necessarily mean that the applicant will not be allowed to take up the post.

In the Free Church of England, the Registered Body is Thirtyone:eight. All DBS checks must go through the Safeguarding Adviser for the Denomination, where the appointed Countersignatory for the DBS gives them a final check before sending them off.

It must be emphasised that DBS checking will only ascertain if there are any KNOWN reasons why a person may be unsafe to work with children. Although there is clearly real value in this system, a clear DBS disclosure should never be seen as a guarantee, as many perpetrators of child abuse will be unknown to the Disclosure and Barring Service because many perpetrators are not known to authorities. Additionally, it must be acknowledged that those who seek to harm, or abuse children will actively seek roles where they can work with children, especially if that work is unsupervised. A high level of vigilance must always be maintained.

A short guide to Disclosure and Barring Service applications in the Free Church of England

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) is an **executive, non-departmental public body of the Home Office**. Its role is to help employers and voluntary organisations in England and Wales make safer recruitment decisions by providing criminal record checks and by maintaining lists of individuals barred from working with children and/or adults at risk.

It is a **criminal offence** to knowingly allow a person who is barred from working with children to engage in regulated activity with children, or to place a barred person in a role from which they are prohibited. The DBS exists to provide a national, consistent system through which relevant checks can be carried out to support safeguarding decision-making.

The DBS became operational in 2012–2013, replacing the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA). It now provides a single system for criminal record checking, barred-list checking, and the consideration of relevant police information where legally permitted.

Use of the DBS within the Free Church of England

While the law does not require every organisation to use the DBS in all circumstances, the Free Church of England requires DBS checks as a mandatory element of safer recruitment for all roles involving work with children or adults at risk where the role is eligible.

This applies to both paid employees and volunteers. DBS checks are a prerequisite for appointment to relevant roles and form one part of a wider safer-recruitment framework that includes references, interviews, confidential declarations, training and ongoing supervision.

All safeguarding activity involving children must be based on a clear understanding of when a DBS check is required, what level is appropriate, and how checks are managed. Where there is any uncertainty, advice must be sought from the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser before an appointment proceeds.

Fees and Administration

The DBS charges a fee for checks on paid employees but does not charge for volunteer applications. For the purposes of DBS eligibility, a role is considered paid if the individual receives any payment other than reimbursement of actual, receipted expenses.

The Free Church of England uses Thirtyone:eight.org as its Registered Body. An administration fee may apply through this service, even where the DBS itself does not charge.

Levels of DBS Check

The DBS offers **three levels of check**, though only two are relevant to most church roles:

- **Standard DBS Check**
Discloses spent and unspent convictions, cautions, reprimands and final warnings recorded on the Police National Computer.
- **Enhanced DBS Check**
Includes all information in a standard check, plus any **relevant and proportionate non-conviction information** held by local police forces. Where relevant, this may also include a **check of the children's barred list and/or adults' barred list**.

The Free Church of England requires **enhanced DBS checks** for roles involving:

- Regular or unsupervised contact with children or adults at risk,
- Positions of trust or authority within the Church that give credibility or access,
- Leadership or supervisory responsibility for safeguarding or ministerial activity.

DBS eligibility is determined by law and guidance; checks must only be requested where the role is legally eligible.

Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974

Many roles involving substantial or unsupervised contact with children or adults at risk are exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. This means that individuals applying for such roles are required to disclose all convictions, including those that would otherwise be considered spent.

An enhanced DBS check may therefore reveal historical convictions or police involvement. The existence of such information does not automatically preclude appointment. All disclosures must be assessed on a case-by-case basis, considering:

- The nature of the role,
- The relevance of the information,
- The time elapsed,
- Evidence of changed behaviour,
- Safeguarding risk.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to discuss any information likely to appear on a DBS check in advance with the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser.

Role of DBS Checks in Safeguarding

DBS checks can only identify known and recorded information. They are an important safeguarding tool but must never be relied upon in isolation. Many individuals who pose a risk to children are not known to statutory authorities and will not appear on a DBS check.

For this reason:

- A clear DBS certificate must never be regarded as proof that someone is safe,
- DBS checks must always be combined with safer recruitment practices and robust supervision,
- A high level of vigilance must be maintained at all times.

DBS APPLICATIONS IN THE FREE CHURCH OF ENGLAND – PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

- All DBS applications and renewals are completed electronically.
- All checks are administered centrally through the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser (DSA).
- Original identity documentation must be verified before submission.
- Digital ID checking may be used where appropriate and permitted.

Accurate identification and address history verification are essential to ensure effective matching against DBS and barred-list records.

WHO SHOULD HAVE A DBS CHECK

Because local church roles vary, it is not possible to provide an exhaustive list. When in doubt, advice must be sought from the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser.

Roles that WILL NORMALLY REQUIRE a DBS Check (Paid and Voluntary)

- Sunday School helpers
- Children's and youth workers and helpers
- Holiday club helpers
- Crèche workers where parents or carers are not present
- Drivers for organised children's or youth activities
- Worship leaders where their role involves regular contact with children

Roles that do NOT USUALLY Require a DBS Check

- Parent-and-toddler group leaders where parents remain present
- Welcome and hospitality teams
- Choir members
- Caretakers and gardeners
- Members of Church Councils or trustees unless they have direct contact with children or adults at risk

SAFER RECRUITMENT SCOPE

This safer-recruitment and DBS guidance applies to:

- All clergy holding the Bishop's licence or permission to officiate
- Licensed or accredited lay ministers and readers
- Leaders whose roles provide regular or unsupervised access to children
- Individuals supervising or managing work with children or young people
- Church Safeguarding Officers and Children's Advocates
- All employees and volunteers whose roles involve direct and regular contact with children or adults at risk

**More than 90% of child sex
abuse cases involve a relative,
friend or someone else close to
the child. ~ NSPCC**

USEFUL SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION DEFINITIONS

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is the overarching framework of actions and responsibilities used to protect individuals from harm and promote their welfare. It applies to children, young people and adults at risk and is a shared responsibility across individuals, communities and organisations.

Safeguarding has two closely related elements:

- **Protection**
Taking action to protect individual children or adults at risk who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of abuse, neglect or exploitation.
- **Promotion of welfare**
Proactively supporting the safety, wellbeing, dignity and rights of children and adults at risk by creating safe environments, raising awareness, enabling access to help and support, and taking steps to reduce vulnerability and prevent harm.

Safeguarding is not solely a response to abuse; it is a continuous, preventative process that should shape the culture, leadership and practice of the Church.

A Child

For the purposes of safeguarding and child protection, and in accordance with the Children Acts 1989 and 2004, a child is anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. The terms *child*, *children*, *young person* and *young people* are used throughout this document to describe individuals under the age of 18.

A child's entitlement to protection and safeguarding services does not change because they:

- Are aged 16 or 17,
- Live independently,
- Are in further or higher education,
- Are a member of the armed forces,
- Are in hospital, custody, or a Young Offenders' Institution.

The term parent includes anyone who has parental responsibility for a child. Safeguarding concerns may also arise in relation to other adults who have contact with, or care for, a child. Where such concerns exist, advice must always be sought through appropriate safeguarding channels.

An Adult at Risk

(sometimes previously referred to as a "vulnerable adult")

Current safeguarding practice uses the term adult at risk, in line with the Care Act 2014.

An adult at risk is a person aged 18 or over who:

- Has needs for care and support (whether or not those needs are being met), and
- Is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect, and
- As a result of those needs, is unable to protect themselves from harm or exploitation.

Care and support needs may arise from a wide range of factors, including:

- Physical or mental ill-health,
- Learning disability,
- Sensory impairment,
- Frailty or age-related conditions,
- Substance misuse,
- Social isolation or dependency,
- Circumstances that increase vulnerability, such as bereavement or domestic abuse.

Safeguarding responsibilities apply because of risk and circumstance, not because of labels. An adult may be at risk temporarily or at particular points in their life, and safeguarding responses must be proportionate, respectful and person-centred.

Key Principle

Safeguarding decisions must always be guided by the principle that the safety, wellbeing and dignity of the child or adult at risk are paramount, and that concerns should be acted upon promptly, shared appropriately, and addressed in line with statutory guidance and professional advice.

**“Speak up for those who
cannot speak for themselves;
ensure justice for those being
crushed.”
*(Proverbs 31:8)***

CHILD PROTECTION AND SAFEGUARDING RESPONSIBILITIES

Responsibilities of All Those Working with Children and Families

All those who work with children, young people and their families, whether in a paid or voluntary capacity have an individual responsibility to safeguard and promote their welfare. This responsibility applies during all church-related activities and extends beyond formal roles.

All such individuals must:

- Remain alert to possible indicators of abuse, neglect or exploitation, including harm that may occur online or outside the immediate church context.
- Be aware of risk, including the potential risks posed by adults, peers, situations, environments or patterns of behaviour.
- Share information appropriately and promptly with those who need to know, contributing to assessment and decision-making in line with safeguarding procedures.
- Take action when concerns arise, ensuring that safeguarding issues are not minimised, ignored or handled informally.
- Contribute to protective and supportive actions, including safeguarding plans or agreed protective measures where appropriate.
- Participate in review and reflection where safeguarding plans or actions are in place, to ensure that outcomes for children are improving.
- Work constructively with parents and carers wherever possible, unless doing so would place the child at increased risk of harm.

Safeguarding is a shared responsibility and cannot be discharged by any individual acting alone.

Church Responsibilities in Working with Children

Each Church has a clear duty of care, led by the Minister in Charge and the Church Council (or equivalent governing body), to ensure that children and young people are safeguarded within all aspects of church life. This responsibility includes leadership, governance, culture and practice.

To meet this responsibility, every Church must:

- Promote a culture of informed vigilance, in which safeguarding is taken seriously, concerns are welcomed, and speaking up is encouraged.
- Ensure appropriate health and safety arrangements are in place for all activities involving children and young people.
- Maintain adequate insurance cover for all activities undertaken in the name of the church.
- Comply with relevant legal and regulatory requirements, including any registration or inspection requirements where childcare or regulated provision is offered, taking advice from the local authority or Ofsted as appropriate.
- Adopt and implement the Denominational Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, ensuring they are understood and applied consistently, while addressing any relevant local circumstances.

- Appoint a Church Safeguarding Officer (CSO) and notify the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser of this appointment.
The CSO should not hold primary pastoral responsibility for children and must be able to act with independence, ensuring that safeguarding concerns are reported promptly to statutory agencies and escalated appropriately within the Church.
- Ensure pastoral support is available for adults who disclose experiences of abuse in childhood, while remaining alert to any ongoing safeguarding risks, particularly where an alleged abuser may still have contact with children.
- Provide appropriate support for parents and families, especially where children have experienced harm or trauma.
- Ensure effective risk management arrangements are in place for any individual who may pose a risk to children or young people, including clear safeguarding agreements and regular review.
- Identify a children's advocate or equivalent role, where appropriate, offering children a trusted person they may approach with worries or concerns.
- Display child-friendly safeguarding information, including the Childline telephone number, in areas accessible to children and young people.
- Ensure safer recruitment practices are followed for all staff and volunteers working with children or holding positions of authority, including appropriate vetting, training, supervision and ongoing support.
- Pay particular attention to the needs of children who may be more vulnerable, including those with disabilities, learning difficulties, communication needs, or who experience isolation, discrimination or language barriers.
- Review safeguarding arrangements annually, assessing compliance with policy, identifying learning, and making necessary improvements.
- Provide adequate insurance cover for all activities involving children and young people conducted in the name of the church.

Key Principle

Safeguarding is not an optional or secondary activity. It is a core responsibility of the Church, requiring leadership, accountability and vigilance, so that the welfare of children and young people is always paramount.



THE CHURCH SAFEGUARDING OFFICER

The **Church Safeguarding Officer (CSO)** plays a critical role in ensuring that safeguarding responsibilities are carried out effectively within each church. The CSO is the designated lead at local level for receiving, responding to, and appropriately escalating safeguarding concerns relating to children, young people and adults at risk.

Safeguarding is a specialist responsibility. The CSO's role is distinct from pastoral ministry and exists to ensure that concerns are handled independently, consistently and in line with statutory guidance and Denominational policy.

Suitability for the Role

The Church Safeguarding Officer should normally be a lay person and must be able to act with integrity, independence and confidence. While experience in safeguarding, social care or related professions may be beneficial, it is not essential provided that appropriate training and support are undertaken.

The role is generally not suitable for the Minister in Charge, as ministers must remain available to provide pastoral leadership and support, particularly where safeguarding concerns arise. Separation between pastoral and safeguarding roles helps to avoid conflicts of interest and protects all involved.

The CSO must be someone who:

- Commands respect and trust within the church community,
- Can handle sensitive information with discretion and professionalism,
- Is willing to challenge poor practice where necessary,
- Is able to follow procedures rather than act informally or independently.

Training and Support

The CSO must:

- Have a current understanding of safeguarding children and adults at risk, and
- Undertake appropriate safeguarding training, refreshed at least every three years, or more frequently if required by Denominational guidance.

Training may be provided through the Denomination, Thirtyone:eight, or other approved safeguarding providers. The CSO is supported and advised by the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser (DSA) and must remain in regular contact with them.

Accountability and Working Relationships

The CSO works closely with the Minister in Charge and the Church Council, but must be able to act independently when responding to safeguarding concerns.

The purpose of appointing a CSO is to ensure that:

- Safeguarding concerns can be raised without fear, pressure or conflict of interest, and
- The needs and safety of the child or adult at risk are prioritised over pastoral, relational or organisational considerations.

The CSO is not responsible for investigating concerns and must not attempt to do so.

Their role is to receive concerns, ensure they are recorded accurately, seek advice, and ensure appropriate referrals and escalation.

Responsibilities of the Church Safeguarding Officer

The Church Safeguarding Officer is responsible for:

- Maintaining familiarity with the church's Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, and ensuring that these are reviewed regularly by the Church Council.
- Ensuring that safeguarding policies and procedures are accessible to all staff and volunteers, including those new to the church.
- Making safeguarding advice and contact details widely known, so that those with concerns know who to approach and where to seek help.
- Providing a safe point of contact for anyone with concerns about the safety or welfare of a child or young person connected to the church.
- Ensuring that all safeguarding allegations or concerns involving church officers, staff or volunteers are immediately referred to the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser.
- Ensuring that statutory agencies are contacted promptly where concerns meet safeguarding thresholds, and that escalation takes place appropriately.
- Ensuring Childline and other child-friendly safeguarding information is displayed prominently in areas accessible to children and young people.
- Raising concerns about safeguarding practice with the Minister in Charge, Church Council or Bishop where necessary.
- Ensuring that safer-recruitment processes are followed, including DBS checks where roles are eligible, in liaison with the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser.
- Maintaining accurate, factual and secure safeguarding records, including recording concerns using the words of the child or reporting person wherever possible.
- Ensuring that safeguarding records are stored securely and shared only on a need-to-know basis, in line with data protection requirements.

Limits of the Role

The CSO **must not**:

- Investigate safeguarding concerns,
- Interview alleged perpetrators or witnesses beyond establishing basic facts,
- Attempt to resolve safeguarding matters internally or pastorally,
- Delay reporting while seeking further confirmation or reassurance.

The CSO **may** ask limited, factual questions to understand:

- What the concern is,
- What has been seen or heard,
- Who may be affected,
- Whether the child or adult is currently safe.

Key Principle

The Church Safeguarding Officer exists to ensure that safeguarding concerns are taken seriously, handled professionally, and escalated appropriately.

Their role is to protect children and adults at risk, uphold statutory safeguarding standards, and support the Church in fulfilling its duty of care.

DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE

Significant Harm and Child Protection Plans

A child may become the subject of a multi-agency child protection plan where a statutory assessment concludes that the child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, and requires ongoing intervention to keep them safe. Decisions of this nature are made through multi-agency safeguarding arrangements in accordance with statutory guidance.

Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Children

For the purposes of this document, safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined as:

- Protecting children from maltreatment, including abuse and neglect; and
- Preventing impairment of children's health or development, by ensuring safe and effective care.

Safeguarding is not limited to responding to harm. It also includes proactive measures to prevent abuse, reduce risk, and support healthy development.

Child Protection

Child protection is one part of safeguarding and promoting welfare. It refers specifically to the actions taken to protect individual children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm. While effective child protection is essential, safeguarding practice should aim to reduce the need for reactive intervention through prevention, early help and supportive environments.

Categories of Abuse

Abuse is a form of maltreatment of a child. A child may be abused by an adult or adults, or by another child or children. Abuse may occur in families, communities, institutional settings, or online, and may involve a single act or a pattern of behaviour.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is a form of abuse that may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child.

Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates symptoms of illness or deliberately induces illness, sometimes referred to as fabricated or induced illness (FII).

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such that it leads to severe and adverse effects on the child's emotional development.

It may involve:

- Conveying to a child that they are worthless, unloved or inadequate;
- Imposing age-inappropriate or developmentally inappropriate expectations;
- Over-protection or restriction that limits exploration, learning or normal social interaction;
- Seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another, including exposure to domestic abuse;
- Serious bullying, including cyberbullying, that causes the child to feel frightened or in danger;
- Exploitation or manipulation that undermines the child's sense of self or safety.

Some level of emotional abuse is present in all forms of child maltreatment, although it may also occur on its own.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child understands what is happening.

This may include:

- Physical contact, including penetrative and non-penetrative acts;
- Non-contact activities such as involving children in viewing or producing sexual images, watching sexual activity, or encouraging sexually inappropriate behaviour;
- Online abuse, including grooming or exploitation through digital platforms.

Sexual abuse may be perpetrated by adults or by other children and often involves an imbalance of power.

Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in serious impairment of the child's health or development.

Neglect may occur during pregnancy due to substance misuse or other factors. Following birth, it may involve failure to:

- Provide adequate food, clothing or shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment);
- Protect a child from physical or emotional harm or danger;
- Ensure adequate supervision, including the use of inappropriate or unsafe care arrangements;
- Ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment;
- Respond adequately to a child's emotional needs.

Neglect may be deliberate or unintentional but is always harmful.

Organised or Institutional Abuse

Organised abuse involves one or more perpetrators abusing multiple children, sometimes acting in concert, and may involve the misuse of organisational structures, authority or trust. This form of abuse may occur within institutional, community or religious settings and requires particular vigilance and robust safeguarding governance.

Spiritual Abuse (*Faith-context specific*)

While spiritual abuse is not classified as a separate statutory category of abuse, it is recognised within safeguarding practice as a form of emotional and psychological harm.

Spiritual abuse may involve:

- The misuse of religious belief, teaching or authority to control, coerce, manipulate or frighten;
- Using threats of divine punishment, condemnation or exclusion to enforce obedience or silence;
- Pressuring children or young people into beliefs or behaviours through fear, shame or intimidation.

Statements that instil fear or imply spiritual harm or punishment as a consequence of ordinary behaviour are harmful and inappropriate. While faith formation may involve teaching and guidance, safeguarding requires that children and young people are supported to explore belief freely, safely and without coercion.

Safeguarding within a Christian context must always reflect love, care, dignity and respect for the developing child.

Key Principle

Any suspected abuse must be taken seriously and acted upon promptly. Where there is concern that a child may be suffering harm or is at risk of harm, safeguarding procedures must be followed without delay.

TYPES OF ABUSE OF ADULTS AT RISK

Under the Care Act 2014, safeguarding duties apply to adults aged 18 and over who have care and support needs and who are experiencing, or are at risk of, abuse or neglect. Abuse may be a single act or repeated acts and can occur in any setting, including family homes, community environments, churches, or online.

The Care and Support Statutory Guidance identifies the following categories of abuse and neglect.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse includes assault, hitting, slapping, pushing, shaking, biting, burning, scalding, poisoning, rough handling, inappropriate restraint, misuse of medication, force-feeding, or withholding food or drink.

It also includes failing to provide appropriate physical care or necessary aids to living.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse includes rape, sexual assault, inappropriate touching, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, or pressuring an adult into sexual activity that they do not understand, do not want, or feel unable to refuse.

Sexual abuse can occur within relationships and may involve manipulation, coercion or abuse of trust.

Psychological or Emotional Abuse

Psychological or emotional abuse includes threats of harm or abandonment, verbal abuse, shouting, swearing, humiliation, intimidation, coercion, controlling behaviour, bullying, harassment, isolation, gas-lighting, or denying privacy or autonomy.

It may also include preventing an adult from making choices or expressing their wishes.

Financial or Material Abuse

Financial or material abuse includes theft, fraud, exploitation, pressure in connection with wills or property, misuse or misappropriation of money or possessions, withholding financial resources, coercing loans, or intentionally mismanaging finances.

This may include abuse by someone in a position of trust or authority.

Neglect and Acts of Omission

Neglect includes failing to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, heating, hygiene, medical care or access to support services. It may involve ignoring physical or emotional care needs, failing to provide supervision, or exposing an adult to unacceptable risk.

Neglect may be intentional or unintentional but is always harmful.

Discriminatory Abuse

Discriminatory abuse includes harassment, slurs or unequal treatment due to a person's disability, age, race, gender, gender identity, faith, sexual orientation or culture. This may involve exclusion, denial of services, bullying or institutional practices that result in disadvantage or harm.

Organisational or Institutional Abuse

Organisational (or institutional) abuse arises from poor practice within an organisation or care setting. It may include rigid routines, lack of choice, unsafe systems, neglectful practices, or failure to respond to safeguarding concerns.

This form of abuse can occur in residential, healthcare, community or faith-based settings.

Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse includes psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse between intimate partners or family members.

Under current safeguarding guidance, domestic abuse is recognised as a significant adult safeguarding concern and may affect individuals of any gender or background.

Modern Slavery

Modern slavery includes slavery, human trafficking, forced labour and domestic servitude. Adults may be coerced, deceived or exploited for labour, services or criminal activity and may appear to be acting voluntarily.

Self-Neglect

Self-neglect covers a wide range of behaviour, including neglecting personal hygiene, health or surroundings, refusing necessary care, or failing to manage essential daily activities in a way that places the individual at serious risk.

Self-neglect is included within the scope of adult safeguarding under the Care Act.

Spiritual Abuse

While not a separate statutory category, spiritual abuse is recognised within safeguarding practice as a form of psychological and emotional harm and may occur within faith contexts.

Spiritual abuse may include:

- The misuse of religious belief, teaching or authority to control, coerce or manipulate;
- Pressuring individuals through fear, guilt or shame;
- Misuse of authority or power to silence, dominate or exploit;
- Intrusive healing, deliverance or prayer practices without informed consent;
- Denial of an individual's right to freedom of belief, spiritual exploration, or personal conscience.

All ministry must respect dignity, consent and personal autonomy and must never be used to exert control or cause harm.

Key Principle

Any concern that an adult with care and support needs may be experiencing abuse or neglect must be taken seriously and acted upon promptly, in line with statutory safeguarding procedures and Denominational guidance.



RESPONDING TO CONCERNS ABOUT POSSIBLE ABUSE

Safeguarding is a shared responsibility. While some individuals within the church hold specific safeguarding roles, every member of the Church community has a duty to remain vigilant and to act if they are worried about the safety or welfare of a child.

Those most likely to become aware of safeguarding concerns include parents, carers, youth and children's workers, leaders of uniformed organisations, clergy, worship and music leaders, and volunteers. However, safeguarding concerns may be identified by anyone.

Raising and Recording Concerns

Anyone who is worried about:

- The behaviour of an adult or young person, or
- A change in a child's presentation, behaviour or demeanour
- must share those concerns without delay with the Church Safeguarding Officer (CSO).

All concerns must be:

- Taken seriously,
- Handled respectfully, and
- Recorded carefully and accurately.

The Church Safeguarding Officer is responsible for keeping a clear, factual record of:

- The concern raised,
- Any advice sought,
- Decisions made, and
- Actions taken.

Safeguarding records must be stored securely and handled in accordance with the **UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)** and **the Data Protection Act 2018**. Information may be shared **without consent** where this is necessary to protect a child from harm.

The Church Safeguarding Officer will then decide whether:

- a) advice should be sought from the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser (DSA), and/or
- b) a referral should be made to Children's Social Care or the Police.

No-one within the Church should attempt to investigate safeguarding concerns. Investigation is the responsibility of statutory authorities.

Concerns About Other Organisations

Clergy or lay people may hear safeguarding concerns relating to:

- Church schools,
- Uniformed organisations, or
- Other external settings.

Such concerns must be reported to the relevant organisation's safeguarding lead. Where there is uncertainty, or concern that a matter is not being handled appropriately, advice must be sought from the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser without delay.

If a Child Tells You About Abuse

Children may find it extremely difficult to disclose abuse. If a child chooses to tell you, it is vital that you respond calmly and appropriately.

You should:

- Listen carefully, without interruption or judgement.
- Allow the child to speak at their own pace.
- Avoid asking leading or probing questions.
- Reassure the child that they are being taken seriously.
- Make clear that you will try to help them stay safe.

You must never promise confidentiality. Explain, in age-appropriate language, that you may need to share information with others whose job it is to help children.

You must never speak to the person alleged to have caused harm.

Even if the disclosure seems unclear, confusing or implausible, you must still seek safeguarding advice. Children rarely fabricate abuse disclosures, and it is not your role to assess credibility.

Urgent and Out-of-Hours Situations

In out-of-hours situations (for example, evenings or weekends), consider whether the child is safe:

If the child is in immediate danger, contact the Police (999).

If the child does not feel safe to go home, or immediate advice is required, contact the local out-of-hours Children's Social Care / Emergency Duty Team (EDT).

When contacting statutory services, make clear that this is a child protection concern and follow the advice given.

After a Disclosure: What You Must Do

As soon as possible after receiving a disclosure or concern:

- Make a written record, using the child's own words wherever possible. Include dates, times, locations, and who was involved.
- Record all actions taken, including advice sought and referrals made, noting names, roles, dates and times.
- Contact the Church Safeguarding Officer or Denominational Safeguarding Adviser (as appropriate) to share the concern and confirm next steps.
- Ensure records are stored securely and shared only on a need-to-know basis.
- Where required, contact Children's Social Care and follow up any verbal referral in writing (often via a Multi-Agency Referral Form).

- If the concern involves a church officer, employee or volunteer, contact the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser immediately. Such allegations must always be managed externally by statutory agencies.
- Arrange appropriate pastoral support for the child and family, in collaboration with statutory services.

Supporting the Child

Children who disclose abuse may require significant emotional and practical support. While some support may be offered within the Church, many children benefit from specialist help, including:

- NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS),
- NSPCC and other specialist voluntary organisations.

Children's Social Care can advise on appropriate local support services.

If an Adult Discloses Abuse from Their Childhood

Many adults never disclosed abuse when they were children and may seek support years later.

If an adult discloses childhood abuse:

- Listen respectfully and compassionately.
- Acknowledge the courage it has taken to speak.
- Offer appropriate pastoral support.

Adults have a right to confidentiality. However, if there is reason to believe that the alleged abuser may still have contact with children, there may be an ongoing risk.

You must therefore be clear at an early stage that:

- If identifying details of the alleged abuser are shared, confidentiality may need to be breached to protect others.

Adults should be supported to remain in control of what they choose to disclose, while being helped to understand safeguarding responsibilities. You should seek advice from the Church Safeguarding Officer or Denominational Safeguarding Adviser.

Supporting adults who disclose abuse can be emotionally demanding. You may need to seek support for yourself.

Some adults may later choose to report abuse to the Police. Modern Child Abuse Investigation teams can offer an initial, informal discussion to explain what reporting would involve, allowing the adult to make an informed choice.

Your role is not to pressure someone to report, but to support them respectfully and safely.

If Someone Tells You They Have Abused a Child

If a child, young person or adult tells you that they have abused a child:

- You have a responsibility to share this information with statutory authorities, regardless of when the abuse occurred.
- Explain clearly that you must pass on the information to protect others.
- Do not act in a way that puts yourself at risk.

Enlist the support of the Church Safeguarding Officer or Minister, who will contact the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser as necessary. Advice can be sought initially without naming the individual.

If the disclosure occurs out of hours and there may be an immediate risk, contact the Police or out-of-hours Children's Social Care and make clear this is a safeguarding matter.

Support for the person disclosing abuse may continue, but safeguarding and protection of others must always take priority.

Key Principle

Doing nothing is not an option.

Safeguarding concerns must be recognised, recorded, shared and acted upon promptly to ensure the safety of children and to uphold the Church's duty of care.

If you **SEE** something **Do** something



REPORTING ALLEGED ABUSE

“If a practitioner believes that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, they should make a referral to local authority children’s social care immediately. Anyone can make a referral.”

Working Together to Safeguard Children (updated 2026)

Safeguarding concerns must never be ignored, minimised or managed informally. Any delay or failure to refer concerns may place a child at further risk of harm and undermines the Free Church of England’s commitment to safeguarding children and young people.

All those involved in church life are expected to exercise responsible, informed and timely judgement, recognising that the welfare of the child is paramount.

Duty to Refer and Share Information

There is no requirement to conduct further investigation before making a referral. If there is concern that a child:

- is suffering harm, or
- is likely to suffer harm,

those concerns **must be shared promptly** with the Church Safeguarding Officer, and where appropriate referred to **Children’s Social Care or the Police**, in line with safeguarding procedures.

While safeguarding law in England does not impose a universal mandatory reporting duty on all individuals, statutory guidance places a clear expectation on organisations and practitioners to share information where there is a risk of significant harm. Failing to do so may have serious consequences for the child and for the organisation.

Information Sharing and Consent

The law recognises a general duty of confidence, where information shared in confidence should not normally be disclosed without consent. However, this duty is not absolute.

Under the Children Act 1989, Working Together to Safeguard Children, and UK data-protection legislation, information may and should be shared without consent where this is necessary to:

- protect a child from harm,
- prevent or detect serious crime, or
- serve the public interest in safeguarding children.

Seeking consent to share information is good practice where it is safe and appropriate, but must not be sought if doing so would:

- place a child at increased risk, or

- cause delay in protective action.

In safeguarding contexts, it is best practice to:

- be transparent with the person sharing information about your duty to protect children,
- explain that information will be shared where necessary, rather than asking permission to do so.

Even where consent is withheld, the duty to share information remains if a child may be at risk.

Encouraging Appropriate Disclosure

Where information suggesting harm is received in confidence:

- The individual disclosing should, where appropriate, be encouraged to share the information directly with statutory services.
- Where this is not possible or appropriate (particularly with younger children), the responsibility rests with the person receiving the information to make the referral themselves.

Individuals must be told clearly and respectfully that:

- safeguarding duties override confidentiality where a child may be at risk, and
- information will be shared on a **need-to-know basis only**.

Proportionality and Need-to-Know

The key principle governing information sharing is proportionality.

When deciding what information to share, consider:

- Is the disclosure necessary to protect the child?
- Is the information shared relevant and accurate?
- Is it shared with the minimum number of appropriate people?

Only those who need the information to take safeguarding action should receive it. For example:

- The Church Safeguarding Officer will usually require full information to enable referral and coordination.
- Senior church leaders or bishops do not normally require full disclosure, unless there is a specific governance or oversight reason.
This approach is fully consistent with UK GDPR, which recognises safeguarding as a lawful basis for sharing personal data.

Key Principles

- The child's welfare is paramount.
- Safeguarding concerns must be shared promptly.
- Consent is not required where a child may be at risk.
- Confidentiality does not override safeguarding.
- Information sharing must be proportionate and purposeful.



FREE CHURCH OF ENGLAND
**MANAGING ALLEGATIONS AGAINST CHURCH OFFICERS,
STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS**
(2026)

It is essential that there is a clear, consistent and robust procedure for responding to safeguarding allegations made against any person within the life of the Church. This procedure is based on current statutory safeguarding guidance, including *Working Together to Safeguard Children (updated 2026)*, and recognised national best practice.

This procedure must not be improvised and must always be followed in full. Failure to manage allegations correctly risks further harm, undermines trust, and may expose children, adults at risk and the Church itself to serious risk.

Scope of These Procedures

These procedures apply when allegations, concerns or incidents are reported relating to:

- Ordained clergy
- Those holding Permission to Officiate
- Church officers and office holders
- Employees and volunteers
- Anyone undertaking work or ministry on behalf of the Free Church of England

This includes situations where the person:

- Is currently active, or
- Has retired, resigned, or otherwise left their role.

Safeguarding duties do not expire when a person leaves office.

Immediate Reporting Requirement

Any allegation or concern must be reported immediately to the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser (DSA). 📞 **07900 912754**

If the DSA is unavailable, the concern must be reported without delay to:

- The relevant **Bishop**, or
- The **General Secretary**.

No investigation must be initiated by the person receiving the allegation, as this may compromise statutory enquiries.

Key Principles

1. Allegations Covered

These procedures apply whenever it is alleged that a person who works with children has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed or may have harmed a child;
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child;
- Behaved in a way that indicates they may be unsuitable to work with children.

2. Relevance of Behaviour Outside Church Context

These procedures apply regardless of where the alleged behaviour occurred, including:

- During church activities or employment
- In another professional or voluntary role
- In domestic, family or social contexts
- In past employment or activity

3. Overarching Principles

- The welfare of the child is paramount.
- Allegations must be reported, not judged or tested locally.
- Failure to report an allegation may itself result in disciplinary action.
- Child protection and/or police investigations take precedence over church processes.
- Suspension, where required, is a neutral safeguarding act, not a disciplinary measure.
- Persons subject to allegations must only be informed with LADO agreement.

Statutory Roles and Responsibilities

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

The **LADO** provides oversight and coordination of allegations against people who work with children. Their role includes:

- Advising employers and organisations
- Liaising with Police and Children's Social Care
- Oversight of investigations and timescales
- Ensuring consistency and fairness
- Contributing to strategy discussions and meetings
- Advising on suspension decisions
- Ensuring appropriate referrals to the **DBS** where required

All allegations **must be referred to the LADO on the same working day.**

Named Senior Officer (NSO) (*General Secretary*)

The NSO holds strategic responsibility for ensuring that:

- Allegations procedures comply with statutory guidance
- Robust recording and reporting systems are in place
- Inter-agency issues are addressed
- Annual learning and procedural improvement occurs

Senior Manager (Safeguarding) (*Denominational Safeguarding Adviser*)

The DSA has operational responsibility for:

- Receiving all allegations and concerns
- Liaising with the LADO
- Coordinating internal processes
- Ensuring accurate, secure recording
- Advising church leaders regarding safeguarding-related employment decisions
- Attending strategy meetings as required
- Ensuring appropriate risk assessment and support arrangements

If an allegation relates to the DSA, it must be reported directly to the **Bishops**, who will contact the Local Authority.

Procedure

1. Any staff member or volunteer receiving an allegation must immediately inform the DSA.

2. Allegations must be reported where harm is alleged to have occurred through:
 - Abuse
 - Reckless or unsafe action
 - Failure to safeguard
 - Failure to follow agreed safeguarding procedures
3. A written record must be made as soon as possible, including:
 - The allegation
 - Dates, times and locations
 - Actions taken and advice sought
4. The DSA will refer the allegation to the LADO immediately.
5. The NSO must be notified of all allegations, regardless of role or employment status.
6. Investigations under s.47 Children Act 1989 and police enquiries always take precedence.
7. The accused must not be approached or questioned prior to LADO advice.
8. Parents/carers should normally be informed of referrals unless doing so places the child at risk or compromises an investigation.
9. Strategy discussions or meetings will determine:
 - Investigative pathway
 - Risk management
 - Suspension considerations

Outcomes Following Investigation

Investigations may result in one of the following outcomes:

- **Substantiated**
- **Unsubstantiated**
- **False**
- **Malicious**
- **Inconclusive**

These outcomes must be clearly recorded.

Record-Keeping and Retention

- All allegations and outcomes must be recorded securely.
- Records must be retained **at least until State Pension age or for 10 years**, whichever is longer.
- Records must support DBS disclosures, references and safeguarding reviews.

DBS Referrals (Duty to Refer)

Where a person is dismissed, resigns, retires, or is removed from regulated activity because they have harmed a child or posed a risk of harm, the Free Church of England **has a legal duty to make a referral to the DBS.**

This duty applies regardless of:

- Criminal prosecution
 - Resignation prior to disciplinary conclusion
- Failure to refer is itself a safeguarding breach.

Key Reminder

Safeguarding allegations must always be managed externally, professionally and without delay.

Protecting children, maintaining trust, and upholding justice require clarity, integrity and accountability.

PROCEDURES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF SAFEGUARDING INFORMATION

The Free Church of England recognises that safeguarding requires the careful, lawful and proportionate handling of personal information. Confidence in safeguarding processes depends on assurance that information is gathered, stored, used and shared appropriately and securely.

The management of safeguarding information is governed by law and statutory guidance, including:

- **UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)**
- **Data Protection Act 2018**
- **Working Together to Safeguard Children** (updated statutory guidance)
- **Information Sharing: Advice for Practitioners** (Government guidance)

Safeguarding responsibilities do not conflict with data-protection law. On the contrary, data-protection legislation provides a clear framework that enables appropriate information sharing where children or adults are at risk of harm.

UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018

UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 set out the rights of individuals ("data subjects") and the responsibilities of organisations that hold and process personal information.

Since their introduction, these laws have:

- Increased requirements for transparency and accountability,
- Strengthened rights for individuals,
- Increased sanctions for serious or reckless non-compliance.

Everyone within the Church who handles safeguarding information must:

- Understand their responsibilities under data-protection law, and
- Apply the principles of lawfulness, fairness, transparency, accuracy, security and proportionality.

The introduction of UK GDPR should be seen as an opportunity to reinforce good safeguarding information-handling practice, not as a barrier to protecting people from harm.

Key Data-Protection Terms

Personal Data

Personal data is any information relating to an identified or identifiable living individual (the "data subject").

In safeguarding contexts, this may include names, dates of birth, contact details, family circumstances, and records of concerns or disclosures.

Information may still be personal data even if names are not used, where individuals could be identified from context or combined information.

Special Category Personal Data

Special category data includes information revealing or relating to:

- Religious or philosophical beliefs
- Health or medical information
- Genetic or biometric data
- Sex life or sexual orientation
- Racial or ethnic origin

Safeguarding information will almost always involve special-category data and therefore requires careful handling and a clear lawful basis for processing.

Criminal Offence Data

Criminal offence data includes information about:

- Allegations of criminal behaviour,
- Criminal investigations,
- Cautions, charges or convictions.

This data is subject to additional protections under the Data Protection Act 2018 but can be lawfully processed where safeguarding requires it.

Lawful Bases for Processing Safeguarding Information

Data-protection law recognises that safeguarding can require information to be processed and shared without consent.

1. Sharing Information with Statutory Agencies

Information may be lawfully shared with Police, Children's Social Care, Adult Social Care and other statutory bodies where necessary for:

- Preventing or detecting crime, or
- Protecting children or adults at risk from harm.

The lawful basis includes substantial public interest and safeguarding of children and individuals at risk, as set out in the Data Protection Act 2018 (Schedule 1, Part 2).

Where possible:

- Requests for information should be documented,
- The reason for disclosure should be recorded,
- A copy of any request or justification should be kept with the safeguarding record.

2. Internal Safeguarding Activities

Safeguarding activities such as:

- Recording concerns,
- Risk assessment,
- Consulting safeguarding advisers,
- Planning and implementing protective measures,

are lawful where they are necessary and proportionate to protect a person from neglect, physical harm, emotional harm or abuse.

Where there is reasonable cause to believe that an individual:

- Has care and support needs, and
- Is experiencing or at risk of harm, and
- Is unable to protect themselves,

information may be recorded and shared without consent, where this is necessary to safeguard them.

INFORMATION SHARING, CONFIDENTIALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Concerns are sometimes raised that safeguarding information sharing breaches confidentiality or human-rights law. Current government guidance is clear:

- The welfare of a child or adult at risk takes precedence.
- The Human Rights Act does not prevent information sharing where necessary to protect life or prevent harm.
- The common-law duty of confidence can be overridden where disclosure is justified in the public interest.

In safeguarding situations:

- Consent should be sought only where it is safe and appropriate.
- Consent must not be sought where doing so would place someone at greater risk or cause delay.
- Lack of consent does not prevent lawful information sharing where safeguarding thresholds are met.

Principles for Safe Information Sharing

When handling safeguarding information, the following principles must always be applied:

- **Necessity** – share information only where it is required to safeguard.
- **Proportionality** – share the minimum necessary information.
- **Accuracy** – record information clearly, factually and promptly.
- **Security** – store records securely (locked storage or secure electronic systems).
- **Need-to-know** – share information only with those who require it to take safeguarding action.
- **Accountability** – record why decisions were made and what information was shared.

Reassuring Those Involved

It can be helpful, where concerns arise, to explain to individuals that:

- Safeguarding information sharing is lawful, expected and supported by government guidance,
- The Church is required to act where there are safeguarding concerns,
- Information is handled carefully and respectfully.

Providing copies or summaries of government information-sharing guidance may reassure those worried about legality or fairness.

Key Message

Data-protection law exists to protect people, not to prevent safeguarding. When a person may be at risk, information must be shared responsibly, lawfully and without delay.

RETENTION OF SAFEGUARDING INFORMATION

The Free Church of England recognises that safeguarding records are critical evidence for protecting children and adults, enabling accountability, supporting survivors, and learning from past failures. Records must therefore be retained securely, lawfully and for appropriate periods, even where significant time has passed.

Learning from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA)

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) highlighted the serious harm caused by inadequate, fragmented or destroyed safeguarding records. It made clear that organisations must retain safeguarding records sufficiently long to enable:

- Proper response to disclosures, including non-recent abuse
- Accountability and public scrutiny
- Fair handling of allegations
- Survivor confidence and access to justice

While IICSA has now concluded, its findings and recommendations continue to shape national safeguarding expectations. Safeguarding records relating to abuse must not be destroyed prematurely, and prolonged retention for safeguarding and accountability purposes is lawful under UK data-protection legislation.

Legal Basis for Retaining Safeguarding Information

The retention of safeguarding information is lawful under:

- UK GDPR (Article 6 and Article 9)
- Data Protection Act 2018 (Schedule 1 – safeguarding and substantial public interest)

Safeguarding records will typically contain special category personal data and criminal offence data. These may be retained where necessary for:

- Safeguarding and protection of children and adults at risk
- Prevention and detection of serious harm or crime
- Compliance with legal and regulatory obligations
- Responding to future disclosures, investigations or reviews

Extended retention for safeguarding purposes does not breach data-protection law where it is proportionate, justified and documented.

What Constitutes Safeguarding Records

Safeguarding information includes (but is not limited to):

- Referrals for safeguarding advice, assessment or intervention
- Safeguarding casework files and records
- Risk assessments and safeguarding agreements or contracts
- Records of safeguarding panels, strategy meetings and reviews

- Complaints, disciplinary and conduct records relating to safeguarding
- DBS information (excluding DBS certificates themselves)
- Safer recruitment records where they relate to safeguarding concerns
- Safeguarding audit, assurance and governance records
- Records of safeguarding concerns, disclosures or allegations
- Policies, procedures and guidance relevant to safeguarding practice

Retention Periods

Core Safeguarding Records

Records of safeguarding concerns, allegations or disclosures, including risk assessments, safeguarding plans and outcomes, must be retained for:

At least 75 years after the last known contact with the individual concerned or any survivor, or until State Pension age plus 10 years (whichever is longer).

This aligns with national practice across faith-based organisations, local authorities and statutory partners.

Other Safeguarding-Related Information

Some information held as part of safeguarding records may originate from other organisations (for example, correspondence or reports). Where such material does not form part of the core safeguarding record, it may be subject to shorter retention periods. Decisions must be:

- Documented
- Risk-assessed
- Taken with advice from the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser

No information relating to abuse concerns should be destroyed without safeguarding oversight.

DBS Information

- DBS certificates must not be retained once the recruitment decision is complete.
- Records of DBS checks (date, level, reference number, outcome) may be retained as part of safeguarding or personnel records in line with policy.
- Information relevant to safeguarding concerns arising from DBS disclosures must be retained as part of safeguarding records.

Secure Storage and Access

All safeguarding records must be:

- Stored securely (locked physical storage and/or encrypted electronic systems)
- Accessed on a strict need-to-know basis
- Separated from general pastoral or administrative records
- Clearly marked as safeguarding material

Access should normally be limited to the Church Safeguarding Officer, Denominational Safeguarding Adviser, and those with specific safeguarding governance responsibilities.

Sharing Safeguarding Information

When safeguarding information is requested or shared, the following steps must be followed.

Step 1: Validate the Request

Before disclosing any information:

- Verify the identity of the requester
- Confirm their role and legal authority to receive the information
- Be cautious with urgency-based requests; urgency does not remove the need for verification

Step 2: Validate the Purpose

Consider whether there is a lawful and legitimate basis for sharing the information, such as:

- Immediate or ongoing risk to a child or adult at risk
- A statutory investigation (Police, Children's or Adult Social Care)
- A court order
- A lawful subject access request

Only relevant and proportionate information should be shared.

If in doubt, seek advice from the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser.

Step 3: Consider Consent

Where it is safe and appropriate, individuals should be informed that information is being shared. However:

- Consent is not required where there is safeguarding risk
- Consent must not be sought if it may increase risk or cause delay
- Lack of consent does not prevent lawful sharing in safeguarding contexts

Be clear and transparent about safeguarding duties from the outset, as this often builds trust.

Recording Decisions

All decisions relating to:

- Retention
- Disclosure
- Refusal to disclose

must be clearly recorded, including the rationale and legal basis. This demonstrates accountability and supports future scrutiny.

Key Principles

- Safeguarding records must be retained, not hidden or destroyed.
- Retention protects children, adults, survivors and the Church.
- Data-protection law supports safeguarding; it does not obstruct it.
- Decisions must be lawful, proportionate, accountable and recorded.

Summary Statement

Safeguarding records exist to protect people over time, not only at the moment of concern. Their careful retention is a core safeguarding responsibility.

WORKING TOGETHER: LOCAL SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIPS

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 fundamentally reformed the way safeguarding arrangements operate in England. Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) were abolished and replaced by local multi-agency safeguarding partnerships, bringing a stronger focus on shared leadership, accountability and effectiveness.

Under the current framework, safeguarding arrangements are led jointly by the three statutory safeguarding partners:

- The Local Authority
- The Integrated Care Board (ICB) for the NHS
- The Police

These partners are responsible for setting local safeguarding priorities, agreeing how agencies work together, and ensuring that safeguarding practice is effective.

Multi-Agency Working

Safeguarding children cannot be achieved by any single organisation acting alone. Effective protection and promotion of children's welfare depends on co-ordinated action across statutory and voluntary agencies, including faith-based organisations.

Under *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, voluntary, community, social enterprise and faith organisations are explicitly recognised as relevant agencies. Churches are therefore expected to:

- Co-operate with local safeguarding partners,
- Follow locally agreed safeguarding arrangements and procedures,
- Share information appropriately where there are safeguarding concerns, and
- Participate in learning and improvement where required.

Each organisation retains its own governance and accountability, but safeguarding partnerships provide the framework through which agencies work together, share learning and resolve challenges.

Role of Local Safeguarding Partnerships

Local safeguarding partnerships are responsible for:

- Publishing local safeguarding arrangements and thresholds,
- Overseeing multi-agency safeguarding practice,
- Reviewing serious safeguarding incidents and learning lessons,
- Providing or commissioning training and guidance,
- Ensuring consistent, high-quality safeguarding practice across their area.

Local arrangements typically include:

- Processes for referral to Children's Social Care,
- Procedures for managing allegations (including LADO arrangements),
- Information-sharing protocols,
- Guidance on early help and child protection pathways.

These arrangements are usually published on local authority safeguarding partnership websites.

The Church's Responsibility

Co-operation with local safeguarding partnerships is a key element of good safeguarding practice within the Church. Engaging with statutory safeguarding arrangements:

- Helps ensure compliance with national standards,
- Provides clarity and consistency in handling safeguarding concerns,
- Supports transparency and accountability, and
- Strengthens protection for children and families.

The Free Church of England is committed to working constructively with statutory safeguarding partners and contributing its understanding of faith contexts to safeguarding discussions where appropriate.

GUIDELINES FOR WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (UPDATED 2026)

These guidelines apply to all church activities involving children and young people and are intended to promote safe, respectful and transparent practice.

1. Supervision and Safer Working

- Avoid one-to-one situations wherever possible.
- Ensure another responsible adult is nearby and aware when one-to-one contact is unavoidable.
- Activities should be planned so that adults are never isolated with a child.
- Adults must not smoke or use alcohol or illicit substances during activities with children.

2. Pastoral or Counselling Work

Anyone undertaking one-to-one pastoral or counselling work with children or young people must:

- Have appropriate training and safeguarding awareness,
- Understand the limits of their competence,
- Agree purpose, boundaries and duration of meetings in advance,
- Meet in a space that is private but not secretive,
- Inform another adult of the meeting, and
- Make a confidential written record after each session.

If concerns arise, advice must be sought immediately.

3. Physical Contact

- Physical contact must be minimal, appropriate and child-led,
- It must always meet the child's needs, not the adult's,
- Respect each child's personal space and boundaries,
- Avoid rough play, physical games or teasing that could be misinterpreted.

4. Records and Registers

Keep up-to-date records of children attending activities, including:

- Name,
- Date of birth,
- Address,
- Emergency contact details,
- Parental or carer information.

These records must be stored securely.

5. Staffing Ratios and Regulation

Adequate adult-to-child ratios must be maintained to ensure safety and meet regulatory expectations. Where there is uncertainty about registration or regulation (particularly for younger children), advice must be sought from Ofsted.

Indicative minimum ratios commonly used in safeguarding practice include:

Age of children	0 – 2	2 - 3	4 - 8	9 -12	13 - 18
Children per one adult	3	4	6	8	10

6. Parental Consent

- Written parental consent is required for all under-18s attending activities.
- For children who are “looked after” by a local authority, consent must be obtained from the local authority, not solely from foster carers.
- No child may take part in off-site activities without appropriate consent.

7. Unaccompanied Attendance

Children may attend worship or activities unaccompanied by adults. Where this occurs:

- Make reasonable efforts to ensure parents are aware of attendance,
- Check that arrangements for getting home are safe,
- Encourage children to leave at an appropriate time.

8. Premises and Safety

- Church premises must be safe, well-maintained and suitable for children’s activities.
- Regular checks should be undertaken on equipment and facilities.
- A stocked first-aid kit must be available.
- All activities must be covered by appropriate insurance.

9. Listening to Children

- Take what children say seriously.
- Listen calmly and without judgement.
- Do not investigate or assess credibility.
- Any safeguarding concern or allegation must be referred externally via the Church Safeguarding Officer, Denominational Safeguarding Adviser, or directly to the LADO as appropriate.

10. Confidentiality

Never promise to keep secrets.

If someone asks you to promise confidentiality, you must explain (in age-appropriate language) that:

- You will respect their wishes as far as possible, **but**

- You may need to share information to keep people safe where someone is at risk of harm.

Key Message

Safeguarding works best when churches act openly, consistently and in partnership with statutory agencies, always placing the welfare of children at the centre of decisions.

APPOINTMENT OF YOUTH WORKERS

Youth work is a valuable and demanding ministry requiring clear boundaries, maturity, and a strong safeguarding framework. The appointment of youth workers—paid or voluntary—must always prioritise the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, while also protecting workers themselves from situations that could place them at risk.

Age, Maturity and Professional Boundaries

While age alone does not determine suitability, experience shows that small age gaps between youth workers and older teenagers (particularly those aged 14–17) can increase safeguarding risk if expectations, boundaries and supervision are not robust.

For this reason:

- Churches should exercise particular caution when appointing youth workers under the age of 21 as lead workers with teenage groups.
- Decisions should be based on maturity, competence, training, supervision, and role clarity, not age alone.

Maintaining appropriate professional distance is essential. Where boundaries are unclear or poorly supported, both young people and youth workers may be placed at risk of harm, allegation or misunderstanding.

Legal Context: Positions of Trust and Grooming

Churches must be aware of key safeguarding offences under current law:

- **Abuse of Position of Trust**
It is a criminal offence for a person in a position of trust with responsibility for 16–17-year-olds to engage in sexual activity with a young person in their care, even though the young person may be over the age of consent.
- **Grooming**
It is also a criminal offence for an adult to groom a child or young person, including through online or digital communication, with the intention of sexual abuse at a later stage.

These offences underline the importance of clear roles, supervision, codes of conduct and swift safeguarding response.

Protecting Young People and Youth Workers

Safeguarding protects everyone involved. Inadequate recruitment, role definition or supervision can place youth workers—particularly younger or less experienced workers—at risk of situations that may:

- Lead to allegations,
 - Damage future opportunities to work with children, or
 - Result in adverse DBS outcomes.
- For this reason:
- All appointments must follow safer-recruitment procedures, including references, training and (where eligible) DBS checks.
 - Churches planning to appoint a youth worker should seek up-to-date advice from the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser as a matter of good practice.

Appointments Under the Age of 21

Churches should not appoint a youth worker under the age of 21 to sole or lead responsibility for a youth group without prior consultation with:

- **The Denominational Safeguarding Adviser, and**
- **The Bishop, where appropriate.**

Where individuals under 21 are involved in youth work:

- They must always work alongside a formally appointed and experienced youth leader (normally aged 21 or over).
- They must never be left in sole charge of individuals or groups of young people.
- Their role should be clearly defined as supported, supervised and developmental.

This approach allows emerging youth leaders to:

- Develop skills safely,
- Gain experience within clear boundaries, and
- Be supported without placing themselves or young people at risk.

Key Safeguarding Expectations

All youth workers, regardless of age, must:

- Operate within a clear role description,
- Adhere to the Church's safeguarding policy and code of conduct,
- Receive appropriate training and supervision,
- Understand professional boundaries and reporting responsibilities,
- Never enter into personal or romantic relationships with young people in their care.

Key Principle

Safeguarding-led youth work enables young people to flourish and youth workers to serve confidently and safely.

Decisions about appointment must always balance encouragement with responsibility, and opportunity with protection.

MINISTERING TO PEOPLE WHO MIGHT POSE A RISK TO CHILDREN

Churches are communities that include people from a wide range of backgrounds and life experiences. It is well-established through research and safeguarding practice that some congregations will include individuals who have caused harm to children, including those with convictions for sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse or neglect. In some cases, this history may be known; in others, it may not.

The Church is called to minister pastorally to all people. However, this pastoral responsibility must never override the duty to safeguard children. Where there is a tension between inclusion and protection, the welfare of children and young people is always paramount.

Understanding Risk

In addition to individuals with known convictions against children, others may present a safeguarding risk that requires careful assessment and management. This may include, for example:

- Individuals convicted of violent or sexual offences against adults
- Individuals known to perpetrate domestic abuse
- People experiencing unmanaged substance misuse
- Individuals with certain medical or mental health conditions that may, in rare cases, result in unpredictable or disinhibited behaviour

Risk is not determined by labels or assumptions, but by behaviour, context and safeguards. Where there is any uncertainty or concern, advice must be sought at an early stage.

The Denominational Safeguarding Adviser is the first point of contact for advice in all cases where a person may pose a risk to children.

Congregational Awareness and Culture

Where a congregation has a clear understanding that:

- Safeguarding takes priority,
- Risks are managed discreetly and professionally,
- Boundaries apply to everyone,

it becomes easier to respond calmly and appropriately when a specific situation arises. Clear safeguarding culture protects children, supports clergy and volunteers, and reduces fear or confusion.

MINISTERING TO PEOPLE KNOWN TO HAVE SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILDREN

The careful, supervised inclusion of individuals who have sexually abused children can, in some circumstances, reduce the risk of re-offending and support accountability. Where this is done, it must be approached with clarity, rigour, professional advice and strict safeguards.

This work is specialist safeguarding practice, not informal pastoral care.

Initial Action

Where it is known or disclosed that a member of the congregation has sexually abused a child:

- The Bishop must be consulted immediately
- The Denominational Safeguarding Adviser must be involved from the outset
- Relevant statutory guidance and local safeguarding arrangements must be followed

A structured safeguarding approach must then be agreed to ensure children are protected and responsibilities are clear.

Survivor-Centred Safeguarding

If the person's victim attends the same church, the individual who caused harm must not attend that congregation. The needs, safety and dignity of survivors always take precedence.

Consideration must also be given to other survivors who may be present in the congregation, including those abused elsewhere and at other times.

Eligibility for Church Roles

An individual known to have sexually abused a child:

- **Must never** hold any role involving children or young people
- **Must never** hold roles of trust, authority, leadership or public credibility
- **Must not** be placed in positions that could cause a child to view them as trustworthy

This applies regardless of the length of time since the offence or whether the individual remains subject to statutory supervision.

Safeguarding Agreements (Risk Management Plans)

A written safeguarding agreement (sometimes called a risk-management plan) must be developed in consultation with:

- The Bishop
- The Denominational Safeguarding Adviser

- Where appropriate, statutory partners

The agreement exists to protect children, protect survivors, and protect the individual from situations that could lead to allegation or harm.

The individual must be informed clearly and honestly about:

- Why the agreement is necessary
- What restrictions apply
- What the consequences will be if it is breached

Where possible, the content of the agreement should be discussed with the individual, but its terms are not negotiable if safeguarding requires restriction.

Safeguarding Agreements May Include:

- Attendance at specific, agreed acts of worship only
- Sitting in designated areas away from children
- Not entering areas used by children or young people
- Exclusion from house groups or activities where children are present
- Declining hospitality in households where children are present
- Never being alone with a child or young person
- No involvement in mixed-age activities
- Clear supervision and accountability arrangements

The agreement must be signed, strictly supervised, and not altered without safeguarding advice.

Safeguarding Support Group

A very small group (agreed in advance) may be involved to implement and oversee the agreement. This will usually include:

- Clergy
- Churchwardens or equivalent
- Church Safeguarding Officer
- Approved befriending volunteers (where appropriate)

Only those who need to know to safeguard effectively should be informed. Confidentiality must be maintained, but never at the expense of safeguarding.

Children's work leaders must be told that:

- An agreement exists
- The individual must not volunteer or be approached regarding children's activities
- Any concerns must be reported immediately to the Safeguarding Officer

Supervision, Review and Escalation

- Agreements must be reviewed regularly, at least quarterly
- They must remain in place for as long as the individual is part of the congregation
- Breaches must be reported immediately to the Bishop and Safeguarding Adviser

If an agreement is broken, escalation may include:

- Immediate safeguarding action
- Contact with statutory agencies
- As a last resort, exclusion from attendance

Where exclusion is necessary, advice must be taken regarding:

- Risk to other congregations
- Notifications to police or probation services (where appropriate)

Non-Recent Abuse

Where abuse only comes to light many years later:

- Safeguarding responsibilities remain
- Risk must still be assessed
- Agreements will usually still be required

Time elapsed does not remove safeguarding duties.

Key Principles

- Safeguarding comes before inclusion
- Children's welfare is paramount
- Risk is managed, not ignored
- Agreements protect everyone
- Pastoral care must never replace safeguarding controls

CHILD PROTECTION AND MIXED-AGE GROUPS IN THE CHURCH

One of the distinctive strengths of church life is the opportunity for people of all ages to gather together for worship, learning and shared activity. Inter-generational groups can help children and young people feel valued, develop confidence, and grow in faith alongside trusted adults. Activities may include worship, music, drama, study groups, service projects, residential events and church weekends.

Where such activities involve children without their parents or carers being present, the Church Council or equivalent governing body holds responsibility for ensuring that children are safeguarded and cared for in accordance with health, safety and safeguarding requirements.

Safeguarding Risks in Mixed-Age Groups

Experience and safeguarding reviews have shown that mixed-age settings can present specific risks if safeguards are weak or assumed rather than made explicit. Regular informal contact with adults can, in some cases, be exploited by individuals seeking to gain a child's trust in order to cause harm.

All mixed-age groups must therefore:

- Recognise that safeguarding applies equally to informal and formal activities,
- Be alert to grooming behaviours and blurred boundaries,
- Ensure clear rules, supervision and accountability are in place.

It is expected that mixed-age groups will be prepared to restrict or exclude participation where an individual is assessed as posing a risk to children, following appropriate safeguarding advice.

Governance and Responsibility

The Church Council must ensure that:

- Safeguarding policies apply explicitly to mixed-age activities,
- Group leaders understand their safeguarding responsibilities,
- Appropriate oversight and review arrangements are in place.

Safeguarding arrangements should be proportionate to the activity, but must always place the welfare of children first.

Implementing Safer Practice

All mixed-age groups should ensure that adult members and leaders:

- Receive safeguarding awareness appropriate to their role,
- Are familiar with good-practice expectations,
- Agree to work within clear behavioural boundaries.

Good practice guidance must include agreement that adults will:

- Not arrange to meet children outside group activities without the explicit knowledge and consent of parents or carers.
- Not provide one-to-one tuition, mentoring or pastoral support in private homes or secluded settings.
- Not give lifts to a child alone, or without parental consent and agreed arrangements.
- Avoid private electronic or social-media contact with children unless this is part of an agreed, group-based communication system with transparency and oversight.

Where one-to-one interaction is unavoidable, it must:

- Be authorised,
- Be time-limited,
- Take place in a visible and accountable setting,
- Be recorded where appropriate.

Leadership, Recruitment and DBS

All leaders of groups where children may be expected to attend, even if no children currently do so, must:

- Be appointed using safer-recruitment procedures,
- Receive appropriate safeguarding training,
- Undertake a DBS check where the role is eligible,
- Work under supervision and clear role descriptions.

Safeguarding responsibilities apply to potential access, not just current attendance.

Safeguarding Culture

Mixed-age groups should promote a safeguarding culture where:

- Children know who they can talk to if they are worried,
- Adults understand that safeguarding is proactive, not reactive,
- Concerns are raised early and taken seriously.

Safeguarding should be visible, normalised and embedded in the life of every group.

Key Principle

Inter-generational church life flourishes when clear boundaries, shared responsibility and safeguarding awareness create truly safe spaces for children and adults alike.

COMMUNICATING ELECTRONICALLY

This section of the Denominational Safeguarding Policy relates to the use of electronic and digital communication with children and young people. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Mobile phones and voice/video calls
- SMS and instant messaging services (e.g. WhatsApp, Signal)
- Email
- Social media platforms (e.g. Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Facebook)
- Online gaming and messaging functions
- Group chat platforms and collaboration tools

Electronic communication is now an integral part of everyday life for children and young people. While digital communication can be a legitimate tool for coordination and engagement, it also presents distinct safeguarding risks that require clear boundaries and accountability.

Safeguarding Risks in Digital Communication

Electronic communication differs from face-to-face contact in important ways:

- Absence of visual and contextual cues such as body language and tone, increasing the risk of misunderstanding.
- Reduced certainty about identity, particularly in online or group-chat environments.
- Increased privacy, meaning interactions may occur without oversight.
- Creation of permanent or retrievable records, which may later be examined as evidence.

Safeguarding practice and research consistently show that grooming and boundary-testing frequently begin online before progressing to face-to-face contact. Churches therefore have a responsibility to model safe, transparent and professional digital behaviour, and not to normalise risky patterns of communication for young people.

Required Standards of Practice

All adults communicating electronically with children or young people as part of church activity must do so openly, purposefully and accountably.

Consent and Awareness

- Parents or carers must be aware of, and consent to, electronic contact between church workers and children.
- Preferred practice is communication via group messages or official church platforms, not private one-to-one channels.
- Children must be told who else has access to messages and how communication is monitored.

Tone, Content and Boundaries

Electronic communication must be:

- Purpose-driven (e.g. sharing information about activities or arrangements).
- Brief and appropriate. If discussion is needed, arrange it in person following safeguarding guidance.
- Friendly but not personal, intimate or over-familiar.
- Free from humour, emojis or language that could be misunderstood or interpreted as suggestive or exclusive.
- Never suggestive of a special relationship, secrecy or emotional dependency.

Before sending a message, always ask:

Would I be comfortable if this message were read by the young person's parents, my supervisor, or a safeguarding professional?

One-to-One Communication

- One-to-one electronic communication with children should be exceptional, not routine.
- Where unavoidable, it must:
 - Be authorised,
 - Be transparent (copied to another responsible adult where possible),
 - Relate solely to the agreed church purpose.

Private or secret digital communication with children is never appropriate.

Social Media and Online Presence

- Church workers should not "friend", follow or privately message children or young people from personal accounts.
- Any online engagement must take place through designated church accounts, with appropriate moderation and oversight.
- Tagging, commenting on personal photos, or engaging in personal online conversations with children is not acceptable.

Confidentiality and Safeguarding

- Respect the confidentiality of young people, except where safeguarding concerns arise.
- Never promise confidentiality in digital communication.
- If abuse or concerning behaviour is disclosed online, follow safeguarding procedures immediately and preserve messages as records.

Record-Keeping

- Electronic communications relating to safeguarding concerns must be retained securely as part of safeguarding records.
- Messages must not be deleted where they may be relevant to safeguarding, complaints or investigations.

Do's and Don'ts Summary

✔ Do:

- Ensure parents know about and consent to digital contact
- Use group or official channels wherever possible
- Keep messages short, factual and appropriate
- Maintain professional tone and boundaries
- Share concerns immediately through safeguarding channels

✘ Do Not:

- Communicate secretly or privately without oversight
- Use personal or inappropriate language, humour or emojis
- Offer emotional support or counselling via messaging
- Engage in late-night or excessive messaging
- Suggest secrecy, exclusivity or special relationships

Key Principle

Electronic communication with children must be transparent, purposeful and safe, never private or personalised.

Good digital practice protects children, workers and the Church alike.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN

(Informed by NSPCC learning and contemporary safeguarding research)

Sexual abuse is one of several recognised categories of abuse that can lead to a child experiencing or being at risk of significant harm. It often generates particular concern among those who work with children because it is typically hidden, manipulative and difficult to detect, and because of the deep and lasting harm it causes.

This section addresses frequently asked questions in order to support awareness, vigilance and effective safeguarding, not fear or suspicion.

Who sexually abuses children and young people?

Sexual abuse of children is perpetrated by people of all genders, backgrounds and social contexts. Evidence shows that most identified perpetrators are male, but women also abuse, and abuse by females is likely to be under-reported.

Children and young people may be sexually abused by:

- Adults, or
- Other children or young people,

In all cases, abuse involves an imbalance of power, whether through age, strength, authority, dependency, emotional need or access.

Can sexual abusers be recognised?

There is no reliable way to identify a sexual abuser by appearance, personality, status or background. There is no "typical" offender profile.

People who sexually abuse children are found:

- In all communities,
- Across all professions,
- In families, friendship groups and faith communities,
- Sometimes in positions of respect or trust.

They are frequently known to the child and may also be known and trusted by other adults.

What does this mean for safeguarding?

Many adult perpetrators report that abusive behaviour began in adolescence. As a result:

- Abuse may continue undetected for many years,
- Patterns of behaviour may become entrenched,
- Harm may multiply over time.

This also means that sexualised or harmful behaviour by children or young people must never be dismissed as "experimentation" without careful assessment and safeguarding advice.

Why do people sexually abuse children?

There is no single explanation for sexual abuse, and the reasons are always complex. Factors may include:

- Early experiences of abuse or trauma,
- Patterns of distorted thinking,
- Desire for power, control or emotional gratification,
- Poor emotional regulation or empathy.

While understanding causes may inform prevention and treatment, nothing excuses abuse. Safeguarding responses focus on protecting children from harm, rather than explaining or justifying the behaviour of those who abuse.

Is sexual abuse accidental or spontaneous?

Sexual abuse of children is not accidental.

Perpetrators may claim that abuse occurred because of stress, alcohol, drugs or lack of control. However:

- Such factors do not cause abuse,
- Abuse typically involves planning, preparation and deliberate boundary violations.

Perpetrators often:

- Seek environments with access to children,
- Choose roles or relationships that provide trust or authority,
- Take time to lower suspicion and increase opportunity.

How do abusers justify their behaviour?

To continue abusing while living within the community, perpetrators often rely on distorted thinking that minimises or denies harm. This may include beliefs such as:

- "The child wanted it"
- "The child is mature or seductive"
- "It didn't really hurt them"
- "It was a one-off"
- "They enjoyed the attention"

Such thinking may be reinforced by pornography, peer support networks, online content or belief systems that sexualise children or deny children's rights.

Perpetrators can be plausible and convincing, sometimes drawing others into doubting or minimising concerns.

Claims of religious conversion or repentance do not negate safeguarding risk. Genuine accountability requires:

- Full acknowledgement of harm,
- Acceptance of responsibility,
- Ongoing restrictions and supervision,
- Commitment to preventing further abuse.

Can sexual abusers be 'cured'?

There is no evidence of a cure for sexual abuse of children.

However, the risk of further offending can be managed and reduced through:

- Specialist treatment programmes,
- Long-term supervision,
- Strict limits on access to children,
- Clear accountability and monitoring.

Once abusive behaviour is known, controls and safeguards must remain in place indefinitely, regardless of the passage of time.

How do sexual abusers operate?

Sexual abusers are often:

- Skilled at building trust,
- Likeable and engaging,
- Good at relating to children,
- Highly manipulative and patient.

They may invest significant time in relationships with:

- Children,
- Parents and carers,
- Families and community members,

in order to appear safe, helpful and credible.

How do abusers gain access to children?

Access is rarely random. It usually involves planning and opportunity.

Abusers may seek:

- Leadership or helper roles in children's activities,
- Sporting or musical coaching roles,
- Work in education or care settings,
- Positions within mixed-age groups (e.g. choirs, bell-ringing, study groups),
- Relationships with adults who already have children.

They often wait until trust is well established before escalating behaviour.

Are all children equally vulnerable?

Sexual abusers target children of different ages, genders and abilities. Some offend against pre-pubescent children; others target adolescents; some offend against both.

Children who may be at increased risk include those who are:

- Isolated, lonely or lacking supervision,
- Experiencing loss, bereavement or emotional need,
- In care or living away from home,

- Disabled or reliant on intimate care,
- Less confident or less able to communicate,
- Seeking approval, success or attention,
- Already experiencing neglect, bullying or abuse.

Importantly, risk arises from vulnerability and opportunity, not from the child themselves.

How do abusers target children: Grooming

Sexual abuse commonly develops through a grooming process, which may include:

- Giving special attention or privileges,
- Building emotional dependence,
- Gaining trust of parents or carers,
- Creating opportunities to be alone,
- Offering gifts, money or favours,
- Gradually introducing physical contact,
- Normalising secrecy and boundary violations.

Abusers may also groom other adults, presenting themselves as trustworthy, generous or devoted to children, making disclosure harder for the child to be believed.

Why don't children tell anyone?

Children may not disclose abuse because they:

- Feel ashamed, frightened or confused,
- Believe they are to blame,
- Fear they won't be believed,
- Have been threatened or manipulated,
- Are told disclosure will harm their family,
- Fear punishment or loss of relationships,
- Are emotionally dependent on the abuser.

Delayed or partial disclosure is common and does not undermine credibility.

What can we do to prevent sexual abuse?

Any organisation working with children, including churches, can be targeted by abusers.

Effective prevention requires:

- Clear safeguarding policies and culture,
- Safer recruitment and supervision,
- Visibility and accountability in all children's work,
- Willingness to challenge behaviour and raise concerns,
- Prompt responses to worries or disclosures,
- Partnership with statutory safeguarding agencies.

Safeguarding is not about suspicion. It is about creating environments where abuse is difficult to commit and easy to report.

Key Message

Sexual abuse thrives in secrecy, blurred boundaries and silence.
It is prevented through vigilance, clear safeguards and the courage to act.

1 child in 14 in the UK suffers serious physical abuse by a parent or carer.

1 child in 10 under the age of 16 experiences an actual or attempted sexual assault.

Source: NSPCC

UNDERTAKING A RISK ASSESSMENT FOR ACTIVITIES WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (2026)

(Children and young people are those under 18 years of age)

What Is a Risk Assessment?

A risk assessment is a practical tool for identifying and managing risks so that children, young people, workers, volunteers and the Church are protected from harm. It is a key part of both safeguarding and health-and-safety responsibilities.

The law does not require that all risk is removed. It requires organisations to take reasonable and proportionate steps to reduce foreseeable risks to a level that is as low as reasonably practicable.

In safeguarding terms, a risk assessment helps ensure that:

- Children are protected from harm (including abuse, neglect and intimidation),
- Adults are protected from unsafe or ambiguous situations,
- Activities are properly planned, supervised and accountable.

What Does a Risk Assessment Involve?

A risk assessment is a careful examination of what could cause harm during an activity with children or young people, so that suitable safeguards can be put in place.

Children and young people have a right to be protected from harm arising from:

- Unsafe environments,
- Poor supervision,
- Inadequate procedures,
- Opportunities for inappropriate behaviour.

This method is suitable for most church activities and groups. More complex activities (e.g. residential, trips, high-risk activities) may require more detailed assessment.

The Five-Step Risk Assessment Process

Step 1 – Identify the Hazards

In safeguarding contexts:

- A hazard is anything with the potential to cause harm, whether accidental or intentional.

Consider hazards such as:

- Physical dangers (e.g. trip hazards, unsafe equipment),
- Environmental risks (e.g. unlocked exits, hidden rooms),
- Safeguarding vulnerabilities (e.g. adults being alone and unseen with children),
- Situations that could be misunderstood or misinterpreted.

Ways to identify hazards:

- Walk around the venue and identify risks from a child's perspective.
- Consider whether there are spaces that allow seclusion or lack of oversight.

- Review how activities are run: are adults or older young people ever alone with children?
- Ask colleagues and volunteers for their observations.
- Check equipment guidance and safety instructions.
- Review accident, incident or near-miss records.

Step 2 – Decide Who Might Be Harmed and How

Identify groups, not individuals, such as:

- Children or young people,
- Volunteers,
- Leaders or helpers,
- Visitors or members of the public.

For each hazard, consider:

- How harm could occur (e.g. injury, distress, abuse, allegation),
- Whether certain groups are more vulnerable, including:
 - New or inexperienced volunteers,
 - Young helpers,
 - Individuals unfamiliar with safeguarding expectations.

Remember:

Those who wish to abuse children may actively seek opportunities to work with or be near them. Safeguarding risk must always be considered alongside physical risks.

Extra attention is required for:

- Visitors, contractors or maintenance workers,
- Public access to buildings during activities,
- New venues or unfamiliar settings.

Step 3 – Evaluate the Risks and Decide on Precautions

A **risk** is the likelihood of harm occurring combined with how serious that harm could be.

Ask:

- Can this hazard be removed entirely?
- If not, how can the risk be reduced so harm is unlikely?

Apply safeguards in the following order, where possible:

- **Avoid the risk** (e.g. do not allow one-to-one contact),
- **Control access** (e.g. secure doors, supervision),
- **Organise activities safely** (e.g. minimum of two adults present),
- **Provide support measures** (e.g. first-aid equipment, clear processes).

Safeguarding controls might include:

- Clear supervision ratios,
- Visibility in rooms,
- Sign-in/out procedures,
- Role clarity for helpers,
- Restricted access to certain spaces.

Step 4 – Record Findings and Implement Actions

All risk assessments must be written down and shared with relevant leaders and the Church Council.

Records should show that:

- Hazards were identified,
- Risks were evaluated,
- Precautions were agreed and implemented,
- Responsibilities were assigned.

Entries should be simple and clear, for example:

- “Trip hazard near stage – area cleared and checked before each session”
- “Risk of lone working – group suspended unless two adults present”

Your risk assessment must be suitable and sufficient, not perfect.

Create an action plan that:

- Prioritises the most serious risks,
- Includes quick fixes and longer-term improvements,
- Identifies who is responsible for each action,
- Sets timescales for completion.

You should always liaise with the Church Safeguarding Officer for advice and support.

Step 5 – Review and Update

Risk assessments must be reviewed:

- At least annually, and
- Immediately if there is:
 - A new activity,
 - A new venue,
 - A significant incident or near-miss,
 - A change in staffing or supervision.

Set a formal review date and record it. Continuous vigilance prevents complacency.

Assessing Levels of Risk

Risk can be broadly assessed by considering:

RISK = Probability × Severity

Risk Levels

- **Low Risk (0–3)**
Manageable. Reduce further if possible.
- **Medium Risk (4–12)**
Action required. Seek advice if unsure.
- **High Risk (13+)**
Must not proceed without advice from:
 - Church Safeguarding Officer,
 - Minister,
 - Denominational Safeguarding Adviser,

- Bishop (where appropriate).

Severity Examples

- Minor injury or incident
- Injury requiring first aid
- Injury requiring hospital treatment or safeguarding referral
- Significant harm to a child
- Life-changing injury, severe abuse or death

Any risk involving potential abuse or significant harm to a child must always be treated as high priority, regardless of probability.

Key Message

Risk assessment is not a paperwork exercise – it is a safeguarding commitment.

Thoughtful planning prevents harm, protects children, and safeguards those who serve them.



CHECKLIST FOR IMPLEMENTING OR REVIEWING THE CHURCH SAFEGUARDING POLICY (2026)

(Informed by current statutory guidance and NSPCC / Thirtyone:eight good-practice resources)

The Church Council, Minister in Charge, and Church Safeguarding Officer (CSO) share responsibility for ensuring that safeguarding arrangements are embedded, effective and reviewed at least annually.

This checklist is designed to support implementation, assurance and continuous improvement.

Governance and Scope

1. Identify all activities involving children and young people, including:
 - Children's and youth groups
 - Mixed-age activities
 - Worship, music, drama, trips and overnight events

Confirm which are the responsibility of the Church Council and therefore subject to safeguarding procedures.

2. Confirm that safeguarding applies equally to informal and occasional activities, not only core programmes.

Registers, Records and Consent

1. Ensure that every relevant group maintains:
 - Up-to-date registration forms
 - Attendance registers
 - Emergency contact details
2. Check whether any groups involving children under 8 require registration with, or notification to, Ofsted or the local authority, and that appropriate advice has been sought.
3. Ensure that parental or carer consent is obtained for:
 - Participation in activities
 - Photography and online communication
 - Off-site activities and transport

People, Roles and Safer Recruitment

1. Identify all leaders, workers, helpers and adults in mixed-age activities who fall within safeguarding procedures, including those with informal contact (e.g. caretakers, drivers, musicians).
2. Check that adequate adult-to-child ratios are in place and that safer-working expectations (including visibility and supervision) are met.
3. Confirm that:

- Safer recruitment procedures are followed for all appointments
 - Role descriptions clearly state safeguarding responsibilities
4. Check that all paid staff and volunteers:
 - Have completed a Confidential Declaration as required
 - Have an appropriate DBS check where the role is eligible
 - DBS checks are up to date in line with current Denominational policy (not simply date-driven)

Training, Supervision and Support

1. Confirm that all those working with children or young people:
 - Have received suitable safeguarding training
 - Know how to recognise and respond to concerns
 - Receive supervision and ongoing support
2. Agree a plan for refresher training and induction for new staff and volunteers.

Reporting and Responding to Concerns

1. Clearly identify the first point of contact for safeguarding concerns (usually the Church Safeguarding Officer).
2. Ensure that:
 - Contact details are visible and accessible
 - The congregation knows how to raise concerns
 - Children and young people know who they can speak to

Records, Information and GDPR

1. Ensure that safeguarding records:
 - Are stored securely and separately
 - Are accessible only on a need-to-know basis
 - Are managed in accordance with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018
2. Confirm that the Church Safeguarding Officer maintains appropriate safeguarding records and understands retention requirements.

Premises, Activities and Insurance

1. Check that the church's insurance cover:
 - Applies to all activities, on and off the premises
 - Covers staff and volunteers
 - Includes legal liability and safeguarding-related protection
2. Inspect all premises used by children and young people to ensure they are:
 - Safe, suitable and well maintained
 - Secure from unauthorised access
 - Equipped with first-aid provision

Managing Risk and Additional Safeguarding Measures

1. Identify whether there are individuals in the congregation who may pose a safeguarding risk and confirm that advice has been sought from the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser and Bishops, with appropriate safeguarding agreements in place.
2. Identify local and national support services for:
 - Children
 - Families
 - Adult survivors of abuse

Ensure information is available discreetly and accessibly.

Use of Premises by Other Groups

1. Identify all external groups using church premises and confirm that:
 - They hold an appropriate safeguarding policy or
 - They agree formally to follow the church's safeguarding procedures

Approval, Sign-Off and Review

1. Ensure the safeguarding policy and procedures are:
 - Reviewed and approved by the Church Council
 - Signed by the Minister and appropriate office holders
 - Allocated a clear annual review date
2. Confirm that:
 - A copy of the safeguarding policy is publicly accessible
 - Additional copies are available to parents, volunteers and children in appropriate formats

Key Principle

Safeguarding is not a one-off document but a living commitment, requiring leadership, vigilance and regular review.



GENERAL CONSENT FORM FOR REGULAR GROUPS/ACTIVITIES

This form should be completed annually and kept securely with the group's records.

Information will be shared only with those who need it to safeguard and care for your child.

Church Details

Name of your Church:.....

Name of Group / Activity:.....

Child / Young Person Details

Full Name of Child / Young Person:.....

Date of Birth:.....

Home Address:
.....

Primary Contact Telephone Number:
.....

Parent / Carer Details

Name of Parent / Carer:
.....

Relationship to Child:
.....

Alternative Emergency Contact (name and telephone number):
.....

Medical, Health and Additional Needs

Please provide details of any medical conditions, allergies, dietary requirements, medication, disabilities, or additional needs we should be aware of.
(Continue on a separate sheet if necessary.)
.....

.....

Emergency Medical Treatment

In the event of an emergency, I give permission for appropriate first aid to be administered and, if necessary, for my child to receive medical treatment in accordance with professional advice.

Yes No

Participation and Transport

I give permission for my child named above to take part in the normal activities of this group.

I understand that:

- Transport to and from regular meetings is my responsibility unless otherwise agreed in writing.
- Separate consent will be sought for trips, residential activities or special events.

Yes No

Photography, Video and Online Activity

Please tick as appropriate:

I give permission for photographs or video recordings of my child to be taken as part of group activities and used for:

Use	Yes	No
Church noticeboards / displays	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Church publications (e.g. newsletters)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Church website or official social-media channels	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Internal training or safeguarding records	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Children will never be identified by full name online.

Electronic Communication

I understand that leaders may use group-based electronic communication (e.g. email, group messages or official church platforms) to share information about activities.

- I consent to my child being included in approved group communication**
 I do not consent (please discuss with the group leader)

Data Protection and Safeguarding

I understand that:

- Information provided on this form will be used only for safeguarding, care and administration of the group.
- Information will be stored securely and processed in line with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

- Information may be shared without consent where necessary to protect my child or another person from harm, in line with safeguarding procedures.

Declaration

I confirm that the information I have provided is accurate and up to date, and that I will inform the group leaders of any changes.

Signature of Parent / Carer:

.....

Print Name:

.....

Date:

.....

Office Use Only

Date form received:

.....

Reviewed by:

.....



LOGGING SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS, INCIDENTS OR ALLEGATIONS

RELATING TO A VOLUNTEER OR PAID WORKERS

This form must be used to record any safeguarding concern, incident or allegation relating to the behaviour or conduct of a volunteer or paid worker within the church community.

The purpose of this record is to:

- Ensure concerns are handled promptly, accurately and lawfully
- Provide a clear audit trail of decisions and actions taken
- Support appropriate referral to statutory authorities where required
- Protect children, adults at risk, and those subject to allegations

A copy of this completed form must be shared without delay with the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser (DSA), who holds the central and confidential safeguarding record.

Records must be stored securely and handled in accordance with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

IMPORTANT SAFEGUARDING NOTES

- This form is not for investigation.
- Do not express opinions, assumptions or conclusions.
- Record facts, dates, times, words used and actions taken.
- Do not discuss the concern with the person of concern unless advised to do so by the DSA or LADO.
- If a child or adult is in immediate danger, contact emergency services first.

SECTION 1: DETAILS OF PERSON COMPLETING THIS FORM

Full Name:

.....

Role within the Church:

.....

Church / Setting:

.....

Preferred Contact Details (telephone and/or email):

.....

Date and Time Information Logged:

.....

How did you become aware of this concern?

(e.g. disclosure, observation, report from another person)

.....

SECTION 2: DETAILS OF PERSON OF CONCERN

Full Name:

.....

Role / Position (paid or voluntary):

.....

Church / Ministry Involved:

.....

Is the person currently active in their role?

Yes No Unsure

SECTION 3: DETAILS OF THE CONCERN, INCIDENT OR ALLEGATION

Please record only factual information. Use clear, objective language.

Include where known:

- What is alleged to have happened
- Dates, times and locations
- Names and roles of those involved or affected
- Exact words used in any disclosure (where relevant)
- How the concern came to light

(Continue on additional pages if required.)

.....

.....

.....

.....

SECTION 4: CHILD / ADULT AT RISK DETAILS (IF APPLICABLE)

Name(s):

.....

Age / Date of Birth:

.....

Relationship to Church Activity:

.....

(If multiple individuals are involved, record details separately and cross-reference.)

SECTION 5: ACTIONS TAKEN AND INFORMATION SHARED

Record all actions taken, including advice sought.

- Denominational Safeguarding Adviser contacted?
 Yes No
Date and Time:

- Advice received from DSA:
.....

- Referral made to LADO / Children’s Social Care / Police?

- Yes No Not at this stage
Details (who, when, reference number if known):
.....

- Any immediate safeguarding action taken?
(e.g. temporary removal from duties – note this is a neutral safeguarding act)
.....

SECTION 6: CONFIDENTIALITY AND RECORD-KEEPING

- This record will be retained in line with safeguarding record-retention requirements.
- Information will be shared only on a need-to-know basis for safeguarding purposes.
- This record may be required for future safeguarding reviews, statutory inquiries, or DBS duties to refer.

SECTION 7: DECLARATION

I confirm that the information recorded above is accurate to the best of my knowledge, is written factually, and does not include personal opinion or speculation.

Signature:

.....

Print Name:

.....

Date:

.....

OFFICE USE ONLY (DENOMINATIONAL SAFEGUARDING ADVISER)

Date received:

Reference number:

Next review / action:

Key Principle

Clear, timely and accurate recording is a safeguarding act.

What is written today may protect someone tomorrow.



FREE CHURCH OF ENGLAND CONFIDENTIAL DECLARATION FORM

For people intending to work with children, young people or adults at risk
(2026 Edition)

Purpose of This Form

- The role you are applying for or undertaking may involve regulated or close contact with children, young people or adults at risk. This may include regular activities or occasional (“one-off”) events.
- This Confidential Declaration Form applies to clergy, employees, ordinands, volunteers and other adults whose role involves, or may involve, contact with children, young people or adults at risk.
- The purpose of this form is to help ensure safe recruitment and safeguarding, not to exclude unfairly. Information is assessed sensitively and proportionately.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

- This form is strictly confidential.
- Information will be seen only by those responsible for safeguarding and appointment decisions, and where appropriate the Denominational Safeguarding Adviser (DSA).
- Information will be stored securely and processed in accordance with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.
- Information will be shared only on a need-to-know basis to safeguard children or adults at risk, or where required by law.
- If you answer “Yes” to any question, please give details on a separate sheet, clearly referencing the question number.

SECTION 1: PERSONAL DETAILS

Full Name:

.....

Date of Birth:

.....

Current Address:

.....

Telephone Number:

.....

Email Address (optional):

.....

SECTION 2: CONFIDENTIAL DECLARATION

Please answer each question by ticking the appropriate box.

1. Name History

Have you, since the age of 18, been known by any other name (including previous legal names)?

Yes (please give details)

No

2. Address History

Have you lived at any address other than the one above in the past five years?

- Yes (please give details)
- No

3. Criminal Convictions

Have you ever been convicted of a criminal offence?

(This includes spent convictions, as roles involving work with children or adults at risk are exempt from parts of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.)

- Yes (please give details)
- No

A conviction does not automatically prevent appointment; all disclosures are assessed case-by-case.

4. Police Disposals

Have you ever received a police caution, warning, reprimand, conditional disposal, or been bound over by a court?

- Yes (please give details)
- No

5. DBS Barred Lists

Are you, to your knowledge, barred from working with children or adults under the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)?

- Yes (please give details)
- No

6. Harm or Risk

Has your conduct ever caused, or been likely to cause, harm to a child, young person or adult at risk, or placed them at risk of harm?

- Yes (please give details)
- No

7. Allegations or Concerns

Have concerns ever been raised about your conduct in relation to children, young people or adults at risk?

- Yes (please give full details, including dates, outcomes and whether you were disciplined, dismissed, moved role, resigned or retired)
- No

8. Investigations or Disciplinary Action

Have you ever been the subject of an investigation, safeguarding enquiry or disciplinary process relating to children, young people or adults at risk, even if no further action was taken?

- Yes (please give details)
- No

9. Current Investigations

Are you currently under investigation by an employer, professional body or statutory agency?

- Yes (please give details)
- No

10. Child Protection History

Has a child for whom you have parental responsibility, or who was in your care, ever:
Been removed from your care, or
Been subject to child protection planning, care proceedings or similar statutory measures?

- Yes (please give details)
- No

Definition: Significant Harm

Significant harm includes serious ill-treatment such as physical, sexual or emotional abuse, neglect, or impairment of physical or mental health or development. It also includes sexual or inappropriate relationships arising from positions of trust or pastoral responsibility.

SECTION 3: DECLARATION

I declare that the information provided on this form is true, accurate and complete to the best of my knowledge. I understand that failure to disclose relevant information may result in withdrawal of any offer or appointment.

Signature:

.....

Print Name:

.....

Date:

.....

SECTION 4: REFERENCES

Please provide two referees who can comment on your suitability for working with children or adults at risk.

(One referee should normally be your current or most recent employer where applicable.)

Referee 1

Name:

.....

Address:

.....

Telephone:

.....

Relationship to You:

.....

Referee 2

Name:

.....

Address:

.....

Telephone:

.....

Relationship to You:

.....

SECTION 5: DBS CHECK

Where the role is eligible, appointment cannot be confirmed until a suitable DBS check has been completed and assessed.

Guidance on DBS eligibility and process is available from the Church Safeguarding Officer or Denominational Safeguarding Adviser.

Submission Instructions

Please return this completed form securely to the Church Safeguarding Officer.

Forms must never be retained by group leaders or unauthorised individuals.

Key Safeguarding Principle

Honest disclosure enables safe decision-making.

Safeguarding requires openness, proportionality and integrity.

LETTER AND REFERENCE REQUEST TO REFEREE



(Use headed church paper where possible)

Date:

Dear [Name of Referee],

Re: Reference Request – [Full name of applicant]

Address:.....

Role applied for:.....

The above-named person has given your name as a referee in connection with their application to work with children, young people and/or adults at risk within the Free Church of England.

As part of our safer-recruitment responsibilities, and in line with current statutory safeguarding guidance (*Working Together to Safeguard Children*) and good practice for faith-based organisations, we are required to obtain references that specifically address suitability to work with those who may be vulnerable.

I would therefore be grateful if you could comment, to the best of your knowledge, on the following areas as they relate to the applicant:

- Their previous experience of working with or caring for children, young people or adults at risk
- Their ability to provide safe, consistent and appropriate care
- Their willingness to respect boundaries, authority and safeguarding expectations
- Their commitment to treating all individuals with dignity, respect and fairness
- Any concerns, historical or current, that may suggest they are unsuitable to work with children, young people or adults at risk

Please note that safeguarding practice requires referees to share any relevant concerns, even where these did not result in disciplinary or criminal proceedings. Such information will be handled sensitively and proportionately.

The enclosed reference form will be treated in strict confidence and processed in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. Information will be used solely for safeguarding and safer-recruitment purposes and shared only on a need-to-know basis.

I would be grateful if you could complete and return the enclosed form as soon as possible.

Thank you for your assistance in helping us safeguard those in our care.

Yours sincerely,

.....
(Name and role)

.....
(Church name and contact details)



PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

REFERENCE FOR WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Name of Applicant:

.....

About You (the Referee)

What is your relationship to the applicant?

(e.g. employer, supervisor, colleague, community leader)

.....

How long have you known the applicant?

.....

Safeguarding-Related Questions

Please answer the following questions honestly and fully, based on your knowledge of the applicant. This reference forms part of a safer-recruitment process.

1. Experience

Please comment on the applicant's previous experience of working with or caring for children, young people and/or adults at risk.

.....

.....

2. Care and Boundaries

Please comment on the applicant's ability to provide safe, consistent and appropriate care, including their understanding of professional boundaries.

.....

.....

3. Respect and Inclusion

Please comment on any evidence of the applicant's willingness to respect the background, culture, identity and needs of children, young people or adults at risk.

.....

.....

4. Attitudes and Values

Please comment on the applicant’s commitment to treating individuals fairly, respectfully and without discrimination.

.....
.....

5. Safeguarding Concerns

Are you aware of any concerns, past or present, that may indicate the applicant is unsuitable to work with children, young people or adults at risk?

This includes:

- Concerns that did not lead to formal action
- Boundary issues
- Allegations or complaints
- Behaviour that caused you concern

Yes (please give details below)

No

.....
.....

6. Additional Comments

Please add any other information you believe is relevant to the applicant’s suitability for this role.

.....
.....

Data Protection and Confidentiality

Information provided will be:

- Used solely for safeguarding and safer-recruitment purposes
- Processed in accordance with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018
- Shared only on a need-to-know basis

Please note that honest disclosure of safeguarding concerns is expected, even where information is sensitive or historical.

Declaration

I confirm that the information provided above is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge.

Signature:

.....

Print Name:

.....

Date:

.....

Contact Details

Address:

.....

.....

Telephone Number:

.....

Email (optional):

.....

Church / Organisation (if applicable):

.....



VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT (2026) *Free Church of England*

Name of Church:

Name of Volunteer:

Role / Position:

Our Commitment to You

Those who work with children, young people and adults at risk do so as part of the Church's shared responsibility to nurture faith, promote wellbeing and safeguard those entrusted to our care.

On behalf of the Church, we commit to:

- Supporting you through prayer and encouragement
- Providing appropriate training, supervision and resources
- Ensuring safeguarding responsibilities are clearly explained and supported

Supervision and Accountability

You will be directly supported and supervised by:

Name and Role:

This person is available to:

- Offer guidance and support
- Discuss any concerns or questions
- Help you reflect on your role and development

Your Role and Responsibilities

Your role includes the following responsibilities:

.....

.....

.....

(A role description or activity outline may be attached.)

Review and Support

You will be offered:

- An annual review of your role
- Opportunities to raise concerns or seek advice
- Access to ongoing safeguarding training and development

Working with children and young people is a serious responsibility, but also a rewarding ministry. We hope you will find fulfilment and encouragement in the role you have undertaken.

Safeguarding Commitment

By signing this agreement, you confirm that:

- You understand the nature of the work you are undertaking
- You have read and understood the Church's Safeguarding Policy and Procedures
- You agree to work within safeguarding guidance and codes of conduct
- You recognise your duty to protect children, young people and adults at risk
- You know what action to take if abuse or safeguarding concerns are disclosed or suspected
- You will raise concerns promptly and appropriately
- Safeguarding responsibilities apply at all times, including informal contact and online communication.

Signatures

Signed on behalf of the Church:
(Minister in Charge or authorised representative)

Print Name:

Date:

Volunteer Declaration:

I confirm that I understand my role, responsibilities and safeguarding duties, and agree to work in accordance with the Church's safeguarding policies.

Signed:
(Volunteer)

Print Name:

Date:

Record-Keeping

- One copy of this agreement will be retained securely by the Church
- One copy will be held by the supervising person named above
- One copy will be provided to the volunteer

Records will be stored in accordance with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.



ACCIDENT AND INCIDENT REPORT FORM (2026)

Free Church of England

Church and Activity Details

Name of Church:.....

Name of Group / Activity:.....

Church Address:

.....

.....

Purpose of This Form

This form must be used to record all accidents, injuries, near-misses and dangerous occurrences involving children, young people, adults at risk, volunteers, staff or visitors during church activities.

The form should be completed as soon as possible after the incident.

Where appropriate, factual descriptions should be provided by the person involved or a responsible adult, and then checked by a church official.

All records must be stored securely in accordance with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

SECTION 1: DETAILS OF PERSON INVOLVED

Full Name:

Home Address:

.....

Age (if under 18):

Status (please tick):

Employee Volunteer Visitor Congregation Member Child / Young Person

SECTION 2: INCIDENT DETAILS

Date of Incident:

Time of Incident:

Location (room, area, address if off-site):

.....

SECTION 3: DESCRIPTION OF ACCIDENT / INCIDENT

Please give a clear, factual account of what happened.

Include:

- What occurred
- Any equipment or apparatus involved
- Injuries sustained
- First aid or immediate action taken

(Continue on a separate sheet if necessary.)

.....

.....

.....

SECTION 4: SIGNATURE OF PERSON INVOLVED

Signed by injured person or responsible adult (for a child):

.....

Print Name:.....

Date (include year):

SECTION 5: TO BE COMPLETED BY CHURCH OFFICIAL

Employment / Volunteering Details (if applicable)

1. Role / Nature of involvement:.....
2. Was the person on duty at the time?
 Yes No
3. Did they continue their role after the incident?
 Yes No
4. If not, when did they stop and for how long?
.....

Children / Youth Activity Details (if applicable)

Who normally leads the group?

.....

Who was responsible at the time (if different)?

.....

Safety and Follow-Up

- Has any damaged equipment been retained for inspection?
 Yes No Not applicable
- Does action need to be taken to prevent a recurrence?
 Yes No

If yes, describe:

-
- Are the premises currently safe for continued use?
 Yes No
 - Is the equipment safe to continue using?
 Yes No

Notifications

Who has been informed? (e.g. Church Safeguarding Officer, Minister, insurer, parent/carer)

.....

SECTION 6: SIGNATURES

Signature of person in charge of the group at the time:

.....

Print Name:

.....

Signature of Church Official:

.....

Print Name and Position:

.....

Date:

.....

SECTION 7: WITNESSES

Please list witnesses and attach signed statements where applicable.

Name(s):

.....

Data Protection Statement

Information recorded on this form will be:

- Used only for health, safety, safeguarding and insurance purposes
- Stored securely
- Shared only on a need-to-know basis, including with insurers or statutory bodies where required



RISK ASSESSMENT FORM (2026)

Activities Involving Children, Young People and/or Adults at Risk

Activity Details

Name of Church:

Activity / Event:

Start Date:

End Date / Duration:

Location / Address of Activity:

.....

.....

Lead Worker / Person in Charge:

Date of Risk Assessment:

Review Date:

Risk Rating (Overall)

Low Risk Medium Risk High Risk

(High-risk activities must not proceed without safeguarding advice.)

RISK ASSESSMENT TABLE

Hazard (what could cause harm?)	Who may be affected? (Children / Young People / Adults at Risk / Workers / Others)	Likelihood (Low / Medium / High)	Severity (Low / Medium / High)	Risk Level	Control Measures / Action Taken to Reduce Risk

(Add rows as necessary)

Safeguarding-Specific Considerations

Please confirm that the following have been considered (tick all that apply):

- Adequate adult-to-child ratios
- No lone working or unseen one-to-one situations
- Clear supervision and visibility in all spaces
- Safe arrival and departure arrangements

- Toileting / changing arrangements assessed
- Online or electronic communication risks considered
- Inclusion and additional needs considered
- Known safeguarding risks managed (where applicable)

Emergency and Incident Arrangements

- First Aid provision in place: Yes No
- Named First Aider (if applicable):
- Emergency contact procedures known to staff/volunteers: Yes No

Additional Notes / Actions Required

.....

.....

.....

Declaration

I confirm that this risk assessment is suitable and sufficient, that reasonable steps have been taken to reduce risk, and that safeguarding considerations have been included.

Assessment completed by:

Role:

Signature:

Date:

Approval (if required)

- Approved to proceed
- Further action required before proceeding

Approved by (Minister / Church Safeguarding Officer / Church Council):

.....

Signature:

Date:

CONTACTS



Bishop Primus

Diocesan Bishop (North & South)

The Rt Revd Dr Paul Hunt

Tel: 01902 607335

E-mail: bishoppaul@btinternet.com

Assistant Bishop (North)

The Rt Revd Matthew Firth

Tel: 07932482929

E-mail: mpf19831@icloud.com

Assistant Bishop (South)

The Rt Revd Dr Mark Gretason

Tel: 07925 428703

E-mail: drmarkgretason@yahoo.co.uk

General Secretary

The Ven Dr Bob Stephen

Tel: 07939 991454

E-mail: GenSec@fcofe.org.uk

Diocesan Secretary (North):

Mrs Julie Murphy

Tel: 01254 581 582 or 07791 855183

Email: murphyjulie54@gmail.com

Diocesan Secretary (South):

The Revd Robert Wilson

Tel: 0208 965 2019

E-mail: revrobwil2@gmail.com

DBS Checks:

Denominational Safeguarding Adviser:

The Revd Canon Mark Spiers

Tel: 07900 912754

E-mail: Safeguardingadviser@fcofe.org.uk

NATIONAL SUPPORT AND SAFEGUARDING CONTACTS

Thirtyone:eight (Safeguarding advice for churches)

- Helpline: 0303 003 1111 (Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; out-of-hours & emergencies additional support)
- General email: info@thirtyoneeight.org
- Website: thirtyoneeight.org

NSPCC Helpline

- Phone: 0808 800 5000 (free—Mon–Fri 10am–4pm; email support available 24/7)
- Email: help@nspcc.org.uk
- Website: nspcc.org.uk

Childline (for under-19s)

- Phone: 0800 1111 (24/7)
- Webchat / Email: Available through childline.org.uk

CEOP (Child Exploitation & Online Protection Centre)

- Report Centre: ceop.police.uk/safety-centre
- General website: <https://www.ceop.police.uk>

Refuge / National Domestic Abuse Helpline

- 24/7 Helpline: 0808 2000 247 (freephone)
- Website: nationaldahelpline.org.uk

Papyrus (HOPELINEUK)

- Phone: 0800 068 4141
- Text: 88247
- Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org
- Website: papyrus-uk.org

NAPAC (National Association for People Abused in Childhood)

- Support Line: 0808 801 0331 (Mon–Thu 10am–9pm, Fri 10am–6pm)
- Support Email: support@napac.org.uk
- Website: <https://www.napac.org.uk/contact>



**ALERT OUR SAFEGUARDING ADVISER IF YOU THINK
SOMETHING MAY BE WRONG**

**Mobile: 07900 912754
Email: safeguardingadviser@fcofe.org.uk**