

# MARKET HARBOROUGH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH SAFEGUARDING POLICY

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The other forms and appendices are for the use of the Church only.

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# **MARKET HARBOROUGH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH SAFEGUARDING POLICY**

## **Section 1**

### **Details of the organisation**

**Name of Church:** Market Harborough Congregational Church

**Address:** High Street, Market Harborough, Leicestershire, LE16 7JD

**General Email address:** mhcc.leics@gmail.com

**Minister Name:** Rev Roo MacRae

**Minister Contact Telephone / Email:** 01858 440129/ mhccroo@gmail.com

**Safeguarding Lead:** Nikki Beacher and Sharon Brannen, [mhccsafe@gmail.com](mailto:mhccsafe@gmail.com)

**Protection Verifier Name:** Mel Stride

**Protection Verifier Contact Email:** mel.stride@outlook.com

**Insurance Company:** Congregational Insurance

The following is a brief description of our organisation and the type of work / activities we undertake with children and adults who have care and support needs:

- We meet to worship God, working together to share the good news of Jesus Christ and to serve our community

This is a church which meets collectively for worship on a Sunday 10.30 a.m. and the last Sunday of the month at 6.30 p.m.

The church's involvement falls into three categories:

- a) the informal fellowship of people of different ages and capabilities in the worshipping community.
- b) groups organised specifically for children, young people or adults.
- c) groups organised by other agencies on the church premises.

**Groups run by the church are:**

<b>Group Name</b>	<b>Leader Name/s</b>
Toddlers Group	Jenny Young
Junior Church	Nikki Beacher
On the Steps	Nikki Beacher
Sunday Lunch	Charmaine Sole
First Wednesday Group	Barry Osbourne Margaret Nash
Men's Fellowship Group	Colin Freer
Tea at Two	Sheila Allen
Prayer Ministry	Jacquie Gavin
Pastoral Team	Maureen Freeman
Music Group	Roo MacRae

Leaders of groups must sign an agreement that they will follow safeguarding and other relevant processes. See Appendix 1.

**Other groups using church premises**

Lettings for the Church are managed through the Lettings Administrator, [lettingsmhcong@outlook.com](mailto:lettingsmhcong@outlook.com). The Lettings Administrator ensures that rental agreements are supplied which includes reference to this Safeguarding Policy. The Church advises those who use the premises that all work on its premises must meet the standards set down in this Safeguarding policy. They are advised to have sufficient insurance cover appropriate for the activity carried out on church premises.

Any Safeguarding incident that occurs on Church premises must be reported to the Safeguarding Lead for their information -mhccsafe@gmail.com

Persons running groups solely for children and young adults must provide an up to date and relevant DBS certificate, a copy of which is lodged with the Protection Verifier. This includes Church and outside organisations.

**Our Commitment**

The Minister, Steering Group and Church Members recognise the need to provide a safe and caring environment for children, young people and adults. We acknowledge that children, young people and adults can be the victims of physical, sexual, spiritual and emotional abuse, and neglect. We accept the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant of Human Rights, which states that everyone is entitled to “all the rights and freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status”. We also concur with the Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that children should be able to develop their full potential, free from hunger and want, neglect and abuse. They have a right to be protected from “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s), or any other person who has care of the child.” As a Church we have therefore adopted the procedures set out in this safeguarding policy in

accordance with statutory guidance. We are committed to build constructive links with statutory and voluntary agencies involved in safeguarding.

The policy and any attached practice guidelines are based on the ten **Safe and Secure** safeguarding standards published by Thirtyone:eight. Thirtyone:eight are the only independent safeguarding charity offering organisations a complete safeguarding solution.

The Minister, Steering Group and Church Members undertake to:

- Endorse and follow all national and local safeguarding legislation and procedures, in addition to the international conventions outlined above.
- Ensure on-going safeguarding training for all its workers and will regularly review the operational guidelines attached.
- Ensure that the premises meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and all other relevant legislation, and that it is welcoming and inclusive.
- Support the Safeguarding Leads in their work and in any action, they may need to take in order to protect children and adults with care and support needs.

## **Section 2**

### **Prevention**

#### **Understanding abuse and neglect**

Defining child abuse or abuse against an adult is a difficult and complex issue. A person may abuse by inflicting harm to vulnerable people but if you are aware of or witness or fail to protect someone and do not report it then that will increase the chances of the abuse continuing too. Children and adults in need of protection may be abused within a family, an institution or a community setting. Very often the abuser is known or in a trusted relationship with the child or adult.

In order to safeguard those in our places of worship and organisations we adhere to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and have as our starting point as a definition of abuse, Article 19:

*1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.*

*2. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.*

Also, for adults the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights with particular reference to Article 5:

*No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.*

Detailed definitions, and signs and indicators of abuse, as well as how to respond to a disclosure of abuse, are included here in our policy.

Definitions and further definitions and signs and symptoms of children:

- See Appendix 4 - Statutory Definitions of Abuse.
- See Appendix 5 - Signs of possible abuse (Children and Young People)
- See Appendix 6 - Statutory Definitions of Abuse (adults) .
- See Appendix 7- Signs of possible abuse (Adults)

### **Safer Recruitment**

The Minister, Steering Group and Protection Verifier will ensure all workers will be appointed, trained, supported and supervised in accordance with government guidance on safe recruitment. This includes ensuring that:

- There is a written job description / person specification for the post.
- Those applying have completed an application form and a self-declaration form.
- Those short listed have been interviewed.
- Safeguarding has been discussed at interview and the panel was satisfied the principles were understood and any training needs were highlighted.
- Written references have been obtained and followed up where appropriate.
- A Disclosure and Barring Service check (DBS) for England and Wales or Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) scheme for Scotland has been completed where necessary (we will comply with Code of Practice requirements concerning the fair treatment of applicants and the handling of information).
- Qualifications where relevant have been verified.
- A suitable training programme is provided for the successful applicant.
- The applicant and appropriate members of the church will meet at regular periods throughout the induction period.  
The Church may implement a period of probation which will be agreed with the applicant prior to commencing the role.
- The applicant has been given a copy of the organisation's safeguarding policy and knows how to report concerns.

- If a situation arises where a worker in the Church is from outside the UK, we will follow the appropriate checks in line with the policy.

### **Safeguarding Training**

The Minister, Steering Group and Church Members are committed to on-going safeguarding training and development opportunities for all workers, developing a culture of awareness of safeguarding issues to help protect everyone.

The Minister and Steering Group will also ensure that children and adults with care and support needs are provided with information on where to get help and advice in relation to abuse, discrimination, bullying or any other matter where they have a concern.

### **Supervision of Volunteers – Codes of Conduct**

The Minister, Steering Group and Church Members are committed to supporting all Church workers and volunteers and ensuring they receive support and supervision. All Church workers/volunteers have been issued with a code of conduct towards children, young people and adults with care and support needs. *See Appendix 1.*

## **Section 3**

### **Practice Guidelines**

As a church working with children, young people and adults with care and support needs we wish to operate and promote good working practice. This will enable workers to run activities safely, develop good relationships and minimise the risk of false or unfounded accusation.

As well as a general code of conduct for workers we also have specific good practice guidelines for every activity we are involved in and these are attached or in the appendices. The practise guidelines are found in Standard 5. of the Thirtyone:eight Safeguarding manual and includes information on bullying, first aid, ratios, outings and photography. The activities they cover include those with reference to Standard 5 - Working Safely Guidance (Separate Document to Policy).

Duty of Care

Positions of Trust

Data Protection, Human Rights and Safeguarding

Anti-bullying Policy and Practice (Children and Young People)

Risk Assessments

Health and Safety (Buildings and Equipment)

Health and Safety (Food Hygiene)

First Aid

Keeping Records

Gifts, Rewards and Favouritism

Safeguarding Principles for Group or Activity

Adult to Child Ratios

Working safely with disabled children, young people and adults

Challenging Behaviour

Drop-in Centres

Unexpected Attendance at Activities

Home Visits

Filming and Taking Photographs

Guidance Standard 8 - Pastoral Care Guidance

Along with

- See Appendix 8 – Praying with Children and Young People
- See Appendix 9 - Guidance on touch

### **Working in Partnership with Churches**

The diversity of organisations and settings means there can be great variation in practice when it comes to safeguarding children, young people and adults. This can be because of cultural tradition, belief and religious practice or understanding, for example, of what constitutes abuse.

We are affiliated to the Congregational Federation and we hold a Safeguarding certificate. This was issued on July 2022 and is valid to July 2027

This check covers:

- Premises e.g., Fire equipment and First Aid
- Practise e.g., risk assessment and security of the building
- Policy
- Safer recruitment

A nominated Safeguarding Checker visits the church and liaising with the protection verifier and National Safeguarding Officer of the Congregational Federation to ensure agreed standards are maintained and a certificate to display on premise is presented. It is also our expectation that any organisation using our premises, as part of the letting agreement will have their own policy that meets Thirtyone:eight's safeguarding standards.

We believe good communication is essential in promoting safeguarding, both to those we wish to protect, to everyone involved in working with children and adults and to all those with whom we work in partnership. This safeguarding policy is just one means of promoting safeguarding. The other ways in which we have promoted Safeguarding include: Displaying our Safeguarding Poster on the reception notice board and Hall, safeguarding training, regular Contact articles, annual confirmation of role holders, annual review of policy.

## **Section 4**

### **Responding to allegations of abuse**

Under no circumstances should a volunteer or worker carry out their own investigation into an allegation or suspicion of abuse. Follow procedures as below and refer to flow charts for action if necessary:

See - *Flowchart-for-action-children.pdf* (Separate document to policy).

See - *Flowchart-for-action-adults.pdf* (Separate document to policy).

1. Document the concern

*Using the proforma in Appendices 10 – Reporting a Concern Form*

The worker or volunteer should make a report of the concern in the following way:

2. The person in receipt of allegations or suspicions of abuse should report concerns as soon as possible to:

Name: Safeguarding Lead Nikki Beacher or Sharon Brannen

Email: [mhccsafe@gmail.com](mailto:mhccsafe@gmail.com)

The above are appointed by Church Meeting to act on its behalf in dealing with the allegation or suspicion of neglect or abuse, including referring the matter on to the statutory authorities.

In the absence of the Safeguarding Lead or, if the suspicion in any way involves the Safeguarding Lead, then the report should be made to:

**Name:** Rev Roo MacRae

**Tel:** 01858 440129/

**Email:** [mhccroo@gmail.com](mailto:mhccroo@gmail.com)

If the suspicions implicate any of the above listed, then the report should be made in the first instance to local Social Cares.

Or advice from

**Thirtyone:eight** PO Box 133, Swanley, Kent, BR8 7UQ.

Tel: 0303 003 1111.

- The named safeguarding contact above should contact the appropriate agency, or they may first ring the Thirtyone:eight helplines for advice. They should then contact Social Cares in the area in which the child or adult lives.

**Leicestershire County Council** Children's Duty Team 0116 3050005 (24 hours)

Adult Social Care 0116 3050004 (8.30 – 17.00) or Out of Hours Duty Team 0116 305 0888

Deaf or hard of hearing text 07949633 788

**Leicester City Council** Children's Duty Team 0116454 1004

Adult Social Care 0116 454 1004 or Out of Hours Duty Team 0116 454 1004

- The named safeguarding person may need to inform others depending on the circumstances and/or nature of the concern and whether there was any action to protect i.e., Suspension
  - I. Chair or trustee responsible for safeguarding who may need to liaise with the insurance company or the charity commission to report a serious incident.
  - II. Designated officer or LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) if the allegation concerns a worker or volunteer working with someone under 18.
- Suspicions must not be discussed with anyone other than those nominated above. A written record of the concerns should be made in accordance with these procedures and kept in a secure place. (Appendix 10)
- Whilst allegations or suspicions of abuse will normally be reported to the Safeguarding Lead, the absence of the Safeguarding Lead should not delay referral to Social Cares, the Police or taking advice from Thirtyone:eight.
- The Minister will support the Safeguarding Lead in their role and accept that any information they may have in their possession will be shared in a strictly limited way on a need-to-know basis.
- It is, of course, the right of any individual as a citizen to make a direct referral to the safeguarding agencies or seek advice from Thirtyone:eight, although the Minister and Steering Group hope that members and staff of the church will use this procedure. If, however, the individual with the concern feels that the Safeguarding Lead has not responded appropriately, or where they have a disagreement with the Safeguarding Lead as to the appropriateness of a referral, they are free to contact an outside agency direct. We hope by making this statement that the Minister and Steering Group demonstrate its commitment to effective safeguarding and the protection of all those who are vulnerable.

The role of the Safeguarding Lead is to collate and clarify the precise details of the allegation or suspicion and pass this information on to statutory agencies who have a legal duty to investigate.

### **Detailed procedures where there is a concern about a child:**

#### **Allegations of physical injury, neglect, or emotional abuse.**

If a child has a physical injury, a symptom of neglect or where there are concerns about emotional abuse, the Safeguarding Lead will:

- Contact Children's Social Care (or Thirtyone:eight) for advice in cases of deliberate injury, if concerned about a child's safety or if a child is afraid to return home.
- Not tell the parents or carers unless advised to do so, having contacted Children's Social Care.
- Seek medical help if needed urgently, informing the doctor of any suspicions.
- For lesser concerns, (e.g., poor parenting), encourage parent/carers to seek help, but not if this places the child at risk of significant harm.

- Where the parent/carer is unwilling to seek help, offer to accompany them. In cases of real concern, if they still fail to act, contact Children's Social Care direct for advice.
- Seek and follow advice given by Thirtyone:eight (who will confirm their advice in writing) if unsure whether or not to refer a case to Children's Social Care.

### **Allegations of sexual abuse**

In the event of allegations or suspicions of sexual abuse, the Safeguarding Lead will:

- Contact the Children's Social Care Department Duty Social Worker for children and families or Police Child Protection Team direct. They will NOT speak to the parent/carer or anyone else.
- Seek and follow the advice given by Thirtyone:eight if for any reason they are unsure whether to contact Children's Social Care/Police. Thirtyone:eight will confirm its advice in writing for future reference.

### **Detailed procedures where there is a concern that an adult needs protection:**

**Suspicious or allegations of abuse or harm including physical, sexual, organisational, financial, discriminatory, neglect, self-neglect, forced marriage, modern slavery, domestic abuse.**

If there is concern about any of the above, Safeguarding Lead will:

- Contact the Adult Social Care Team who have responsibility under the Care Act 2014 to investigate allegations of abuse. Alternatively, Thirtyone:eight can be contacted for advice.
- If the adult is in immediate danger or has sustained a serious injury contact the Emergency Services, informing them of any suspicions.

If there is a concern regarding spiritual abuse, Safeguarding Lead will:

- Identify support services for the victim i.e., counselling or other pastoral support
- Contact Thirtyone:eight and in discussion with them will consider appropriate action with regards to the scale of the concern.

### **Allegations of abuse against a person who works with children/young people**

If an accusation is made against a worker (whether a volunteer or paid member of staff) whilst following the procedure outlined above, the Safeguarding Lead, in accordance with Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) will:

- Liaise with Children's Social Care regarding the suspension of the worker

- Make a referral to a designated officer formerly called a Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) whose function is to handle all allegations against adults who work with children and young people whether in a paid or voluntary capacity.
- Make a referral to Disclosure and Barring Service for consideration of the person being placed on the barred list for working with children or adults with additional care and support needs. This decision should be informed by the LADO if they are involved.

**Allegations of abuse against a person who works with adults with care and support needs.**

The Safeguarding Lead will:

- Liaise with Adult Social Care in regards the suspension of the worker.
- Make a referral to the DBS following the advice of Adult Social Care.

The Care Act places the duty upon Adult Services to investigate situations of harm to adults with care and support needs. This may result in a range of options including action against the person or organisation causing the harm, increasing the support for the carers or no further action if the 'victim' chooses for no further action and they have the capacity to communicate their decision. However, this is a decision for Adult Services to decide not the church.

## **Section 5**

### **Pastoral Care**

#### **Supporting those affected by abuse**

The Minister, Steering Group and Church Members are committed to offering pastoral care, working with statutory agencies as appropriate, and support to all those who have been affected by abuse who have contact with or are part of Market Harborough Congregational Church.

#### **Working with offenders and those who may pose a risk**

When someone attending Market Harborough Congregational Church is known to have abused children, is under investigation, or is known to be a risk to adults with care and support needs; the Minister, Steering Group or designated person will supervise the individual concerned and offer pastoral care, but in its safeguarding commitment to the protection of children and adults with care and support needs, set boundaries for that person, that they will be expected to keep. These boundaries will be based on an appropriate risk assessment and through consultation with appropriate parties. Refer to:

Appendix 11 - Sex Offenders and Church Attendance

Appendix 12 - Contracts and Agreements

Appendix 13 – Someone I care about may be a sex offender

## **Adoption of the policy**

This policy was agreed by Market Harborough Church Meeting and will be reviewed every three years with updates relating to current groups provided as required.

Signed by:

Position:

Signed by:

Position

Date:

A copy of this policy is also lodged with: Steering Group and Ministers

**The information you supplied is held for that purpose only and will not be shared with any third party. The submission of this form and the information contained indicates your acceptance to retain this information which will be held.**

**You can withdraw or change your consent at any time by contacting the Church. Please note that all processing of your personal data will cease once you have withdrawn consent, other than where it is required by law, but this will not affect any personal data that has already been processed prior to this point. Data will be stored on a password protected computer or locked filing system and deleted in accordance with guidelines.**

# CODE OF CONDUCT

**Market Harborough Congregational Church behaviour code for working with children, young people and adults at risk of harm.**

## **Purpose**

This behaviour code outlines the conduct expected of all workers (staff and volunteers).

The code of conduct aims to help protect adults at risk of harm, children and young people from abuse and inappropriate behaviour from those in positions of trust, and to reduce the risk of unfounded allegations of abuse being made.

## **The role of workers (staff and volunteers)**

When working with children and young people or adults at risk of harm, you are acting in a position of trust for Market Harborough Congregational Church. You will be seen as a role model and must act appropriately.

## **Good Practice**

- Treat everyone with dignity, respect and fairness, and have proper regard for individuals' interests, rights, safety and welfare
- Work in a responsible, transparent and accountable way
- Be prepared to challenge unacceptable behaviour or to be challenged
- Listen carefully to those you are supporting
- Avoid any behaviour that could be perceived as bullying, emotional abuse, harassment, physical abuse, spiritual abuse or sexual abuse (including inappropriate physical contact such as rough play and inappropriate language or gestures)
- Seek advice from someone with greater experience when necessary
- Work in an open environment – avoid private or unobserved situations
- Follow policies, procedures and guidelines and report all disclosures, concerns, allegations, and suspicions to the Safeguarding Lead
- Don't make inappropriate promises particularly in relation to confidentiality
- Do explain to the individual what you intend to do and don't delay taking action

## **Unacceptable Behaviour**

- Not reporting concerns or delaying reporting concerns
- Taking unnecessary risks
- Any behaviour that is or may be perceived as threatening or abusive in any way
- Passing on your personal and/or social media contact details and any contact that breaches Market Harborough Congregational Church's social media policy
- Developing inappropriate relationships
- Smoking and consuming alcohol or illegal substances when working with children and young people or adults at risk of harm

- Favouritism/exclusion – all people should be equally supported and encouraged

### **Breaching the Code of Conduct**

If you have behaved inappropriately, you will be subject to disciplinary procedures (particularly in the case of paid staff where the line manager will consult the Safeguarding Lead as appropriate). Depending on the seriousness of the situation, you may be asked to leave Market Harborough Congregational Church. We may also make a referral to statutory agencies such as the police and/or the local authority children's or adult's social care departments or DBS. If you become aware of a breach of this code, you should escalate your concerns to the Safeguarding Lead or line manager (in the case of a paid staff member).

### **Declaration**

I agree to abide by the expectations outlined in this document and confirm that I have read the relevant policies that assist my work with vulnerable groups.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

The information you supplied is held for that purpose only and will not be shared with any third party. The submission of this form and the information contained indicates your acceptance to retain this information which will be held.

You can withdraw or change your consent at any time by contacting the Church. Please note that all processing of your personal data will cease once you have withdrawn consent, other than where it is required by law, but this will not affect any personal data that has already been processed prior to this point. Data will be stored on a password protected computer or locked filing system and deleted in accordance with guidelines.

# COMPLAINTS, GRIEVANCE AND DISCIPLINARY POLICY AND PROCEDURE

If you are an independent church, this document is to assist you.

## What is a complaint or grievance?

These terms are used interchangeably but mean the same for the purposes of this document. A complaint or grievance is a written or verbal expression of dissatisfaction about an action including a statement or a lack of action by any person including volunteers, leaders or office holders within the church setting. The complaint or grievance may also be that a person has behaved in an upsetting or unacceptable way.

## What does discipline mean in this document?

If the allegation is very serious and contravenes an employed person's contract of employment, the procedure may lead to discipline procedures being initiated to look in detail at the situation and may result in dismissal or further supervision for the person. The discipline measures may begin at the end of the complaints procedure or may start straight away depending on the circumstances. This procedure may be implemented regarding a person's conduct outside the church but where there is concern about the impact upon their employment or may bring the church into disrepute.

## Beginning the process for complaints and grievances

### Stage One

The aim is to resolve the situation by reconciliation of those involved and therefore needs to be instigated as soon as possible within 3-5 days. The resolution may take place by discussion, negotiation or mediation.

It is likely that this may resolve the situation without minimising or ignoring the concerns expressed. It may be that there has been a misunderstanding which can be quickly resolved.

**NB. It is important to say that if the complaint or concern or allegation is related to potential harm or risk of harm to a child under 18 or adult at risk, this policy/procedure is not appropriate. Please follow the policy and procedure regarding potential abuse of vulnerable groups.**

### Stage two

If the complaint or grievance is not resolved at the informal stage, the complainant needs to put their concern into writing and send/give to the line manager of the person concerned. The written document needs to not be abusive or inflammatory. The line manager may be a church leader. If the concern is regarding the line manager, the document needs to be given to another person of equivalent responsibility within the church. A meeting needs to take place within 14 days to which the complainant may bring a supporter on the basis that the person needs to understand their role of passive support and that the situation is confidential.

The manager/leader then sends the decision, conclusions and findings in writing to the complainant within 7 days.

### **Stage three**

If this does not resolve the situation, the complainant can put their concern in writing within 7 days to the Trustee responsible for complaints for the church or a more senior church leader. That person(s) needs to consider all the notes/documentation, meet the complainant and their supporter and make a decision within one month. The decision at that stage will be final.

All the notes taken throughout the process need to be stored in a secure place.

### **Discipline Policy and procedure**

The aim of any church or faith organisation is to encourage improvement and confidence in individual conduct or performance. This procedure sets out the action which will be taken when disciplinary rules are breached or where performance is unsatisfactory. Therefore, each employee needs to have a job description and contract which sets out clearly, any expectations about their conduct and behaviour within the organization.

- A. The procedure is designed to establish the facts quickly and to deal consistently with disciplinary and performance issues. No action will be taken until the matter has been fully investigated.
- B. At every stage employee's will be informed in writing of what is alleged and have the opportunity to state their case at a disciplinary meeting. The employee has a right to be accompanied, if they wish, by a trade union representative or a work colleague. The representative has the right to explain and sum up the employee's case and to respond to any views expressed at any hearing or investigatory meeting. He or she may not answer questions on the employee's behalf.
- C. The employee is expected to make every effort to attend a disciplinary hearing or investigatory meeting. Failure to do so without good reason may result in the hearing being held without the employee being present.
- D. An employee has the right to appeal against any disciplinary penalty.

This policy does not apply in such a formal way in respect of volunteers although we recommend that a volunteer should also be clear about the expectations of the agreement they are committing to and what they can expect in return. If these expectations are breached, a meeting needs to take place to discuss the situation and a decision made about whether the volunteer can continue or whether the situation is so serious that the volunteer cannot continue in their role.

**NB. If the contract or agreement for an employee is brought to an end, and where the role has required a DBS/PVG relevant criminal records check, the Disclosure and Barring Service/relevant authority need to be informed about the dismissal/ending of the agreement but only if the issue is one of safeguarding. In these circumstances, DBS/relevant authority need to be informed as soon as the situation arises and even if the person has resigned.**

### **The Procedure**

#### ***Stage 1 – First warning***

If conduct or performance is unsatisfactory, the employee will be given a written warning or performance note. Such warnings will be recorded but disregarded after 6 months of satisfactory service. The employee will also be informed that a final written warning may be considered if there is no sustained improvement or satisfactory change in conduct or performance. Where the first

offence is sufficiently serious, for example because it is having, or is likely to have, a serious harmful effect on the Church, it may be justifiable to move directly to a final written warning.

### **Stage 2 – Final written warning**

If the offence is serious, or there is no improvement in standards or performance or a similar offence occurs, a final written warning will be given which will include the reason for the warning and that the situation will be monitored for six months.

### **Stage 3 – Dismissal or other actions**

If the conduct of the employee does not improve or of there is a reoccurrence of the original event, the employee may be dismissed. Alternatively, there may be a demotion or transfer to another role where the contract will be changed/amended.

### **Gross Misconduct – what does this mean?**

If at any stage during the investigation, it transpires that an employee has been found to have committed gross misconduct, the employee may need to be dismissed immediately without notice or payment in lieu of notice. Although not an exhaustive list, examples of this might be.

- Theft, damage, fraud within or outside of work
- Being under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Bullying, harassment, discrimination or intimidation
- Bringing the church into disrepute
- Unauthorised absence from work
- Serious breach of confidentiality

### **Suspension**

While the alleged gross misconduct is being investigated, the employee may be suspended at any stage during the procedure. While suspended the employee will be paid their normal pay and will be required to be available to attend meetings during normal working hours. A decision to suspend may be made by the Senior Minister/designated Church Leader or other appointed deputy. While suspended an employee may not normally visit Church premises or discuss the process with anyone within the church. The Church will arrange for appropriate pastoral support for employees during any period of suspension. The Church may request that an employee does not attend services at Church until matters are resolved. Suspension is not a penalty but a precautionary measure and will not prejudice any disciplinary meeting. The Church may appoint a member of the Leadership Team to undertake the investigation or an independent investigator or external advisor to assist them. The Church will use its best endeavours to minimise the length of suspension period. Any decision to dismiss will be taken by the employer only after full investigation has taken place and the employee has had the opportunity to state their case. Where the employee falls sick during suspension or the disciplinary process the sickness procedure will apply.

### **Appeals**

An employee who wishes to appeal against any disciplinary decision must do so in writing to the Senior Minister/designated Church Leader within five working days. Appeals will, so far as is reasonably practicable, be held within 10 working days of receiving the appeal notification. Given the size and resources available to the Church it may be necessary for the same people to hear an appeal as were involved in the original disciplinary decision. The Church will hear the appeal and decide the case as impartially as possible.

# STATUTORY DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE (CHILDREN)

Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm.

Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting; by those known to them or, more rarely, by a stranger. They may be abused by an adult or adults or another child or children.

Child protection legislation throughout the UK is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Each nation within the UK has incorporated the convention within its legislation and guidance.

## England

The four definitions (and a few additional categories) of abuse below operate in England based on the government guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018)'.

### What is abuse and neglect?

Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting, by those known to them or, more rarely, by a stranger for example, via the internet. They may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children.

**Physical abuse:** Physical abuse 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 the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

**Emotional abuse :** Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious

bullying (including cyberbullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

**Sexual abuse:** Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of or understand what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

**Neglect :** Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment).
- protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger.
- ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate caregivers); or
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

### **Child sexual exploitation**

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology

### **Extremism**

Extremism goes beyond terrorism and includes people who target the vulnerable – including the young – by seeking to sow division between communities on the basis of race, faith or denomination; justify discrimination towards women and girls; persuade others that minorities are inferior; or argue against the primacy of democracy and the rule of law in our society.

# **SIGNS OF POSSIBLE ABUSE (CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE)**

The following signs could be indicators that abuse has taken place but should be considered in context of the child's whole life.

## **Physical**

- Injuries not consistent with the explanation given for them
- Injuries that occur in places not normally exposed to falls, rough games, etc
- Injuries that have not received medical attention
- Reluctance to change for, or participate in, games or swimming
- Repeated urinary infections or unexplained tummy pains
- Bruises on babies, bites, burns, fractures etc which do not have an accidental explanation\*
- Cuts/scratches/substance abuse\*

## **Sexual**

- Any allegations made concerning sexual abuse
- Excessive preoccupation with sexual matters and detailed knowledge of adult sexual behaviour
- Age-inappropriate sexual activity through words, play or drawing
- Child who is sexually provocative or seductive with adults
- Inappropriate bed-sharing arrangements at home
- Severe sleep disturbances with fears, phobias, vivid dreams or nightmares, sometimes with overt or veiled sexual connotations
- Eating disorders - anorexia, bulimia\*

## **Emotional**

- Changes or regression in mood or behaviour, particularly where a child withdraws or becomes clinging.
- Depression, aggression, extreme anxiety.
- Nervousness, frozen watchfulness
- Obsessions or phobias
- Sudden under-achievement or lack of concentration
- Inappropriate relationships with peers and/or adults
- Attention-seeking behaviour
- Persistent tiredness
- Running away/stealing/lying

## **Neglect**

- Under nourishment, failure to grow, constant hunger, stealing or gorging food, Untreated illnesses, inadequate care, etc

\*These indicate the possibility that a child or young person is self-harming. Approximately 20,000 are treated in accident and emergency departments in the UK each year.

# STATUTORY DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE (ADULTS)

The following information relates to the Safeguarding of Adults as defined in the Care Act 2014, Chapter 14. Safeguarding, this replaces the previous guidelines produced in 'No Secrets' (Department of Health 2000)

The legislation is relevant across England and Wales but on occasions applies only to local authorities in England.

The Safeguarding duties apply to an adult who.

- has need for care and support (whether or not the local authority is meeting any of those needs) and.
- is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect; and
- as a result of those care and support needs is unable to protect themselves from either the risk of, or the experience of abuse or neglect.

Organisations should always promote the adult's wellbeing in their safeguarding arrangements. People have complex lives and being safe is only one of the things they want for themselves. Professionals should work with the adult to establish what being safe means to them and how that can be best achieved. Professional and other staff should not be advocating 'safety' measures that do not take account of individual well-being, as defined in Section 1 of the Care Act.

**Link:** [The Care Act 2014](#)

**Link:** [Care and Support Statutory Guidance under the Care Act 2014](#)

This section considers the different types and patterns of abuse and neglect and the different circumstances in which they may take place. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list but an illustrative guide as to the sort of behaviour which could give rise to a safeguarding concern.

**Physical abuse** – including assault, hitting, slapping, pushing, misuse of medication, restraint or inappropriate physical sanctions.

**Domestic violence** – including psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional abuse; so, called 'honour' based violence.

**Sexual abuse** – including rape, indecent exposure, sexual harassment, inappropriate looking or touching, sexual teasing or innuendo, sexual photography, subjection to pornography or witnessing sexual acts, indecent exposure and sexual assault or sexual acts to which the adult has not consented or was pressured into consenting.

**Psychological abuse** – including emotional abuse, threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, cyber bullying, isolation or unreasonable and unjustified withdrawal of services or supportive networks.

**Financial or material abuse** – including theft, fraud, internet scamming, coercion in relation to an adult's financial affairs or arrangements, including in connection with wills, property, inheritance or financial transactions, or the misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits.

**Modern slavery** – encompasses slavery, human trafficking, forced labour and domestic servitude. Traffickers and slave masters use whatever means they have at their disposal to coerce, deceive and force individuals into a life of abuse, servitude and inhumane treatment.

**Discriminatory abuse** – including forms of harassment, slurs or similar treatment; because of race, gender and gender identity, age, disability, sexual orientation or religion.

**Organisational abuse** – including neglect and poor care practice within an Institution or specific care setting such as a hospital or care home, for example, or in relation to care provided in one's own home. This may range from one off incidents to on-going ill-treatment. It can be through neglect or poor professional practice as a result of the structure, policies, processes and practices within an organisation.

**Neglect and acts of omission** – including ignoring medical, emotional or physical care needs, failure to provide access to appropriate health, care and support or educational services, the withholding of the necessities of life, such as medication, adequate nutrition and heating.

**Self-neglect** – this covers a wide range of behaviour neglecting to care for one's personal hygiene, health or surroundings and includes behaviour such as hoarding. Incidents of abuse may be one-off or multiple and affect one person or more.

# **SIGNS OF POSSIBLE ABUSE (ADULTS)**

## **Physical Abuse**

- History of unexplained falls, fractures, bruises, burns, minor injuries.
- Signs of under or overuse of medication and/or medical problems left unattended.
- Any injuries not consistent with the explanation given for them
- Bruising and discolouration - particularly if there is a lot of bruising of different ages and in places not normally exposed to falls, rough games etc.
- Recurring injuries without plausible explanation
- Loss of hair, loss of weight and change of appetite
- Person flinches at physical contact &/or keeps fully covered, even in hot weather.
- Person appears frightened or subdued in the presence of a particular person or people

## **Domestic Violence**

- Unexplained injuries or 'excuses' for marks or scars
- Coercive, controlling and/or threatening relationship including psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional abuse; so, called 'honour' based violence and Female Genital Mutilation.
- Age range extended to 16 yrs.

## **Sexual Abuse**

- Pregnancy in a woman who lacks mental capacity or is unable to consent to sexual intercourse
- Unexplained change in behaviour or sexually explicit behaviour
- Torn, stained or bloody underwear and/or unusual difficulty in walking or sitting
- Infections or sexually transmitted diseases
- Full or partial disclosures or hints of sexual abuse
- Self-harming
- Emotional distress
- Mood changes
- Disturbed sleep patterns

## **Psychological Abuse**

- Alteration in psychological state e.g., withdrawn, agitated, anxious, tearful
- Intimidated or subdued in the presence of a carer
- Fearful, flinching or frightened of making choices or expressing wishes
- Unexplained paranoia
- Changes in mood, attitude and behaviour, excessive fear or anxiety
- Changes in sleep pattern or persistent tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- Helplessness or passivity
- Confusion or disorientation
- Implausible stories and attention seeking behaviour
- Low self-esteem

### **Financial or Material Abuse**

- Disparity between assets and living conditions
- Unexplained withdrawals from accounts or disappearance of financial documents or loss of money
- Sudden inability to pay bills, getting into debt
- Carers or professionals fail to account for expenses incurred on a person's behalf
- Recent changes of deeds or title to property
- Missing personal belongings
- Inappropriate granting and / or use of Power of Attorney

### **Modern Slavery**

- Physical appearance: unkempt, inappropriate clothing, malnourished
- Movement monitored, rarely alone, travel early or late at night to facilitate working hours.
- Few personal possessions or ID documents.
- Fear of seeking help or trusting people.

### **Discriminatory Abuse**

- Inappropriate remarks, comments or lack of respect
- Poor quality or avoidance care
- Low self-esteem
- Withdrawn
- Anger
- Person puts themselves down in terms of their gender or sexuality
- Abuse may be observed in conversations or reports by the person of how they perceive themselves

### **Institutional Abuse**

- Low self-esteem
- Withdrawn
- Anger
- Person puts themselves down in terms of their gender or sexuality
- Abuse may be observed in conversations or reports by the person of how they perceive themselves
- No confidence in complaints procedures for staff or service users.
- Neglectful or poor professional practice.
  
- Neglect and acts of omission
- Deteriorating despite apparent care
- Poor home conditions, clothing or care and support.
- Lack of medication or medical intervention

### **Self-neglect**

- Hoarding inside or outside a property
- Neglecting personal hygiene or medical needs
- Person looking unkempt or dirty and has poor personal hygiene
- Person is malnourished, has sudden or continuous weight loss and is dehydrated – constant hunger, stealing or gorging on food
- Person is dressed inappropriately for the weather conditions
- Dirt, urine or faecal smells in a person's environment

- Home environment does not meet basic needs (for example not heating or lighting)
- Depression

# **PRAYING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

## **Introduction**

Some of the main ingredients that underpin any effective ministry to children and young people, including prayer, are:

- acceptance
- respect
- non-judgemental listening,
- sensitivity,
- discernment,
- patience.

In applying these values in the area of prayer, not only will you build trust and respect, but you will also be providing a good 'prayer' model so that children and young people can learn how to pray for others in a sensitive and responsible way.

Although it may seem obvious, it is important parents/carers are aware that prayer is an integral part of church life (particularly if they don't attend church themselves), and that on occasions you may pray with their child either corporately or individually at the child's request.

You can reassure any concerned parent/carer with the principles contained in these guidelines, or if a child is part of a club or Sunday school within the church this could be mentioned, for example, on the information leaflet given to parents/carers when the child joins the group.

In the unlikely event of a parent/carer requesting that their child does not participate in individual prayer, this must always be respected.

## **Praying**

Prior to praying, always make sure you have the child's permission and always pray in an open area where other leaders and/or children are around. If there is a general invitation to come forward for prayer in or after a family service, then it will be helpful to have children's workers available to pray with the children/young people rather than relying on other leaders who may be used to dealing with adults. Only those authorised by the church leadership should be involved in this ministry.

The child should be asked if there is anything specific, they are requesting prayer for and listen to their reply. Speak quietly and calmly, never shout or raise your voice. Don't laugh at or dismiss out of hand if they want to pray for something you consider trite or irrelevant (e.g., my cat's poorly). If they do not have specific needs or requests, then simply ask God to bless them.

Those praying with children and young people should always be alert to child protection issues and other concerns such as bullying. In these circumstances do not forget about or delay taking appropriate action because you are caught up with praying!

If you have prayed about a specific issue, it may be helpful to write it down afterwards and give it to the child so that, if they want, they can let their parents/carers know and remember it themselves.

If a child/young person becomes distressed, stop praying. Stay calm and gently ask them if they would like to say what has caused their distress. Depending on the child's response you could consider whether there are any gender issues or whether they would feel more comfortable with someone else

If unsure or the child/young person remains distressed do not continue praying but stay with them until they are calm, offering them reassurance and complete acceptance. Then talk to the child's parents/carers, assuming you have no child protection concerns.

### **Practicalities**

When it comes to praying, consider your body language, particularly in relation to things like your height and the height of the child/young person. Try to ensure you are on their level rather than towering over them perhaps by both of you sitting down; but do avoid crowding.

Refrain from placing your hands on a child/young person's head as they may find this frightening or threatening. If you think they may appreciate something like an arm round a shoulder or their hand being held, always ask them if this is what they would like before doing it.

Some churches use substances such as oil on the forehead when praying for healing. Bear in mind that a child/young person may be uncomfortable with the use of anointing oil, so it is important to only go ahead with the child and parents' agreement.

Remember also that a child/young person may not, for example, understand things like 'speaking in tongues' and it is important therefore not to do anything that may cause confusion or distress.

### **Language**

Use clear uncomplicated language. Reflect back what the child has said to you, to show you have understood their prayer request. If a child says they are feeling tired, you could reply "let us pray for you as you are feeling tired" not "I think you are depressed, let's pray about that". Keep the prayers simple and short so you can then be confident your prayers have been understood by the child.

### **Giving Advice**

Avoid giving specific advice about problems involving decisions. A child or young person could be very susceptible to suggestion, particularly if they are distressed. Even if you believe you have heard from God about their situation, it would be far wiser to pray this through on your own or with another leader. Never advise a child/young person to stop taking medication or cease seeing professionals involved in their care or welfare.

### **Confidentiality**

Never promise total confidentiality. Should a child/young person wish to disclose to you a situation such as abuse within a prayer ministry context, you have a duty to pass this on to your church's child Safeguarding Lead and possibly Children's Social Care or the police. You may need to gently give clear boundaries but reassure the child that if you share anything about their situation with someone else it will be on a 'need to know' basis only and you will make sure they are supported and cared for.

### **Deliverance / Exorcism**

Any religious, traditional or cultural practice that causes significant harm to a child is a criminal offence and cannot be justified. One example of this is when children have been subjected to horrific abuse following accusations, they are witches or possessed by evil spirits. When practices such as these come to light, the statutory authorities may investigate and take appropriate action to protect the children involved.

Some places of worship believe that a child can have an evil spirit or is possessed when they display behavioural problems or are different in some way. The child may have learning difficulties, mental health issues, copied or unconventional behaviours, or be experiencing some kind of trauma such as culture shock at coming to live in a different country.

Children are easily frightened and very susceptible to suggestion. They may also be upset by shouting and will easily believe they are bad, wicked etc. A child should never be told they are demonised, possessed or oppressed by the devil or evil spirits.

Prayer for children should therefore always be carried out using the guidelines above.

### **Examples of good practice**

#### **Case No 1**

When Thirtyone:eight and the Metropolitan Police provided training for Congolese leaders at the beginning of 2006, a woman told the group that in Congo she had been experiencing difficulty with her son. She was told that he had a demon and a pastor prayed for deliverance. She came to England and was told that he was autistic, and he was sent to a special school. In his teens he was becoming quite difficult and in particular quite unmanageable in the car. The woman related how she took her son to her Congolese pastor to ask him to pray the demons out. He told her that the lad did not have a demon but raging hormones. He was like any other young person of his age but was not able to express himself. She went on to describe how he gave her a practical behaviour management programme, which solved the problem.

#### **Case No 2**

A parent, recently arrived in the UK from a war-torn African country, asked a pastor to pray for 'deliverance' for her child. The 3–4-year-old had no speech, though he had been heard to speak with his mother. It was explained that recent events in the family's life had affected the child and he was referred to SureStart (government support programme for the under 5s) and following attendance at a nursery where he received one-to-one attention he soon began to communicate. The pastor offered general prayer for the mother and the child, together with reassurance and care.

#### **Case No 3**

A mother asked the pastor to pray for deliverance because her child was having nightmares and was possessed. What was important to the pastor was to hear what the child had to say. He spoke gently with the child, asking about the nightmares. The pastor assured the mother that the child was not possessed and that given traumatic events in the family's life, the nightmares were hardly surprising. He then gave the mother some practical tips on how she could deal with the matter.

In 2007, HM Government published 'Safeguarding Children from Abuse Linked to a Belief in Spirit Possession' to help practitioners apply 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' to the particular needs of children who may have suffered abuse or neglect due to such beliefs. The key

considerations in this guidance were based on government commissioned research undertaken by Eleanor Stobart 'Child Abuse Linked to Accusations of Possession and Witchcraft' (June 2006).

In 2012, the Department for Education published the National Action Plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief. This serves as the latest guidance and can be downloaded [here](#).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-action-plan-to-tackle-child-abuse-linked-to-faith-or-belief>

## **GUIDANCE ON TOUCH**

- Keep everything public. A hug in the context of a group is very different from a hug behind closed doors.
- Touch should be related to the child, young person or vulnerable adult's needs, not the workers.
- Touch should be age-appropriate and generally initiated by the child, young person or vulnerable adult, rather than the worker.
- Avoid any physical activity that may be sexually stimulating.
- All children, young people and vulnerable adults are entitled to personal privacy and the right to decide how much physical contact they have with others, except in circumstances such as a medical emergency.
- When giving first aid (or applying sun cream etc.), encourage the child, young person or vulnerable adult to do what they can themselves but, in their best interests giving appropriate help where necessary.
- Team members should monitor one another in the area of physical contact. They should be free to help each other by constructively challenging anything which could be misunderstood or misconstrued.
- Concerns about abuse should always be reported.

## REPORTING A CONCERN FORM

### Part 1: Record of concern about a child/adult's safety and welfare

(for use by any staff/volunteers– This form can be filled in electronically. If the form is handwritten care should be taken to ensure that the form is legible)<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>

Child/Adult's name (subject of concern):	Date of birth/age:  Child/Adult:	Address:
Date & time of incident:	Date & time (of writing):	
Your Name (print): ..... Role/Job title:		
Signature: .....		
Other members of the household <sup>4</sup> :		
Record the following factually: Nature of concern, e.g., disclosure, change in behaviour, demeanour, appearance, injury, witnesses etc. <i>(please include as much detail in this section as possible. Remember – the quality of your information will inform the level of intervention initiated. Attach additional sheets if necessary.)</i>		
How did the concern come to light?		
What is the child/adult saying about what has happened <sup>4</sup> ?		
Any other relevant information. Previous concerns etc.		
Date and time of discussion with Safeguarding Lead <sup>5</sup> : _____		

Check to make sure your report is clear to someone else reading it.

**Please pass this form to your Safeguarding Lead without delay.**

**Guidance notes for Form 1 (volunteers/staff only):**

Following are some helpful pointers in completing the above form:

1. As a registered body the church/charitable organisation is required to ensure that its duty of care towards its beneficiaries is carried out in line with the principles enshrined within the Working together to safeguard children and young people, 2018 and the Care Act, 2014. (Refer to your own church's/organisation's safeguarding policy at this point too).
2. Essential principles of recording the information received/disclosed/observed:
  - a. Remember: do not investigate or ask any leading questions
  - b. make notes within the first one hour of receiving the disclosure or observing the incident
  - c. be clear and factual in your recording of the incident or disclosure
  - d. avoid giving your opinion or feelings on the matter
  - e. aim to record using the 4 W's and 1 H: When, where, what, why and how
  - f. do not share this information with anyone else except your Safeguarding Lead in the first instance and they will advise on who else will need to be informed, how and when.
  - g. make use of the additional information section to add any other relevant information regarding the child/adult/ family that you may be aware of. This can include any historic concerns or observations.
3. **What constitutes a safeguarding concern?** – any incident that has caused or likely to cause significant harm to a child can be classed as a safeguarding concern. Abuse is classified under four different categories (with regards to children) as already stated within the safeguarding policy (physical, sexual, emotional, neglect). With regards to adults there are 6 further categorisations. Whilst it may be helpful to record a specific category in the above form, if possible, this may not always be the case. Therefore, it is important to seek advice from your safeguarding Officer or Thirtyone:eight at this stage.
4. **Why do you need information regarding 'other household members'?** – It has been demonstrated as important to include information about significant adults in the household especially when concerns relate to children as this has been a recurrent risk factor in several serious case reviews.
5. **Why is the view of the child/adult significant?** It is important to give whatever detail is available of the child or adult's explanation (or verbatim) of the matter to help ascertain if it is plausible and to help offer a context to the concern identified.
6. **Passing information to the Safeguarding Lead** – Your Safeguarding Lead holds ultimate responsibility in responding to any safeguarding concerns within the church/organisation and therefore it is important that they have oversight of the actions being taken and make relevant and appropriate contact with statutory agencies if required. They will remain the most appropriate link between the organisation and external agencies.

**Part 2: Record of concern about a child/adult's safety and welfare**

(for use by Safeguarding Lead - This form can be filled in electronically. If the form is handwritten care should be taken to ensure that the form is legible)

Information received by SC:	Date:	Time completed:	From whom:		
Any advice sought, if applicable	Date:	Time completed:	Source of advice: name/organisation:		
	Advice received:  Advice received about informing parents or in the case of adults, seeking consent/capacity <sup>1</sup> :				
Initial Assessment of concern following advice <sup>2</sup>					
Action taken with reasons recorded (e.g., Referral completed, monitoring advice given to appropriate staff, CAF etc)	Date:	Time completed:	By whom:		
	Referral		To whom		
	Signposting to other community resources				
	Pastoral Care and other support from church				
	Ongoing Monitoring				
Parent/carer informed?	<b>Y</b>	Who spoken to:	Date:	Time:	By whom:
	<b>N</b>	Detail reason:			
Any other relevant information					
Name of Safeguarding Lead:			Signature:		

**OVERVIEW OF ACTIONS<sup>3</sup>:**

S.No.	Date	Outcome (if known)	Service currently involved	Ongoing support offered by church (this can include monitoring)- include dates
1.				

**Guidance notes for Form 2:**

Following are some helpful pointers in completing the above form(s)

1. **Importance of consent from parents/carer or adults (in the light of mental capacity)** – With regards to children, consent of the parents is considered important before a referral is made to external agencies, unless of course doing so will place the child(ren) at greater risk of harm. With regards to adults, it is important to be aware that their consent is crucial before reporting concerns onto statutory agencies. The individual’s mental capacity will also be a significant factor to consider at this stage. You can always seek the advice of local authority Social Care.
2. **Initial assessment-** Based on the advice you may have received from relevant individuals/agencies (i.e., this could be school/Thirtyone:eight/CEOP etc), what are the concerns categorised as?
3. **Overview of actions** - Includes a summary of the actions taken so far and who holds responsibility for it. You can use this section to add on information gathered when monitoring the situation or offering pastoral care over a defined period of time.

# SEX OFFENDERS AND CHURCH ATTENDANCE

The Christian church is unique in that, based on the uncompromising message of the gospel, it opens its doors to all. It has also been known for some time that a significant number of sexual offenders living in the community also attend church. This may come as a surprise to some, a shock to others, and it is likely to stir up all sorts of feelings and strong opinions. On a personal level if you are told, or you find out, that a sexual offender has joined or plans to join your church, what is your reaction and what should you do to ensure others, (children and adults) who also attend your church are protected? This booklet attempts to answer some of these dilemmas and includes comments from a pastor and a sexual offender ('D') in this situation.

## How do I feel?

It is perfectly understandable to be fearful, panicky or, at the very least, apprehensive. Perhaps you feel angry at the thought that someone who has abused children or adults should even be allowed back into the community. There are probably others in your church that, if they knew, would feel exactly the same. Whilst it is important to acknowledge your feelings, any information you have concerning an offender should only be shared on a 'need to know' basis with the leadership in the church who are responsible for ensuring that appropriate safeguards are in place.

## What do you mean by 'sexual offender'?

A sexual offender is someone who has committed sexual offences against either children or adults. In this guide we are primarily referring to people who have offended against children or vulnerable adults. Sexual offences include rape, indecent assault and indecent exposure, exposing children to pornography, and encouraging children to perform sexual acts on themselves, other children or the offender. They also include looking at images of children being abused or photographed in provocative poses. These are called indecent images of children (IIOC).

A number of sexual offenders will have downloaded child abuse images. Others will have made these images or distributed them to others as well as possessing them. Whilst some offenders will also have gone on to 'hands-on' offending, others may gather large collections of images on their computer. These offences are often described as 'child pornography' but this is inaccurate as every image captures an actual situation where a child has been abused, therefore a more appropriate term is indecent images of children (IIOC).

Some sexual offenders target children at a specific stage of sexual development. Others do not discriminate in this way and may also target adults who they see as vulnerable in some way. Most target children of a particular gender, but some target both.

Most offenders "groom" victims by forming a friendship with them, giving gifts, praise etc. so that the child or adult is comfortable in their presence and trusts them. They also groom parents, carers and others in the community to gain their confidence that it is alright for them to be around their family. This grooming is very subtle and is usually more recognisable by outsiders than by those being groomed. Lone parent families, as well as children from low-income families, are often targeted. Most people think of a sexual offender as a lone adult male because this is the image frequently portrayed by the media. Such offenders actually represent between a third and a half of the total. A

significant number of allegations of sexual crimes are against other children and young people (between a quarter and a third). Allegations against women account for up to a quarter and groups of offenders a similar amount also.

It needs to be borne in mind that offences are often not reported. However, Thirtyone:eight have dealt with serious cases of abuse referred by churches relating to all these different types of offenders.

Whilst most abuse of children happens in families; it is important to realise that children of any age may be at risk of abuse by an offender who is part of your church. You should not therefore be complacent about the risks to a child whatever their age and never assume that because, as far as you know, the offender abused younger children they would be safe with an older age group. Any safeguards must be applied across the board! We also know that abuse of adults can be by family members, by carers within the home or within care homes or hospitals.

### **What are the on-going risks?**

Sexual offenders often display addictive or repetitive behaviour towards their victims. For this reason, however repentant a sexual offender may appear to be, there are no cast-iron guarantees that they will not re-offend. Even if the offender has undergone treatment or received prayer ministry, they should not be assumed to be safe.

For some worshipping communities there is sometimes a denial that sexual offenders from within their own culture would frequent their place of worship. The fact that an individual demonstrates they are “Born Again” or is “Spirit-filled” is often the only requirement to place them within a position of trust within that community. Sexual offenders are present in all cultures, regardless of ethnicity and religious affiliation. Therefore, good sense safeguarding policies and procedures should not be disregarded purely because someone has had a spiritual renewal or experience.

True repentance is a change in thinking and behaviour, to “go and sin no more” so, apart from safeguarding considerations, in support of the repentant offender’s desire not to fall again we should not place them in a position of vulnerability where they could be tempted to re-offend. Sexual offenders need to be regarded in the same way as someone who has an addiction.

Whilst some offenders when arrested feel relief that their offending behaviour has been stopped, many initially refuse to admit that they have committed an offence and may continue to deny their guilt. This denial can be reinforced by family members who cannot accept the facts. (See Appendix 13 “Someone I care about may be a sex offender”).

Those offenders who represent a risk to children should be monitored closely and strict boundaries placed on their movements and behaviour within the church setting. A small group needs to be told of the situation; a contract written regarding the conditions necessary. There are three options.

- In some parts of church life, for example, morning worship, the offender must be monitored and discreetly supervised.
- Where provision cannot be made to monitor the individual at meetings involving children or adults who are vulnerable, it may be necessary to ensure that such offenders only attend meetings where those who are vulnerable are not present which may mean for the person

not to attend morning worship where large numbers of those who are vulnerable may be present.

- Some churches have created a home group with the person specifically in mind and where other members of the group know of the circumstances. It is important that such a group does not include families with children or is held in a house where children reside.

### **What can we do?**

Having described the worst-case scenario, it is possible to help those who accept that what they have done is wrong and want to change. When they leave prison or the criminal court, they may feel:

- Worried about how people will react
- Frightened in case the temptation to re-offend overcomes them
- Guilty and ashamed
- Isolated and lonely.

*'D': 'When leaving prison, society doesn't exactly welcome you with open arms. I did have support from friends and family but generally people don't trust ex-offenders. I felt like a second-class citizen'.*

Like anyone, an offender wanting to change will need people around them who will love and accept them, offering care and protection with the assurance that God does not reject them. Alongside this, the people supporting the offender will need to:

1. Challenge risky or wrong thinking and behaviour.
2. Not allow themselves to be manipulated.
3. be relied upon to be supportive to help maintain self-control.

We encourage the setting up of Support and Accountability Groups, particularly for high-risk offenders, which can provide a group of people not only to share any necessary chaperoning and monitoring of the offender in church, but also provide a context in which they can address and be supported through the issues they face in life. They will be held to account for their thinking and behaviour, develop a range of close relationships with adults and be disciplined, all of which are key to maintaining an offence-free lifestyle and not giving into temptation.

On-going monitoring is essential, and it is important that, with changes of staff and leadership over time, knowledge of the offender is passed on to new leaders or staff. It is important that the offender is never placed in a position of trust including leadership, a door welcomer, a leader of worship, a reader or member of a worship band. All these roles suggest that the person is trustworthy and may lead others not to see the risk they may pose.

In every situation a careful assessment needs to be made as to whether the church can safely and adequately work with the person. Seek the help of police and probation in carrying out risk assessments which need to consider the details of offending and subsequent behaviour and attitudes. You will also need to take into account your own church circumstances, accepting the fact that some people will be just too risky and may need to be helped to find another fellowship where the risk to children can be more easily managed.

*'D': 'I know I can phone if I'm in trouble. I know they want to help me. These people give up their free time. It's about feeling like a person again, not a number'.*

### **What about boundaries?**

Behavioural boundaries need to be put in place. These should help the offender feel secure and less at risk of false accusations. Most importantly, these boundaries will serve to protect children and young people who attend church activities.

- An offender should not be permitted to get close to children or adults who are vulnerable (either physically or emotionally)
- He or she should not sit in the vicinity of children or known vulnerable adults at church or attend house/cell group meetings where there are children in the home.
- An offender should never be allowed to work with children and young people or with adults who are known to be vulnerable
- They should not hold positions of leadership or responsibility where they are seen by others as someone who can be trusted.
- They should not undertake any activity where they might be seen as in a position of trust. e.g., giving books out at the door, greeting people, reading the lesson, leading prayers or a bible study, because those roles are regarded as suitable for those who are trustworthy.

*'D': Working to a contract is a helpful and necessary procedure for ex-offenders in the church. It helped me know what I could and couldn't do'.*

*Pastor: 'In the beginning I found myself policing him, thinking and worrying whether it was going to work. Now, my pastoral team take care of this and I am more relaxed'.*

Internet sexual offending includes not only indecent images of children but also online grooming, so helping an offender with online boundaries may also be needed.

See also; Thirtyone:eight Practice Guide – Contracts and Agreements.

### **What about forgiveness?**

An offender needs pastoral care to help them deal with the spiritual and emotional aspects of their life. They may feel that their sins are too awful for God to forgive, that they can never change or be healed of their own hurts. A pastor or carer needs to distinguish between forgiveness by God and forgiveness offered to the offender by those abused.

Offenders do not always appreciate that the consequences of their behaviour can be devastating for the person(s) involved and forgiveness by the victim may take a considerable time. Some may choose not to forgive. Offenders need to know that they have no inherent right to be forgiven by those they have harmed.

An offender may feel that they could never forgive themselves for their actions. In acknowledging they have done wrong they need to know that God forgives them and because of this they can forgive themselves. That is not to say they should forget what has happened and neither should the church. One offender commented that remembering his offence was a reminder to him to keep certain boundaries so that he would not be tempted to re-offend.

### **What about confidentiality?**

Confidentiality is an important principle in any dealings with people in pastoral situations. However, where safety may be compromised, confidentiality has to take second place to the protection of others. Open communication with the person who has offended and sharing information with the police and probation service are vital for the protection of children and adults who are vulnerable. A church leader may be given confidential information by one of the statutory agencies that cannot be shared with the wider church. However, leaders responsible for children and vulnerable adults can be made aware of any boundaries that are in place without being given details of the offender's history. This is an important distinction; to know the boundaries without the reasons.

### **What about people who have never been convicted of an offence?**

Most people who offend against children are not convicted. We know this by the number of adults admitting to unreported sexual offences against them as children and the number of cases reported to the police actually resulting in a conviction (about 5%). Even if an allegation is reported to the police, most are denied by the accused, and the case generally won't reach court if, for example, there is a lack of corroborative evidence or because it is not in the interests of the child or adult victim to take the matter further. For a case that reaches court, it is necessary for a jury to find someone guilty 'beyond all reasonable doubt'. Unless the jury agree on a verdict, the person will be found not guilty.

Where there are reasonable grounds for concern, churches will still need to respond even if the allegation is denied and in particular by applying appropriate boundaries. Failure to do so could place vulnerable adults and children at risk and it is also in the interests of someone who feels they have been falsely accused to work within given boundaries in order to minimise the possibility of further allegations.

### **Support for offenders - not an optional extra**

Supporting offenders safely in the church is fundamental if others are to be protected from abuse. Safeguarding policies and good working practice are vital. If general procedures are in place and working, spelling out, for example, who has access to the crèche, then sudden changes do not have to be initiated immediately a person with a known problem comes to church. Having said this it is important, as a matter of course, to review policies and procedures on a regular basis, whether or not a known offender joins the church.

We cannot be all things to all people. For example, a church with one meeting room overflowing with children cannot provide appropriately for a high-risk offender. In this situation the church could seek the help of another local church who may be in a better position to provide a safer environment.

Alternatively, the church may minister to an individual outside of public meetings. For example, in some situations offenders have been restricted to attendance at a particular cell group.

### **Part of a bigger package**

The help and pastoral support available in the church needs to run alongside the monitoring of the individual by police and probation. Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) exist in all areas. MAPPA places a duty on the police, the probation service and the prison authorities to assess and manage risks posed by offenders in every community in England and Wales. Similar arrangements apply elsewhere in the UK. They do this work in partnership with other agencies including health services, housing, Social Care etc. Where an offender is subject to a supervision plan it will be vital for churches to work closely with these agencies both in order to reduce risk and also to understand how the church can positively contribute to the supervision plan as well as the offender's relapse prevention or "better life" plan.

MAPPA guidance issued in 2009 by National Offender Management Service (NOMS) Public Protection Unit, Section 6.5, 'Offenders and Worship', stresses that MAPPA should work in partnership with places of worship and "that religious leaders should be provided with sufficient information to protect their congregation" Page 70. The guidance has been updated in 2012, 2014 and 2016. This guidance also says, 'Any breaches of the 'contract' with the offender must be reported to the offender/ case manager'. Therefore, it is important to contact the police/probation at an early stage and involve them in attending meetings and/or setting the contract where possible.

### **Further help and resources**

The UK has led the world in sexual offending treatment programmes. There are accredited programmes in many prisons as well as community-based services. Research shows that those who complete treatment is less likely to fantasise about children or deny they harmed their victims and are therefore less likely to re-offend. It is vital that any help provided by the church is not seen as a substitute for working with the statutory agencies. It will also be important in any contract arrangement with an offender to emphasise keeping to agreed programmes and meeting the expectations of supervising agencies. If we are to gain full co-operation from an offender it is important that the Agreement, we put in place is discussed and agreed with them, possibly asking them what they think should be helpfully included, and is proportional to the risk they pose, reflects their pattern of offending and also their needs in terms of pastoral support.

Over the years, Thirtyone:eight has pioneered work with sexual offenders in churches. This whole area is dealt with in detail in our safeguarding manual 'Safe and Secure'. It covers all the issues outlined above including working with perpetrators, and the model contract suggested between church and offender has been adopted by a number of mainstream denominations and many individual churches. We will also provide help and support in regard to individual cases which might include meeting with church leadership teams to help them deal with such issues and in some areas deliver direct training in working with sexual offenders in the church context.

Sexual offenders are not born as sexual offenders. Their sexual attraction to children developed mainly through their childhood experiences of abuse, be it emotional, physical, mental or sexual. They are typically people with low self-esteem, emotionally lonely and unable to relate deeply to adults, and who, to quote a probation officer, feel "powerless to change and hopeless". Many are full of shame for their activities, and that sense of shame may actually drive their sexual offending cycle. All of these characteristics, and more we have not mentioned, reflect what has come to be known in some Christian circles as an "orphan heart" and this gives us clues as to how we might fruitfully help them, for all of them are loved by God. The mandate for Christ's life, which we have

inherited, was to heal the broken-hearted, set captives free, bring recovery of sight to the blind (self-deceived people?), to proclaim the Lord's favour etc. (Isaiah 61).

### **Key things to take away**

A sexual offender is someone who has committed sexual offences against either children or adults. Whilst most abuse of children happens in families; it is important to realise that children of any age may be at risk of abuse by an offender who is part of your church.

Those offenders who represent a risk to children should be monitored closely and strict boundaries placed on their movements and behaviour within the church setting.

Like anyone, an offender wanting to change will need people around them who will love and accept them, offering care and protection with the assurance that God does not reject them.

Supporting offenders safely in the church is fundamental if others are to be protected from abuse. Thirtyone:eight provides training and advice on all areas of child protection and good working practice to churches, organisations and individuals across the UK as well as a 24-hour helpline service.

### **The Lucy Faithful Foundation**

A national safeguarding agency working with perpetrators of child sexual abuse.

Tel: 01527 591 922

Web: [www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk](http://www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk)

### **Circles of Support and Accountability**

A Community support system for sexual offenders

Tel: 0118 950 0068

Web: [www.circles-uk.org.uk](http://www.circles-uk.org.uk)

### **Stop It Now!**

A national campaign that aims to prevent child abuse by encouraging offenders to seek help.

Email: [help@stopitnow.org.uk](mailto:help@stopitnow.org.uk)

Web: [www.stopitnow.org.uk](http://www.stopitnow.org.uk)

# **CONTRACTS AND AGREEMENTS**

Writing and managing a contract with;

- A person who has a conviction / convictions of violence or sexual harm to children or adults
- A person who has been accused of a violent or sexual offence
- A person whose behaviour is of concern and they have ignored advice

## **Stage 1 – calling a meeting**

The person of concern needs to be invited to attend a meeting with a small group of people who may have professional expertise (police, social worker, prison officer, probation). If this is not possible, the attendees need to be people who are interested in supporting but also monitoring the person of concern. If the person is on the Sex Offenders or Violent and Sex Offenders Register, the police liaison officer can be invited to the meeting.

## **Stage 2 – church activities**

A list needs to be made of all the activities which take place in the church building and are the responsibility of the church. This will be all the mid-week groups as well as the Sunday Services, but not the meetings which are leased by outside organisations or freely given to other organisations.

## **Stage 3 – risk assessment**

Go through all the meetings and state which the person can attend (such as a concert), cannot attend at all (tea and toddlers or a social group for adults with disabilities), or can attend with supervision (worship).

## **Stage 4 – the contract**

State which groups the person cannot attend and should not be in the building. State which groups the person can attend and what the supervision arrangements are. The contract must be signed by the person and all attendees.

## **Stage 5 – review meeting**

The next meeting is arranged and there is discussion about how the terms of the contract have been adhered to, whether there have been any breaches (if so, any statutory authorities must be informed) and whether the terms of the contract need to be changed.

## **Some Examples:**

## **Scenario A**

Jack has been released from prison for a number of sexual offences against teenagers and young adults. He is on the sex offender's register. Whilst in prison he became friendly with the chaplain and now professes a faith. The church has one service on a Sunday morning with a large all age congregation. In the week, there is a youth club, a ladies bible group, a job club using computers for searching for jobs and a number of home groups. The contract stipulates that Jack must not be on the premises during the youth club night and the lady's bible group.

He is permitted to attend a specific home group where there are no under 18's or young adults in the group/household. He can attend morning worship as long as he sits in a particular place at the back of the church, and this will be within sight of one of the group members. He knows that if he leaves the service to use the toilets, he will be accompanied to the facilities. During coffee one of the groups will sit with him and ensure he does not initiate contact with any under 18's or young adults. The police are going to speak to the job club leader about the computers used for the job searches to ensure that unsuitable websites cannot be accessed.

At the review meeting, one member shared that Jack had formed a relationship with a 25-year-old young woman who is regarded as being vulnerable. The police are to be contacted to be informed of this information.

## **Scenario B**

Joanna was a nursery worker. Four months into her contract she was dismissed from her post. A three-year-old had made an allegation about inappropriate touching but the matter did not proceed due to the age of the child and potential unreliability of the verbal evidence. However, the nursery found that she had breached their protocol about the toilet routines and had frequently been taking children into the toilets alone, even those who were capable of using the toilet independently. Joanna has asked to work in the crèche at church and gave this information on her self- declaration form.

She says she is passionate about working with children and wants a chance to prove her skills. A contract meeting was arranged and decided that she cannot work with any of the children's groups and cannot attend any home group where there are children in the household. She is also barred from agreeing to babysit if asked and from joining social media as a friend with any under 18's. Joanna feels aggrieved about these rules but was reminded that nobody has a right to be a children's worker and that appointments have to be made on the grounds of suitability.

As she was dismissed from the nursery, it is likely that this would be raised as a blemish on any DBS check. The contract group meet with Joanna every six months and are trying to support her in pursuing new areas of interest and employment.

## **Scenario C**

Bill is an eighty-year-old widower. Complaints have been made at church from a number of older women about him hugging them enthusiastically without being asked and kissing them on their mouths. This has caused a couple of the women great distress. Bill has been told about this on a number of occasions, but he has said that the women like it and 'it's all political correctness'.

A small group is formed, and Bill is advised that he will be accompanied as soon as he enters church, during the 'passing of the peace' and until he leaves the building. The person with him will ensure that he does not approach any women whilst in the building. The group decides that until he can prove he is acting appropriately, he is banned from attending the midweek lunch. After a three-month period, the review will look at the contract again. Bill refuses to sign the contract at the first meeting, so his refusal is recorded.

## **Scenario D**

Carl/Carly is on probation for a violent offence when he/she was home carer. He/She was seen by the householder, stealing money from a wallet and when challenged, hit out at the resident and was dismissed from his/her post. At the contract meeting, it was decided to allow him/her to attend church services and a home group where the leader is one of the contract group. He/she was permitted to attend the luncheon club as a helper in the kitchen.

However, was told that he/she is not permitted to attend the group where young adults with learning disabilities meet to socialise and play games. Carl/Carly has no interest in attending the play group or children's groups and that is recorded in the group minutes. Carl/Carly was seen having coffee with a woman who is disabled. The pastoral worker said that Carl/Carly had offered to do some cleaning for her and that they had met in the supermarket, with Carl/Carly saying she recognised her from the church luncheon club. The police were informed about this and the liaison officer went to speak to him/her to give a warning. This made the group feel that Carl/Carly's cooperation with the terms of the contract was more superficial than first believed and so the contract was reviewed to prevent him/her being on church premises at any time other than for Sunday worship and would be accompanied throughout.

# **SOMEONE I CARE ABOUT MAY BE A SEX OFFENDER**

## **First Reactions**

If you are in this situation and you sense there may be some truth behind the allegations, you are likely to experience a range of emotions. You may also need to make decisions that will have a significant impact not only on your own life but on the lives of other family members and those close to you.

Similarly, you may be shocked by the allegations and struggle to believe they are true. You may want to know what to do to in order to prove they are untrue. You are worried about people knowing, particularly if the situation is reported in the press.

Following the initial shock, there may be a sense of outrage, bewilderment and confusion. How could this happen? This person you thought you knew may have a dark side, a secret that you knew nothing about. How could you not have known? How could this secret have been kept hidden?

You may then feel disgusted, intense anger and betrayal. How could they let you down in such a way and expose you to public humiliation? If your own children have been affected this is perhaps the most difficult situation imaginable, to think that someone you loved and trusted could have harmed them without you knowing.

It is not unusual for partners, parents or friends to feel shame and a false sense of guilt. Sometimes they will question whether they are to blame for the abuse by not adequately meeting their partner's sexual needs, but this is never the cause of the sexual abuse of children. Feelings of shame are contagious; the closer you are the more you feel affected by it. It is also not uncommon for family and/or friends to be convinced of the alleged abuser's innocence or remain in denial due to a misguided sense of loyalty.

The situation can become even more complex if, for example, a wife or mother wants to stand by her partner despite the allegations against him. It is crucial all allegations are investigated, and the truth established for the sake of everyone involved. Each situation is individual and Social Care, police liaison officers and those close to you whom you trust will be able to help determine the levels of risk and how to respond.

## **The Investigation Process**

The statutory agencies (i.e., Children's or Adult Social Care, police) have a duty to respond to an allegation of abuse. Depending on the ages of the alleged victims and the seriousness of the allegation, children and vulnerable adults, in particular, may be interviewed by a specially trained social worker and / or police officer. The person accused of the allegation may also be interviewed by the police. Following an arrest, the family may well be advised to discuss the situation on a 'need to know' basis only due to the obvious sensitivities and adverse reactions of others. This is a very difficult and stressful time because those involved have to live with some degree of uncertainty.

Partners, in particular, may feel they are in an impossible situation especially if the allegation is denied.

A natural reaction to anything that contradicts what we think we know is to dismiss or deny it. Some thoughts are just too disturbing and unpleasant to entertain, and that's one of the reasons why there is so much denial surrounding sexual abuse. 'It couldn't happen!' is a common response. Most of us prefer to live in a world that conforms to our expectations. It needs to be recognised that with regard to sexual abuse, it can and does happen – much more frequently than we would like to think. It happens in all sorts of situations; it happens to all sorts of children, and all sorts of people are perpetrators.

The caricature of the 'evil paedophile' portrayed in the media really doesn't help. If you think about it, what child will trust such a frightening character or allow someone like that to get close to them? Sex offenders are, in other respects, ordinary people just like anyone else. To acknowledge the possibility of a child we know being abused by a person we know may require us to suspend disgust, disbelief and/or an instinct to defend them. Being open to the possibility that such a thing could have happened is very hard when we are close to the person involved. However, we owe it to the child or adult to take what they are saying seriously.

#### After the investigation

The aim of an investigation is to try to determine whether abuse has actually occurred. Unfortunately, this isn't always possible. If a perpetrator admits the abuse, then this makes working with them and thereby reducing the risk of re-offending more likely to be successful. If they continue to deny the allegations, then some degree of uncertainty may remain even after the investigation has ended.

Quite often there is an absence of corroborative evidence; it is the word of the victim(s) against that of the alleged perpetrator. This is one of the main reasons many allegations of sexual abuse never reach the courts. In other situations, the matter does go to Court which can take a long time and there can be many hold-ups along the way. The whole situation can be frightening and confusing. Meanwhile, you might feel your life is on hold, waiting for the outcome.

However, even if there is insufficient evidence to proceed with a criminal prosecution, Children's Services can still take action if they consider a child is at risk of significant harm. This can include a protection plan being prepared in respect of any children involved and in the most serious situations, an application can be made to the court for a child to be placed in care.

#### **Don't rush into making decisions**

The impact of such an experience should never be underestimated. If a parent (usually a woman) discovers her partner may be guilty of abuse, she is likely to have to make some agonising decisions over what is best for the whole family. The children's immediate safety and well-being is paramount, and this could mean a period of separation from her partner. It is important she doesn't feel under pressure or rush into making decisions that are going to affect the long-term future of her family.

#### **An inconclusive outcome**

There are some cases where the outcome of an investigation is inconclusive and this presents challenges for everyone involved, the authorities, partners, parents, relatives, friends, and the church in some cases. We have said already, that those close to the alleged abuser can find it very difficult to accept the allegations of victims. This may be, in part, because they don't have all the information surrounding the allegations. They may only hear the abuser's denials and/or minimisations and the victim, whose confidentiality is protected, is not heard. When there is a court

hearing then at least the evidence is out in the open. This can help challenge an abuser's denials and help to bring some sort of closure for those affected.

A false allegation is a possibility but as allegations are generally denied anyway, proving guilt or innocence is often not possible. If doubts remain not only can this be difficult to live with but the potential risk to children or vulnerable adults remains.

### **Offering support**

If you want to continue to offer support to someone suspected/convicted of abuse your acceptance of them, whatever the outcome of the investigation, can make a real difference. The fact that you don't reject them even though you find their alleged or actual behaviour abhorrent can provide hope for the future. The allegations and the investigation will undoubtedly have a life-long impact, even when unsubstantiated. Major readjustments may need to be made and things are unlikely ever to be the same again. It is possible to support the person even when what they have done or been accused of causes you great upset.

### **Facing the consequences – keeping in contact**

The sexual abuse of children is a serious criminal offence and if convicted the person may serve a prison sentence. Sex offenders often feel lonely, isolated, and unforgivable, so contact made by, say, a pastoral carer can be a lifeline. Regular visits by family or friends can help keep valued relationships alive and make reintegration into society easier. However, pressure should not be exerted, and victims never coerced into visiting the offender. Children, in particular, are vulnerable to suggestion and might well feel that it's their fault the person is in prison.

### **Forgiveness and Restoration**

Confession and forgiveness are central themes of the Christian faith. A sincere apology can make a real difference to all those affected, though this should never be allowed to become yet another way of the offender gaining control over the people involved.

Neither does this mean that the offender will not have to live with the consequences of their actions, carrying on with their lives as though nothing had happened? However repentant they may have been, and even though they may have sought forgiveness from God and their victim(s), it does not mean that they might not re-offend when faced with the same situation. Also, it is important to bear in mind that some victims will choose not to forgive. Others may struggle to reach a place where they can forgive an offender.

Due to the addictive nature of sex offending, a judge may decide it is not safe for the person to return home because they are considered too great a risk. Equally, family members may not want the person back even if there has been an admission of guilt, a desire to change and/or put things right. Family members and others may not want any contact with the person or only on a restricted or supervised basis.

An offender may attend a rehabilitation programme which also helps the probation service assess future risk. They can feel overwhelmed at the prospect of change, particularly to their lifestyle, as what was once considered ordinary activities, such as giving lifts to children, become out of bounds. One offender, realising the gravity of what they had done stated, 'I have learnt that I have to put boundaries around myself for the rest of my life'.

### **Reintegration – Is this possible?**

It is important to recognise that churches cannot be all things to all people, but efforts can be made to ensure pastoral care is available without compromising the safety of children. On release from prison or as part of on-going supervision, churches should make contact with and act on the advice of the probation service and/or MAPPA (Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements) and if the person's name is placed on the Sex Offenders Register, they will be required to give a known address and information about community groups they join (including churches). MAPPA assesses and manages the most serious sexual and violent offenders. With the aid of these statutory agencies, a risk assessment can be carried out. In some situations, the individual can be referred to another church where, for example, there are no children and/or they can be properly supervised.

Reintegration into the family home where an offender has abused their child(ren) is rare. It sometimes happens following much work with the offender and the partner agreeing to a monitoring role, much like a police/probation officer. In any event, you, as the partner, parent or friend of the person may be in a position to help them accept any statutory supervision and other requirements. This might include limitations placed upon them in relation to contact with children, particularly in a church situation where they may need to abide by a written contract. A contract does not mean an automatic ban from church life - rather a supervised arrangement where the offender can be valued and supported.