Good Practice 4 in Safeguarding children and adults at risk
Good Practice 4th edition

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A Good Practice Handbook for use in local churches is available to all churches and both documents are supported by a number of online Appendices.

Promoting safeguarding
Preventing abuse
Protecting everyone
i) Letter from the General Secretary of the United Reformed Church

Jesus welcomed children. So does the United Reformed Church (URC). We want children to enjoy church and to learn about Jesus. We want to learn too, from their presence among us and from their faith, openness and wisdom. So we must provide a safe environment for children in which they can be secure and their families can be confident. We must treat them well and take the sort of care that will prevent harm and hurt. This document will help us to do that.

Safety matters for adults too. Indeed, some adults are particularly at risk. Illness, old age, disability and painful past experiences can all make people vulnerable. We have to treat one another carefully and church should be a place of respect, support and proper sensitivity.

Safety requires knowledge, attentiveness and commitment. This document will help us with knowledge, looking at how to prevent harm and what to do if we think someone might have been harmed. It will strengthen our commitment, because it will remind us of the reasons that safety matters. It will also keep us attentive to the people we welcome and worship with, the places where we meet and the processes we must follow if places are to be safe for the people.

Some of our most able and informed people have worked hard to produce this document and to make sure it is properly up to date. They have done this as a piece of Christian service to the United Reformed Church, to all our local churches, to the people who use our buildings and take part in our activities and to the glad and confident message of the good news of Jesus. I am very grateful for their work and commend it warmly.

So let us take seriously the knowledge shared here. Let us be attentive through the weeks and the years. Let us, as a Church, commit ourselves afresh to being a safe place, a community which can be truly seen as a witness to the trustworthiness of God.

John Proctor
Background and purpose

Background
This publication is a major update of Good Practice – Safeguarding Children and Young People in the Church 3rd edition, the United Reformed Church (URC) guidance for safeguarding, and reflects substantial developments in safeguarding over the past ten years. These include:

- changes in legislation and good practice guidelines
- the growing awareness of the need to protect adults at risk
- developments in the understanding of the prevalence of specific types of abuse (e.g. domestic abuse, Female Genital Mutilation, etc...), their impact and effective responses to them.
- the growing emphasis on safer recruitment practices and the changes to legislation and procedures relating to criminal records checks, culminating in the establishment of the current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).
- the need to recognize and respond to the risks arising from advancements in technology, particularly in relation to online communication.

Purpose and scope
The purpose of this document is to provide information about the United Reformed Church’s good practice policies and procedures for safeguarding children and adults at risk, offering model policies and proformas where appropriate.

Safeguarding is not just about reading and adopting policies and procedures. In order to make a difference, they must be put into practice and so this document also offers advice about how this can be achieved.

This edition of Good Practice is presented in three main sections:

1. Introduction to Safeguarding
2. Safeguarding Children and Young People
3. Safeguarding Adults at Risk
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Part 1
Safeguarding: an overview
Section 1
Introduction

The Societal Context

Safeguarding children

There have been numerous child death and serious case reviews in respect of children, many of which have informed current legislation and practice. The most notable of these are the Lord Laming Inquiry Report (2003) into the death of Victoria Climbié, the Bichard Inquiry Report (2004) into the deaths of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman and the report into the death of Baby Peter (2009).

Because of the recurrent themes in inquiry reports regarding a lack of communication between agencies, the Government and local authorities, schools and the wider statutory sector have sought to promote a multi-agency approach to children and families, for example through the ‘Every Child Matters’ programme. This approach is enshrined in legislation by the Children Act 2004.

- poor information sharing
- barriers to communication
- optimism over-ruling natural caution
- poor record keeping
- resistance to working together
- restrictive agency culture, values and language.

There are themes within the various reports which highlight the areas where there are lessons to be learnt, including:

- inadequate supervision of those who work with children
- lack of training

In England and Wales, the more recent government guidance ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015’ addresses interagency and multi-agency working, including the role of the faith sector in the protection of children. The National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2014 sets out similar guidance for Scotland. The emphasis on all agencies and organisations working together for the welfare and protection of children places both a duty and a responsibility on churches to co-operate with the relevant statutory agencies.

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 states that:

‘Churches, other places of worship and faith-based organisations provide a wide range of activities for children and have an important role in safeguarding children and supporting families. Like other organisations who work with children they need to have appropriate arrangements in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of children...’ (p.64)

According to Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015, such arrangements should include:

- a culture of listening to children
- clear lines of accountability for children’s activities
- a designated person at a senior level to lead on safeguarding
- clear ‘whistle-blowing’ procedures
- safer recruitment practices
- clear policy and procedures for making safeguarding referrals to other agencies and dealing with allegations against those who work with children
- appropriate training, supervision and support for all workers so that they are competent to play their part in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Recent high profile investigations, such as ‘Operation Yewtree’, have further helped to change societal attitudes towards safeguarding by heightening awareness of the scale of abuse perpetrated by public figures and others.

Safeguarding adults at risk

Churches and places of worship reflect society as a whole, with children and adults coming together to share in the services and activities taking place. Until recently, society has paid more attention to protecting children. However, our understanding of safeguarding has developed as awareness has grown of how some adults may experience abuse and neglect, whether it be in institutions, in their own homes or in the community.

Work in this area has been framed by the government guidance ‘No Secrets’ (published in 2000, amended in 2009) and by standards and guidance published by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, together with nation specific legislation, such as the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007. It is worth noting that much criminal common law already applies to adults at risk and the Mental Capacity Act 2005 makes clear that the abuse of an adult lacking mental capacity is an offence, while the Mental Health Act makes clear that the wilful neglect of someone with a mental illness is also an offence.

In 2013, the government published an updated *Statement of Government Policy on Safeguarding Adults*, which states that:

“The Government’s policy objective is to prevent and reduce the risk of significant harm to adults from abuse or other types of exploitation, whilst supporting individuals in maintaining control over their lives and in making informed choices without coercion.

The Government believes that safeguarding is everybody’s business, with communities playing a part in preventing, detecting and reporting neglect and abuse. Measures need to be in place locally to protect those least able to protect themselves.”

This statement goes on to explain that safeguarding adults should be based on the following six principles:

**Empowerment**
People being supported and encouraged to make their own decisions and informed consent.

“I am asked what I want as the outcomes from the safeguarding process and these directly inform what happens.”

**Prevention**
It is better to take action before harm occurs.

“I receive clear and simple information about what abuse is, how to recognise the signs and what I can do to seek help.”

**Proportionality**
The least intrusive response appropriate to the risk presented.

“I am sure that the professionals will work in my interests, as I see them, and they will only get involved as much as needed.”

**Protection**
Support and representation for those in greatest need.

“I get help and support to report abuse and neglect. I get help so that I am able to take part in the safeguarding process to the extent to which I want.”

**Partnership**
Local solutions through services working with their communities.
Communities have a part to play in preventing, detecting and reporting neglect and abuse.

“I know that staff treat any personal and sensitive information in confidence, only sharing what is helpful and necessary. I am confident that professionals will work together and with me to get the best result for me.”

**Accountability**
Accountability and transparency in delivering safeguarding.

“I understand the role of everyone involved in my life and so do they.”
The aim is to enable adults at risk to retain as much independence and choice as possible, whilst ensuring that they can live a life free from harm and abuse. Safeguards against poor practice, harm and abuse need to be an integral part of the provision of care and support for adults at risk.

More recently, the Care Act 2014 has helped to further raise the profile of safeguarding adults at risk. For the first time, it has established a clear statutory basis for local Safeguarding Adults Boards, helping to protect adults at risk. It also puts an onus on organisations to inform the statutory authorities of any relevant information relating to adults at risk.

“Workers need to be vigilant to adult safeguarding concerns in all walks of life: in health and social care, welfare, policing, banking, and trading standards, leisure services, faith groups, and housing. Findings from Serious Case Reviews have sometimes stated that if professionals or other staff had acted upon their concerns or sought more information, death or serious harm might have been prevented.” 4

Cultural diversity and safeguarding

In the context of growing diversity as our reality, we need to emphasise that behind every person is a long journey and that a significant part of this involves their culture. As cultural beings, cultural influences largely shape everything we do, including the ways we both understand and respond to what it means to be vulnerable. Therefore, it is important to deepen our cultural awareness and competence so that our policies can be implemented most effectively. (See Appendix D: Sample church equalities policy statement)

Care should be taken not to simply judge other people’s beliefs and behaviours according to the standards of one’s own culture and to avoid stereotyping people on the grounds of cultural affiliation, grouping or background. However, it is also important to remember that all cultures represented in the UK are subject to the laws of the land, including the legislation which governs our safeguarding policy and procedures. For example, while some parents’ culturally conditioned understanding of disciplining children might include hitting them with an implement, such an action would still constitute physical abuse of a child and would be a safeguarding concern which required action. Equally, if culturally conditioned negative attitudes towards people with mental illness is evident and adults with mental illness are being neglected or harmed as a result, this would also constitute a safeguarding concern requiring action.

The need for safeguarding policy and procedures

Safeguarding – a whole Church responsibility

Safeguarding in the United Reformed Church (URC) is underpinned by Jesus’ command to his followers to “love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34–35). Above all, the Church aspires to be a loving community, offering a welcoming environment in which people can flourish, safe from harm. It is important to note that this does not preclude challenge and conflict within the Church. Jesus challenged injustice. Therefore, all those who profess to follow Jesus Christ

4. Department of Health, Care and Support Statutory Guidance Issued under the Care Act 2014 § 14.30 p.198
continue to have a collective responsibility to share in the privilege of upholding the rights of the least powerful and protecting the most vulnerable in society as an expression of the love of God.

It is a sad fact that it has been necessary to legislate to ensure that people’s basic human rights are met, but a vital move nonetheless. Despite such necessity, however, formal procedures will not in themselves protect children and adults at risk. In this document, the URC seeks to go beyond the minimum safeguarding requirements of statute and to foster best practice as an expression of God’s loving concern for all.

Central to this is the view of safeguarding as being everyone’s responsibility. The whole Church community needs to be aware of the dangers and be prepared to report concerns, taking action where necessary, ensuring a culture of informed vigilance rather than the opposite extremes of complacency and paranoia. A collective approach to safeguarding will encourage every local church and every individual member to play their part in:

- creating and maintaining a safe environment for all, especially children and adults at risk, in which the dignity of each person is respected
- being informed about different forms of abuse and harassment and how to respond appropriately, making it clear that they are all unacceptable
- taking seriously any concerns, allegations or complaints of abuse and harassment, responding to them promptly, including reporting concerns to and cooperating with the relevant statutory authorities
- caring for those who have been abused in the past
- offering pastoral support to people in the church who have been accused of abuse and those who are being investigated
- ministering wisely and providing supervision and support to those who have been perpetrators of abuse
- providing opportunities for all to flourish and journey towards healing

The challenge for the Church is helpfully summarised in the following statement:

The challenge to the [C]hurch is to seek to develop a community of care so that children [and adults at risk] find in the church a safe community, survivors find in the church a healing community, the accused find in the church a supportive community and abusers find in the church a redeeming community. This will be the distinctive nature of the church – that it works seriously at what it means to love in a broken world and that it works seriously at being a community that is truly inclusive.’

**Charity Commission requirements**

Every church has charitable status and therefore falls under the regulatory direction of the Charity Commission. The serving elders and minister in each church (or serving members of the church Council or governing body) are charity trustees and have what the Charity Commission term as ‘primary responsibility’ for safeguarding in their church. This includes a duty to ensure compliance with legislation, policy and procedures.

The Charity Commission have developed a safeguarding strategy and state the duty of charity trustees as follows:

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5. Adapted from Safe To Grow, sixth edition, 2011, Baptist Union of Great Britain
“Trustees of charities which work with vulnerable groups and children have a duty of care to their charity which will include taking the necessary steps to safeguard and take responsibility for those children and adults. They must always act in their best interests and ensure they take all reasonable steps to prevent any harm to them. Trustees also have duties to manage risk and protect the reputation and assets of the charity.

It is therefore vital that trustees assess the risks that arise from the charity’s activities and operations involving children and adults at risk and put in place appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures to protect them. They must also undertake ongoing monitoring to ensure that these safeguards are being effectively implemented in practice.”

The Charity Commission makes clear that having safeguards in place not only protects and promotes the welfare of children and adults at risk, but also enhances the confidence of trustees, staff, volunteers, parents/carers and the general public in the charity, protecting its reputation and helping it to fulfil its mission. Negative perception or experience of Church, local or otherwise, would, of course, be counterproductive to the crucial aim of encouraging all in their journey of faith.

Insurance requirements

Although insurance companies differ in their requirements, there is generally a requirement to take reasonable steps to ensure that children and adults at risk are safeguarded. Insurers will require churches to follow legal, government, Charity Commission and internal guidelines. If these steps have not been taken, it is possible that insurance policies could become invalid and that churches and even individual trustees could become liable for losses incurred. The key to avoiding any such risk is to ensure compliance with legislation and guidance. Churches should contact their own insurer for details about their particular requirements.

In summary, churches must therefore have appropriate policies, guidelines and procedures in place:

- to ensure that they meet their duty of care to children and adults at risk and that they do what they can to protect them from harm
- to protect the reputation of the Church (local and wider)
- to comply with insurance requirements and protect church finances

Section 2
Definitions

Terms relating to children

At the outset it is helpful to set out the definitions of some key terms used in this document.

Child
For the purposes of this policy, a “child” is defined as anyone under the age of 18. 7

Child abuse
“A form 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 others (e.g. via the internet). They may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children.” 8

More detailed definitions of different types of abuse are provided in Section 10: Child Abuse.

Harm and significant harm
Harm means ill-treatment or the impairment of health or development, including impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. Harm is the damage.

7. This is in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and UK legislation – the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. Please note that “the fact that a child has reached 16 years of age, is living independently or is in further education, is a member of the armed forces, is in hospital or in custody in the secure estate, does not change his/her status or entitlements to services or protection.” (H. M. Government, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015, p.92)
the individual experiences from abuse, neglect, bullying and/or harassment, and can be experienced simultaneously from more than one type of abuse.

Significant harm is the threshold which justifies compulsory intervention in family life by the local authority, in the best interests of children. Local authorities have a duty to make enquiries and take action to safeguard or promote the welfare of a child who is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm. The Human Rights Act dictates that it also has to be proved that intervention in family life is both proportionate and necessary.

Significant harm has no precise legal definition. The ‘harm test’ can be satisfied by a single traumatic event or by a cluster of smaller incidents over time. Any concern about significant harm requires careful investigation and assessment by the local authority.

Safeguarding children

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is more all encompassing than child protection, and is preventative as well as reactive. It is defined as:

- ‘protecting children from maltreatment
- preventing impairment of children’s health or development
- ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and
- taking action to enable all children to have the best chances in life’.  

Child protection

Child protection is

“part of safeguarding and promoting welfare. This refers to the activity that is undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm.”

Terms relating to adults

Adult

For the purposes of this document, an adult is defined as anyone over 18 years of age, whilst acknowledging that, for certain purposes, Scots law treats 16 and 17 year olds as adults.

Adult at risk

The term ‘adult at risk’ is increasingly used by professionals involved in safeguarding adults, replacing the previous term ‘vulnerable adults’. The term ‘adult at risk’ will therefore be used in this document.

9. Section 31(9) of the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Adoption and Children Act 2002
10. Section 47 Children Act 1989
The definition in England and Wales:
In the context of the Care Act 2014, specific adult safeguarding duties apply to any adult who:
- has care and support needs and
- is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect and
- is unable to protect themselves because of their care and support needs.

Safeguarding duties apply regardless of whether a person’s care and support needs are being met, whether by the local authority or anyone else. They also apply to people who pay for their own care and support services.

An adult with care and support needs may be:
- an older person
- a person with a physical disability, a learning difficulty or a sensory impairment
- someone with mental health needs, including dementia or a personality disorder
- a person with a long-term health condition
- someone who misuses substances or alcohol to the extent that it affects their ability to manage day-to-day living.

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list.

People with care and support needs are not inherently vulnerable, but they may come to be at risk of abuse or neglect at any point due to:
- physical or mental ill-health
- becoming disabled
- getting older
- not having support networks
- inappropriate accommodation
- financial circumstances or
- being socially isolated.

The government definition in Scotland (applicable to individuals aged 16 or over):
"Adults who are unable to safeguard their own well being, property, rights or other interests, are at risk of harm, and because they are affected by disability, mental disorder, illness or physical or mental infirmity, are more vulnerable to being harmed than adults who are not so affected."

An adult is at risk if another person’s conduct is causing (or is likely to cause) the adult to be harmed, or the adult is engaging (or is likely to engage) in conduct which causes (or is likely to cause) self-harm."

A general definition for use in this document:
‘Any adult … who, due to disability, mental function, age, or illness or traumatic circumstances, may not be able to take care or protect themselves against the risk of significant harm, abuse, bullying, harassment, mistreatment or exploitation.’

Adult abuse
‘Abuse is about the misuse of the power and control that one person has over another. In determining whether or not abuse has taken place, it is important to remember that intent is not the issue. The definition of abuse is based not on whether the perpetrator intended harm to be caused but rather on whether harm was caused, and on the impact of the harm (or risk of harm) on the individual. Failing to act to prevent harm being caused to a person you have responsibility for, or acting in a way that results in harm to a person who legitimately relies on you, both constitute abuse.’

Such abuse can take many forms. More detailed definitions of different types of adult abuse are provided in Part 3 – Safeguarding Adults at Risk.

Safeguarding adults
Safeguarding adults incorporates the concept of prevention, empowerment and protection to enable adults to retain independence, well being and choice, and to ensure that they can access the support necessary to live a life free from harm and abuse.
General terms

Worker
A person who is appointed by the church to work with children or adults at risk on behalf of the church, on a paid or voluntary basis.

Safeguarding Coordinator*
A person appointed by the local church to take the lead on safeguarding matters. The role includes:

- being an advocate for safeguarding within the church
- coordinating the church safeguarding policy and procedures
- ensuring that workers have received the appropriate safeguarding training
- being the first point of contact in the church for safeguarding issues, responding appropriately to concerns, liaising with the Synod Safeguarding Officer and cooperating with the relevant statutory authorities.

*Other titles used for this role within the URC have included Safeguarding Link Person or Safeguarding Officer.

Synod Safeguarding Officer
A person appointed by a Synod to take the lead in safeguarding matters. The role includes:

- being an advocate for safeguarding within the Synod
- coordinating Synod safeguarding policy and procedures
- being the first point of contact in the Synod for safeguarding issues, responding appropriately to concerns, liaising with the Assembly Safeguarding Officer and cooperating with the relevant statutory authorities
- advising and supporting local churches in responding effectively to safeguarding issues.

Assembly Safeguarding Officer
The person appointed to work at national level to develop, manage and implement the URC’s safeguarding policies and provide support to URC synods in responding to concerns and conforming to best practice in their work with children and adults at risk.

Charity trustees
Those people responsible for the general management and administration of a charity. In the URC, this typically involves the elders of a local church, the board of trustees for each Synod Trust and the directors of the URC Trust.
Section 3
Safeguarding Policy Statement

Statement of Safeguarding Principles

The United Reformed Church (URC) accepts the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that these rights are inherent to all human beings, irrespective of their nationality, place of residence, gender, national or ethnic origin, race, religion, language or any other status.

The URC agrees that children’s rights require special protection and that steps should be taken to ‘protect children 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’.


Sadly, the reality can be very different from this mandate and it is therefore important to raise awareness, through policies and procedures, of the issues as well as actions required to ensure that our churches are as safe as possible.

Therefore, the URC is committed to:

- the care and nurture of all children and adults at risk
- the safeguarding and protection of all children and adults at risk
- the establishment of a loving environment which is safe and caring, but where there is an informed vigilance about the dangers of abuse
- building constructive links with voluntary and statutory agencies
Statement of Intent

The URC will:

- recognise that the welfare of the child is paramount and that the priority is always to act in their best interests
- follow legislation, statutory guidance and recognised good practice
- champion safer recruitment principles for all those working with children or adults at risk within the Church, whether paid or volunteers
- offer suitable safeguarding training for relevant staff and volunteers
- respond without delay to every complaint which suggests that a child or adult has been harmed or is at risk of harm
- co-operate with the police, LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer), Children's and Adult Services in any investigation
- work with those who have suffered abuse, offering appropriate pastoral support where possible
- challenge any abuse of power, especially where it involves someone in a position of trust
- offer pastoral care and support to those known to pose a risk to children and adults including supervision and referral to the appropriate agencies
- ensure that safeguarding matters are reported quarterly to the Assembly Safeguarding Officer, Safeguarding Advisory Group, URC trustees or Synod trustees as appropriate
- review safeguarding policy and procedures annually in light of lessons learned from safeguarding cases and changes in legislation, statutory guidance or good working practice. Any policy changes should be formally approved by the Assembly Safeguarding Officer, Safeguarding Advisory Group, URC trustees or Synod trustees as appropriate.

Discussion of Statement of Intent

The URC expects that local churches will:

Recognise that the welfare of the child is paramount and that the priority is always to act in their best interests
This may involve a difficult balancing of need between those at risk and those who pose a risk. However, as is the case in law, in this instance the welfare of the child should always be the paramount consideration.

Follow legislation, statutory guidance and recognised good practice
To assist local churches, Assembly and Synod staff will seek to provide up to date information on statutory guidance, legislation and good working practice to safeguard children and adults at risk. We will also seek to share lessons learned from serious incidents that have occurred in both secular and faith communities.

Carefully recruit all those with any responsibility within the Church
Safer recruitment guidance is set out in detail in Section 6 Safer Recruitment. It must be remembered that local churches should follow the full safer recruitment process and not merely rely on criminal records checks; someone whose check is clear may still be unsuitable to work with children and/or adults at risk.
It is the policy of the URC that all those who regularly work with children or adults at risk and who are eligible to have an Enhanced Disclosure should have one, whilst anyone undertaking Regulated Activity must have an Enhanced Disclosure plus Barring List check. A detailed description of eligibility for DBS checks (or PVG checks in Scotland) can be found in Section 7 Criminal Record Checks.

Ensure the relevant people undertake regular safeguarding training
All those working with children and adults at risk, as well as those responsible for their care, need to know how to work in a way which promotes the welfare of those in their care and reduces the likelihood of harm. They also need to know how to respond effectively to concerns or allegations of abuse. As these situations do not arise on a regular basis, it is important that safeguarding training is refreshed every three years, in order to remain confident about how to respond and also to keep up to date with good practice.

Synod Safeguarding Officers can provide information about local training.

Respond without delay to every complaint which suggests that a child or adult at risk has been harmed or is at risk of harm
A church, through its workers and members, has a duty of care in the church building, on other church property, and on any other premises being used for church activities. Responsibility extends to travel between places when this is organised by a church. A church is not responsible, however, for private arrangements made by parents.

The term ‘complaint’ can cover an allegation, disclosure or statement and can be verbal or in writing. If verbal, it needs to be recorded in writing. In both cases, it must be acted upon. Appropriate ways to respond are explained in Section 11 Responding to safeguarding concerns relating to children.

Co-operate with the police, Children’s and Adult Services in any investigation
This means that churches will share all relevant information in their possession and follow multi-agency decisions. It is important to maintain confidentiality, sharing sensitive and personal information only on a ‘need to know’ basis i.e. with individuals and agencies that have a responsibility for the reporting of, or decision making about, a particular safeguarding case. See Section 5 Confidentiality and information sharing for more information.

Work with those who have suffered abuse, offering appropriate pastoral support
Churches should not investigate allegations of abuse, but should instead refer allegations to the appropriate statutory agencies. If it emerges that a child has suffered abuse, church officers will notify the appropriate authorities to ensure that the matter is on record and is able to be investigated. Reporting abuse of adults at risk is more complex and expert guidance should therefore be sought.

Support will be offered to survivors of abuse and adult survivors will be encouraged to make a statement to the police if they have not previously done so. For further information, see Appendix S: A guide to supporting children and adults who have been sexually abused.

Challenge any abuse of power, especially where anyone is in a position of trust
Power is present in all relationships. We therefore have the important duty of exercising that power wisely. It has been said that the responsible use of power is the ultimate challenge of leadership. It is not only ordained ministers and elders who hold positions of power and authority in the Church; many do! Even those who do not have specific roles can be invested with trust and power by children and adults at risk.
Allegations of abuse or misconduct by paid or voluntary staff, lay or ordained, will be taken very seriously. The Synod Safeguarding Officer should be made aware and can offer advice and support. All concerns relating to a staff member’s conduct with children must be referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and the police, where appropriate. Where concerns relate to an adult at risk, wherever possible, these should be shared with Adult Social Care Services / the police with the adult’s consent. However, whether or not consent is given, if others may also be at risk if nothing is done, and/or sharing information may prevent crimes from being committed, then the information should be shared.

More details about dealing with allegations can be found in Section 12 Managing allegations against those working with children and Part 3: Safeguarding Adults at Risk.

**Offer support and supervision to those known to pose a risk to children and adults**

In order to manage any risk to children and adults, churches will put the necessary safeguards in place, including a contract of agreement regarding church attendance for anyone posing a risk. Breach of this agreement, or other concerns, may lead to a referral to the statutory agencies.

It is recognised that those who pose a risk may themselves be vulnerable and we therefore consider it crucial that pastoral care is offered and/or signposting to more formal avenues of support, such as counselling and accountability through the statutory agencies. More information can be found in Section 13 Managing and supporting those who pose a risk of harm to children and Part 3: Safeguarding Adults at Risk.

**Appropriately update those responsible for safeguarding**

In order that local church trustees can fulfil their duty of overseeing good safeguarding practice, the church Safeguarding Coordinator should keep them regularly updated about any significant church safeguarding matters. Such updating needs to take account of guidance given in Section 5 about information sharing being governed by a ‘need to know’ basis. For more details about reporting, see both Section 4 Division of responsibility for safeguarding and Section 5 Confidentiality and information sharing.

**Review safeguarding policy and procedures annually**

Local church Safeguarding Coordinators should ensure that their safeguarding policy and procedures are reviewed annually. Any changes to the policy should be formally approved by the church trustees.
Section 4
Division of responsibility for safeguarding

Local Church

Personnel
Each church must appoint a Safeguarding Coordinator for children and adults at risk. A deputy should also be appointed if possible. These individuals should have knowledge of the specific requirements of safeguarding children and / or adults at risk and be willing to attend appropriate training for the role, including refresher training. See Appendix A2: The role of a church safeguarding coordinator for a role description.

It may not be possible to find a single person who is willing and able to perform both the safeguarding children and safeguarding adult roles. In this case, separate Safeguarding Coordinators should be appointed for children and adults at risk, with deputies if possible. Churches can consider appointing one Coordinator for a group of churches. It is useful to display a poster detailing who to contact and a list of helpful phone numbers. See Appendix B: Sample church safeguarding poster.

It is important that churches notify the Synod Safeguarding Officer of the name and contact details of their Safeguarding Coordinator(s) and deputy Safeguarding Coordinator(s).

Even if a church does not currently have children or adults at risk attending, Safeguarding Coordinators should still be appointed. Churches should be prepared for the possibility that at any point in the future, children or adults at risk could attend and so good safeguarding practice needs to be in place.
Training
The Safeguarding Coordinator(s) should ensure that the relevant people have undergone safeguarding training as recommended by the United Reformed Church (URC) and that the training is renewed every three years. URC Safeguarding training is run by the Synod Safeguarding Officers and covers all aspects of good practice.

Policy and procedures
Each church should adopt policies and procedures for safeguarding children and adults at risk which are suitable for people to work with. Appendix A: Sample church safeguarding policy provides a sample safeguarding policy for local churches. This should be made readily available to anyone who wishes to see it. Each policy should be reviewed and updated on an annual basis by the eldership team. A safeguarding policy statement should be prominently displayed in the church, summarising the principles and intent of the policy. Appendix A1: Safeguarding policy statement provides a sample safeguarding policy statement.

Under the sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969, a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP) can opt to use the safeguarding policies of any member denomination involved in the LEP. However, an LEP should avoid switching arbitrarily between denominational safeguarding policies and systems. They should also inform their Synod Safeguarding Officer which denominational policy and procedures they have decided to follow.

Reviewing and reporting
The Safeguarding Coordinator of each local URC should report regularly to the eldership or church Council. This should include a summary of any safeguarding concerns which have arisen in the period (minus any identifying details), the action taken in each situation, any lessons learned, and any implications for review of safeguarding policy and procedures. Any other significant safeguarding matters should also be noted. On an ongoing basis, the church Safeguarding Coordinator should also report any serious safeguarding situations to the Synod Safeguarding Officer as well as the Charity Commission.

An annual review of safeguarding policy and procedures should take place in light of changes to church activities or premises, lessons learned from previous safeguarding situations and developments in legislation, good practice guidance, etc... The safeguarding policy should be updated accordingly and approved by the elders.

An annual safeguarding form should also be completed and returned to the Synod as part of the annual returns process. This will assist the Synod Safeguarding Officer in providing suitable support and guidance to local churches. For a copy of an annual safeguarding form, and to see the information required to fill one in, refer to Appendix H: Annual safeguarding returns form.

Synods

Personnel
Each Synod should appoint a Synod Safeguarding Officer to be responsible for leading on Synod safeguarding matters, as well as advising and supporting local churches on safeguarding. They will also disseminate good safeguarding practice information and share lessons to be learnt from statutory and faith sector reviews.

It may not be possible for the Synod to find someone who is willing and able to take on the roles of Safeguarding Officer for both children and adults at risk. If this is the case, the Synod should appoint two different people, each with suitable knowledge and skills to fulfil their particular role.

Synod Safeguarding Officers should attend annual safeguarding training, together with specialist training where necessary. A sample role description for a Synod Safeguarding Officer is provided in Appendix O: Sample synod safeguarding officer job description.
It is recommended that all Synods have Indemnity Insurance to cover the Synod Trustees for potential claims made against them, including claims arising from the actions of their Safeguarding Officer, providing they have acted legally and responsibly.

Training
Each Synod should offer regular safeguarding training for church workers and those responsible for the care of children and/or adults at risk. This may be delivered by the Synod Safeguarding Officer or by a separate trainer. It is the responsibility of the Synod Safeguarding Officer to provide further details about training available in their Synod.

Policies and procedures
Each Synod should adopt policies and procedures for safeguarding children and adults at risk during Synod activities. These should be reviewed, updated and approved annually by the Synod trustees.

Reviewing and reporting
In order that Synods can effectively support local churches in safeguarding, an annual safeguarding return (see Appendix H: Annual safeguarding returns form) should be requested from each local church. This could be sent together with the annual church returns form.

An annual safeguarding report should be made by the Synod Safeguarding Officer to the Synod trustees summarising any safeguarding concerns which have arisen from Synod events (minus any identifying details), actions taken in each case, any lessons learned, and any implications for review of safeguarding policy and procedures. The report should also give a summary of the annual safeguarding return information provided by local churches as well as detail the safeguarding training and support provided by the Synod.

A copy of the report should be given to the Assembly Safeguarding Officer so that the URC as a whole can review the church’s commitment to safeguarding children and adults at risk and provide suitable support and guidance to Synods and local churches.

Synod Safeguarding Officers should also provide the Assembly Safeguarding Officer with a brief quarterly report detailing any serious safeguarding situations within their Synod so that the Assembly Safeguarding Officer can maintain an overview.
General Assembly

Personnel
General Assembly will appoint an Assembly level Safeguarding Officer to advise on all matters of safeguarding within the URC.

As part of their role, they will provide support to URC Assembly staff and Synod staff in helping local churches with serious safeguarding situations as well as helping them conform to best practice.

They will work ecumenically, particularly through the Christian Forum for Safeguarding (CFS), and will ensure that the church’s views are represented in the wider field of safeguarding, including appropriate government departments.

Training
The Assembly Safeguarding Officer will ensure that the URC has an effective safeguarding training programme in place to equip Assembly staff, Synod staff, church workers and those responsible for the care of children and/or adults at risk.

Policies and procedures
The Assembly Safeguarding Officer will develop, manage and implement the URC’s safeguarding policies in accordance with legal requirements and best practice.

Reviewing and reporting
Each Synod Safeguarding Officer will provide a brief quarterly safeguarding report to the Assembly Safeguarding Officer, who will then report to the Safeguarding Advisory Group and the URC trustees.

Safeguarding Advisory Group
General Assembly has appointed a Safeguarding Advisory Group to work to the following remit:

1. to oversee the development of policy and the implementation of Good Practice across the Church in the safeguarding of children, young people and adults at risk, making recommendations to Mission Council as appropriate
2. to ensure that Good Practice documents are updated as appropriate
3. to develop systems for monitoring local church and synod compliance with Good Practice and to devise strategies for addressing identified weaknesses
4. to foster collaboration with ecumenical partners across the full range of safeguarding issues, including engagement in the development of public policy
5. to oversee the service which the URC receives from external safeguarding providers and other relevant agencies
Section 5
Confidentiality and information sharing

Confidentiality and information sharing

Privacy and confidentiality is governed by legal provisions that aim to safeguard personal information, particularly:

- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Data Protection Act 1998

However, in England, Wales and Scotland, legislation and statutory guidance makes clear that information about a person will sometimes need to be shared without consent for the purpose of safeguarding the welfare of a child or an adult at risk.

Nothing in the Data Protection legislation seeks to limit the appropriate disclosure of information in order to protect an individual who either is, or may be, at risk of harm. What matters is that the process of information sharing is carried out appropriately. Similarly, Human Rights law recognises that there must be a balance between the risks and advantages of various courses of action. So, although Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights gives people a right to privacy, interference with that right is permitted in certain circumstances.

It is necessary to show proportionality when information is shared i.e. that a fair balance has been struck between the individual rights of the person and the relevant justification. Workers must, therefore, decide whether sharing information is a necessary and proportionate response to the need
to protect the individual in question. The decision making process must weigh up what might happen if the information is shared against what might happen if it is not shared. Information sharing should be limited to those who need to know. If in doubt, advice should be sought from the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

When information is shared, a record should be made of when it was shared, with whom, in what form, for what purpose and whether it was disclosed with or without informed consent. Similarly, any decision not to share information should also be recorded.

It is important to note that Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) have shown how poor information sharing has contributed to the serious injury and, indeed, deaths of children.

**Information sharing without consent**

Sharing confidential information without consent will normally be justified in the public interest when:

- there is evidence or reasonable cause to believe that a child is suffering, or is at risk of suffering, significant harm
- there is evidence or reasonable cause to believe that an adult is suffering, or is at risk of suffering, serious harm
- it could prevent significant harm to a child or serious harm to an adult
- to seek consent would prejudice the prevention, detection or prosecution of a serious crime
- to seek consent would lead to an unjustified delay in making enquiries about allegations of significant harm to a child or serious harm to an adult.

**Sharing information on a ‘need to know’ basis**

It is important to maintain confidentiality, sharing sensitive and personal information only on a ‘need to know’ basis (i.e. with individuals and agencies who have a responsibility for the reporting of, or decision making about, a particular safeguarding situation).

For a local church, such people would ordinarily include:

- the church Safeguarding Coordinator
- the church minister or interim moderator
- the Synod Safeguarding Officer
- the statutory agencies to whom a safeguarding referral is being made (e.g. Children’s or Adult Services, the police, etc...). Churches should share all relevant information in their possession and follow multi-agency decisions.

For a Synod or Assembly event, this would ordinarily include:

- the person appointed to act as Safeguarding Officer for the event
- the Synod or Assembly Safeguarding Officer
- the Synod Moderator or the URC General Secretary
- the statutory agencies to whom a safeguarding referral is being made (e.g. children’s or adult services, the police, etc...). The Synod should share all relevant information in their possession and follow multi-agency decisions.
Decisions about whether others need to be informed (e.g. parents/carers of children or adults at risk, etc...) would be made by those managing the case and on a strictly ‘need to know’ basis. There may well be situations where they should not be told.

The whole eldership of a local URC, or the trustees of a Synod or Assembly, might still be informed that a safeguarding case is being dealt with and the actions being taken, without divulging confidential details of the case, such as the people involved or the precise nature of the issue.

**Gillick competence and Fraser guidelines**

Gillick competency and Fraser guidelines refer to a legal case which looked specifically at whether or not doctors should be able to give contraceptive advice or treatment to under 16 year olds without parental consent. Since then, they have been more widely used to help assess whether a child has the maturity to make their own decisions and to understand the implications of those decisions.

A child who is able to understand and make their own decisions, is able to give or refuse consent to share information. Every case should be assessed to gauge a child’s understanding of consent, explaining the information to the child, in a way which is suitable for their age and likely understanding, using their preferred method of communication.

Capacity to give consent is a ‘functional test’ and is not dependent on age. Generally, children over 12 may be expected to have sufficient understanding. However, this can vary; Younger children may have enough understanding whilst some older children may not. When assessing children for sufficient understanding, workers should consider whether or not the child has a reasonable understanding of what information might be shared, the main reason(s) for sharing it and the implications of sharing or not sharing the information. Workers should address whether or not a child can:

- appreciate and consider the alternative courses of action open to them
- weigh up one aspect of the situation against another
- express a clear personal view on the matter, as distinct from repeating what someone else thinks they should do and;
- be reasonably consistent in their view on the matter

It is important to remember that regardless of whether or not consent is obtained, concerns about a child being harmed, or being at risk of harm, should be passed on to the relevant person without delay.
Record Keeping

As part of their duty of care, churches have a responsibility to appropriately manage both their paper and electronic records. Paper records should be stored securely on church premises, as opposed to private homes. Confidential, sensitive or important records should be stored in locked filing cabinets or safes and must be disposed of in a secure manner (e.g. shredding, etc...).

Electronic records should be managed in the same way as paper records. Churches should use a well organised filing system containing appropriate procedures for retention and disposal of records (see table below). Document titles should be understandable and include the date of creation. It is also helpful to include this title and creation date within the document itself to help identify printed copies of the document. Emails are also electronic records which need to be managed appropriately and, as such, any filing system used for this type of communication must also have appropriate procedures for retention and disposal (see table below).

A regular backup system should also be in place for all electronic records. This should be stored separately from the computer. It is difficult to guarantee long-term access to electronic files and so the URC recommends that any records or emails that need to be kept for longer than ten years are printed and kept as paper records.

Record Retention Periods

Records must be kept only if they are required for operational, legal and historical purposes. When records are no longer required for any of these purposes, they should be destroyed in an appropriate manner. The URC advises the following retention periods:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of record</th>
<th>How long to keep it for before destroying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Photocopies of DBS Disclosures</td>
<td>These can, in theory, be kept indefinitely with the applicant’s permission, but it is better to keep a record of the date of issue, the applicant’s name, the type of certificate requested, the position for which the certificate was requested, the reference number and details of the recruitment decision made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Records relating to safeguarding concerns about children, young people or adults at risk</td>
<td>These should be kept for 75 years following the date when the concern is raised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Records relating to a safeguarding-related allegation (concerning a child or adult at risk) against a member of staff/volunteer, including where the allegation is unfounded</td>
<td>These should be kept for 75 years following the date when the allegation is made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract of agreement with an offender / alleged offender</td>
<td>This should be kept for 75 years following the date when the contract is signed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Records of children’s activities and events (e.g. registers, risk assessments, consent forms, health &amp; safety records, etc...)</td>
<td>These should be kept for 25 years after the date of the activity/event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accident reports</td>
<td>Reports of an adult’s accident should be kept for three years. Reports of a child’s accident should be kept until the child is 21 years old.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unlike the majority of other records, a church’s archives should be preserved indefinitely as they hold great value for legal, historical or research purposes. The URC advises all churches to contact their Synod Safeguarding Officer for more details on how to transfer their archival records to their local public records office whilst maintaining ownership and/or access as appropriate.

For information about record keeping for children’s activities, please see Section 8 Standards of good working practice with children.

**Top Tips**

Remember:

- that the Data Protection Act is not a barrier to sharing information. It provides a framework to ensure that personal information about living persons is shared appropriately
- to be open and honest with the person (and/or their family where appropriate) from the outset about why, what, how and with whom information will, or could, be shared
- to seek advice if you are in any doubt, without disclosing the identity of the person where possible
- to share with consent where appropriate. Do not seek consent if doing so would increase risk
- to ensure that the information you share is necessary for the purpose for which you are sharing it, is shared only with those people who need to have it, is accurate and up to date, is shared in a timely fashion and is shared securely
- to keep a record of your decision and the reasons for it, whether it is decided to share information or not. If you decide to share, then record what you have shared, with whom and for what purpose. If you decide not to share, then record why. Records should demonstrate how the process has been managed. Keeping a chronology of events can be very useful in this respect.

*Appendix T: A guide to confidentiality and data protection* includes a sample confidentiality agreement which workers can be asked to sign.
Section 6
Safer recruitment

Context

Most people working with children or adults at risk are dedicated individuals who want the very best for those in their care. Only a minority of individuals work with children or adults in order to harm them. It is important that this is understood, whilst at the same time acknowledging that there will be people who pose a real risk to children and adults at risk. For this reason, operating safer recruitment procedures is an essential element of our safeguarding arrangements, as those who do pose a risk do not often stand out. The procedures apply to both paid and volunteer staff because it is their engagement and contact with children and adults at risk which is significant.

No-one has an automatic right to work with children or adults at risk. Operating a safer recruitment policy sends a powerful message to parents, children and visitors as well as those intent on causing harm, that safeguarding children and adults is taken seriously.

As explained in Section 1 – Introduction, all churches are charities and fall under the regulatory control of the Charity Commission. The Commission requires that charities prevent harm to the beneficiaries of the charity ‘through sound recruitment and safe programming’ and that ‘the recruitment methods of staff, volunteers and trustees should be sufficiently robust and appropriately reviewed’.
Safer recruitment process

Safer recruitment is a framework which uses a range of measures to both deter and prevent unsuitable individuals from working (either paid or unpaid) with children and/or adults at risk. Mistakenly, some believe that carrying out a Disclosure and Barring Service check (DBS/PVG check) is all that is needed when recruiting workers. It can be tempting for churches to take short cuts when people are willing to help out, are a familiar face or there are gaps in the rota. However, it is important to be aware that a DBS/PVG check is only one part of a safer recruitment process that helps to prevent unsuitable or dangerous individuals gaining access to children and adults at risk.

The safer recruitment process includes:
- providing a job description and person specification
- completing an application form
- a self-declaration of criminal history
- a face-to-face interview
- checking references
- completing a DBS/PVG check
- a trial period

This is supplemented by the applicant’s agreement to abide by the United Reformed Church (URC) Safeguarding Policy and a commitment to undertaking regular safeguarding training.

Before the filling of a position, paid or voluntary, takes place, it is important to have worked out:
- the role and responsibilities (job description or role profile)
- skills and qualities needed (person specification)
- where and how the position will be advertised (e.g. church notices/news bulletin, local paper, etc...)
- the level and nature of contact with children and adults at risk and whether the work required meets the definition of ‘regulated activity’ (current or past). If it does, then the applicant would be eligible for a DBS/PVG check, either with or without the barred list check.

Job description and person specification

A clear and up to date job description containing duties, role and responsibilities for work with children or adults at risk should be produced.

A person specification detailing experience, knowledge and/or qualifications required, as well as details of the support and training that will be provided, should be given to every applicant and be role specific.

Alongside these details, each job description should make clear the duties expected of the post-holder regarding contact with and responsibility for children or adults at risk and what level of supervision will be provided for these duties. This process will help determine if the role includes ‘regulated activity’ and the eligibility for a DBS/PVG check.
Advertisements
As a matter of good practice, all positions working with children or adults at risk should be advertised. Whether this is in the local church newsletter, on the church notice board or in the local paper, advertising assists you to gain the greatest number of possible applicants. As well as a brief description of the role, the advertisement must also state the church’s commitment to safeguarding and the need to complete DBS/PVG check. It is also helpful to state the closing date for applications and the dates agreed for short-listing and/or interview where this is appropriate.

Candidate Information Packs
The Candidate Information Pack is one of the first chances to present a good impression to potential applicants. It is also the primary opportunity to provide applicants with all of the information they require to submit an application that which could result in the person being shortlisted for interview. At the very least, the pack should include:

- a covering letter to the candidate
- information about the church or organisation
- a safeguarding Policy Statement
- a job description/role profile and person specification
- an application form
- a recruitment timetable, including the closing date for applications and interview date(s).

Application Forms
It is good practice to use a standard application form because it ensures everybody provides the information which is needed to make a good recruitment decision. Inviting CVs should be avoided as these may leave out certain necessary items of information and do not allow for easy comparison between candidates.

The application form should contain the applicant’s:

- full name, previous names or aliases
- current address
- education and employment history
- contact details for two referees (not family members)
- supporting statement containing the reasons for applying for the position, personal qualities and experience relevant to the post (which should normally reflect the criteria in the job description/role profile and person specification).

In addition, there should be a declaration that all the information provided by the applicant is true and that they agree to a DBS/PVG check should they be successful at interview. This should be signed and dated by the applicant.

The form can be a good source of information and offers a first impression of candidates who are not well known to you. Gaps and inconsistencies are also useful as they can direct the development of questions at interview.

Appendix L: Sample volunteer application form is a sample application form for a voluntary post and Appendix K: Sample paid worker application form is a sample form for a paid post.
Self-declaration Form
A self-declaration form which includes agreement to a DBS/PVG check should also be completed and signed by the applicant for all positions working with children and adults at risk. Appendix N: Sample self declaration form is a sample of such a form. The form requests details of any police warnings, reprimands, cautions, convictions, bind-overs or other causes for concern such as investigations made by the police, Children’s Services or relevant regulatory bodies. This information is likely to be revealed in a DBS/PVG check later on if it is relevant to the position applied for, so the applicant’s willingness to declare it beforehand is an indication of their honesty and integrity (this may be particularly important if the decision to appoint is a borderline one). It also means the process can be halted at an early stage if the applicant is unsuitable (e.g. if they have applied to work with children or adults at risk despite being barred from doing so, which is a criminal offence).

A statement detailing how the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act applies to this information must also be included, stating that roles involving work with children are exempt and all criminal information must be declared, subject to those who qualify for the DBS/PVG filtering rules.18 A statement informing the applicant that a criminal record does not necessarily prevent them from being appointed should also be given.

In order to maintain confidentiality and to ensure a fair and transparent process, the self-declaration form should be separate from the application form and returned in a separate envelope to the person making the recruitment decision. It should not be opened before the decision to interview has taken place.

Shortlisting
The short-listing panel should consist of at least two people who should meet to undertake the task together. Anyone who does not meet the essential requirements of the person specification should not be short-listed for interview.

If there are a number of applicants each application should be scrutinised by the short-listing panel to ensure that the information provided is consistent, does not contain discrepancies and to identify any gaps in employment.

Any applications which are significantly incomplete should not be accepted or short-listed. Any anomalies, discrepancies or gaps in employment identified by the scrutiny should be taken into account in considering whether to short-list the applicant.

Assessing Candidate Information
Following the above checks, each application that is received should then be assessed in relation to whether the required criteria have been demonstrably met by the applicant in their application form. This may not be all of the criteria from the person specification, but should include the key criteria identified on the person specification as being essential.

All candidates should be assessed equally against the same criteria without exception or variation and agreement reached by the short-listing panel about which applicants to invite for interview.

At this stage of the process, specific questions arising from the information supplied in the application form, self-declaration and references (if obtained prior to interview) can be developed for specific candidates where this is believed to be necessary in addition to the standard questions to be asked of all candidates.

Invitations to Interview

This is an important part of the process which should be used to inform the candidate about the interview process, including additional forms of assessment which will be used, whether children or adults at risk will play a part in the process or not and where the interview is to take place.

References

References are a crucial part of the safer recruitment process. They are an important part of gathering information about the applicant which can provide useful insights into their experience, attitudes, motivation and character. It is good practice to take up references for all shortlisted candidates before interview so that the information supplied can be addressed in interview if necessary and form part of the recruitment decision. If references are to be taken up before interview or offering the post, the candidate’s permission should be sought. It is worth remembering that a candidate may legitimately prefer that an existing employer is not approached before he/she has resigned.

Two references should be requested and ideally one should be from their current employer (or previous employer if they are not currently working). References should not be from family members. The reference should be requested using a standard template where possible so that the same information is gathered about each candidate being interviewed. The job description/role profile and person specification should also accompany the reference request. It is important that the referees are asked whether or not they are aware of anything that might give rise to concern about the candidates’ suitability. For roles working with children or adults at risk, they should be asked about the applicant’s commitment to good practice in safeguarding. Any information given can be compared with information provided by the applicant.

Where a reference is sought from an employer, it should be completed by a manager or human resources officer rather than a colleague. References may be followed up with a telephone call to confirm the referees’ identity and content of the reference supplied. A telephone conversation with the referee can also clarify any discrepancies or queries and provide an opportunity to thank them for their time.

See Appendix M: Sample reference request form for a sample reference request letter.

The Interview

The interview should generally be conducted by at least two people with leadership or supervisory responsibilities within the church/organisation, one of whom will supervise the person who is appointed. It is good practice for anyone undertaking interviewing to have some training/knowledge in interviewing skills.

The applicant may well be feeling nervous and it will benefit them if the first question is one that relaxes them.
Developing & Asking Questions
Your questions at interview should relate specifically to the tasks of the position and broadly reflect in the criteria from the person specification. You may however, ask additional questions about a candidate (e.g. their experience, detail that they have given on the application form, information provided by a referee relevant to the position applied for, etc...). It is important to remember that the interview is an opportunity to get the best from people rather than to catch them out or be overly complicated. It is also essential to ask specific questions about the candidate’s attitude towards, and understanding of, safeguarding and their motivation for working with children and adults at risk. These questions will help to gain an impression of the candidate’s values and attitudes and whether they have the resilience for working with people in the setting required.

It is also helpful for the interview panel to have an idea about the responses they are looking for with regards to set questions as these could help the panel with their decision making. This method can also be used to assess the candidates’ attitude towards, beliefs about and values held on children or adults at risk.

Making Confident Recruitment Decisions
A decision as to whether or not to appoint a candidate should be based on ALL of the information gathered (i.e. their experiences, ability, suitability and their motives for wanting to work with children and adults at risk, etc...). Decisions should not be based on external factors such as the urgency of need or the immediate availability of the applicant. Assessment of the candidate should begin before interview in order that the interview time is used to arrive at a decision to appoint the candidate who gains the greatest level of confidence and whom the panel feel has the greatest ability to work for the church/organisation in question.

If there are legitimate concerns about a candidate that you have not been able to resolve at interview, it is best not to appoint. This minimises the risk to children or adults at risk.

Registrations, Qualifications and Right to Work
Some posts may require an individual to be registered with a professional body or hold certain qualifications. You will need to verify this prior to any offer of appointment.

You should also check a person’s entitlement to work in the UK. This is important as employers knowingly appointing illegal migrant workers can be liable for penalties of up to £10,00019.

Conditional Offers
When a decision is made about to whom the position will be offered to, any offer made should be conditional upon receipt of satisfactory DBS /PVG check, references (if not already obtained) and any other outstanding checks. The candidate should satisfactorily complete a specified probationary period before confirmation of permanent employment (see detail below).

19. For further information see: www.businesslink.gov.uk/bdotg/action/detail?ItemId=1073791948&type=RESOURCES
Criminal records check (DBS/PVG)

Once a decision has been made and a conditional offer of employment has been given, a criminal records check must be carried out if the post is eligible for such a check. The check will reveal any information held on central police databases such as cautions, convictions, reprimands, warnings, bind-overs and where the applicant is applying to work in ‘Regulated Activity’ their inclusion on government lists that bar an individual from working with children or adults at risk.

For more information, see Section 7: Criminal Record Checks.

Written Contract/Agreement

It is a legal requirement for paid workers to have a formal employment contract which contains the terms and conditions of employment.

Volunteers should be given information about their role in writing and the tasks they are expected to undertake.

Line Management

It is important that every employee has an identified line manager, e.g. an individual who will fulfil the role of managing that employee, e.g.: ensuring performance and conduct meet required standards, managing sickness, booking leave, conducting annual appraisals etc.

Probationary / Induction Period

When a worker is appointed, it is beneficial for both the worker and the church/organisation to have a probationary period (usually 3-6 months). During this time the church will provide relevant training and policies (e.g. safeguarding, code of conduct, disciplinary and grievances, etc...) and arrange support for the worker, including regular meetings with a supervisor to discuss how the job/role is going and to make any necessary adjustments. The probationary period also allows the church/organisation to assess the worker’s performance.

At the end of this period the recruiter should confirm the worker’s position in writing unless, of course, they have proven to be unsuitable, in which case the worker will be dismissed.

Volunteers

Every parent, carer or family member has the right to expect the same standards of recruitment and professionalism irrespective of whether an individual is paid or works voluntarily. The Charity Commission requires safer recruitment for volunteers as well as paid staff. Not doing so could, therefore, could invalidate the Churches insurance and potentially incur personal financial liability for elders and ministers. It is therefore important to be rigorous in selecting volunteers.

A potential volunteer’s willingness to complete any necessary forms, undertake interviews, etc, shows that they take safeguarding seriously and enables the church to show that the potential volunteer is valued as a person, not to mention the service which they offer. Generally people will not be put off by paperwork where its importance can be shown. Remember that most voluntary organisations require people to complete application forms, give referees and have
some form of interview, so people usually expect such a process. Robust safer recruitment practices will deter and prevent many who are unsuitable from applying in the first place.

Churches must be satisfied that all appropriate checks have been made and that they have done everything possible to deter and prevent unsuitable candidates from applying and working with children or adults at risk.

Checklist for Safer Recruitment/Selection

It is helpful to have a clear process in mind when embarking upon a recruitment process and for the recruiting person to have a good idea about the position and what sort of people may be appropriate to fill the position. Make sure:

- there is a written job description/role profile and person specification for the position
- the position is advertised
- those applying have completed a standard application form and a self declaration form
- written references have been obtained and followed up
- candidates have been interviewed
- safeguarding has been discussed at interview
- qualifications have been verified
- a criminal records application form has been completed
- a suitable induction training programme is provided
- the applicant has been given a copy of the church/organisation safeguarding policy and knows how to report concerns
- a probationary period has been agreed
- safeguarding training has been attended

Candidates should not commence work until the recruitment process has been fully completed (including the receipt of all checks and references). This will reduce the risk of exposing children and adults who may be vulnerable to potential harm as well as the embarrassment of having to remove someone from a position of work if they prove unsuitable. It also reduces the risk of committing an offence by ‘knowingly’ employing someone whose name is on either of the barred lists.
Section 7
Criminal records checks

DBS Checks
In England and Wales, criminal records checks are called Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks, previously known as Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks. In Scotland, they are called Protecting Vulnerable Groups Scheme (PVG) checks.

What is a DBS check?
A DBS check enables the United Reformed Church (URC) to check the criminal records of workers and potential workers in order to ascertain whether or not they are suitable to work with children and/or adults at risk.

There are three types of DBS check:
A Standard Disclosure contains any information held on the Police National Computer
An Enhanced Disclosure contains any information held on the Police National Computer as well as local police information.
An Enhanced Disclosure plus Barred List check contains any information held on the Police National Computer, local police information and whether the applicant is on the barred list in respect of work with children, adults at risk or both.

Which church roles require a DBS check?
The URC advises that DBS checks should always be carried out for any role which is eligible for such checks, as part of a Safer Recruitment process. In order to identify which roles are eligible for a DBS check, it is important to first be clear about what each role entails. This is best achieved by producing a written job description including reference to:

- the type of work
- the frequency and period of time over which the work will be done
- if and how the work will be supervised

DBS eligibility for those who work with children
For roles which fall within ‘Regulated Activity’ an Enhanced DBS plus Barred List check must be carried out. It is a criminal offence to appoint someone to such a role if they are on the Barred List. In local churches, such roles would typically include:

- any role which involves teaching, supervising or providing advice and guidance to children on a frequent (weekly) basis (e.g. leaders of weekly children's and youth groups, etc...)
- any role which involves teaching, supervising or providing advice and guidance to children intensively (at least four days in a 30 day period) (e.g. leaders at a children's holiday club lasting four days or more, etc...)
- any role which involves supervision of children overnight, irrespective of how many nights or how often (e.g. leaders staying overnight at a residential event, etc...)
- any role which includes personal care of children on account of their illness, disability or age irrespective of how often this takes place (e.g. leaders helping children with eating, drinking, toileting, washing, bathing, dressing, etc...)
- those who drive children as part of their church role weekly, four or more days in a 30 day period, or overnight (e.g. someone who has been asked by the church to transport children to and from a church activity, etc...)
- on church premises used for Ofsted registered childcare, any role which gives opportunity for unsupervised contact with children during childcare (e.g. church office worker or caretaker in a building where toilets are shared with the children, etc...)
- any role which includes the management or supervision of the above regulated activity

Supervised workers
In most church activities volunteers tend to work as co-workers rather than one supervising the other. Therefore, the above list assumes that the roles are not supervised at all times by a senior worker. The URC's definition of supervision covers situations where the person being supervised is in sight of the supervisor at all times. If one of the above roles is supervised in this way, it no longer falls within the current definition of Regulated Activity, but it is still eligible for an Enhanced DBS check without a barred list check.
Regular, but less frequent work
Those who work in the above roles on a regular basis, but less often than every week, are still eligible for an Enhanced DBS check without a barred list check. For example, leaders on a monthly rota for a children’s activity.

Helpers who are under 18
The lowest age at which someone can apply for a DBS check is 16 years old. However, workers under 18 years old should be supervised at all times by an adult and therefore should never be engaged in Regulated Activity and so will not require an Enhanced DBS plus Barred List check. However, if 16 or 17 year olds are doing one of the roles in the above list under supervision, then they are eligible for a DBS Enhanced check without a Barred List check.

Activities in which parents/carers are present (such as parent / carer and toddler groups, messy church, etc)
Any roles which are solely about working with the parents, providing refreshments or providing administrative support are not eligible for a DBS check. If the role of the worker does not involve supervision or personal care of children they do not require a DBS check, but the leader in charge of the group and their deputy should have an Enhanced DBS check without a Barred List check.

If the role of the worker includes supervision or personal care of the children (for example, while parents do other things) then an Enhanced DBS check plus Barred List would be required for the worker (unless supervised at all times, in which case a Barred List check would not be required), as well as for the leader in charge of the group and their deputy.

DBS eligibility for those working with adults at risk
The definition of Regulated Activity is simpler for work with adults at risk. An individual is carrying out ‘Regulated Activity’ relating to adults only when engaging in:

- healthcare for adults provided by, or under the direction or supervision of, a regulated health care professional
- personal care for adults involving hands-on physical assistance with washing and dressing, eating, drinking and toileting. This includes prompting and supervising an adult with any of these tasks on account of their age, illness or disability. This also includes teaching someone to do any of these tasks
- social work – provision by a social care worker of social work which is required in connection with any health services or social services
- assistance with an adult’s financial transactions, money handling, bills or shopping on account of their age, illness or disability arranged via a third party
- assisting in the conduct of an adult’s own affairs under a formal appointment
- conveying adults for reasons of age, illness or disability to, from, or between places where they receive healthcare, personal care or social work arranged via a third party

Even if workers only engage in these activities once, it is still considered ‘Regulated Activity’.

A person whose role includes day to day management or supervision of any person who is engaging in Regulated Activity, is also working in ‘Regulated Activity’. ‘Regulated Activity’ excludes any activity carried out in the course of family relationships or private arrangements made outside of a church role (for example, between friends).
Within a church setting, ‘Regulated Activity’ with adults is likely to be limited to a small number of church roles where the person is involved, as part of their church role, in:

- helping with washing, dressing, eating, drinking, toileting or teaching someone to do one of these tasks
- helping with a person’s financial transactions, bills or shopping on account of their age, illness or disability. Posting letters for a housebound person is not ‘Regulated Activity’, but taking money from them to pay for postage is ‘Regulated Activity’.
- driving someone (on account of their age, illness or disability) to/from places in order to receive health, personal or social care

For roles involving the above activities, an Enhanced DBS plus Barred List check must be carried out. It is a criminal offence to appoint someone to such a role if they are on the Barred List.

For other church roles in which a worker has a significant level of involvement with adults at risk, an Enhanced DBS check without a Barred List check should be carried out as a matter of good practice.

How does a church carry out a DBS check?

The following describes the URC’s process for administering DBS checks at the time of publication. Please note that these guidelines are subject to change so please check the Safeguarding pages of the URC website for current information.

DBS application forms for URC workers are available directly from our DBS service provider (please check the Safeguarding page of the URC website for details). DBS checks are free of charge for volunteers, but there is a charge for paid staff.

The applicant completes the relevant sections of the DBS form and gives it to the church verifier, along with documentary evidence of their identity, to be checked. The church verifier completes the necessary forms and returns them directly to our DBS service provider (please check the Safeguarding page of the URC website for details). For detailed guidance on the process, consult the service provider’s website.

Since June 2013, the DBS online Update Service has been available. This reduces the need for a person to submit multiple DBS applications for different organisations. If a worker subscribes to this service, then they may not need to complete further DBS applications in future for posts within the same workforce (i.e. the child or adult workforce). Ideally, this should be done at the same time as completing a DBS application form, using their unique DBS form reference number (though it can be done within 19 days of the issue of a DBS certificate).

If a worker has already subscribed to the DBS online Update Service, then the church can check the current status of their disclosure online at www.gov.uk/dbs-update-service. More detailed guidance about the online Update Service is available on the DBS website: www.gov.uk/dbs-update-service.

How often should DBS checks be renewed for URC workers?

At least every 5 years.
How does a church check the suitability of overseas visitors?

People who are not British citizens cannot be DBS checked using the United Kingdom system. Some countries will provide a police check of some sort to declare if the person has any criminal convictions and these should be carried out if available. However, DBS checks are only a small part of safeguarding procedures. The rest of the safer recruitment process (see Section 6: Safer Recruitment) is possible whatever the applicant’s nationality.

Who can be the DBS verifier in a church?

The church secretary of each local church is automatically on the list of approved verifiers. The church can ask for additional persons to be added to this list by completing and returning the form which is available via the safeguarding section of the URC’s website.

Blemished Disclosures

It is important for churches to be clear about the procedure for dealing with concerns resulting from information revealed through a DBS check (known as a blemished disclosure). Following the introduction of the Single Certificate, a copy of the disclosure check no longer goes to the organisation that are either recruiting or renewing a disclosure check.

The URC’s policy is that applicants should show their blemished disclosure to the church verifier and the verifier should then send a copy of the disclosure to our service provider. The service provider will gather further information from the applicant and liaise with the Assembly Safeguarding Officer who will conduct a risk assessment regarding the safety of the appointment. Old, minor, unrelated and irrelevant offences will not prohibit people who are otherwise suitable to work with children/adults at risk from doing so. While not being complacent about risk, the URC understands that people are capable of reform. Our commitment to equality of opportunity, which includes information about our approach to employing anyone with a criminal conviction, can be found in Appendix D: Sample church equalities policy statement.

However, this opportunity to, potentially, make an appointment, subject to certain conditions, does not apply to anyone who has been convicted for any number of offences against a child or adult described by the DBS as ‘Relevant Offences’ (see DBS website for details). Anyone who has committed a ‘Relevant Offence’ will have been ‘barred’ from working with either children or adults at risk (or both) in ‘Regulated Activity’ and they will have been notified of their barred status. An individual who is barred and seeks employment (paid or unpaid) in ‘Regulated Activity’ is committing a criminal offence. An employer who ‘knowingly’ seeks to appoint an individual who is barred from working in Regulated Activity from which they have been barred is also committing a criminal offence. Both offences are punishable by a £5000 fine and/or 5 years imprisonment.

Because of the addictive nature of sexual offending, it is the policy of the URC that all those with convictions of a sexual nature against children/adults at risk (considered ‘Relevant Offences’) will not be placed in any position of responsibility which puts them in contact with these groups.
Filtering of criminal record information

*For those over 18 at the time of the offence*

An adult conviction will be removed from a DBS certificate if:

- 11 years have lapsed since the date of conviction and
- it is the person's only offence and
- it did not result in a custodial sentence

An adult caution will be removed after six years have elapsed since the date of caution.

*For those under 18 at the time of the offence*

- five and a half years have lapsed since the date of conviction and
- it is the person's only offence and
- it did not result in a custodial sentence

A caution will be removed after two years have elapsed since the date of caution.

There is a 31 page list of offences that will never be filtered off a DBS disclosure certificate (listed on the DBS website). These include sexual and violent offences towards both children and adults. The preceding information therefore only applies if the offence is not on this list.

Secure storage, handling, use, retention and disposal of DBS certificates and certificate information

The DBS code of practice requires that all registered bodies must have a written policy on the correct handling and safekeeping of DBS certificate information. It also obliges those registered bodies to ensure that any body or individual, on whose behalf they are countersigning applications, has a written policy in place. A sample policy can be found on the DBS website: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)
PVG Checks

The Protecting Vulnerable Groups Scheme (PVG) is a membership scheme which is managed and delivered by Disclosure Scotland, an executive agency of the Scottish Government. Please see [www.disclosurescotland.co.uk](http://www.disclosurescotland.co.uk) for further information.

Providing that someone is not barred from working with children and/or adults at risk (known as ‘protected adults’ in Scotland), and that any vetting information (e.g. convictions, cautions, etc) does not have a bearing on their suitability to do regulated work, they will be eligible to join the PVG Scheme.

All PVG Scheme Members are subject to ongoing monitoring (continuous updating). This means that, when an individual is a PVG Scheme Member, their vetting information is kept up to date and if there is new information about them, this will be assessed to determine if they are unsuitable to do regulated work with children and/or adults at risk. This reduces the need for PVG Scheme Members to complete a detailed application form every time a disclosure check is required.

Types of check
For work with children and adults at risk an enhanced disclosure is required. A basic disclosure is available, but does not meet the requirements for work with these groups.

Eligibility for PVG checks
The criterion for eligibility for a PVG check for those working with children and young people is that the person in question is ‘responsible’ for children and young people. It is recommended that those working with children and young people more regularly than monthly or who are not always working alongside someone who is the ‘responsible’ person should apply for a PVG check.

For those working with adults, please refer to Schedule 3 of the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007. ([www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk))

How does a church carry out a PVG check?
Application forms for a PVG check are available from our service provider in the same way as DBS forms for England and Wales.

How often should PVG checks be renewed for URC workers?
At least every 5 years.

Who can be the PVG verifier in a church?
The church secretary of each local church is automatically on the list of approved verifiers. The church can ask for additional persons to be added to this list by completing and returning the form which is available via the safeguarding section of the URC’s website.
Part 2
Safeguarding Children
Section 8
Good working practice with children

Introduction

The Children Act 2004 (England) and the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 & 2004 place a duty on organisations involved in providing services for children to safeguard and promote their well being. There are similar expectations in other parts of the UK. This duty of care is in part exercised through the development of respectful and caring relationships, but also by workers taking all reasonable steps to ensure the safety and well being of those in their care. This legislation has informed best practice across the voluntary sector, including the church.

In addition, under Health and Safety at Work legislation, organisations have a duty of care to provide a healthy and safe workplace for employees and to carry out an assessment of risk for each employee and their activities in order to develop a safer working environment and safer working practices.

Therefore, in this section, good working practices are described which will help workers to plan and run safe activities which develop and maintain healthy relationships with children.

These good working practices are applicable to all activities organised by the church for children, both on and off church premises. Such activities include:
• regular groups run by the church on church premises. (e.g. junior church, Pilots, Fellowship of the United Reformed Church Youth (FURY) groups, uniformed groups, after school clubs, youth clubs, etc.)
• regular groups for children run by the church which take place on other premises, including someone’s home
• visiting children in their homes
• occasional events for children, such as holiday clubs and outings
• residential events for children, such as youth camps
• other work amongst children offered by the church, including mentoring, detached youth work, etc...
• groups which include adults and children when there are children attending without adult supervision (e.g. a mixed age choir, music or drama group, etc...)

Please note that the above list is not exhaustive.

For activities in which all children present are being supervised by their own parents/carers (e.g. parent & toddler groups, Messy Church, etc...), most of the following standards of good practice will still apply, with the exception of those relating to levels of supervision and parental consent.

The duty of care leaders hold towards children begins behind the scenes with good planning and careful thought about the prevention of accidents. Having done this, the aforementioned duty of care finds expression in healthy, nurturing relationships within the group. The rest of this chapter examines the key areas of:

• prevention of accidents – maintaining safe premises, managing activities safely and making sure these are adequately insured
• people – providing adequate supervision, promoting healthy relationships (including appropriate use of physical contact) and responding to challenging behaviour
• paper trails – information, consent and record keeping to help leaders exercise their duty of care
• particular types of activity – specific considerations for some types of activity

There is obviously overlap between these sections and, as such, they should not be taken in isolation.

Preventing Harm

Health & safety matters

Churches have a moral responsibility to provide a safe environment for their staff, their volunteers and all who use the building. Particular considerations apply when some of the users are children. Consequently, churches should take reasonable measures and precautions to minimise the chance of people getting hurt. Taking care of children involves taking responsibility for their well being at all times, being prepared for unforeseen eventualities, anticipating situations where they could be harmed and taking reasonable steps to minimise risks. This needs to be balanced with helping children to understand the reality of risks in life. This requires giving children the opportunity to take positive risks in a supportive environment.
See the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) website for advice on forming a health and safety policy: [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)

**General Safety**

- ensuring all rooms used for activities with children are fit for purpose
- undertaking a safety check before use, including toilet areas
- checking all equipment regularly, especially electrical and activity equipment
- keeping an attendance list of all adults and children
- ensuring that no unauthorised person can gain access
- ensuring that younger children cannot leave the building on their own
- ensuring that older children cannot leave the building unchecked
- identifying visitors before allowing them access
- making sure children know who their leaders are and their names
- ensuring that children leave with someone who has parental responsibility or parental permission to collect them, unless children have parental permission to make their own way home

Make sure parents and carers are clear about when the responsibility for the care of their children returns to them following junior church or other children’s activities.

**Fire Safety**

Duties include:

- checking that the building complies with fire safety regulations and guidelines. Include in your checks equipment, exits, regulations and signs, making sure they are clearly visible to all
- appointing designated people to be fire marshals and ensure they are properly trained
- making sure that all users of the building are aware of emergency procedures
- organising regular safety drills and testing of fire safety equipment
- keeping accurate records of all checks, drills and tests

**First Aid**

**Be ready** – provide an adequately and appropriately equipped first aid box which is clearly located and recognisable. Where possible ensure that there is at least one trained first-aider on the premises. Ensure a list of trained first aiders is readily accessible and that all leaders understand where the responsibility for administering first aid lies.

**Respond** – call an ambulance if necessary. First aid should be administered in view of others, if at all possible, although the child's welfare should be the paramount consideration. When giving first aid, the worker should explain to the recipient what they are doing and encourage the child or young person to do what they can for themselves while giving appropriate help where necessary.

**Record** – make sure that accidents are recorded in the recommended accident book, obtainable from the HSE. Follow the procedure for storing information outlined in the book to ensure confidentiality is maintained. Visit the Health and Safety Executive website to obtain a first aid book.²⁰


Restock – notify the person responsible for keeping the first aid kit fully stocked if any of its contents have been used.

Review – notify the person responsible for health and safety in the church of any accidents so that they can consider if any action needs to be taken to improve health and safety.

Food and drink safety and hygiene
The Food Standards Agency (FSA) provides up to date information on all matters relating to food supplied outside domestic and family settings: [www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk).

The FSA provides advice and information on legal requirements regarding food prepared and served as part of church activities, the need for a Basic food Hygiene Certificate and advice on good practice in food preparation, handling, storage and disposal of waste. This is especially relevant for residential and camp contexts.

If food and drink are provided during an activity, follow practical considerations as advised by the FSA.

There may be a requirement for certain activities, where food is supplied, to register with the local authority. For further advice on this, look at ‘Community and charity food provision guidance’ on the FSA website.

Travel and transport
Transport arrangements to or from church activities are the responsibility of parents if they make informal arrangements amongst themselves. However, if someone organises travel arrangements for children on behalf of the church, then they assume responsibility for following good practice as outlined below. A risk assessment should be carried out for travel arrangements as well as the rest of the event. Details of travel arrangements should be included with the consent form for the activity/event and it should be clearly understood by all concerned at which point responsibility for the child is passed from parents/carers to the church and at which point responsibility is returned to parents/carers.

Other important matters include:

**Sensible drivers** – the church should check the credentials of prospective drivers including viewing their full drivers licence. Minibus drivers must have passed a MIDAS test (unless they have D1 on their licence).

**Safe vehicles** – the church should satisfy itself that vehicles to be used are roadworthy and fitted with seatbelts for each passenger. Drivers have a legal responsibility to ensure that seat belts are used by children in their car and that appropriate car seats or booster cushions are used by younger children.

**Suitable insurance cover** – drivers should have appropriate insurance cover for any driving they do on behalf of the church. Drivers should check with their insurance company to make sure that they are covered.
Supervision – there should be adequate supervision in cars (ideally one driver and one additional worker), minibuses and coaches (one driver, additional workers in line with minimum adult/child ratios for offsite activities). Where possible, workers should avoid giving lifts to children alone. There may be occasions where a child or young person requires transport in an emergency situation and/or where not giving a lift could place a child at risk. Such circumstances should always be recorded and reported to the person in charge of the church’s work with children as well as parents/carers. If a worker has to be alone in a car with a child or young person, they should ensure that another leader is aware of the situation and the reasons for it. Drivers should not spend unnecessary time alone in a vehicle with a child and children should travel in the back seat of the car.

Stops – for longer journeys, stops should be carefully planned, including allowing time for head counts. Contingency plans should be made in case of breakdown or other emergency.

Standard Permit (formerly known as a Section 19 permit) – if people are contributing to the cost of transport by minibus, then the transport provider requires a permit from your local authority. For more details, contact the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) on permits@vosa.gov.uk or call 0300 123 9000.

Risk Assessment
Leaders of activities for children have a key part to play in risk assessment. They must assess any hazards associated with their group activities and take appropriate measures to minimise or manage the risk of harm. In the risk assessment, it is important to take into account:

- the type of activities
- the space being used
- the nature of the children in the group
- the amount of supervision available

A risk assessment should be carried out:

- annually for regular groups/activities and kept up to date
- for unusual activities which present additional risks
- for activities away from the usual meeting place, including travel arrangements and checking the credentials of instructors for specialised activities
- if the space used changes significantly

Such risk assessments should be carried out in writing in order to share findings with other workers, pass on to those responsible for the maintenance and safety of premises and to make the process easier next time around. Such risk assessments should be kept as evidence that reasonable steps have been taken to ensure the safety of all involved.

It is advisable to appoint someone specifically responsible for completing risk assessments and liaising with the person(s) in the church responsible for health and safety. However, it is worthwhile for the team of children and youth workers in a church to contribute to this process. Involving children in a risk assessment activity can also be a fruitful way to help raise their awareness of health and safety, not just for themselves, but also for other people who use the church building.
How to Carry Out a Risk Assessment
The five steps suggested by the Health and Safety Executive require risk assessments to:

- identify hazards
- decide who might be harmed and how
- evaluate risk and decide what precautions need to be put in place. The level of risk arises from the likelihood that someone will be harmed by a hazard together with the severity of harm which would be caused. The levels of risk may vary for different groups of people
- record findings on a risk assessment form (Appendix J: Sample risk assessment form).
- be reviewed and updated

Further information about risk assessments is provided in Appendix I: A guide to risk assessment.

Insurance
Insurance cover is required to protect property, staff, volunteers and participants against the risks associated with all activities. The level of cover must be adequate and should be reviewed annually.

Satisfactory arrangements should always be made to ensure that all participants are covered by insurance in the event of an accident or incident. The type of cover required will vary for different activities, but might require, for example:

- Public and Employer’s Liability
- personal accident cover for staff (paid and unpaid), other adults and children
- additional cover for specialised high risk activities (mountaineering, etc)
- cover for damage or loss of equipment (whether owned or hired)
- compensation against cancellation or delay of travel
- compensation for loss of baggage, personal effects and money
- legal assistance in the recovery of claims
- additional cover for international trips, including medical insurance

Contact your insurance provider for advice to ensure that sufficient cover is in place. Insurance policies require signatories to take all reasonable steps to prevent injury, loss or damage occurring. Failure to take such precautions may invalidate the insurance cover.

General Assembly
United Reformed Church (URC) insurance is in place for Assembly appointed staff to organise and lead nationally arranged events.

Synods
The URC insurance mentioned above does not cover synod or local area events. Synods require their own insurance.
Local Churches

All local churches should have their own insurance cover. Most church policies cover standard events for children for public liability. However, if the event involves higher risk activities, such as outward bound activities (e.g. rock-climbing, water sports, etc...), the church should check with their insurance company whether additional insurance is required. A local church can usually extend its cover to include an event if it is not already covered, though there may be an additional premium to pay.

Any insurance company can be approached to request a quote for insurance for one-off events. However, it is usually cheaper for the church’s insurance company to extend cover rather than for the church to use another insurance company.

It is the event organiser’s responsibility to ensure that adequate insurance is in place by:

- consulting the church Secretary/Treasurer regarding the existing church insurance policy
- adding any additional cost to the budget for the event
- completing a written risk assessment for the event and taking all reasonable steps to follow good practice guidance in order to prevent injury, loss or damage
- checking that other organisations involved, as well as travel/transport companies, also have adequate insurance in place on their part
- making sure the insurers have all the event details
- notifying the insurance company immediately of any incident or allegation which may result in a claim

Please note that insurance matters can be very complex. The guidelines above are designed only to assist you in understanding the general issues. No responsibility is assumed by the URC for individual insurance matters.

Hire of premises to other users

Many local churches allow other organisations to use their premises. Local churches should promote good practice by requiring any such organisations working with children to abide by the organisation’s safeguarding policy (if they have one), or to abide by the church’s own safeguarding policy, a copy of which should be made available.

When hiring out the church premises or providing space to groups/organisations whose work involves children, we recommend that the following clause is included in any letting agreement:

*The hiring body is required to ensure that children and adults are protected at all times by taking all reasonable steps and by having any necessary insurance in place. The hiring body should abide by their own safeguarding policy, if they have one, or by that of the church.*

It would be useful to add wording which leads them to sign to say that they either have a policy or are prepared to abide by the church’s policy. For instance:

*I have read and understand the policy of ________________ church regarding the safeguarding of children and will implement it."

*or*

*I have in place a similar safeguarding policy (attached). I agree that whilst using these premises, the principles of this policy will be upheld.*
It is important that churches see the organisation’s policy rather than simply accepting that one exists, as it may be necessary, should the organisation’s policy prove inadequate, to discuss the need for them to adopt the church’s policy. This offers a better solution than cancelling the let altogether.

If the hiring body is required to register with OFSTED (e.g. nursery, pre-school, out of school hours childcare, etc...) then the church should ask to see the registration certificate and record that it has been seen.

People

Supervision of activities for children
There must be a sufficient number of adults for the numbers of children to ensure the safety and well being of everyone in the group.

Adult – child minimum ratios
The minimum number of adults leading a group should be two. These ratios for adults to children are based on those recommended by the ‘Safe Network’ (a government initiated network offering advice on good practice for voluntary sector organisations working with children) but with age groups slightly adjusted to those more often used in churches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 2 years</td>
<td>1 member of staff to 3 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 3 years</td>
<td>1 member of staff to 4 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 to 7 years</td>
<td>1 member of staff to 6 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 to 11 years</td>
<td>1 member of staff to 8 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 to 18 years</td>
<td>1 member of staff to 10 children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For mixed-gender groups, at least one female and one male leader should be present, if at all possible. This is essential if there is a need to supervise toileting of younger children or in the context of overnight stays.

Remember that the above ratios are a minimum and may need to be increased to take into account, for example:

- the nature of the group (in particular the presence of children with challenging behaviour or additional needs)
- the nature of the activities and the venue (activities spread across a number of rooms will require more adults, as will outings & residential events)
- the purpose of the group (developing nurturing relationships with children will require more leaders than is needed for simply facilitating safe activities)
- the competence and experience of the workers
- contingency for the unexpected (an extra adult with a willingness to listen or be an extra pair of hands is more often than not invaluable)
Adult – child ratios for international trips

Please note that for international trips the recommended ratio is three adults for up to ten children with an additional adult for every one to ten additional children (e.g. 30 children would require a minimum of five adults). It is essential to have male and female staff for mixed groups. Once again, the nature of the group, the nature of the programme and the competence and experience of the workers needs to be taken into consideration. However, no fewer than three staff should accompany a group of up to ten children. Monitoring activity in smaller groups with frequent head counts is strongly recommended. More detailed advice and guidance can be obtained from the International Relations department at Church House.

Insufficient workers

Ideally, there will be a pool of workers who have undergone safer recruitment procedures and who can be called upon when other workers are unavailable at short notice. However, if no other safely recruited workers are available to stand in, the leaders who are present should carry out an informal assessment of the health and safety risks to decide if it is safe to continue with the planned programme with the leaders available. This might be achieved by leading the activities in ways which reduce risks or by changing the planned activities to reduce risks. Decisions and reasons for any such alterations should be recorded in an incident report. If it is decided that the risks to children’s safety are unacceptable, then the activity should be cancelled.

If this becomes more than a very occasional issue, leaders should consider more carefully how the risks could be reduced to an acceptable level with fewer leaders. For example, this might be achieved by:

- adapting the programme to make it easier to supervise safely
- meeting at the same time as another church children’s/youth group so that other leaders can be called upon in emergencies
- limiting the number of children who can attend to keep within safe staffing ratios

Decisions and reasons for them should be agreed by the elders of the church, in their role as charitable trustees, and recorded in the minutes of the elders’ meeting.

Under no circumstances should the church run children’s groups with only one leader available.

Parents/carers staying with children’s groups

There may be occasions where parents ask if they can stay to watch a children’s group activity. Churches should consider that:

- whilst a person may be a parent/carer for one or more of the children, to the rest of the children they may be a stranger
- parents may initially be permitted to support their own child where it is practical, but they should then be encouraged to take a step back and observe rather than take part
- it can help some children settle into a group if the child knows that a parent/carer is present. However, after the settling in period (e.g. up to three sessions) if a parent/carer wishes to continue to stay, consideration should be given to inviting them to become a helper/worker. If they are happy to do that, they should be required to undertake the same selection procedure as any other worker
for some children with additional needs, it may be appropriate for their parent/carer to stay with them for an extended period. This should be considered on an individual basis to help the child become fully integrated into the group/activity

**Older children as helpers**

Older children can provide a valuable contribution to a team of children’s workers, but churches should consider that:

- those aged 16 or 17 may help to lead groups and supervise children, but must themselves be supervised by an adult worker and cannot be counted as part of the staffing ratios
- those aged under 16 may act as helpers, but should not have responsibility for supervising children and must themselves be supervised
- if young leaders are on work experience a reference should be obtained and a contract set up with the sending organisation/school detailing expectations and responsibilities. A specific question should be asked regarding any previous or current safeguarding concerns involving the individual
- although the age of 18 marks the legal division between adulthood and childhood, it is wise to require a minimum three-year difference between the age of young adult workers aged 18-20 years and the age of the children they supervise

**Supervision of peer-led activities**

All peer-led activities should be overseen by appropriate named adults who have been appointed by the church in accordance with safer recruitment procedures and have the backing of the church leadership team. Their role should include ensuring that peer-group leaders receive support and training. The person with oversight should be involved in the review and planning of the groups, including their programmes. They should also ensure that parents/carers are kept informed about the purpose of the peer-group activities, when and where they meet, who the leaders are and how they are run.

If there are children under 16 years involved in an activity, adult workers should be present. No person under the age of 16 should be left with the responsibility of caring for or supervising other children.

Those aged over 16 who assist with the care and supervision of other children should undergo the same recruitment process as adults, should undertake safeguarding training and be aware of safeguarding procedures. For example, they should know how to report concerns of abuse or bullying to a nominated adult and how to protect the confidentiality of sensitive information.

**Children in all age groups and activities**

This may include groups such as choirs, music groups and drama groups run by the church which are open to people of all ages, both adults and children. The church should ensure that children attending these groups and activities without a parent/carer are supervised by appointed people within the group who have been recruited safely.
Codes of conduct for those who work with children

All adults working with children are in positions of trust. A relationship of trust can be described as one in which one party is in a position of power or influence over the other by virtue of their work or the nature of the activity. It is vital that workers do not use their position of power and authority inappropriately, even unwittingly. Workers should always maintain professional boundaries and avoid behaviour which might be misinterpreted.

The trusting relationship between worker and child or young person means the worker should never use their position to:

- gain access to information for their own or others’ advantage
- intimidate, bully, humiliate, threaten, coerce or undermine
- form or promote relationships that are or may become sexual. This includes non-contact activities, such as causing children to watch sexual activity. Any kind of sexual relationship between an adult worker and a child is never acceptable, may be regarded as a criminal offence and will always be a matter for disciplinary action. If concerns arise this should be recorded and reported to the church Safeguarding Coordinator and/or Synod Safeguarding Officer.

Workers should nurture a culture of dignity and respect towards children by:

- understanding the organisation’s safeguarding policy and good working practice
- listening to children
- respecting boundaries and privacy of those being cared for
- knowing how to deal with issues of discipline in line within the church’s code of conduct
- developing an awareness of issues of equality, inclusion and anti-oppressive practice

Occasionally, a child or young person may develop an infatuation with someone who works with them. Workers should deal with such situations sensitively and appropriately to maintain the dignity and safety of all concerned. They should remain aware, however, that such infatuations carry a high risk of words or actions being misinterpreted and should, therefore, make every effort to ensure that their own behaviour is above reproach. A worker who becomes aware that a child or young person is developing an infatuation should discuss this at the earliest opportunity with their manager so that appropriate action can be agreed and taken to minimise hurt, distress, misunderstanding or embarrassment.

It is good practice to introduce a code of conduct which all workers can agree to follow. A sample is provided at Appendix A3: Code of conduct for working with children or young people.

Good practice with colleagues

If a worker sees a colleague acting contrary to the code of conduct, or in ways which might be easily misconstrued, they should be prepared to speak to them about it and/or to the leader in charge. Leaders should encourage an atmosphere of mutual care, support and accountability which allows all workers to feel comfortable enough to discuss inappropriate attitudes or behaviour. These measures will help to reduce the risk of abuse, as well as help to protect workers against false allegations.
Complaints and Compliments procedure

It should be clear how adults and children can formally share compliments about workers or voice concerns about unacceptable and/or abusive behaviour towards children or other workers. This procedure should be written down and publicised at church meetings and to children. Talking to them and using posters that they will be able to understand can be helpful in this. If necessary have two posters and consider involving the children in their design.

An opportunity should be provided for children to talk with an independent person about any concern which they may have (e.g. a poster advertising the services of ‘Childline’ together with the telephone number displayed in a prominent position).

Appropriate physical contact with children

When leaders are considering what appropriate physical contact with a child or young person is, it is important that they remember that wholesome physical interaction is important for the well-being of children. However workers should be aware that even well intentioned physical contact can be misconstrued by the child or an observer. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind the following questions:

Is it a response to the needs of the child?

Physical contact should be related to the child or young person’s needs, not the worker’s. For example, a hug initiated by a child can be reciprocated, but only as necessary to meet the needs of that child. Any physical contact that is rough or may be sexually stimulating should always be avoided.

Is it appropriate to the situation?

Physical contact may be appropriate in various situations, such as: accepting a quick hug initiated by a child; assisting a child in a physical activity; administering first aid; comforting a child who is upset or protecting a child from danger. Very occasionally, it may be necessary to restrain a child or young person who is harming themselves or others. In these situations, use the least possible force in the minimum amount of time and inform the leader in charge and the parents as soon as possible. All such incidents should be recorded and the information given to the Safeguarding Coordinator. If physical restraint is more than a very occasional occurrence, it would be wise for leaders to review the activity and put in place preventative measures as well as seeking training in the safest physical restraint techniques.

Is the child comfortable with it?

Touch should be appropriate to the age, gender, culture and religion of the child. All children are entitled to personal privacy and the right to decide how much physical contact they have with others, except in specific circumstances such as a medical emergency. Therefore, in the vast majority of situations, the worker should ask permission from the child or young person before engaging in appropriate physical contact. When giving first aid (or applying sun cream, etc) encourage the child or young person to do what they can for themselves while giving appropriate help where necessary.
Is it in view of other people?
No worker should be working independently and should seek the support of co-workers at all times.

If the answer is yes to all of the above questions, then the use of physical contact by a worker is likely to be appropriate. However, they should accept that any physical contact is open to scrutiny and should always be prepared to give an account of their actions, for example, by completing an incident form.

Intimate care for young children and children with disabilities
The most common instance in which intimate care will be needed is in changing nappies and clothes for babies and toddlers. It may also be necessary for young children who have soiled their clothes or children with disabilities who need assistance in using the toilet. In such situations the following should be considered to help maintain dignity and respect:

**Privacy** – everyone has a right to privacy appropriate to their age. In order to respect this, some aspects of intimate care will need to be carried out by a single adult, although depending on the circumstances, it may be appropriate for another adult to be in the vicinity. While this does create an opportunity for an adult to abuse a child, this has to be balanced with the loss of privacy. As long as workers have been appointed following safer recruitment procedures and follow the code of conduct and guidance below, the risk of abuse should be minimal and the issue of privacy should take precedence.

**Involvement** – encourage the child to be as involved as possible in their own intimate care, asking them if they can do each task themselves. Avoid doing things for the child if they are able to do it alone or for themselves. When they genuinely require assistance, explain to them what you are doing and offer them choices where this is possible.

**Sensitivity** – Check what you are doing by asking questions such as “How do you normally do that?” or “Is it OK to do it like this?” Take it seriously if a child expresses dislike or reluctance at a certain person providing their intimate care, ask them why and pass this on to the leader in charge (or to the Safeguarding Coordinator if there are any allegations or concerns of abuse). A child’s right to object to the way intimate care is carried out should always be respected.

**Consistency** – discuss approaches to intimate care together as a team and agree together on the approach which is most suitable for the children concerned.

**Competence** – only carry out acts of intimate care if you know how to perform them safely and well. If you are not sure, ask someone in the team with more knowledge and experience. Don’t put children at risk through your own lack of knowledge or experience.
**Communicating concerns** – You should contact the leader in charge of the group or the Safeguarding Coordinator straight away if, while attending to the intimate care of a child:

- you accidentally hurt a child
- you notice a child is sore or tender in the genital area
- a child seems to respond sexually to the intimate care
- a child seems to misunderstand and misrepresent something you have done
- a child has an emotional reaction without an apparent cause

A positive, caring and enabling attitude and approach to intimate care can send messages to children which will help them to have a positive body image, to value their body and feel more confident about it. This in turn makes them less vulnerable to sexual abuse.

**Supervision of personal care situations**

Children are entitled to respect and privacy at all times, especially when in a state of undress, changing clothes, washing or undertaking any form of personal care. There are occasions where there will be a need for an appropriate level of supervision in order to safeguard children and/or satisfy health and safety considerations. This supervision should be appropriate to the needs and age of the children concerned and sensitive to the potential for embarrassment.

In practice, this means that workers should:

- avoid any physical contact when children are in a state of undress
- avoid any visually intrusive behaviour
- announce their intention of entering a changing area before doing so, and wait before doing so, if asked
- ensure that, where appropriate, other leaders are also in the vicinity

It also means that workers should NOT:

- change, shower or bathe with children
- assist with any personal care task which a child or young person can undertake by themselves

**Supporting children experiencing mental health problems**

The emotional well-being of children is just as important as their physical health. Most children grow up mentally healthy, but certain risk factors can make some more likely to experience problems than others. Traumatic events in themselves will not usually lead to mental health problems, but they may trigger problems in those children whose mental health is not robust. Changes, such as moving home or changing school, can act as triggers.

For some children, mental health problems will severely limit their capacity to participate actively in everyday life and will continue to affect them well into adulthood. Some may go on to develop severe difficulties and display behaviour which challenges their families, including personality disorders. A small number of children with mental health problems may pose risks to themselves and others.
A child may be more likely to experience mental health problems as a result of:

- having a long-term physical illness
- having a parent or carer who has had mental health problems, problems with alcohol/drugs or a history of offending behaviour
- experiencing the death of someone close to them
- having parents who are, or in the process of becoming, separated or divorced
- having been severely bullied or abused physically, emotionally or sexually
- living in poverty or being homeless
- having a learning disability
- experiencing discrimination, perhaps because of their race, nationality, sexuality or religion
- acting as a carer for a relative
- having long-standing educational difficulties
- not having a secure attachment with their primary carer

Children can experience a range of mental health problems, from depression and anxiety through to psychosis, just as adults can. While some will recover, many are left with unresolved difficulties or undiagnosed illnesses which can easily follow them into adult life. Children experiencing such difficulties must have access to the right support and services, and know that their issues are being taken seriously. The same is true for parents and carers, who may be bewildered or frightened by their child’s behaviour or concerned that they are the cause of it.

Children experiencing mental health issues are likely to need professional support. The following organisations can provide information and advice:

- [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)
  Mind is an organisation which provides advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem.

- [www.mindfull.org](http://www.mindfull.org)
  Mindfull is a free, web-based service for 11-17 year olds providing support, information and advice about mental health and emotional well being.

- [youngminds.org.uk](http://youngminds.org.uk)
  Young Minds is a national charity committed to improving the mental health of all babies, children and young people. It provides information for both parents and young people.
Managing the behaviour of children

Promoting positive behaviour
The following points provide a helpful starting point when thinking about how to promote positive behaviour and prevent challenging behaviour.

Prayer, Planning, Preparation – make use of key tools to help you offer a programme which the children want to engage with. Be prepared to be flexible in response to the needs and moods of the children during the session. Try to offer a degree of choice from a selection of activities and have some activities in reserve, just in case.

Relationships – be prepared before the children arrive so that you can concentrate on making them feel welcome and getting to know them. Use their names as much as possible. Show an interest in them as individuals and get to know a bit about their family.

Example – leaders should set a positive example for children to follow.

Code of Conduct – agree together, with the children, a code of conduct to provide boundaries for behaviour.

Rewards and sanctions – notice positive behaviour and give plenty of praise. Follow an agreed policy on rewards and sanctions.

Behaviour policy and code of conduct for children
It is good practice to have a behaviour policy and code of conduct. These are usually best formed in consultation with children.

The behaviour policy should cover:

- how children should/should not behave towards one another. This should elaborate on what it means to respect and care for one another whilst the group/club/activity is in session. It should include references to the unacceptable nature of racism, sexism, homophobia, bullying and all other forms of discrimination
- personal relationships between participants – encouraging inclusive relationships and behaviour whilst the group/club/activity is in session, rather than exclusive behaviour between cliché groups
- health and safety, not least the behaviour necessary to maintain appropriate health and safety standards (e.g. walking rather than running in corridors or on stairs, etc...)
- taking care of the premises and equipment and making clear which parts of a premises may be used and which parts are out of bounds
- responsibility for personal belongings
- when children may leave the group/club/activity and the procedures for doing so. This is linked to whether or not parental permission has been given for a child to make their own way home. This should normally involve a signing in/out process in order for leaders to be clear about who is present on the premises
the UK ban on smoking in public places including churches (especially relevant for youth groups)
a ban on alcohol and illegal drugs (especially for youth groups). The policy should make clear that these are not to be consumed whilst the group/club/activity is in session and that leaders may, subsequently, use their discretion to refuse entry to a young person if they are deemed to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs
specific circumstances when parents will be informed of issues happening within the group/club/activity and how this will be done
a procedure for addressing concerns or complaints about unfair treatment. This should also offer a way for people to formally offer positive feedback. It should make clear who children or parents should approach as well as the church’s commitment to investigate and respond to complaints and compliments, including a timeframe
sanctions which will apply in the event of the code of conduct being broken

Sample code of conduct for children:

The code of conduct should be both realistic and fair, balancing the expectations of children with the expectations of the organisation and the wider community. It is also helpful to strike a balance between positive rules and negative rules; the do's and don’ts. For example:

| Do respect your leaders | Don’t disobey them |
| Do encourage one another | Don’t be nasty or rude |
| Do stop when you hear the whistle | Don’t carry on what you’re doing |
| Do play fair | Don’t cheat |
| Do listen carefully | Don’t ignore other people |
| Do care for people and property | Don’t hurt each other or damage things |
| Do tell the truth | Don’t lie |

The behaviour policy and code of conduct should be available and made known to children, parents/carers and leaders/staff. It should be reviewed regularly and adjusted when necessary.

Responding to challenging behaviour

Challenging behaviour is partly a matter of interpretation. It can be helpful, therefore, to distinguish between:

- dangerous and damaging behaviour, which causes harm to people or property. This can be deliberate or unintentional
- disruptive behaviour, which prevents others in the group from engaging with and enjoying the activities
- difficult behaviour, which is hard to deal with but is not dangerous or deliberately disruptive (e.g. annoying habits, etc…)
- different behaviour, which we may find hard to accept because of cultural differences but is not necessarily dangerous or disruptive

All children have a right to be treated with respect and dignity when displaying challenging behaviour. Workers should follow the agreed behaviour policy and use strategies appropriate to the child and to the situation. There is usually a back story which lies behind and is part of the reason for particular challenging behaviour. It is invaluable for a worker to get to know the background of the children with whom they work, so as to better understand the factors which
Good Practice 4

affect their behaviour, thereby allowing workers to respond in a helpful way. In some cases, the back story might include involvement with gang activity, which can be a powerful influence on a child’s behaviour. For more information about gangs, please refer to ‘Safeguarding children and young people who may be affected by gang activity’ www.gov.uk or visit the Safe Network website www.safenetwork.org.uk

Workers should not use any form of degrading treatment to punish a child and under no circumstances should they ever physically chastise a child.

Below are some possible strategies and tips for dealing with dangerous and disruptive behaviour at different levels. Remember, certain approaches may be more successful with particular children, so there is no substitute for knowing them well. It can first be helpful to ask “Why is the child behaving in this way?” and deal with any obvious causes (e.g. aggravation from other children; peer pressure; boredom; misunderstanding the activity; finding an activity difficult, etc).

**Level 1** – such as children talking when leaders are speaking to the whole group

- prolonged eye contact or a shake of the head may be enough
- a quiet word (e.g. “Sarah, should you be doing that?”, etc...)
- try to give positive instructions (e.g. “Peter, it would be really helpful if you came over here and sat down, please.”, etc...)

**Level 2** – such as a child ignoring a first intervention, being verbally abusive to a child/leader or abusing property

- warn them again, tell them what the consequence will be and be prepared to implement that consequence
- separate two or three children if they continue to misbehave together
- have the child sit directly in front of you or sit directly next to the child
- take the child out of the game/activity for a short time
- take the child aside to talk to them. Encourage their strengths, explain why their behaviour is unacceptable and encourage them to change their behaviour

**Level 3** – such as a child ignoring a second warning or displaying minor physical aggression

- take the child aside and give them a more formal warning. Encourage them to change their behaviour

**Level 4** – such as a child defiantly continuing with disruptive, damaging or dangerous behaviour or becoming violent

- consider a one session exclusion (or longer if necessary)
- have the club leader talk with the parents/carers about the incident and, in the case of very serious incidents, ask for parents/carers to their child(ren) straight away
- seek advice and guidance, reviewing whether it is feasible for the child to continue attending the group/club/activity if their negative behaviour continues.
Physical intervention
The use of physical intervention should, wherever possible, be avoided. It should only be used as a last resort when other behaviour management strategies have failed. It must only be used to manage a child or young person’s behaviour if it is necessary to prevent personal injury (either to the child, other children, an adult or adults) to prevent serious damage to property or in what could reasonably be regarded as exceptional circumstances.

When physical intervention is used, it should be undertaken in ways which maintain the safety and dignity of all concerned. The scale and nature of any physical intervention must be proportionate to both the behaviour of the individual to be controlled and the nature of the harm they may cause. The minimum necessary force should be used and any techniques deployed should be in line with recommended policy and practice. In all cases where physical intervention is employed, the incident and subsequent actions should be documented on an incident form and reported. The parents/carers should be informed on the same day.

If physical intervention is necessary on more than a very occasional basis, there should be a careful assessment of the situation and steps should be taken to reduce the likelihood of the need arising in future. Workers should seek specialist training on appropriate use of physical intervention. Where a child has specific needs in respect of particularly challenging behaviour, a positive handling plan should be drawn up and agreed by all parties concerned.

Some ‘golden rules’ about managing children’s behaviour...

...might include:

- learning and using children’s names; it makes a big difference!
- offering plenty of praise to help prevent behaviour problems
- phrasing instructions positively, not negatively
- always making it clear when behaviour is unacceptable
- labelling behaviour as wrong, not children
- not making promises/threats which cannot or will not be carried out
- being calm, but firm; how it is said will have as much impact as what is said
- avoiding physical intervention when dealing with bad behaviour, except as a last resort

Data protection and record keeping

Paper trails
The Data Protection Act 1998 contains principles governing the reasonable use of personal data. Personal data should be:

- processed fairly and lawfully
- obtained and used for specific purposes
- adequate, relevant and not excessive
- accurate
- not kept for longer than is necessary
- processed in line with a person’s rights
- secure
- not transferred to non-UK countries without adequate protection
Nothing in data protection legislation seeks to limit appropriate disclosure in order to protect an individual who either is, or may be, at risk of harm. What matters is that the process of information sharing is reasonable and proportionate. Further advice is available from the website of the Information Commissioner: [www.ico.org.uk](http://www.ico.org.uk)

**Record keeping for children’s activities**

We advise that each regular group or event records:

- the date, time and venue of event/group
- an attendance list of both children and adults (with a note of their role)
- consent forms for attendance at regular groups and occasional events
- a brief outline of programme
- any significant incidents together with action taken
- details of accommodation, including sleeping arrangements / room allocation for residential events
- a record of risk assessment
- a record of insurance cover
- details of accidents, recorded on an appropriate accident sheet

Some of this information need only be recorded annually (e.g. consent forms, risk assessment and insurance cover). A session by session record would include date, time and venue, brief programme outline and a record of any noteworthy incidents.

It is best practice to keep a record of the children and adults in attendance for all children’s groups and activities organised by the church. It is helpful to note the age of the children and the role of the adults. An attendance record can be helpful in a number of ways, including:

- fire safety, by allowing leaders to check everybody in the group is accounted for in the event of an emergency evacuation of the premises
- pastoral care by allowing leaders to notice children who have not attended the group for a few weeks so that someone can enquire as to their well being and find out if anything has put them off coming along
- responding to allegations by providing evidence that a particular child or adult was or was not in attendance at the time of an alleged incident.

An attendance list could be completed on a single document for a whole term, or session by session as part of a log book. The important thing is that this information is recorded.

The church should also record significant incidents which occur during activities for children. This is to help the church respond to any concerns or complaints arising from a child, young person or parent and to help leaders review incidents and learn from them. It may also help to put any allegations into context and to identify concerns about individual children.

Such recorded incidents should include:

- bullying witnessed by workers, as well as allegations of bullying
- dangerous or violent behaviour
- significant disagreements or arguments between a child and a worker
- any instances of physical contact where there is concern that it might have been or might be misinterpreted
any use of physical force by leaders (e.g. to prevent an accident or used in self-defence, etc.)
- accidents (details, including action taken, should also be recorded in the church’s accident record)
- details of any time spent by a leader alone with a child, making clear the purpose of the one-to-one time
- allegations of misconduct by a worker
- evidence that a child or young person may be being abused.

This information can be recorded on an incident sheet and kept in a child’s file. See Appendix A8: Safeguarding incident recording form for a sample form.

Information of a sensitive nature (e.g. a disclosure or concern that a child is being abused) must be recorded on a separate incident sheet, passed to the designated Safeguarding Coordinator and kept separately in a secure place. However, a cross reference should be recorded in a logbook along the lines of “Jenny spoke to Bill tonight regarding a safeguarding concern – see separate note in her file”.

United Reformed Church (URC) record keeping advice for churches states that:

- databases, mailing lists and contact lists should be destroyed when no longer in use
- accident reports relating to children should be kept until they reach the age of 21
- general records relating to the church’s work with children should be kept for a period of 25 years before being destroyed
- records of concerns about abuse or allegations of abuse (including where an allegation was unsubstantiated) should be kept for 75 years before destroying as safeguarding concerns can be raised many years after an event. Please note that some insurance companies may require that these records be kept indefinitely

Personal information should be kept securely, but in a way that is easily retrievable by authorised people. In general terms, every child, young person, parent or carer should be able to view what is recorded about them if they so request. However, whilst it is important to observe data protection requirements, remember that safeguarding is always the priority. Information about the prevention and detection of crime is exempt from Data Protection requirements. Therefore it may, in some cases, be inappropriate to release information to a parent that has been disclosed by a young person, without first consulting the statutory agencies. For more details on this, see Section 5: Confidentiality and Information Sharing.

Parental responsibility and consent

Churches should be aware of the meaning of parental responsibility, as introduced by the Children Act 1989. Parental responsibility is concerned with the power to make decisions in relation to a child. It is defined as ‘all rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority which by law a parent of a child has in relation to the child and his/her property’. The scope of parental responsibility has changed as new issues have arisen. Parental responsibility becomes relevant in issues regarding consent to medical treatment, international trips, and allowing a child to be interviewed as part of an investigation by the statutory Children’s Services.
In the UK, the following people have parental responsibility:

- the mother of a child whether married or unmarried
- the father of a child if he is married or was married to the mother at the time of conception or birth
- an unmarried father if he has acquired parental responsibility through a court order or agreement registered in court
- an unmarried father if he is listed on the birth certificate of the child after 1 December 2003 in England and Wales or after 4 May 2006 in Scotland
- any person who holds a residence order in relation to a child
- the Local Authority shares the responsibility with a parent/parents if a child is the subject of a care order
- the parents of an adopted child
- same-sex partners who were civil partners at the time of the treatment leading to conception
- for same-sex parents who were not civil partners at the time of the treatment leading to conception, the second parent gains parental responsibility if they jointly register the birth, become a civil partner of the other parent and make a parental responsibility agreement or make a parental responsibility agreement and apply for parental responsibility.

In most circumstances, each person sharing parental responsibility may act alone, i.e. one parent may act without the consent of another. A relevant exception is in allowing a child to travel to another country (e.g. as part of an international trip). Any person with parental responsibility may delegate some or all of it. The person to whom the responsibility is delegated ‘may do what is reasonable in all circumstances of the case for safeguarding or promoting the child’s welfare’ 21

If one parent does not agree with the other about a matter concerning a child, application through a court should be taken. This means that if one parent consents to a child taking a trip and the other disagrees, as far as the church is concerned, consent has been given. It would be up to the other parent to apply to the court for an order to stop the child attending. However, the church would of course have to consider its role in the matter very carefully. Being aware of these pastoral issues and alert to such possibilities may help prevent difficult situations arising. The issues are complex and professional advice should be sought in all matters of this nature.

Where a church is looking after a child for an agreed period, the church is responsible for the child and has a duty to safeguard the child’s welfare.

Information and consent forms

To assist workers in exercising their duty of care, relevant information and consent should be obtained for all children who regularly attend children’s groups or activities organised by the church. Additional specific consent should be sought for special events/activities and for all off-site activities. While an information and consent form is not required for attendance at worship, it is good practice to use one if young children regularly attend without their parents.

Information and consent forms should request the following:

21. Children Act 1989
Information on:

- name, date of birth and address of child
- parent/carer contact details
- emergency contact details
- relevant medical information (e.g. medical conditions, allergies, family doctor, etc...)
- details of any additional needs (e.g. due to disability, etc...)
- any other information relevant to the activities, (e.g. dietary requirements, who is allowed to collect a child at the end of the activity, etc...)

Consent for:

- participation in particular groups/activities/events
- necessary medical treatment in the event that the parent/carer cannot be contacted in a medical emergency
- making and using appropriate images of children, including specific consent for display of images on the internet if this is expected (for more about photographic consent, see Section 9: Safeguarding and digital communication)
- online communication between workers and children (for more information, see Section 9: Safeguarding and digital communication)

For a sample information and consent form, see Appendix F: Sample information and consent form.

Parents and guardians have prime responsibility for their child's health and should provide information about their child's medical condition and medication in order to enable workers to exercise their duty of care effectively. Parents may request workers to administer medication and workers may be happy to do so. However, there is no legal duty which requires workers to administer medication. For a Sample request to administer medication form, see Appendix G.

Where there are specific instructions from parents/carers about a child, all relevant staff should know what they are and how to carry them out.

Unexpected attendance at activities

Sometimes, children will want to join in with an organisation's activities without the knowledge of parents or carers (e.g. children playing outside or wandering the streets with no adult supervision, etc...). In these circumstances it is important to:

- welcome them, but try to establish their name, age, address and telephone number. Record their visit in a register
- ask if a parent/carer is aware where they are and what time they are expected home. If this is before the session ends, they should be encouraged to return home, unless the parent/carer can be contacted and they are happy for the child to stay until the end of the session.
- link the visiting child with a regular attendee who can introduce them to the group and explain its workings
- on leaving, give the child a leaflet about the group with contact telephone numbers and perhaps a standard letter to the parent/carer inviting them to make contact
- without an interrogation, it is sensible to find out as soon as possible whether they have any medical issues, so that you can respond appropriately in an emergency
Supporting children with medical needs

Churches should formulate their own policy and procedures for supporting children with medical needs to enable them to participate in events, activities, trips and residential visits.

When forming a policy, it should:

- be clear, understood and accepted by workers, parents/carers and children
- state whether workers are prepared to supervise or give medication
- state the circumstances in which children may take non-prescription medicines (e.g. pain-killers, etc...)
- cover how to assist long term or complex medical needs
- cover the need for medical information and consent forms
- contain a policy on children carrying and taking medication themselves
- cover training for workers
- cover record keeping
- cover storage and access to medication
- cover emergency procedures
- cover special arrangements for trips and residential activities

Insurance cover should be in place for workers supporting children with medical needs and those workers should be aware of it. Ensure that the church policy has been accepted by the insurance company.

Any emergency procedures should be clearly understood by workers (e.g. response to peanut allergies, diabetic hypos, etc...) Therefore, appropriate training must be available to any workers who volunteer to administer medication.

Detailed information on this issue can be found in the Department for Education document, 'Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions April 2014' [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

Particular types of activity

Requirements for registration of children’s activities

Some churches provide groups for children under the age of 6 who attend regularly for more than two hours at a time or for more than 14 days in any period of 12 months. These will need registration with OFSTED unless an exemption applies. However, even if an exemption applies, there may still be a requirement to inform OFSTED of the activity.

For further details, consult the relevant agencies.

For England, contact OFSTED: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk) or call 0300 1231231
For Scotland, contact the CI: [www.careinspectorate.com](http://www.careinspectorate.com) or call 0845 600 9527
For Wales, contact the CSSIW: [www.cssiw.org.uk](http://www.cssiw.org.uk) or call 0300 123 777
Home visits
Workers may need to make home visits from time to time. When doing so, we advise that they:

- inform a supervisor or a co-worker of the proposed visit and be clear about the purpose of the visit
- get parent/carer permission in advance wherever possible
- assess the risks associated with the child/young person, parents and others living in the household. Risk factors such as hostility, child protection concerns, complaints or grievances can make adults more vulnerable to an allegation. If this is a regular part of the work, a formal risk assessment should be carried out and reviewed periodically
- avoid being alone with a child during the visit, where possible (e.g. not going into a separate room with them, etc...)
- carry a mobile phone
- never go into a home if a parent or carer is absent (unless the child would be at risk of significant harm if they do not do so)
- some means of identification and explanation for the visit that can be given to them
- keep a written record of the visit detailing the following:
  - purpose of visit
  - time of arrival and departure
  - who was present
  - what was discussed
  - any concerns
- leave a card or letter if no one is present.
- always report any safeguarding concerns to the church Safeguarding Coordinator

Detached work
This involves working on the streets or in areas where children congregate. This is highly specialised work and can be risky. No one without the relevant training and support systems should carry out this type of work and specialist expertise should be sought before any such programme is undertaken. Frontier Youth Trust has a wealth of experience and expertise in this specialist type of work (see [www.fyt.org.uk](http://www.fyt.org.uk)) as do many Local Authorities.

Working one-to-one
Workers are advised not to meet one-to-one with children. However, there may be situations which require ad hoc one-to-one interaction, such as when a child wants to discuss a personal matter with a worker. In these situations, workers should:

- always inform a supervisor/co-worker about the contact(s) beforehand
- obtain the agreement of parents/carers, if possible
- chat in a public place, such as a room with the door open while other people are present in the building. Avoid meetings with a child or young person in remote, secluded areas
- carefully consider the needs and circumstances of the child/children
- always record and report any situation where a child becomes distressed, or angry, to a senior colleague.
Trips and outings
Workers should take particular care when supervising children on trips and outings, where settings can be less formal than the usual workplace. Workers remain in a position of trust and need to ensure that their behaviour remains within agreed codes of conduct.

Where activities include trips away from normal venues and/or overnight stays, a site visit should be undertaken in advance to plan, carry out risk assessments and agree arrangements for care, including sleeping arrangements. Children, adults and parents should be informed of these arrangements prior to the start of the trip. The person in charge of the church’s work with children should also be kept fully informed, if not directly involved. In all circumstances, those organising trips and outings must pay careful attention to ensuring safe staff/child ratios and to the gender balance of the staff team, especially on overnight stays. (see Adult/Child Minimum Ratios – page: 55)

When participating in hazardous activities, always abide by the policies and rules of any external organisation as well as external staff running those activities. It is the church’s responsibility to check that external organisations have safety policies and procedures in place and that external staff are suitably qualified.

Overnight stays
Sleepovers, residential events and camps should be discussed and arranged well in advance so that the best care can be provided through arrangements which take the venue, number of children, age, gender mix, etc... fully into account. Children are best protected in an environment where the adults caring for them are aware of the possibility of abuse by adults and children alike and remain vigilant in the need to be ever watchful. When organising overnight stays and residential events:

- there must be adequate insurance cover for any premises used in the activity, including any limits on numbers (see Insurance – page 53)
- if using an established residential centre, checks should be made that it operates a safeguarding policy and carries out training and criminal records checks on workers, as well as full risk assessments for health and safety
- all church workers attending should complete safeguarding training and have sufficient criminal record checks prior to the event
- prior to the event the building should be checked for suitable fire exits and workers should know where the water, electricity and gas can be turned off, as well as the location of fire extinguishers. A fire drill should be carried out as soon as possible
- parents/carers must complete medical/activity consent forms detailing their child(ren)’s medical requirements, travel and collection arrangements, sleeping arrangements, dietary requirements and any other relevant information pertaining to their child(ren)’s participation in any element of the programme (see Appendix F: Sample information and consent form)
- parents/carers should be given written details of all arrangements, particularly the contact telephone number of an identified worker (as opposed to a general telephone number for the premises)
- specific responsibilities should be designated to workers to ensure clarity of roles
- there should be a nominated safeguarding person(s) and they should be made known to everyone in attendance
- there must be a qualified first-aider in attendance
• all workers should attend an event safeguarding briefing to ensure everyone is clear about safeguarding procedures
• both female and male leaders are needed for mixed gender groups
• males and females should sleep separately
• workers should not sleep in the same room as children unless there are exceptional circumstances where children require supervision. Appointing workers to conduct random night patrols might offer a better solution in some cases
• appropriate night wear must be worn
• changing and showering facilities should be single-sex and separate for children and adults. If there are limited facilities, timetables are needed to ensure separate access times for children and adults
• all medical information and emergency contact numbers must be easily accessible and workers should have access to a telephone (or mobile)

More detailed guidance on outings, including participation in hazardous activities, can be found on the following websites:

• Department for Education: www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/advice. Look for ‘Departmental advice on health and safety for schools’.
• Health & Safety Executive website: www.hse.gov.uk/education/visits.htm.

International trips
All the Good Practice guidelines apply, but there will be additional considerations to be taken into account. It is recommended that advice is sought from the URC department responsible for world church relations.
Section 9
Safeguarding & Digital Communications

Introduction

The digital world has now become part of children’s everyday living. The ways that children are able to access content online are changing considerably. This presents positive opportunities to support children’s education, as well as aiding their creativity and self-expression. Conversely, this also poses a number of risks including cyber bullying, online grooming and identity theft.

When communicating via the internet and mobile phones, children can feel less wary and talk about things far more openly than they might when communicating face to face. By the very nature of their age and stage of development, children can be adventurous and prepared to take undue risks. Whilst risk taking is part of a child’s healthy development we need to educate children on the safe use of mobile and internet communications.

Read in conjunction with Appendix W: URC Communications Department Guidelines for the use of social media:
Why online safety?

Local churches have a responsibility for protecting all children in their care. In the past, this has mainly revolved around the running of children’s activities within church buildings or other faith-based activities. Today, however, safeguarding embraces online interaction as well as traditional offline communications and activities.

Increasingly, it is being discovered that many sexually abusive relationships possess an online element. This is often referred to as ‘grooming’ behaviour and has been illegal since the implementation of the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

Churches should, therefore:
- encourage children to stay safe online and direct them to age appropriate guidance
- ensure access to the internet on their premises is as safe as possible
- provide workers with policies and procedures for safer online communication with children

Myths about the internet

There are many myths surrounding the internet and how children make use of it. It is important that all churches are aware that these myths exist in order to increase their own understanding and enable them to support children, parents, carers and workers in staying safe online.

For example:

**Myth:** Young people are now so ‘net savvy’ and adults almost always technologically incompetent in comparison, that adults will never be able to understand e-safety adequately.

**Reality:** Adults tend to lead and children tend to follow. ‘Facebook’ started as an adult social networking site (and is still only officially available to those over the age of 13).

It is true that children may be able to grasp technology quickly but it must not be forgotten that:

- children often lack maturity in understanding the dangers and consequences of their actions online
- children take risks as a normal part of growing up and this process now takes place online as well as offline

It is vital that children are well supported as they explore the digital environment.

Online ‘stranger danger’ is NOT a myth

Research has shown that in real life (as opposed to virtual), children are most at risk of sexual harm from people already known to them and that ‘stranger danger’ is less prevalent now. However, in the context of the internet this is not the case, particularly when children befriend people online through social networking or gaming sites. A child may believe his or her new friend to be who they say they are, when, in reality, they are not. The area of most concern is when initial online contact develops into face to face meetings. As just one example a 14 year old girl who thought she was being befriended by a 15 year old boy who, in fact, turned out to be a 50 year old man who was grooming her in order to abuse her.
What is a ‘friend’?
In the online environment and social media platforms, the definition of a ‘friend’ has changed. Offline, we might consider a friend to be a person who is well known to us whom we have got to know through face to face contact, and who we regard with liking affection and loyalty. Online engagement may be between those who are well known to each other in a face to face context as well as online, but can also be between those who are only known to each other online. Over time, through regular digital engagement, people may consider themselves just as much friends with those they meet solely online as those whom they regularly meet with face to face, even though they may never have met in person.

Why do children engage with strangers on social networking sites?
When a young person is aware that ‘all’ of their friends are part of a particular online community, they are also likely to want to be a part of it whether it’s sharing particular digital content, engaging with specific topics or communicating in a particular manner. However, as already mentioned, dangers can arise, especially when young people feel a pressure to engage with as many people online as possible, or are not able to assess what is appropriate for them to share online.

Internet safety
The internet is, in many respects, a great place for children to explore. However, there are some areas which are not appropriate for them.

It is important to realise that the actual digital equipment used (e.g. PCs, laptops, mobile phones, tablets, games consoles, etc...) is itself neutral, as are the technologies and digital spaces which children use and inhabit (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, etc...). It is the ways in which such technology is used and the values which underpin that use which can be problematic. Facebook has become the digital space of choice for many children, some of whom lie about their age in order to join.

What and where are the risks and dangers for children on the internet?
Irrespective of which technology or digital space children use they need to be aware of:

- protecting their own safety
- risks involved in meeting people online and the danger of being groomed
- the security of their digital footprints (covered later in this section), which can lead to a loss of privacy, identity theft, data misuse and fraud
- cyber bullying, online fights, making threats and sexting
- file-sharing, computer security and copyright law
- exposure to dangerous material such as pornography, racist and other hate-focussed materials, self-harm advocacy, drug paraphernalia, suicide and gambling, to name but a few
- the dangers of overusing technology. Texting, social media and gaming, for example, can all be very addictive
Protecting personal safety
The internet opens up a world of entertainment, opportunity and knowledge. To help children to enjoy it safely, the UK Council for Child internet Safety (UKCCIS) has developed code called ‘Click Clever, Click Safe’ to help.

In December 2009, the Government also unveiled a ground-breaking child internet safety strategy, encouraging all children’s organisations to teach the mantra ‘Zip it, Block it, Flag it’. This has been designed to give parents the confidence to be able to help their children enjoy the internet safely and to help children understand how their online experiences can expose them to risks.

Online grooming
What is online grooming?
Online grooming involves someone making contact with an individual with the motive of preparing them for sexual abuse, either online or offline. Online grooming can be faster due to the anonymity afforded by the virtual world, which can result in children trusting an online ‘friend’ more quickly than they would in a face to face encounter. People intent on grooming children online often use the same social media platforms popular with children and young people. Anyone who grooms a child, either in the real or virtual world, is breaking the law (Sexual Offences Act 2003, Sections 14 & 15).

Abusers use a range of techniques to make contact and establish relationships with children. These can include:

- gathering personal details online from social networking sites, multi-player games and other platforms (e.g. age, name, address, mobile number and school, etc...)
- offering opportunities for modelling, especially to young girls
- promising meetings with celebrities and offering gifts, such as computer games or tickets to concerts
- gaining the confidence of children by offering positive attention or providing a sympathetic response when personal problems are shared
- masquerading as a child or assuming another false identity in order to gain the trust of a child or children
- bullying, threatening or blackmailing a child or children

Children can be exploited online without any physical contact taking place. The abuser, for example, could ask a child to send naked photos or perform sexual acts transmitted via a webcam.

Once the abuser has gained the child’s trust online, they might suggest meeting up in person.
What can parents and workers do?

There are a range of actions which can be taken by both parents/carers and workers. Like CCPAS, the URC advises parents/carers and workers to:

- discuss the potential risks of online grooming with children. Do not wait for something to happen, but instead talk to them now, on a regular basis
- visit the www.thinkuknow.co.uk website, which has a lot of useful information aimed at various age groups
- remind children that the internet is a public place and that not everyone online is who they say they are
- use parental controls and safe-search facilities based on the age and maturity of children concerned. Remember, however, that these may not be 100% effective and are not a substitute for supervision
- explain that children should never give out their personal details (e.g. name, address, phone number, school, etc...) or share personal information (including photos and videos) with strangers on any digital platform
- strongly encourage children to set their online profiles (e.g. on social networking websites, etc...) to ‘private’ so that only friends and family can see them
- set rules for the use of webcams, digital cameras and camera phones
- remember that children can be vulnerable to online grooming on all digital platforms, including multi-player gaming websites and social networking websites.
- encourage children to talk about anything which makes them feel uncomfortable online, such as a stranger making contact, and to save emails, texts and other evidence
- look for any unusual signs, such as children hiding their emails or texts, unknown adults contacting them or sending them gifts, or seeing dramatic changes in their behaviour
- report any incident of online grooming to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre as well as the police
- keep computers in an ‘open’ room to allow effective supervision
- encourage children to enjoy their time on the internet, but also encourage offline activity such as playing with their real life friends, participating in physical activities and developing practical hobbies

If, as a worker, you are worried about the welfare of a child, you should follow the reporting procedures in Section 11: Responding to safeguarding concerns relating to children.

Digital footprints

Digital footprint is the term used to describe the virtual trail which people leave behind as they explore the digital world. Every time someone does something as simple as visiting a website, information is stored on their computer, as well as by the website itself, about the visit. Anything posted on social media websites can be easily accessed by others and could remain there forever.

Young people are increasingly creating their own digital content as a way of expressing opinions and engaging with the people who matter to them.
Children often don’t understand that what they do in the digital world could have huge implications with regards to their reputation in real life over a long period of time. The main reason is that literally anything posted online can be searched for and retained by other people. For example:

- a blog or social networking profile might contain comments, photos or videos a young person would not want fellow students or teachers to see. It is not uncommon for university admissions tutors and employers to look up applicants online
- children might download and share music or other content illegally, even unwittingly
- someone might publish footage of children doing something silly, embarrassing or reckless on a video-sharing platform such as YouTube
- children might exchange intimate or naked photos with people they know via text or instant message (sometimes under pressure from their boyfriend or girlfriend) which could be passed around a wider group. This can make children (girls, in particular, but increasingly boys, too) vulnerable to sexual exploitation
- children could make nasty comments (often referred to as ‘trolling’ or cyber bullying) which they might deeply regret later

It is therefore essential that children are helped to understand the potential consequences of their behaviour in the digital world, so that they can protect their reputation in real life.

**Helping children manage their digital reputation**

The internet is a public place where, potentially, anyone can see what is posted and that posts could remain there forever. Therefore it is important to think about the implications of posting images and comments. Things to think about:

- encourage them to make the most of built-in privacy tools
- explain that every time they go online they leave a trail
- encourage them, with supervision, to type their name into a search engine so they can see what comes up about them
- encourage them to ask permission before publishing content, of any sort, involving their friends or family (and to ask their friends to do the same)
- explain why it is important to be honest when registering for access to websites and services. Many social networking websites, video-sharing sites and blogs have a minimum age limit
- discuss, with them, moral and legal issues surrounding the posting of material involving others (e.g. a negative comment about someone could be considered slanderous, etc...)
- talk to them about the consequences of sharing intimate or naked images in the digital world, including through text messages (called ‘sexting’)

**Identity Fraud and Phishing**

Identity fraud (also called identity theft) involves someone pretending to be another person. This is illegal. They might attempt this in order to open bank accounts, apply for debit cards and buy things in someone else’s name, leaving others to pick up the bill.

Phishing is when someone tries to acquire personal details, usernames, passwords, bank or credit card details, by fraudulent means, in the digital world, often through bogus emails or fake websites which look as though they are reputable.
It may not be immediately obvious that this is happening, so it is essential to protect personal financial details (including pins and passwords) at all times. Look out for the warning signs, too, such as debits on bank statements of which you are unaware. Some useful tips include:

- delete suspicious emails without opening them
- be aware that offers which seem too good to be true probably are
- install a ‘firewall’ on all computers
- don not use the same password for all websites or services
- never respond to any unexpected email requests or callers looking for personal details
- do not respond to emails purporting to be from banks asking for personal details. Banks never ask clients to submit this type of information by e-mail
- refrain from online purchases unless the URL begins with 'https://' and the padlock symbol is displayed beside it

Helping children understand misleading content
It is useful to explain that not all information on the internet is fact. Some of it might be deliberately misleading and/or designed primarily to sell commercial products.

Cyber Stalking
Cyber stalking is the use of digital platforms to stalk or harass an individual, a group of individuals, or an organisation. This may include false accusations, monitoring, making threats, identity theft, damage to data or equipment, the solicitation of minors for sex or gathering information in order to harass..

Cyber Bullying
Cyber bullying is no different from real life bullying, except that it happens in the digital world. Bullying involves an individual or group being tormented, teased, threatened, harassed, humiliated or embarrassed. Cyber bullying may involve the use of images, text, phone calls and hits on social networking profiles. It can invoke a sense of helplessness in children, making them feel afraid, depressed and alone. Cyber bullying is just as unacceptable as bullying in real life; the only difference is that it is not restricted by time or physical location.

If children believe they are being bullied or stalked, cyber or otherwise, the first step is to tell a trusted adult such as a parent, teacher or friend. Children should also be aware of the Click CEOP button, present on some websites, through which abuse can be reported. Of course it may also be necessary for the police to be involved.

For more information about cyber bullying, visit the beat bullying website: www.beatbullying.co.uk
Sexting

Sexting involves the sending of sexually explicit content. Such content depicts people (perhaps the sender or others in contact with them) in sexually provocative or revealing positions. Such indecent images can be, and are, used to bully and blackmail. Additionally, sexual predators browse the internet, not only seeking to distribute the images they create, receive or find, but also to pretend to be a child themselves in order to groom others.

Once made public, sexts are very difficult to retract and, apart from causing acute embarrassment and distress, such images may have far more serious consequences.

What do churches need to know about sexting?

Children can engage in a variety of sexting scenarios, including:

- partners exchanging images with each other (either with each other’s consent or with one partner under duress)
- partners sharing private images outside of their relationship, for example, by passing them around the school. Ex partners can be particularly vulnerable to this type of action.
- friends passing on such images which they have, themselves, received.

During 2011/2012, CEOP found that self-generated indecent imagery is being distributed, in the vast majority of cases, freely by the person through:

- live one to one video chats on websites
- video chats via instant messaging applications
- files sent by email to another person
- files uploaded to public video hosting websites
- files being sent as attachments during online chat sessions
- the use of such images as profile pictures or posting them on social networking websites

This research also stresses, that the generation and distribution of such imagery, willingly by children, could indicate underlying vulnerabilities or behavioural concerns which could be exploited.

Young people often start sexting ‘for a laugh’ but it could lead to serious consequences for everyone involved. In the digital world, images can be copied, manipulated or sent to other people within seconds. Because images can easily be passed on to other people, something which starts a private conversation between two people can quickly reach peers and even complete strangers.

Helping children to understand sexting

Tips include:

- talking to children about sexting, just as you would about any digital safety issue. This is especially important for older teenagers, who might be in (or considering starting) a relationship
- discussing sexting as part of a wider conversation about relationships
reminding children why it is important to think carefully before they post anything. Once an image or piece of information is uploaded, it is very difficult to retract
• encouraging children not to pass on these kinds of images, even if they are being urged to do so by their peers
• explain that, under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, it is illegal to take, hold or share indecent images of anyone under the age of 18 (even if they are also under the age of 18)

Exposure to inappropriate and harmful material
The second most common online risk is exposure to potentially harmful, user-generated content. Concerns about children being exposed to age-inappropriate content on TV, in films or magazines, equally apply to material in the digital world. Harmful content might include violent or pornographic images, gambling websites, pro-anorexia and self-harm websites, video-sharing websites and forums that encourage anti-social or reckless behaviour, such as substance abuse, vandalism or violence. The content in question might not be illegal, but it could be upsetting, disturbing or otherwise generally unsuitable for children.

What do workers need to know about inappropriate and harmful material?
Workers should have an awareness of the kind of content available in the digital world in order to better explore with children the type of content it is appropriate to access.

Children may come across unsuitable or upsetting content inadvertently, as well as actively looking for content, such as pornography, for example, out of curiosity.

You must contact the police if:
1. indecent images of children are found
2. obscene materials are sent to children
3. there is a suspicion of grooming behaviour

If inappropriate content is received, the advice from CEOP is to turn off the device’s monitor, but keep the device powered on. The police will give guidance on what to do next.

What can workers do about inappropriate and harmful material?
• Workers can help by making sure that:
• children are supervised at all times when using church computers
• churches run regular sessions to help educate young people about safe internet usage. The Synod Safeguarding Officer can offer advice
• all children using church computers complete consent and behaviour forms
• church computers and games consoles have appropriate age controls in operation
• search-engine safety features are operational for church computers
• filters on video-sharing websites are operational for church computers
• children agree which type of websites and resources to seek out and access
• the importance of age limits for websites and services are understood by children, as these exist to help protect children from unsuitable content
Contact the **internet Watch Foundation UK** Hotline\(^2\)\(^2\) to report, confidentially (and anonymously if you wish), criminal content online, including:

- child sexual abuse content hosted anywhere in the world
- criminally obscene adult content hosted in the UK
- non-photographic child sexual abuse images hosted in the UK

### Technology Addiction

**What do I need to know about the excessive use of technology?**

Children and young people can spend many hours on digital platforms

In the same way that it is right to help children manage and moderate their behaviour and activities in the real world, it is also right to offer guidance and support for their use of the digital technology.

To help avoid excessive use of technology, clear boundaries are needed for children when using digital platforms. This might include the length of time they are allowed to spend on computers, the kind of websites they can visit, which games they are permitted to play, limiting the amount of data they can download to their mobile phone, etc...

### Church Websites

Read in conjunction with *Appendix W: URC Communications Department Guidelines for the use of social media*

Below are some tips to help when creating, managing and editing your church website:

- make sure that websites are safe and appropriate for users
- make clear, in the design of sites, what is permissible to copy or use in other places
- obtaining permission from parents/carers/children before using any pictures of children
- use group photographs of children rather than individuals
- Do not publish the name or location of any child
- never publish personal email addresses, postal addresses or telephone numbers
- make web content accessible to people with disabilities, eg using fonts which are easier for people with dyslexia to read, etc...
- appoint an appropriate adult(s) to monitor the content of the website
- placing the CEOP, ‘Report Abuse’ button on websites along with the link to [www.ThinkUKnow.co.uk](https://www.ThinkUKnow.co.uk) (an internet safety site provided by CEOP). These offer effective and age appropriate advice for children, parents and carers
- assess the potential benefits which hosting message boards, forums or blogs could bring, against potential risks and ensure that message boards etc. are password protected
- remember churches are responsible for all content contained within websites, blogs, social media or any other platforms maintained by them

\(^2\)\(^2\) [https://www.iwf.org.uk/](https://www.iwf.org.uk/)
Filming and photography

Since the Data Protection Act 1998 organisations must take great care in the ways they create and use photographs or film footage involving children. This does not mean that pictures should not be taken or that filming should be prohibited. However, certain protocols should be followed in order to comply with legislation, as well, of course, as to safeguard children:

- permission must be obtained from parents/carers before a photograph is taken or film footage recorded
- it must be made clear why images or films are being made, what they will be used for, who might see them and where they will be stored
- children and young people should be asked if they want to be filmed or photographed
- use group photographs of children where possible and to ensure that individuals cannot be identified by any personal details such as their name, email address, postal address or telephone number
- all photographs should be appropriate and respectful of the subject. For example, the photographer should ensure that the subject is appropriately dressed, etc...
- photos and other digital media should be stored in a secure location. This should be on a church computer. If this is not possible it is important to record where the photographs and digital media are stored
- consent forms should contain a section covering consent for photography and digital media. Appendix F provides a Sample information and consent form

Abusive/Illegal Images of Children

As the use of, and accessibility to, the internet has increased, so too has the production of abusive/illegal images of children. In 1990, the Home Office estimated that the number of individual hard copy illegal images in circulation stood at approximately 7,000. Today, due to the ease of circulation, this number is now estimated to be in the millions.

The possession of abusive/illegal images is a form of child exploitation, It may not necessarily involve direct interaction between the person possessing the images and the victim(s), but it still means that people have been exploited in the production of the images and, furthermore, face re-victimisation each time the image is accessed. It is therefore unhelpful and inaccurate to refer to ‘child pornography’, as is regularly the case, and, instead the terms ‘abusive images of children’ or ‘illegal images of children’ are preferred in order to highlight the seriousness of the offences related to them. It is also important to be aware of the fact that, whereas pornography is legal (with some exceptions), making, viewing or distributing sexual images of children is never legal.

Under section 1(1) of the 1978 Protection of Children Act, it is an offence for a person to:

- take, permit to be taken or to make any indecent photograph or other image of a child
- distribute or show such indecent photographs or images
- have, in their possession, such indecent photographs or images with a view to distributing or showing them to others
- publish or cause to be published any advertisement likely to be understood as conveying that the advertiser distributes or shows such indecent photographs or images, or intends to do so
Under section 160(1) of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, possessing an indecent photograph or other image of a child is a criminal offence. All of these activities would suggest a sexual interest in children that needs to be dealt with. The Lucy Faithfull Foundation runs a confidential helpline for people who are either worried about their own thoughts or those of someone they know.²³

Is there a link between those who offend with images of children, and contact offenders?

Research conducted by CEOP²⁴ found that there is a clear correlation between offending involving images and contact sexual offending. This particular research concludes that anyone who possesses illegal images of children poses a real risk of committing contact sexual offences against children; however, this cannot be proven.

While it would be wrong to assume that anyone involved in making, possessing or distributing abusive images of children are also at serious risk of committing contact sexual offences, it would be equally dangerous to exclude that possibility.

Electronic communication with children and young people

General advice for communicating with children using email, text and other electronic methods includes:

- communicating via parents rather than directly with children, where possible
- obtaining parental consent for electronic communication with under 18’s, making it clear what type of communication will be used (e.g. text, email, social media platforms, etc...)
- not communicating digitally with children under the age of 13 years
- keeping communication purposeful and unambiguous, using language which is friendly without being over-familiar or suggesting a special relationship
- not using text abbreviations which might be misinterpreted (e.g. ‘lol’ could be interpreted as ‘laugh out loud’ OR ‘lots of love, etc...’)
- using standardised group communications where possible (e.g. group emails and social networking messages, etc...)
- making communications transparent (e.g. ensuring that another leader or a parent will also see what is shared by copying them in, keeping a record of any communication which is not visible to others online, etc...)

²³ Stop It Now 0808 1000 900
²⁴ ‘A picture of Abuse’ 2012
not communicating at night-time
not keeping communications secret from those in the church to whom one is accountable
maintaining appropriate boundaries regarding the personal information children are allowed to access on social networking sites. The simplest way to do this is to communicate via a public page or a group which includes more than one leader. The URC would not recommend having children as friends online but, should you choose to, use appropriate privacy settings to help maintain boundaries
encouraging and educating children on how to manage their privacy settings and to think carefully about what they share online

Use of Social Media Platforms
Social media platforms provide a range of opportunities for children and churches, such as:

an attractive and powerful communications environment, albeit one in which children need close advice and guidance
a strong sense of community
a marketing tool for promoting the church and its various activities and groups
an evangelistic platform

Social media platforms also carry a number of risks, such as workers befriending children online.

Workers befriending children online
This topic has been much discussed and debated in the faith sector, with many considering that the same rules which apply to teachers and youth workers should not be applied to those who work in churches.

The advice from CEOP and CCPAS is that, if workers are to engage with children via social network sites, this should be through a public page set up by the church.

The URC recommends that workers only engage with children on social network sites through a public page set up by the church and not a personal social media account.

The benefits of this include:
transparency
ease of information sharing
ease of management and administration by an individual or team
an area for children to interact with each other safely, with supervision and no obligation to interact with others via their own, personal pages.

Public pages are also particularly useful given the many disadvantages of workers communicating with children through their personal accounts, which include:

concerns from parent about their child being a ‘friend’ with a church worker.
a lack of privacy for the worker who would, subsequently, always have to be careful about what they shared online
the content of a worker’s page may not be suitable for children. Even if workers are careful what they add, their online friends might not be
blurring of boundaries. The role of a worker seemingly shifts from being a role model and advice giver to more of an equal ‘friend’
• the potential for information on a personal profile being used against the worker, for example, through teasing and bullying
• workers may leave themselves open to accusations of professional misconduct as the private and the professional became blurred
• not all workers are ethical or professional in their work with children. It is much more difficult to monitor what is being said to a child if they communicate via the worker’s personal page as opposed to a public one
• this mode of communication can also be fraught with difficulties for children who are experiencing emotional or other issues which cause them to be particularly vulnerable
• children can be groomed through social networking sites

A sample online communications policy can be found at *Appendix C: Sample church online safety policy*.

**Twitter**

All tweets are public unless the user decides to make their account private.

People ‘tweet’ short messages, photos and links, but are limited to 140 characters per tweet. Other users ‘follow’ a user and then have access to their tweets. Other users can ‘reply’ to tweets.

Twitter also has a ‘Direct Message’ function which enables users to send private messages to each other, though these messages are also limited to 140 characters.

Workers should follow the same principles for Twitter as for Facebook and be aware that there is less scope to make tweets private than there is with Facebook posts.

Churches should set up a ‘corporate’ Twitter account. This could be one account for the whole church or one for each group, as appropriate. These accounts should be used for communication about church or group activities. Such an account should be accessible by more than one worker, even when one worker is primarily responsible for its upkeep.

Direct messages should be discouraged, but where these are sent, a record of communication should be kept.

**E-Safety, acceptable use policy & safeguarding policy**

All churches should, within their Safeguarding Policy, have a section on e-safety, including expectations of workers in their communications with children. This should also include an acceptable use policy in relation to the use of church computers by both workers and children. See *Appendix C: Sample church online safety policy*, which includes sample forms which children and workers could be asked to sign.

More information relating to this section can be found in Section 9 of the main *Good Practice 4* document: [www.urc.safeguarding.org](http://www.urc.safeguarding.org)
Section 10
Child abuse

Introduction

Child Abuse covers various 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, either 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. Abusers, including children with sexually harmful behaviour, will have greater power than their victims, perhaps due to age, gender, physique or ability. Children may also be abused by trusted professionals, leaders or members of their church. Where their health, physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual or social development is damaged by other people, this is an abuse of relationships, a misuse of power and a betrayal of trust.

Abuse prevents children from achieving their full potential and undermines their dignity and human rights. The consequences and the pain of child abuse are long-lasting and are likely to continue to affect children when they become adults. The damage may be apparent in many aspects of their lives, including their ability to form healthy relationships and their ability to care for their own children. When abuse occurs within the context of the Church, or by a Christian, it will almost certainly affect the person’s faith, spiritual development and their view of God.

Children are included, in varying ways, in the decision making processes of society. The fact that a child has reached the age of

25. See the following web sites for information for children in relation to responsibilities and legal ages: www.thesite.org/homelandmoney/law/yourrights/whatagecan I See also the Scottish Government ‘At What Age can I?’ www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/04/02155040/2
16, is living independently, is in further education, is a member of the armed forces, is in hospital, in prison or a young offenders’ institution, does not change their entitlement to protection, as a child is defined as being under the age of 18.

Child abuse is not new, although it has been increasingly recognised, named and condemned during the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Church communities must be particularly vigilant in identifying the inappropriate use of any religious belief or practice which may harm someone spiritually, emotionally or physically.

Child abuse affects girls and boys, babies and children of all ages up to 18, including children with learning difficulties and physical disabilities, as well as from all cultural groups and backgrounds, religions and classes.

Child abuse can result in a child suffering significant harm and there may be a need for court proceedings to safeguard their welfare.

**Signs and symptoms of abuse**

It is important to be able to recognise signs of abuse, but it is equally important to highlight potential signs and symptoms of abuse too. Observing any of the signs does not necessarily mean that a child is being abused; there could be perfectly ordinary explanations for these signs. However, observation of multiple signs and symptoms, together with explanations which are inconsistent or do not ‘ring true’, should give more cause for concern. The possible signs and symptoms of abuse are part of the sample local church safeguarding policy which can be found in Appendix A: Sample church safeguarding policy.

**Definitions of abuse**

The following definitions of physical, emotional, sexual abuse and neglect are taken from ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015’.


**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. This may:
• involve conveying to a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person
• include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or ‘making fun’ of what they say or how they communicate
• 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
• involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyber-bullying), causing children to frequently feel frightened or in danger, or allow the exploitation or corruption of children

Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may also occur alone.

**Sexual abuse**

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening.

The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (e.g. rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts (e.g. masturbation, kissing, rubbing or touching the 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 also commit acts of sexual abuse, as do other children.

See Appendix S: A guide to supporting children and adults who have been sexually abused, for information about how churches can best support victims of sexual abuse.

**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 care-givers)
• ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment

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

Spiritual abuse is not covered by the statutory definitions, but is of concern both within and outside faith communities. The term ‘spiritual abuse’ covers a wide variety of behaviours, but can be summarised as the use of spiritual authority or spiritual means in order to demean, manipulate, control or exploit someone.\(^{26}\) As with any category of abuse, spiritual abuse is most likely to arise when people, often in positions of authority, misuse power.

This can be done intentionally, in manipulative ways, such as forcing someone to engage in religious acts which they do not wish to (e.g. forced healing sessions, female genital mutilation, etc...), or declare beliefs or commitments which they do not hold (e.g. a belief that the abuser is their master, a commitment to follow the ways of a particular religion or denomination, etc...).

Often, though, as with other forms of abuse, this can be done unintentionally. A minister or teacher, for example, might preach or teach with the intention of passionately and lovingly protecting and sharing what they believe to be true whilst, in reality, acting in ways which leave others feeling intimidated or pressured. Passion, commitment and energy are crucial elements of all Christian ministries. However, alongside all people, Christians have a serious responsibility to be mindful of the effect which their work and service can have on others, negatively as well as positively.

Harm can be caused to spiritual and faith development through failure or negligence in this regard, which can lead people to feel that the Church, local or otherwise, is not a safe, just, welcoming, loving place for them. Local churches must, then, be sensitive, seeking to avoid, even inadvertently, forcing religious values or ideas onto people, especially those who may be particularly susceptible to undue influence or pressure through such practices.

In this regard, a church which explores difficult questions, together as a community, openly and honestly, acknowledging and respecting different points of view, is much less likely to be susceptible to abusive behaviour, either intentional or otherwise, within its life and work.

It is also crucial, in dealing with survivors of abuse, for the Church, local and otherwise, to be sensitive to the suffering, pain and dilemmas facing victims of abuse after their ordeals. Forgiveness and healing are crucial concepts in Christian life, work and teaching, but they are not ‘quick-fixes’. They are long and difficult processes which people must have the choice to select and work through, if and when it is right for them. They require appropriate care, attention, awareness and dignity. Any action of the Church which presents forgiveness and healing as simplistic solutions, without regard to people’s pain, could be experienced as abuse in itself. Pastoral Care which seeks to genuinely recognise the person’s needs is vital.

With regards to disabilities, learning difficulties and long-term illness, Christians also, often, display a tendency towards the suggestion that all can, and/or should, be ‘healed’. This can be disrespectful in a number of ways, not least in situations where people have, of other own accord, accepted their disability, difficulty or illness as part of their life, identity and worldview (e.g. a person with autism may feel offended at the suggestion that they need ‘healing’ when they have built a prosperous and enjoyable life for themselves, etc...). This can also be problematic in situations where, even though healing is desired, it is very unlikely at this time (e.g. terminal cancer, Parkinson’s disease, etc...). The Church, local and otherwise, must take great care, then, when dealing with issues around the concept of healing.

\(^{26}\) From an article in Christianity magazine
www.christianitymagazine.co.uk/Browse%20By%20Category/features/SpiritualAbuse.aspx
The use of religious beliefs or practices in oppressive teaching, intrusive healing or deliverance ministries, misuse of leadership or penitential discipline are all exceptionally likely to result in people, especially children, experiencing physical, emotional or sexual harm.

Careful teaching, supervision and mentoring of those entrusted with pastoral care should help in tackling such abuse, as should a strong sense of community awareness and resilience against it.

**Safeguarding children in specific circumstances**

This section gives additional information about specific circumstances which can negatively impact children.

**Abuse in the digital world**

Risks, threats and dangers associated with the internet, mobile communications, gaming, social media and other platforms in the digital world can be very serious for children indeed. For more details, see *Section 9: Safeguarding and digital communications.*

**Bullying**

Bullying is repeated behaviour which is intended to hurt someone either physically or emotionally. In such encounters, there is an imbalance of power which leaves victims feeling defenceless. Such behaviour is often aimed at people considered to have specific vulnerabilities (e.g. racial background, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc...)

Bullying usually falls into two categories:27

- emotionally harmful behaviour (e.g. taunting, spreading hurtful rumours, threats, excluding people from groups, etc...) and
- physically harmful behaviour (e.g. kicking, hitting, pushing, etc...)

Cyber bullying is also a major concern. See *Section 9: Safeguarding and digital communications for more information.*

Bullying can have a profound effect on children’s self-esteem and is a common cause of suicide. It is vital that bullying is challenged. There are various organisations that are available for support, such as ‘Beat Bullying’28, ‘Cyber Mentors’29 and ‘Safe Network’30.

**Domestic Abuse**

Domestic abuse is physical, psychological, sexual or financial abuse which takes place within an intimate or family-type relationship and forms a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour. It is extremely common and can have an enormous effect on children. According to

27. AntiBullying Alliance  
28. www.beatbullying.org  
29. www.cpft.nhs.uk/services/Cybermentors.htm  
30. www.safenetwork.org.uk
Women’s Aid\(^{31}\), nearly three-quarters of children considered at risk by Social Services are living in households where one of their parents/carers is abusing the other. A high proportion of these children are, themselves, being abused, either physically or sexually, by the same perpetrator (estimates vary between 30% to 66% depending on the study). It is vital that churches respond to domestic abuse appropriately and report any concerns.

See Appendix R: *A guide to domestic abuse* for more detailed information.

**Children affected by gang activity**

Such children are at risk of violent crime and are therefore considered to be vulnerable. Risks include access to weapons (including firearms), retaliatory violence and territorial violence involving other gangs. Other risks include increased likelihood of involvement in knife crime, dangerous dogs, sexual violence and substance misuse.

For more information about gangs, please refer to ‘Safeguarding children and young people who may be affected by gang activity’ [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) or visit the Safe Network website [www.safenetwork.org.uk](http://www.safenetwork.org.uk)

**Fabricated or induced illness**

Parents and carers can induce or pretend to observe symptoms in a child which lead to unnecessary investigations or treatment. This was previously referred to as Munchausen Syndrome or Munchausen Syndrome By Proxy.

**Abuse of children with disabilities**

Various studies\(^{32}\) have shown that children with disabilities are more likely to be abused. The definition of ‘children with disabilities’ includes children with a comprehensive range of physical, emotional, developmental, learning, communication and health care needs. Children who are deaf or hard of hearing, or who have behavioural disorders, learning disabilities and/or sensory impairments are particularly at risk. Neglect is the most frequently reported form of abuse in this respect, followed by emotional abuse. Children with disabilities are more likely to be dependent on support for communication, mobility, manual handling, intimate care, feeding and/or invasive procedures. There may be increased parental stress, multiple carers and care in a range of different settings (including residential). Children with disabilities are likely to be less able to protect themselves from abuse. In addition, the network of carers around the child is likely to be larger than for other children, which can be a risk factor in itself. Children looked after by parents/carers in the community can have complex health care needs, including life-threatening conditions. Caring responsibilities, which may involve complex clinical procedures, can lead to considerable pressure on families. Reliance on physical, mechanical and chemical interventions to manage health and behaviour can leave these children particularly vulnerable to harm.

Dependence on medication may leave children with disabilities exposed to further abuse. For example, where medication is wrongly, or simply not administered, either deliberately or through lack of knowledge or understanding.

See Appendix E: *A guide to working with people with disabilities* for further information about supporting children with disabilities.

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31. [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)
Deliberate self-harm

What is self-harm?
Self-harm can take on various physical forms, and while not an exhaustive list, can include:

- cutting
- burning
- bruising
- scratching
- hair pulling
- poisoning
- overdosing
- intentionally putting oneself in risky situations

Why do children self-harm?
There are many reasons why children hurt themselves. It can be a way of dealing with difficult feelings and memories as well as overwhelming situations and experiences.

Self-harming is not a mental illness, nor does it constitute a suicide attempt. Self-harming behaviour may be a warning sign that a child is experiencing trauma, such as sexual, physical or emotional abuse, or bullying. It could also indicate that they are dealing with an underlying mental health problem, such as depression.

According to Mind (www.mind.org.uk) children often say that they are self-harming in order to:

- convert emotional pain into physical pain
- feel like they are in control
- have a reason to physically care for themselves
- communicate that they are experiencing severe distress

Children may hide their behaviour for a number of reasons, including embarrassment and shame, apprehension about the judgement of others or fear that they will be pressured to stop. As children tend to keep self-harm a secret, it is important to be aware of the possible indicators of this type of behaviour.

Possible indicators of self-harm
According to the National Health Service website, signs of self-harm in children can include:

- unexplained cuts, bruises and burns, which are likely to be on wrists, arms, thighs and chest
- keeping themselves fully covered, even in hot weather
- signs of depression, including low mood, tearfulness and a lack of motivation or interest
- becoming withdrawn and a reluctance to speak to others
- weight loss or weight gain due to changes in eating habits, including being secretive about eating
- signs of low self esteem, such as an inclination to blame themselves for external problems and expressing that they are not good enough
- signs of alcohol and/or drugs misuse
Responding to self-harm

If a child discloses self-harm, it is crucial that they receive a supportive response. When helping the children who share such disclosures:

• invite them to discuss the self-harm in a safe environment, giving gentle, empathetic support
• listen to them without judgement, criticism or anger. Show them that you are actively listening and understand what they are telling you. If a child experiences a negative reaction, this may cause them to refrain from disclosing or talking about self-harm again, which could prevent them from receiving the support needed
• explore possible options for them to access support. For example, from school, parents, local support groups, Children’s Services, child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), their GP (especially if medical assistance is needed), specialist organisations, etc.

Help and support available

Responses to children who are self-harming need to be worked out on a case-by-case basis. In all situations, it is vital that appropriate support is put in place. Please contact your Synod Safeguarding Officer for advice and support.

For specialised advice, visit the following websites:

NSPCC: www.nspcc.org.uk
Mind: www.mind.org.uk
Young Minds: www.youngminds.org.uk
Teen Mental Health: www.teenmentalhealth.org

Parental alcohol and drug misuse

Substance misuse can involve alcohol and/or drug misuse (including prescription as well as illegal drugs). The risks to and impact on children of parents and carers who misuse drugs are known and well-researched. Substance misuse during pregnancy can also have a significant health impact on unborn children. Parental substance misuse can also result in sustained abuse, neglect, maltreatment, behavioural problems, disruption in primary care-giving, social isolation and stigma of children. Parents/carers who misuse drugs and/or alcohol often lack the ability to provide structure or discipline in family life. Poor parenting can impede child development through poor attachment and the long-term effects of maltreatment can be complex. The capability of parents/carers to be consistent, warm and emotionally responsive to their children can also be undermined through substance abuse.

Parents/carers who misuse drugs and/or alcohol will need support, including referral to appropriate agencies to ensure that they, as well as the children, receive appropriate professional help.

Parental mental health problems

It is not inevitable that living with a parent/carer with mental health issues will have a detrimental impact on a child’s development. Many adults who experience mental health problems parent very effectively indeed! However, there is evidence to suggest that many families in this situation are more vulnerable.
A number of factors can contribute to the risk experienced by children living with a parent/carer who has mental health problems. These include:

- the parent/carer being unable to anticipate the needs of children or put the needs of children before their own
- children becoming involved in the parent/carer’s delusional system or obsessive compulsive behaviour
- children becoming the focus of parental aggression or rejection
- children witnessing disturbing behaviour arising from mental illness (often with little or no explanation)
- children being separated from a mentally ill parent/carer (e.g. due to the parent/carer’s hospitalisation)
- children taking on caring responsibilities which are inappropriate for their age and/or abilities

There are also factors which may impact on parenting capacity, including:

- maladaptive coping strategies (ways of dealing with stress that usually make things worse in the long-term) or misuse of alcohol and/or drugs;
- lack of insight into the impact of the illness (on both the parent/carer and child)
- poor engagement with services or non-compliance with treatment

This list is not exhaustive.

Allegations of possession by evil spirits

It is sometimes suggested that a child is possessed by evil spirits and that this may account for behavioural issues in the child, or be considered to justify harsh treatment by the parents or carers.

The Government has issued guidance in connection with this subject, known as **Safeguarding Children from abuse linked to a Belief in Spirit possession**.\(^\text{33}\) This is a very complex area and if faced with it we recommend that advice is taken from the statutory agencies or the NSPCC on 0800 800 5000.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

FGM is the deliberate mutilation of female genitalia. The World Health Organization describes FGM as any procedure that injures the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. FGM has no health benefits and is, in fact, very harmful to health in many ways.

FGM is a criminal offence and any suggestion that it is being sought, or has been carried out, should be referred to Children’s Services/Social Work Scotland or the police.

Daughters of Eve is an organisation which works to protect girls and young women who are at risk from FGM\(^\text{34}\).

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34. [www.dofeve.org](http://www.dofeve.org)
Child trafficking
Child trafficking is the forced movement of children across borders, sometimes without proper immigration arrangements, for a variety of illegal purposes including domestic service, illegal adoption, organ harvesting, benefit claims or prostitution. Such children may speak little English.

The police or Children’s Services should be contacted immediately if a church member suspects that children they come into contact with might be trafficked.

The following specialist helplines also offer support:

The Metropolitan Police with Stop the Traffik:
(24-hour hotline for victim support or to report suspected trafficking)
Telephone: 0800 783 2589

NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice Centre:
(for potential child victims of trafficking)
Telephone: 0808 800 5000.

Sexual exploitation and involvement in prostitution
Children can be exploited through the giving of rewards in return for sexual favours or activities. The internet and other media technology can often be used in such abuse. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common. Exploited children should be victims of child sexual abuse and, subsequently, should be viewed as such. The police or Children’s Services/Social Work Scotland should be contacted immediately if a church member suspects that a child is being exploited in this way.

Complex (organised or multiple) abuse
This is abuse which involves one or more abusers and a number of children. The abusers may be acting with others or in isolation and may be using an institutional framework or position of authority to abuse children. The internet may also be used. The police or Children’s Services should be contacted immediately if a church member suspects that a child is being abused in this way.

Forced marriage and honour-based violence
There are clear differences between a forced marriage and an arranged marriage. An arranged marriage has families of both spouses involved and the choice to accept the arrangement remains with the individuals concerned. A forced marriage involves at least one party being coerced, in some way, to be involved or otherwise refusing consent.

Disclosures of actual or possible forced marriage should not be treated as a family matter, or be disclosed to family members. Children’s Services / Social Work Scotland or the police should be contacted. Concerns can also be reported to H. M. Government/Foreign and Commonwealth Office Forced Marriage Unit by:
- Telephone: +44 (0) 20 7008 0151
- Email: fmu@fco.gov.uk
Section 11
Responding to safeguarding concerns relating to children

How to respond if a child discloses abuse

It is both a privilege and a responsibility for workers to build relationships of trust with children. Church workers may get to know the children in their groups very well and a child may feel enough trust to be able to talk about unhappy things which are happening at home, school and/or church, for example. It is therefore important that all are aware of how to appropriately respond to any concerns raised.

It is important to explain to children that, when they make such disclosures, depending on the circumstances, it may be necessary to get other people to help if they, or someone else, is being harmed.

It is, of course, not always possible to stop children in mid-flow, but when you are listening to children making such a disclosure:

Do:
- stay calm
- let the child talk and listen attentively, giving the child your complete attention
- accept what is said without judgement
- reassure the child that they are right to share these sorts of things
- seek medical attention if necessary
- reassure the child that you will make sure that they will be supported during the difficult time to come
- tell the child that they are not to blame for the abuse they have suffered
- explain what you will do next
Do not:
- panic
- confront people alleged to be responsible for or involved in the abuse
- press for information or put words into children’s mouths
- promise confidentiality. Explain that you will tell someone who can help investigate
- use leading questions, such as ‘so it sounds like you have been abused’. Instead, encourage children by saying ‘tell me’, ‘explain to me’, ‘describe to me’, etc...
- ask the child to repeat the disclosure over and over
- take any action which would undermine any future investigation or disciplinary process
- say everything will be alright
- give any reassurances about what is likely to happen to them
- keep it to yourself

Helpful things to say include:
- You have been brave for telling me
- Thank you for telling me
- I am glad you’ve told me
- It’s not your fault
- I will help you
- I believe you
- It is OK to tell me
- I am sorry that happened

Avoid saying:
- Why didn’t you tell anyone before?
- I can’t believe it
- Are you sure?
- This is really serious
- Don’t tell anyone else
- Are you sure you are telling the truth?
- Why? How? When? Who? Where? (i.e. Don’t barrage them with questions)
- I’m shocked
- This is awful
- I won’t tell anyone
- You won’t have to live with them anymore (i.e. Don’t make guarantees about the future)

If abuse is discovered, disclosed or suspected:
- consult your church Safeguarding Coordinator or Synod Safeguarding Officer in the first instance (if either of these are implicated, only discuss the matter with the person who isn’t implicated). Do not discuss the situation with anyone else in the church unless they have a safeguarding remit within the church.
- if the child would be at risk if they were to return home, contact Children’s Services/Social Work Scotland, or the police (keep their numbers handy)
- record your conversations as soon as possible, certainly within 48 hours
- keep copies of handwritten notes made at the time, even if these have subsequently been typed up
- do not delay
• do not act alone
• do not try to investigate or confront the alleged perpetrator. Leave investigations to the appropriate statutory agencies

Recording
As soon as possible, write down carefully what the child said, how they said it and how they appeared emotionally. Write down the context of the disclosure and what was said to the child. Make sure these notes are signed and dated. If an opinion is expressed in the record, state that it is an opinion and record what has led to its formation. Do not talk to anyone about this except on a need to know basis, for example, the minister and Safeguarding Coordinator. Do not talk to the alleged abuser. Pass the information on to the nominated Safeguarding Coordinator, unless the allegation is about them, in which case it should be referred to the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

Recording is vital and may save the child having to tell their story repeatedly. It may also help with prosecutions or in ascertaining if allegations are accurate.

Records should be kept securely and only disclosed to the appropriate authorities.

See Appendix A: Sample church safeguarding policy for an incident report form

Reporting concerns
If you believe that a child may be suffering or is at risk of suffering significant harm, these concerns should always be referred. It is important to remember that it is not appropriate to investigate matters yourself. This is a job for the statutory authorities.

Lord Laming, in his deliberations on the Victoria Climbié Inquiry, introduced the concept of ‘respectful uncertainty’, highlighting that it involves the critical evaluation of information given. The United Reformed Church (URC) agrees that “respectful uncertainty” is an essential tool in safeguarding the vulnerable. This means that total trust should not be invested in anyone. However, it does not mean that we should be suspicious of everyone. It requires everyone with safeguarding responsibility to treat individuals and situations with dignity and respect, asking oneself “yes, but...”.

A church member or worker may only have one small observation but that piece of information may be vital when put together with others to make the “big picture”. Safeguarding is made up of many pieces of information and practice, just as a jigsaw is. Everyone must ensure, then, that any information possessed or uncovered is disclosed so that all can contribute to the ‘Safeguarding Jigsaw’ which helps to protect the vulnerable.

The church Safeguarding Coordinator should be contacted in all circumstances where there is concern about a child, unless they are implicated in the concern. If anything is likely to receive attention from the media then the URC press office should also be informed. In these cases it is also appropriate to inform the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

In an emergency anyone can, and should, make a referral to Children’s Services/Social Work Scotland, or the police. A record should be kept of such a referral and given to the church

Safeguarding Coordinator who should, in turn, notify the Synod Safeguarding Officer. It is worth noting that Children’s Services/Social Work Scotland should always be notified of incidents of domestic abuse due to the emotional impact on children, as well as the increased risk of physical and sexual abuse, as well as neglect. Please see Appendix R: A guide to domestic abuse for further information.

In some cases, particularly those involving sexual and physical abuse, children could be placed at further risk if parents/carers are told of concerns, so advice should be sought from the statutory agencies before making a decision about whether to consult/inform parents/carers. It should be remembered that actions should not in any way compromise possible future investigations.

Referrals can be made to Children’s Services or the police. Relevant contact details should be included in the church’s safeguarding policy. The Statutory Agencies will decide whether the legal criteria to investigate are met, and, if so, will then undertake such investigations.

Making a referral is an important, though not always easy, thing to do. It can be particularly difficult if the family is known. The church Safeguarding Coordinator and Synod Safeguarding Officer can offer support. Children’s Services or Social Work Scotland can also advise whether a referral needs to be made. A record should be kept of decision making, along with any conversations which take place.

When concerns are reported

If a referral is made, the appropriate services will consider what has been shared together with any other information already held or received. It is important, again, to note here that any information shared could form a significant part of the jigsaw.

Children’s Services/Social Work Scotland will assess the strength of the allegation and investigate if they suspect a child or young person is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm. They will often do this in conjunction with the police. An investigation may include:

- visiting the child’s home
- contacting other agencies which might have information on the child or the family
- a child protection conference will be held, if there are sufficient concerns, where all of the professionals involved can share their observations. The person receiving the information from the child may also be required to attend. Parents and children may also be invited
- informing the police if agencies suspect an offence has been committed
- taking legal action, where necessary, to protect the child or young person
- formulating a plan which will protect the child and assist the family

Ministers or church members may be asked to attend a meeting and could be asked to give evidence in care or criminal proceedings. If attending a meeting, it is useful to clarify if one’s role is either to support or to contribute to assessment and planning. One should try, as far as possible, to ensure that one’s actions cannot be construed as support for one side or the other. If one is asked to give a character reference for someone involved in a case, this should only be given after consultation with the church Safeguarding Coordinator and the Synod Safeguarding Officer.
It is important to highlight that Children’s Services/Social Work Scotland will do their utmost to keep children with their families, so will be working towards providing services to support children and families wherever possible. This is consistent with their duty to promote the upbringing of children by their families\(^36\). The welfare of the child will be paramount and intervention in family life through the removal of a child is seen as a last resort. This will only be done, therefore, if proportionate and necessary\(^37\).

If you have played a significant role in the child’s life you may be asked to contribute to the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), which is a standardised approach to the assessment of children’s additional needs and decisions about how these should be met.

The CAF aims to provide a simple process for the holistic assessment of children’s needs, taking account of the roles of parents, carers and environmental factors on their development. A lead professional is appointed so that the child does not have to speak to numerous professionals. This should be someone whom the child knows well and feels comfortable with. The CAF aims to help all the appropriate services to work together in an integrated way, focused on the needs of the child. If you are asked to do this and are not familiar with the process, contact your church Safeguarding Coordinator and/or Synod Safeguarding Officer who will be able to assist you.

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\(^{36}\) S17 Children Act 1989  
\(^{37}\) Human Rights Act 1998
Section 12
Managing allegations against those working with children

Allegations against staff

Most staff work well and safely with children. However, it is a sad fact that some people will cause harm to those they work with. On occasion, this is intentional and, regrettably, a part of their motivation to work with children. For others, it may be as a result of poor attitudes, low standards of care or inadequate awareness of professional boundaries. Regardless of the circumstances surrounding harm caused to children by workers, the United Reformed Church (URC) believes it is never acceptable.

Referral criteria
It is essential that local churches know how to manage allegations of abuse against workers. We endorse and follow the guidance issued in ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015’ which details clear criteria for the referral, by churches, of concerns about workers’ conduct with children to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) in England, Designated Senior Manager in Wales, Social Work Scotland. For convenience, this document uses the term LADO to refer to each of these. Referrals can also be made to the police.

This guidance states that a referral must be made without delay where it is alleged a worker has:

- behaved in a way which has harmed a child or may have harmed a child
- has, or possibly has, committed a criminal offence against or related to a child
- behaved towards a child or children in a way which indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children

These procedures may also be used where concerns arise about:

- a person’s behaviour in their personal life, which may impact upon the safety of children to whom they owe a duty of care
- a person’s behaviour with regard to their own children

If an allegation requiring immediate attention is received outside normal office hours, the out of hours emergency duty team or police should be contacted and the LADO informed the next working day.

**Concerns outside of the referral criteria**

Concerns which fall outside of these criteria may nevertheless amount to inappropriate conduct. The church should seek advice from the Synod Safeguarding Officer to decide whether to handle this by way of advice, supervision, training, disciplinary processes or a combination of some or all of these.

A record should be kept of all allegations made. See pages 101 and 115 for further information.

**Who should be informed of a referral**

The Synod Safeguarding Officer should be informed in respect of any referral made to a LADO. The Moderator should also be informed if the allegation relates to an ordained minister. Moderators will inform the General Secretary as appropriate.

Where there is potential reputational risk to the Church, the United Reformed Church (URC) Press Office should also be informed.

The worker concerned should only be informed as soon as possible after consultation with the LADO, but with due regard to protecting evidence. A decision about who should inform the worker will be made in consultation with the LADO and the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

**The role of the LADO (and their equivalents in Wales and Scotland)**

The LADO provides advice and guidance to employers and voluntary organisations, including the faith sector, where there are concerns about a worker in relation to children.

They will first establish, in discussion with the referrer, whether or not the allegation falls within the scope of their procedures, and whether or not it appears to have sufficient foundation. The LADO ensures that all allegations of abuse against people working with children are dealt with fairly and efficiently. They help co-ordinate information-sharing with the right people and also monitor and track any investigation, with the aim of resolving it as quickly as possible.

Contact details for the appropriate LADO should be contained in each church safeguarding policy and can also be found on Local Safeguarding Children Boards websites.
The LADO’s responsibilities include:

- management and oversight of individual cases
- providing advice and guidance
- monitoring the progress of cases to ensure they are dealt with within agreed timescales
- ensuring a consistent and thorough process for all adults (who work with children) when allegations are made against them
- liaising with the police and Crown Prosecution Service
- discussing the possibility of referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service

Information that will need to be given to the LADO includes:

- what was said and by whom
- any action taken
- whether the parents/carers of the child have been informed
- the name, date of birth and address of the member of staff and the child/children involved
- whether or not there are any witnesses
- details of any previous strategy meetings/discussions about the worker in question

Depending on the nature of the allegation and on the urgency of the referral, the LADO may decide that a strategy discussion is appropriate. The initial discussion can be carried out via telephone. If the allegation is more serious and/or complex in nature, the LADO will set up a multi-agency strategy meeting to agree the next steps.

Strategy meetings will usually include the employer and/or referrer, a Children’s Services worker, a police officer and the LADO. The aim is to gain fuller information and discuss immediate steps (i.e. if the member of staff should be suspended or if there is an alternative way of ensuring proper enquiries can be undertaken). Advice will be given as to whether, when and what information can be given to the staff member about the investigation.

An investigation against a worker may have three related, but independent strands:

- child protection enquiries relating to the safety and welfare of any children who are, or may have, been involved
- a police investigation into a possible offence against a child
- consideration of disciplinary action in respect of the worker, including the possibility of suspension

If the police or Children’s Services decide to investigate, it is likely that they will advise that internal investigations should wait until the outcome of the statutory investigations.

Minutes of meetings are distributed to all those in attendance.
Informing the member of staff

The worker who is the subject of the allegation needs to be informed as soon as possible after consultation with the LADO.

Where it is likely that police and/or Children’s Services will be involved, an agreement needs to be made with those agencies regarding when and what information can be disclosed to the worker in question.

If the alleged misconduct involves sexual abuse or other allegations of child abuse where there is a risk that the alleged perpetrator may destroy evidence, it is essential that the police are consulted before the person is informed about any action, as the police must be given the opportunity to investigate first.

If the staff member is a member of a trade union or a professional association, they should be advised to seek support from that organisation.

Informing parents/carers

There are some circumstances where a church may need to directly advise parents/carers of an incident involving their child, such as, for instance, a child being injured whilst in the care of the church or requiring medical treatment, etc... In these circumstances, care should be taken not to say anything which could jeopardise the ability to conduct a proper investigation. The LADO will be able to advise on this.

Suspension of a Worker

Suspension of a worker pending the outcome of an investigation should be carried out in consultation with the statutory authorities. Timing can be crucial, as the police and Social Services need to be able to conduct investigations which are not compromised by a premature suspension.

Where an allegation of abuse is made against a worker, depending on the nature of the allegation, and any advice received from Social Services or the police, consideration should be given to suspending the worker ‘without prejudice’, in other words, without passing judgment on the validity of the allegation. Staff should not be automatically suspended and strategy meetings may discuss alternative courses of action. If they are a paid member of staff, they will be suspended at the appropriate rate of pay (normally full pay) pending an investigation.

This action protects the worker from further allegations of abuse, protects the organisation from allegations of not dealing with the situation appropriately and, most importantly, protects the child from possible further abuse or intimidation.

Suspension should always be considered where there is cause to suspect a child is at risk of significant harm, an allegation warrants investigation by the police or an allegation is so serious that it might be grounds for dismissal.

It is clearly in everyone’s interest for the matter to be dealt with swiftly. Failure to do so, and failure to suspend the worker while the investigation is undertaken, could make a subsequent dismissal unfair. The reason for this is that summary dismissal for serious misconduct implies that the employer considers the misconduct so serious that it would be impossible to allow the worker to

39. Within the meaning of the law on unfair dismissal
remain in employment. Doubt could be cast on this belief if it appears to have taken the employer a long time to put the allegation to a worker, or if the employer appears to have felt able to take the risk of the worker remaining on the premises while an investigation was undertaken.

When suspending a worker, the appropriately authorised manager should put the allegation to the worker. The worker may be accompanied by a friend of their choice and it is advisable for the manager to be accompanied as well. The allegation should be put in a non-judgemental manner and there should be an explanation of how the matter will be taken forward, explaining that the worker will be suspended on the appropriate rate of pay (normally full pay), if in a paid position, while an investigation is carried out and that it may also be necessary to speak to the worker further, during the investigation, before determining whether a disciplinary hearing is required. It should be emphasised that suspension is not disciplinary action in itself and does not imply guilt. Rather, it is a precautionary measure which is taken where serious allegations are raised in order for an appropriate investigation to be undertaken.

A record of the suspension meeting should be kept in case it is necessary to refer to it at a subsequent hearing and the arrangements for suspension should also be confirmed to the worker in writing.

At the time of suspension, the worker should be asked if they undertake any other paid or voluntary work with children. Where there are other employers (paid or voluntary posts), they should be informed of the allegation, and the worker should be informed that this will happen. The worker should also be asked whether or not they live in a household with children, as they may require protective measures. It is likely that the LADO will inform other employers and Children’s Services – the referrer should check this with them.

If the suspended worker wishes to remain involved in the life of a church, then it may be necessary to place them under a contract (see Section 13: Managing and supporting those who pose a risk of harm to children). This is to protect children from any potential risk. In this instance, the Synod Safeguarding Officer should be contacted for advice.

Only relevant people in the church should be made aware of the allegation and subsequent suspension (e.g. the Safeguarding Coordinator, minister and a nominated elder). In terms of releasing any church or press statements, this should first be discussed with the Synod Safeguarding Officer/URC Press Officer.

A proforma letter giving guidance to staff can be found in Appendix Q: A guide for staff facing allegations.
Investigation and disciplinary

The LADO’s discussion with the police may result in the beginning of a criminal investigation. The police will aim to complete their enquiries as quickly as possible, consistent with a fair and thorough investigation. The church involved must co-operate with the police at all times.

Ministers and others should be aware of the pitfalls of providing a character reference in criminal matters. They should avoid commenting on matters under investigation unless invited by the investigating team at a formal meeting or in discussion with the Synod Safeguarding Officer. They should restrict themselves to known facts and first-hand knowledge.

The police are likely to set a review of progress date at the outset of their investigation. The first progress review should take place no later than four weeks after the initial evaluation. This timescale does not mean, however, that the police are expected to finish their investigation within four weeks. The review may, therefore, conclude that the investigation is still in progress. The aim of the review is to ensure that the case is progressing.

The police will keep the employer informed of progress and outcomes. This is usually done through the LADO.

The police will gather their evidence and seek advice from the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) regarding the level of evidence needed in order to proceed through the courts.

There are many reasons why a particular case may not come to court or may result in a ‘not guilty’ verdict, one being the burden of proof in Criminal proceedings being, what is referred to, as a higher test of ‘beyond reasonable doubt’, as opposed to civil proceedings which are tested ‘on the balance of probabilities’.

Such a verdict does not, however, necessarily mean that there is no remaining concern and it may be that the person should not continue to work with children. Equally, there may remain evidence of inappropriate or misguided behaviour which needs to be addressed or untested complaints of serious harm to a child. The advice of the statutory agencies should be sought about any continuing risk to children. It may still be appropriate in some circumstances, and in accordance with legal advice, to continue disciplinary action.

A professional risk assessment can also be used in the process of ascertaining whether or not it is safe for a person to continue work which brings them into contact with children. Depending on the outcome of the assessment, the following actions may be necessary:

- training and supervision
- referring the person to the Disclosure and Barring Service/Disclosure Scotland
- re-deploying the person to another post
- terminating employment
Criminal Prosecution
The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) (in England and Wales)/Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) (in Scotland) work to certain guidelines and the police are expected to demonstrate that there is sufficient evidence for a realistic prospect of conviction.

The CPS/COPFS also considers whether or not taking the case to court is in the child’s or the public interest and whether or not proceeding with a case would be an abuse of process.

It may be decided that the case should not proceed through the criminal courts and the police may pass the case back to the employer to consider carrying out their own investigation and possibly disciplinary action.

Disciplinary Proceedings
If the CPS/COPFS decides against criminal proceedings, disciplinary proceedings must always be considered.

Disciplinary proceedings carry a lower burden of proof than criminal proceedings. The employer has to be satisfied that ‘in all probabilities this did happen’ rather than having to prove that happened ‘beyond reasonable doubt’.

If the employer has a reasonable belief that the individual has acted inappropriately (i.e. in an abusive manner) and that the implications in relation to their role are such that it is no longer tenable for them to continue in it, then it is acceptable to dismiss a person from that role (whether paid or voluntary).

The police may be able to share some details of their investigation with the employer. The Synod Safeguarding Officer will be able to advise on how to proceed with both the internal investigation and any subsequent disciplinary action.

If the allegations are against a minister and disciplinary action is taken, the URC’s Section O procedure will be followed.

Resignations and compromise agreements
If a person tenders their resignation during an investigation or before one is started, the investigation should be continued. It is important to try to reach a conclusion. In practice, continuing to investigate without the compliance of the worker can prove very difficult indeed. However, employers are expected to be able to show evidence that they have done as much as they can to reach a conclusion which can be properly recorded.

Compromise agreements (by which a person agrees to resign, the employer agrees not to pursue disciplinary action and both parties agree a form of words to be used in any future reference) must not be used in these cases without legal advice and careful consideration of any safeguarding issues. In any event, such an agreement will not prevent a thorough police investigation where appropriate, nor can it override an employer’s statutory duty to make a referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service and the Charity Commission where circumstances require it.
Additional information

Referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) / Disclosure Scotland

The following applies to volunteers and paid staff. A referral must be made to the DBS / Disclosure Scotland when:

- the employer (church) withdraws permission for an individual to engage in work with children (or would have done so had that individual not resigned, retired, been made redundant or been transferred to a position which does not involve work with children) because the employer believes that the individual has engaged in relevant conduct (see below for details)
- and the harm test is satisfied (see below for details),
- or an individual has committed an offence which would lead to automatic inclusion on a barred list

This is a statutory duty which applies to churches and, subsequently, a failure to submit a referral in such circumstances is a criminal offence. The duty applies in respect of all staff, whether ordained, lay, casual, agency, self-employed, paid or voluntary.

Relevant conduct is conduct which:

- endangers, or is likely to endanger, a child
- if repeated against a child, will endanger, or be likely to endanger, them
- involves sexual material relating to children (including possession of such material)
- involves sexually explicit images depicting violence against human beings (including possession of such images)
- is inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature involving a child

The harm test is satisfied if the individual:

- may harm a child
- may cause a child to be harmed
- puts a child at risk of harm
- attempts to harm a child
- incites another to harm a child

A person will be automatically included on a barred list where he or she has been convicted of, or cautioned in relation to, serious criminal offences involving sexual misconduct or violence.40

If you are concerned about a member of staff, a referral should already have been made to the LADO (or equivalent), who will discuss referral to the DBS/Disclosure Scotland. The LADO should suggest such a referral when appropriate information and any documentary evidence which is available has been gathered.

The DBS and Disclosure Scotland have processes for dealing with referrals and have risk assessment tools which are used to make decisions. A decision not to bar someone from working with children does not necessarily mean that the person poses no risk, as in the case of unsuccessful criminal proceedings. It remains the employer’s duty to decide whether a person should continue to work with children. If necessary a professional risk assessment should be carried out.

For advice on making a referral, contact your Synod Safeguarding Officer.

Charity Commission

The Charity Commission advice is that referral to the DBS constitutes a threat to the reputation of a charity and should, as such, be reported to the Commission as a serious incident. Serious incident reporting by charity trustees ensures that the Charity Commission can provide assistance at the earliest opportunity, target their resources where the risks are highest and help to put charities back on a secure footing where necessary. The responsibility for reporting serious incidents rests with the charity’s trustees, even if they delegate this work to others.

Insurance advice

It is vital that where there may be liability issues, churches should inform the claims manager of the insurance company as soon as any incident arises which may lead to a claim. Advice should be sought about the insurance cover and any steps needed to be taken (as far as possible) to safeguard it. The claims manager will also need to be kept in touch with developments.

Any person accused of abuse, where they have the benefit of insurance, should also inform their insurance company.
Action in respect of false or unfounded allegations

If an allegation is determined to be unfounded, malicious or, in rare situations, is proven to have been deliberately invented, consideration should be given to referring the matter to Children’s Services in order for a decision to be made as to whether or not the child concerned is in need of support.

It is crucial to ensure that the member of staff who has been the subject of a false allegation is also properly supported. Such incidents can cause extreme stress to the individual concerned and the employer may need to offer the services of a counsellor.

Reinstatement and redeployment

Careful consideration should be given to the future employment or volunteering role of anyone against whom an allegation has been made.

A professional risk assessment, carried out by someone with suitable qualifications and experience in this field, which will withstand scrutiny and possible legal challenge, may be needed. Contact your Synod Safeguarding Officer for advice.

Timescales

Timescales will vary depending on the policy of the Local Safeguarding Children Board in whose locality reporting becomes necessary. However, most require to be informed within one day of the allegation/action coming to light and three days before the strategy discussion is held.

It is in everyone’s interest to resolve cases as quickly as possible, consistent with a fair and thorough investigation. Every effort should be made, therefore, to avoid any unnecessary delay. It is expected that most cases will be resolved within one month, although cases which require a criminal prosecution or a complex police investigation are likely to take longer than three months.
Pastoral Support

During the investigation, the child and their family will need support. A separate person will need to support the alleged perpetrator. People involved in support should be uninvolved with the investigation or disciplinary proceedings and may be chosen from outside the church or Synod to ensure neutrality. The police advise that it is important that the parties do not communicate with each other about the allegation, so that evidence cannot be contaminated through such interaction.

In the case of allegations against a minister, the Synod Moderator will need to manage the impact of the investigation on the Synod.41

The General Secretary of the United Reformed Church (URC) will manage the impact of the investigation on the wider Church.

Media

The URC Press Office should be informed of all cases which may attract media attention, as should the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

Whistle blowing

To fulfil its commitment to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, the URC recognises the importance of creating a culture where there is a mechanism in place for workers to be able to raise legitimate concerns about other workers. This is commonly referred to as ‘whistle blowing’.

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 gives workers legal protection against being dismissed or penalised as a result of publicly disclosing certain serious concerns. While the Act does not provide the same protection for volunteers, churches should endeavour to adopt the same practice of protecting the whistle-blower that is outlined in the legislation, for volunteers.

All staff, volunteers and members of a congregation should be encouraged to acknowledge and act on, their individual responsibility to bring matters of unacceptable practice, performance or behaviour to the attention of any of the following:

- church Safeguarding Coordinator or deputy
- the elders
- the minister or interim moderator
- Synod Moderator
- Synod Safeguarding Officer

41. For further exploration of the issue, see Deirdre Offord - Betrays of trust: Addressing the impact on Congregations when leaders abuse their Position. Grove Books
Recording and retention of records

It is important that a clear and comprehensive record is kept of any allegations made, details of how these were followed up and any action taken. It is useful to keep a chronology to serve as a time line, making reference to notes, emails or correspondence and details where appropriate documents can be found. All documents should be kept in the person’s confidential file and copies should be given to the person in accordance with Data Protection Legislation. The person can make an application to see their file, known as a Subject Access Request.

False and malicious allegations are very different from unsubstantiated allegations. For an allegation to be described as false, it is necessary to have evidence that disproves the allegation. This means that the allegation is unfounded. For an allegation to be described as malicious, it is necessary to have evidence that not only disproves the allegation, but also proves a deliberate intent to deceive. Where the allegation is unsubstantiated, it simply means that there has been insufficient evidence to prove or disprove the allegation and therefore it is not possible to conclude either guilt or innocence.

Records of investigations, whether proved to be unfounded or not, must be retained until the staff member reaches retirement age or for 10 years, whichever is the longest.

Where there is an allegation of a safeguarding nature against a member of staff or a volunteer, including where the allegation is unfounded, records should be retained for 75 years from the date of the allegation.

If a person about whom an allegation has been made leaves the Synod, their file should be passed to the receiving Synod. If the individual moves to a different denomination, the receiving denomination should be informed and a copy of the relevant information from the file passed on to them.

Allegations of historical abuse

Any allegation of historical abuse from a child/young person should be referred to the Police and Children’s Services /Social Work Scotland and will be dealt with in the same way as current concerns.

An adult historical abuse allegation is a more complex area and careful consideration needs to be given as to whether the allegation should be referred to the statutory authorities. An important part of recovery for the person making the allegation is to be entrusted with power over their own history. This includes, where possible, deciding when and how the allegation should be shared. This can be problematic, however, because it is important to recognise that where others may still be at risk, the statutory authorities will need to be informed. The Synod Safeguarding Officer should be contacted for advice on a case by case basis.
Learning lessons

At the conclusion of a case in which an allegation is substantiated, the church should review the circumstances of the case, with the assistance of the Synod Safeguarding Officer, to determine any improvements which need to be made to procedures or practices for the future.

Consideration should be given to any policy or practice areas which require greater exploration. This may include additional commitment to training, more robust induction for new staff, use of codes of conduct and improved guidance for managing particularly vulnerable groups, as well as dealing with parents/carers.
Section 13
Managing and supporting those who pose a risk of harm to children

Introduction

The United Reformed Church believes it is called to share its ministry with all people. As a result, congregations may have people within their membership who have abused children within the church. Not all will have committed sexual offences. Some may have neglected, or physically or emotionally abused a child. The duty to share God’s universal offer of forgiveness places a duty on all within the URC to ensure that those who pose a potential risk to children are welcomed to participate in Church Life in ways which do not compromise the safeguarding of children.

If anyone is made aware that a person attending their church has been convicted of an offence against a child, or has had an allegation of this nature made against them at any time, they should immediately inform the Synod Safeguarding Officer and Minister or Interim Moderator. It is important to note that when offenders, or alleged offenders, disclose information themselves, they often offer a minimised version of events. Advice should, therefore, always be sought.

Caring for convicted sex offenders

Where it is known that someone has a caution or conviction for committing an offence against a child, the church can play an important role in the prevention of further abuse by helping the offender to live an offence-free life.

It is important to provide known offenders with a group of people who will offer support, friendship and supervision. The membership of this group should be chosen carefully and the Synod Safeguarding Officer consulted about its constitution. The members should have training, which can be provided or sourced by the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

In its safeguarding commitment to the protection of children, the members of the group will set boundaries for the individual, which they will be expected to
keep. Following advice from the Synod Safeguarding Officer, it may be appropriate to draw up a formal contract between the church, the person who is considered to pose a risk and any statutory agencies involved. This will include a range of conditions which the individual will be expected to meet. These might, for example, state designated areas of the church building where it is, or is not, appropriate for the abuser to enter, either at all or at specific times. Contracts are explained in more detail on page 122-123.

The offender should not be given any official role in the church which gives them status or authority and should not be given positions where children would invest trust in them by virtue of their role. For instance, people involved in pastoral ministry of any kind are regarded as trustworthy people of integrity, both by church communities and by the general public. This perception can be used by offenders, if in such a role, to target victims.

Caring for those against whom an allegation of sexual abuse is made

To protect the person against whom the allegation is made, as well as to take into account the possibility of truth in allegations, it is necessary to establish appropriate boundaries. This is usually achieved in the form of a contract. Such a process does not presume a person’s guilt, but, instead, protects the safety of all involved through the concept of ‘respectful uncertainty’, covered earlier in this document. Synod Safeguarding Officers should be consulted for advice.

Circles UK

This is a community initiative in which volunteers become “buddies” to offenders released into the community. Some such schemes are operating successfully in conjunction with local churches, although a formal Circle may not be appropriate in all circumstances. Churches can contact their local branch of Circles UK for further information. CCPAS and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation can also provide assistance.

Understanding the issues

Research shows that the majority of those who offend against children are not caught and that, of those who are, few are prosecuted and even fewer convicted\(^42\). The URC encourages everyone involved in the Church to receive training in this important area.

\(^{42}\) Between 94% and 97% of abuse is not reported to the Police. Out of the 3 – 6% that is reported only 3% lead to convictions \textit{Home Office British Crime Survey}
Sex offending can be addictive in nature, so although the person may have truly regretted and accepted responsibility for what they have done, the possibility of succumbing to opportunity or habit often remains constant. Among those who are experienced in working with sex offenders, it has been said that there is no cure, only control. It is vital, therefore, that churches exercise this important element of their ministry with great caution.

Jesus prayed ‘lead us not into temptation’. We would therefore be doing a disservice to someone who has a sexual interest in children to place them in the way of temptation. In exercising Christian love, we need to establish appropriate boundaries and, if someone is genuinely interested in reform/redemption, they will accept and comply with these boundaries.

Understanding the Grooming or Entrapment Process

Churches offer excellent opportunities for children to grow in faith and are often one of the main places where they develop appropriate trusting relationships with adults outside of family or formal education settings.

However, churches can also provide opportunities for adults to target and groom children. Grooming is communication with a child with an intention to commit a sexual offence. More generally, it can be seen as the process through which an individual manipulates those around them, particularly, but not exclusively, the child, in order to gain access to opportunities to abuse with a reduced likelihood of being reported or discovered.

Sexual offenders also use the internet to groom children and view indecent images of children. Individuals who download images of children being abused are participating in the abuse of children.

Abusers come from all sections of society and are often perceived by others as respectable, reliable and trustworthy people. The vast majority of abusers are well known to the child and often hold a position of trust or authority.

Grooming the environment

Abusers not only groom the child, but also the adults around the child. This could include the child’s family members and people within the church. For example, an adult who wanted to abuse a child might spend significant time and energy building a friendship with the child’s parents/carers, the minister and members of the congregation. By grooming the adults around the child, developing a reputation of respectability, helpfulness or popularity within the church, the abuser makes it more difficult for the child to disclose abuse or for adults (who trust and may even know the individual well) to accept even the possibility that there could be a cause for concern or, if allegations are made, that they could be true.

43. Adapted from CPSYU briefing NSPCC
Sex Offenders

Sex Offenders are people who commit, or have committed, a crime involving a sexual act. They are often referred to as paedophiles. However, this term is only appropriate when indicating someone who has a sexual interest in pre-pubescent children. The term hebephile is used to denote people who have a sexual interest in children who are in the early years of puberty.

By understanding the behaviour of sexual offenders, we can place obstacles in their way and develop a greater insight into how best to support them in being offence-free.

Although these may apply to innocent parties as well as sex offenders, those who have sexually abused children may:

- be good at making friends with children. They can appear to be kind, trustworthy, caring and helpful. They put on a good act which fools parents, children and otherwise potentially protective adults, such as church members
- appear as both nice and nasty to the abused child; “I can be loving and kind, but if you don’t do what you’re told, you’ll see another side to me.” They may also be extremely controlling/intimidating and frightening, using fear, threats and violence to get both adults and children to do what they want
- live in or join families in order to abuse children
- look for jobs or volunteer roles which place them in regular contact with children
- spend time around places like arcades, playgrounds, parks and sports venues to get to know children so they are not seen as strangers
- offer a combination of attention, gifts, treats, games, outings, money, toys, bribes and threats to children in order to entrap them. They may threaten the child with physical harm or with the loss of someone they love if they don’t do what the abuser wants
- seek out and join organisations with unclear boundaries around contact with children, or with poor safeguarding standards generally, in order to avoid attracting concern about their behaviour. For example, a club with no guidance on travelling with a young person, photography, texting, lone working, or where the prevailing culture is to disregard such guidance
- treat a particular child as a favourite, making them feel ‘special’ compared to other children
- spend most of their time with children and have little or no interest in spending time with people of a similar age
- attempt to prevent a child or children from interacting with other adults or children

Most abusers try to find out as much as possible about the child and use this information to both engage the child and to drive a wedge between the child and those who would protect them. The more difficult it is for abusers to come between children and protective adults, the safer children will be.

44. Oxford English Dictionary
Believing the Child

If the abuser is a family member, or has shared a long term relationship with the child in a trusted setting, it is especially painful to face up to the abuse and can be even harder for children to be open about. Parents and adults may find it difficult to believe what the child tells them and can retreat into denial, which can isolate the child even further.

When abusers say to a child “nobody will believe you”, they are unfortunately too often correct, as many adults struggle to get over the hurdle of believing abuse could happen to someone they know or be perpetrated by someone they know, particularly when that individual is well liked and respected or holds a position of authority within the church.

Why do they do it?

We cannot fully understand what motivates some seemingly kind and respectable people to groom and abuse children. The important thing is to understand that this can and does happen. At some level most abusers know that what they are doing is harmful and so develop distorted views about appropriate behaviour to justify their actions. They convince themselves, for example, into believing they only want to ‘love’ children, or that the children enjoy and encourage such behaviour, for example.

Abusers may see the depictions of abusers, in the media, as being ‘monsters’, failing to recognise themselves in these depictions. They may manage potential feelings of guilt by convincing themselves that their actions do not constitute abuse, that the abuse is not harmful (even, that it’s good for the child) or that they are actually the victims in the situation. If they experience flashes of reality they may become depressed. Some may push guilt away, often blaming others, including the child.

How do abusers control children?

Child abuse is rarely a single incident or event. In order to protect children, it needs to be understood that most abusers develop a relationship with a child (and often with those close to them), a relationship which harms the child and often makes the child feel responsible and unable to talk about what they are facing. Secrecy is fundamental to abuse continuing and children are often trapped before they know what has happened.

Importance of challenging secrets

If abuse remains a secret, abusers will continue to abuse. If someone speaks about the abuse, this can help to end the abuse, support the child and may even open the door to treatment for the abuser, leading to positive change towards a safer society.
Treatment of sex offenders

Research shows that those who complete treatment are less likely to fantasise about children or deny that they harmed their victims. They are also likely to be able to show more self-control and are, therefore, less likely to re-offend. However, the result of research does rely heavily on reports from sex offenders themselves. Rehabilitation of offenders is the best guarantee of long term public protection, including the protection of victims.

There are sex offender treatment programmes in some areas run by Prison and Probation services. There is sadly little support or similar training programmes for partners of sex offenders, sometimes referred to as non-abusing carers. The Lucy Faithfull Foundation, an expert organisation in tackling sex offending, run treatment programmes for partners. They also provide community-based assessment and intervention programmes and manage ‘Stop It Now! UK & Ireland’, which provides a free confidential helpline for adults uneasy about their sexual inclinations, as well as for those who have concerns about someone else’s behaviour.

Regardless of whether or not a sex offender has received treatment, they should still be considered a risk and, therefore, it is vital that the necessary safeguards are put in place.

Written contracts of behaviour

If a sex offender is to be allowed to attend church activities and/or worship in a particular church, then robust measures need to be put in place to ensure that children are safeguarded. These measures are in everyone’s interests, including children, offenders and churches.

Where someone is known to pose a risk, or is suspected to pose a risk, it is important that the Synod Safeguarding Officer is advised as soon as possible. They will, together with agreed members of the church leadership team, meet with the person and explain the need for safeguarding procedures to be put in place.

Not all sex offenders accept that what they have done is wrong and do not accept the impact of their actions on their victim. They can be very manipulative and may not have developed an understanding of the importance of boundaries. It is, therefore, vital that appropriate boundaries are established, for the protection of all.

Any contract should involve the person’s partner and/or relevant family members. Contracts will need to be personalised in each case, taking the needs of the individual concerned, local circumstances and other factors into account. This should be in line with the risk thought to be posed in consultation with the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

The contract will be signed and dated by all those named within it. It will be reviewed regularly, initially every three months, unless there are compelling reasons to leave more time between reviews.

The agreement will remain in force as long as the person is part of the congregation, whether or not they are on licence or their name appears on the sexual offenders register.
If the person leaves the church, the receiving church should be informed of the existence of the contract so that a new contract can be drawn up. If a person leaves without informing anyone where or whether they will attend anywhere for worship, the police should be informed.

**Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)**

The police, prison and probation services (known as the ‘responsible authority’) are required to establish and monitor the arrangements for managing sexual and violent offenders, known as Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). MAPPA Panels may also include Housing, Health, Children’s and Adult Services.

It is important to note that there are many people convicted of sexual offences against children who do not meet the MAPPA criteria and, subsequently, do not have such managed and co-ordinated approaches by the statutory agencies. Equally, offenders who start off under MAPPA do not continue to be monitored by MAPPA indefinitely. It is therefore crucial that arrangements for the protection of children are put in place irrespective of whether an offender falls within the MAPPA.

The purpose of MAPPA is to help reduce the re-offending behaviour of sexual and violent offenders in order to protect the public, including previous victims, from serious harm. It aims to do this by ensuring that all relevant agencies work together effectively to:

- identify all relevant offenders
- complete comprehensive risk assessments which take advantage of co-ordinated information sharing across the agencies
- devise implement and review robust Risk Management plans
- focus available resources in ways which best protect the public from serious harm

Each area has a MAPPA Strategic Management Board (SMB) attended by senior representatives of each of the responsible authorities, plus two lay advisors. It is the role of the SMB to ensure that MAPPA are working effectively and to establish and maintain working relationships with the Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs).

**Local Safeguarding Children Boards**

The Children Act 2004 requires every local authority to establish a Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). A primary goal of LSCBs is to ensure that work to protect children is properly co-ordinated and effective. However, once this has been secured they should go beyond to work to their wider remit, which includes preventative work to avoid harm being suffered.

45. Criminal Justice Act 2003 S 325-327
46. MAPPA Guidance 2012
47. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013 p 95
MAPPA guidance for the faith sector

Guidance under MAPPA states that religious communities must put in place effective arrangements which allow them to ensure they are able to protect their community, whilst, at the same time, allow sex offenders to maintain their right to worship in as safe a way as possible. An assessment of risk is needed, which should be carried out together with the police, probation services and Children’s Services as well as with the Synod Safeguarding Officer. The statutory agencies can provide appropriate information and guidance.

The relevant section of the MAPPA guidance reads as follows:

*It is essential that we assist religious communities to put in place effective arrangements, which allows them to ensure they are able to protect their community whilst allowing the offender to maintain their right to worship but in a safe way. The place of worship and religious leader should be provided with sufficient information to protect their congregation.*

*Where a Registered Sex Offender (RSO), who has committed offences against children, or other offenders who present a risk of harm to children and/or other identified victims wishes to continue to practise their religion, through attending services and/or being part of their faith community the offender/case manager must ensure that they have fully assessed the potential risk of harm this could present.*

*There should always be a discussion with the offender regarding the need to protect children/identified victims (unless this places the victim at greater risk), who may also be present at services and/or events, from harm. The offender needs to be aware that information will be disclosed to the religious organisation and that they (the offender) will be required to agree to and sign a ‘contract’ of behaviour. Where an offender is unwilling to give this undertaking, the Offender Manager (OM) and police should consider whether to seek a restrictive condition on a licence or in a Sexual Offences Prevention Order (SOPO) to prevent the offender being in a place of worship. The outcome of this decision must be recorded [i.e. by the Offender Manager] on the Violent and Sex Offender Register (ViSOR) and the case management record.*

*Any breaches of the ‘contract’ with the offender must be reported to the offender/case manager* 48

There are three categories of offender eligible for MAPPA:

- registered sexual offenders (Category 1) who are required to notify the police of their name and address, as well as other personal details, and notify any subsequent changes
- violent offenders (Category 2) sentenced to imprisonment/detention for 12 months or more, or detained under hospital orders (in relation to murder or offences specified in schedule 15 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003). This category also includes a small number of sexual offenders who do not qualify for registration and offenders disqualified from working with children

48. MAPPA Guidance 2012
other dangerous offenders (Category 3) who do not qualify under categories 1 or 2 but who currently pose a risk of serious harm. There is a link between their offending and the risk posed, meaning that they require active multi-agency management.

When an offender comes to notice before release, the Synod Safeguarding Officer can explore, with the probation service, whether specific licence conditions should be included. Sex Offender Prevention Orders (SOPOs) can be sought to control or exclude an offender’s involvement with a place or community of worship. In appropriate cases, the Synod Safeguarding Officer should explore with the police whether a SOPO condition should be sought and how it should be drafted.

If someone is coming out of prison and wishes to be part of a church community, discussions may need to be held as to which church might be appropriate in light of an offender’s needs and taking into account the nature of the congregation of any given church. For instance, if there is a church locally which does not have children it may be preferable to encourage the person to attend that church rather than one which does. The Synod Safeguarding Officer will be involved in these discussions.

It is important to note that management arrangements are likely to continue to be needed, even after statutory intervention has ceased.

Information sharing

The MAPPA guidance sets out principles for information sharing. Full details can be found in the guidance itself49. It is possible for information about offence(s) to be given by the police through, what is known as, a third party disclosure. The police will give careful consideration as to whether it is appropriate to share the information and will take into account, amongst other things, whether it is proportionate and necessary to do so. They will identify who in the church needs to know, and these people will be specifically listed in the disclosure. The police will need to be assured of the safety and security of the information.

If a disclosure is considered appropriate, it will be likely that, apart from the Synod Safeguarding Officer, it will be possible to inform a small number of the leadership team, including the minister or interim moderator. Those people would need to keep the information confidential and seek further guidance from the Synod Safeguarding Officer and police if they felt that others needed to know.

It is not acceptable for the entire congregation to be informed as this would not be considered to be either proportionate or necessary to safeguard children and would be contrary to the offender’s Human Rights. If, however, the information is in the public domain, for instance in local press reports, it may be necessary for the sake of the overall ministry of the Church to have a more open discussion. Careful thought would need to be given in handling such a situation as these types of scenario have the real potential to split a church, given that there are likely to be many different emotions at play. The Synod Safeguarding Officer and URC Press Officer should be involved in any kind of church statement.

49. MAPPA Guidance 2012 p.51-57
Pressing Needs Test regarding an offender/suspected offender

Synod Safeguarding Officers should be consulted before confidential information is shared. A disclosure should only be made if there is a pressing need. A disclosure can have grave consequences, so there must be real and cogent evidence of a pressing need for disclosure.

Each case must be considered on its own merits. A blanket approach is not possible. Considerations to be made in deciding whether there is a pressing need to share information about an offender/suspected offender include:

- the balance between the public interest and the need to protect children with the right of an individual to a private life
- the person's previous history and current risk assessment, if available
- the level of likely access to children
- the degree of risk posed by the person if a disclosure is not made
- any other factor in the individual case which is thought to be relevant

Where possible, these matters should be considered on a multi-agency basis. Legal advice should be sought where there is doubt about the lawfulness of a disclosure. In view of the possibility of a legal challenge/complaint by an offender, potential/suspected offender or future victim, all agencies must, in addition to seeking any legal advice required, maintain a written audit trail of events, actions, discussions and decisions as well as the reasons for them.

The Child Sex Offenders Disclosure Scheme /Community Disclosures Scheme

In England and Wales, there is the Child Sex Offenders Disclosure Scheme (known as Sarah’s Law 50) and in Scotland, the Community Disclosure Scheme – Keeping Children Safe, which both enable parents, carers and third parties to enquire whether a person who has access to a child is a registered sex offender or poses a risk the child.

Under the scheme, a parent, carer or third party can make an application to find out if there is any information which they should be aware of in protecting children in their care. If there is a need to pass on such information, the police will disclose this accordingly to whoever is in a position to use it in safeguarding the child(ren). This might not necessarily be the person who requested it.

50. “Sarah’s Law” was proposed after the murder of eight-year-old Sarah Payne by a convicted sex offender
The scheme builds on existing process for proactive management of sexual and violent offenders by the constabulary’s Public Protection Units under the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA).

Response of the church if an allegation is made

A child may make an allegation against someone in the church community. The child may already feel a loss of safety, trust, power and self-esteem. They may also feel guilt, shame, anger, blame and confusion. They may doubt they will be believed. It is vital that the child does not feel rejected by the church community.

Where the alleged perpetrator and the victim and/or their family are in the same church, support will need to be given to all parties. This should be offered by different people, as it is only in this way that support can be offered impartially and effectively. It is prudent, in these circumstances, to take advice from the statutory agencies before suggesting formal counselling for the child, as this can affect the possibility of a successful prosecution. This does not mean that kindness and a listening ear cannot be offered.

Ministers should be wary of attending Court with alleged perpetrators, as this may send a powerful message to the child and affect their trust in the church.

It may be necessary, for the sake of the child, or to satisfy the needs of an investigation, for the alleged perpetrator to attend different meetings or, by agreement, worship elsewhere. In such cases, the minister of the receiving church needs to be informed of the reasons. This sharing of information should be done in liaison with the statutory authorities.

The church should always seek the advice and involvement of the Synod Safeguarding Officer before responding to such situations.
Section 14
Children with sexually harmful behaviour

Introduction

With current research suggesting that nearly a third of serious sexual offences are committed by young people aged between 16 and 19, there is a growing need for churches to think seriously about how to manage this complex and sensitive issue. It is hard for us to think of children abusing other children, but it does happen. It is not always easy to tell the difference between normal sexual exploration and abusive behaviour. Children, particularly in younger age groups, may engage in such behaviour with no knowledge that it is wrong or abusive. For this reason, it may be more accurate to talk about sexually harmful behaviour, rather than abuse.

Where there is a concern, early intervention is the key to addressing the issue at hand. It is vital, therefore, not to ignore the warning signs in the hope that they will go away.

Understanding the issue

Children pass through different stages of development as they grow. Their awareness and curiosity about sexual matters change as they pass from infancy into childhood and, subsequently, through puberty into adolescence. It is also helpful to be aware that children with disabilities and additional
needs may develop at differing rates from others, depending on the nature of their disability, which can often make them more vulnerable to abuse. Children with learning difficulties, for example, may behave sexually in ways which are out of step with their age. Particular care may be needed in educating children as they develop an understanding of their own sexual development and to ensure that they can communicate effectively about any worries they may have.

Many patterns of behaviour understandably might alarm adults. These range from playful experiment which unintentionally goes too far, all the way through to serious sexual assault. The areas to consider when assessing the level of concern are:

**Power**
Abuse often involves an imbalance of power. Such imbalances can be physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual or due to social position or a position of trust held by the abuser. Age difference may also contribute.

**Consent**
The concept of consent is difficult to apply to children, particularly since those who have not yet reached puberty may have a limited understanding of what they are agreeing to. If force, coercion or bribery is involved, this also gives rise to concern.

**Secrecy**
Older children often know that what they are doing is wrong and can go to extraordinary lengths to prevent their behaviour being detected. If there is a concern and a child is being deliberately vague about where they’ve been or what they’ve been doing, it is essential to ascertain the facts. Once known, these often speak for themselves, but most children who are on the receiving end of abuse find it very difficult to talk to adults about what is happening, especially if the person responsible is supposed to be a friend or a person in a position of trust. In the same way that adult abusers are usually well known to the person they are abusing, the same is true for children who abuse. Rarely is the victim a random stranger.

**How should we respond?**
If there are concerns about the behaviour of a child, seek advice and support from the Synod Safeguarding Officer about the best action to take. Action can lead to abuse being prevented, children who are being abused receiving the protection they need and survivors receiving help to recover. It can also lead to the abuser getting effective help or treatment to stop abusing and allow them to grow up as a safer member of society.
Key safeguarding messages

It is important that churches …

- do not ignore the signs or symptoms of children who display sexually harmful behaviours;
- take seriously any disclosure of abuse from a child about other children and follow appropriate safeguarding procedures;
- review their current safeguarding policy to see whether it adequately addresses these issues;
- seek advice from the Synod Safeguarding Officer and be prepared to engage with other professionals and statutory agencies that have expert knowledge in this area;
- be prepared to offer ongoing pastoral care and support in the context of a risk assessment.

These issues are highly complex. It is imperative, therefore, that help is sought for any children whose behaviour is a cause for worry. Support must also be given to those who have suffered as a result of sexually harmful behaviours. Statutory agencies should be contacted in all situations.

Additionally ‘Stop It Now!’ has a confidential helpline on 0808 1000 900.

The Churches Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS) is also able to offer advice on 0845 120 45 50

It might be useful to have these and other helpful contact details displayed as part of general protective and supportive measures.

More information can be found in Appendix U: Children with sexually harmful behaviour.
Part 3
Safeguarding Adults at Risk
To follow in 2015