Part 3
Safeguarding Adults at Risk
Section 15
Adults at risk of Abuse

Safeguarding – Everybody’s business

Our duty of care to ensure all are safe when engaged with our churches is an expression of being a loving, faithful church community.

The responsibility placed upon churches for safeguarding adults, is no less, than the responsibility for safeguarding children. Although the protection of adults at risk from abuse or neglect has been less prominent in church settings than safeguarding children; awareness is growing.
What is Adult Safeguarding?

Adult safeguarding means protecting a person’s right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect.1

Safeguarding adults can be complex, reflecting the myriad relationships in which adults engage, and the societal, family and wider circumstances, in which relationships evolve and change.

Understanding Adult Abuse

Our understanding of ‘harm’ and ‘abuse’ reflect societal and cultural norms. Recent investigations have highlighted the pain caused by abuse to adults with learning disabilities in hospitals, how neglect in care homes leaves frail people distressed, without dignity, and the ways in which prominent individuals have used their power and influence to abuse men and women over many years. As we learn more of the extent of adult-to-adult abuse, so we realise the prevalence of the abuse taking place around us. 2 3

Abuse of adults at risk of neglect occurs in any setting including the person’s own home and the very places which should present as safe, such as churches, hospitals and care homes.

Most abuse is caused, or inflicted by a third party. Adult abuse or neglect, like child abuse, involves the misuse of power, authority and status in a relationship.

Research shows that a significant proportion of adults who need safeguarding do so because they are experiencing abuse from someone close to them.4 5

Adult abuse can include all forms of domestic abuse and this guidance therefore includes references to domestic abuse.

Self-neglect is now also recognised as a type of abuse or neglect which is relevant to safeguarding adults in some circumstances. 6

Concerns about adult abuse can emerge from observations, receiving and passing information, or direct disclosures from individuals. Their severity may range from unintentionally inflicted difficulty or harm to deliberate and calculated abuse of individuals or groups of people.

Incidents can be one-off events or a pattern of repeated, cyclical or historic abusive behaviours.

2. See: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-31557790
3. See: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-32693998
6. Care Act 2014
The Church and Safeguarding Adults

Jesus’ command to “love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34-35) places upon us a responsibility to uphold the rights of the least powerful and protect the most vulnerable in society.  

We know many safeguarding adult referrals involve people aged 65 years and older and current trends indicate the likelihood of abuse increases with age.

Furthermore 30% of adult females and 16.9% of the male adult population will have experienced some form of domestic abuse since the age of 16 years.

This means statistically our church communities will include adults who have either experienced domestic abuse, or who are at risk of experiencing abuse or neglect.

Adult safeguarding is the responsibility of the church and those church elders who act in the role of charity trustees. The Charity Commission and insurers require churches to have well used policies and procedures for the safeguarding of adults. See Section 2 for further details.

Churches have responsibilities for their own activities and also for those using their premises. As charities, churches should ensure that those hiring their premises have safeguarding policies in place. If the building is being let to organisations conducting activity regulated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), trustees should ensure their letting agreements include reference to having appropriate registration in place. Examples can include organisations offering respite or day care to adults with learning disabilities. You can find more information about this by searching for information for providers on the CQC website.

Similarly, synods, churches and denominational officers arranging residential or overnight conferences and accommodation, should also check that the hosting body has appropriate safeguarding policies in place.

The United Reformed Church requires all residential establishments, including Resource Centres for Learning, to have safeguarding policies and procedures for safeguarding adults.

Treating one another well, being respectful of our rights as individuals, and respecting the dignity and needs of each other, witnesses to our faith. To do so means we take important steps to prevent harm occurring.

This universal regard for others requires that we offer a welcome to all.

Churches and places of worship are unique; our church communities care for those who have been abused, or are at risk, yet also hold a responsibility for giving pastoral support to perpetrators and people accused of abuse.

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11. See: www.cqc.org.uk
This can mean survivors of abuse, and those at risk of harm, may be in close proximity to people alleged to have abused, or who have been convicted of abuse. We believe this difficult responsibility can be met, through careful attention to the needs of all the church family. See pages 96 to 99 in this handbook for more details about managing these types of risk.

We recognise too, there will be times when consideration of risks and circumstances, lead to the conclusion that the wisest and safest decision is to ask an individual not to worship in a particular church, and to invite them to attend services elsewhere.

To do so expresses our duty of care to all in our church communities, in an honest and faithful manner.

Safeguarding and the Law

Some forms of adult abuse are criminal offences which apply to all adults. Examples include physical assault, theft and rape.

There are other less obvious statutes which encompass aspects of safeguarding; these include health and safety legislation, some NHS-specific legislation, legislation against sharing ‘hate porn’ and other images, trading standards and environmental health regulations and legislation.

In England and Wales both the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and Mental Health Act 1983 include provisions for the protection of adults who may be at risk of abuse and in 2014 the Care Act made safeguarding adults a legal responsibility for public agencies. Local Authorities must have a Safeguarding Adults Board and investigate cases where there may be safeguarding concerns, if they pose sufficient risk. Public agencies are required to co-operate to protect adults at risk of harm or neglect and there is a legal requirement to hold a serious case review if there are concerns about the response to a safeguarding adult case, or if a death has occurred in the context of safeguarding processes.

Note: the Mental Capacity Act 2005 applies to adults and young people from the age of 16 years.

In Scotland the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007 outlines the statutory basis of safeguarding adults in Scotland together with the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000 and the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003.

The Scottish legislative framework requires public bodies to work together to protect adults at risk and co-operate in appropriate enquiries and investigations. It includes protection orders such as removal and banning orders and affords a legislative framework for Adult Protection Committees in Scotland.

In Wales there will be new legislation which will come into force in April 2016. The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act received Royal Assent in May 2014 and will be implemented in April 2016. Until then the existing legislation continues to apply.

- This will mean that from April 2016 there will be three legislative frameworks for adult safeguarding operating across the denomination.
People who are at risk from abuse and neglect

‘Vulnerable Adult’ or ‘Adult at Risk’?
We use the term ‘adult at risk’ to make explicit that the cause of abuse rests with the perpetrator, not the person being abused. For this reason, the term ‘vulnerable adult’ is not used, as often now.

Note: You will still see the term ‘vulnerable adult’ being used. For example the Charity Commission still use the term and some housing regulations use this definition. Disclosure and Barring systems for checking the suitability of individuals to work with children and adults are based upon legislation that refers to ‘vulnerable adults’.

More information can be found in Sections 6 and 7 of the comprehensive edition of Good Practice 4:
www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding

Who are ‘Adults at Risk’?
In Scotland, the definition of an ‘adult at risk’ under the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007 is a person aged 16 years or over who is:

- Unable to safeguard themselves, their property (their home, the things they own), their 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 others who are not so affected

In England and Wales people who may need protecting from abuse or neglect are defined in the Care Act 2014 as being:

- Adults who have care and support needs
- Are at risk of, or experiencing abuse, or neglect and
- Because of their care and support needs cannot protect themselves against actual, or potential abuse or neglect.

An ‘adult at risk’ of abuse or neglect is someone who, by nature of their circumstances, physical or mental health, is unable to protect themselves from harm or exploitation. It is important to note that the person must have care and support needs they do not have to be receiving help or services from the Local Authority, the NHS, or elsewhere to fall within the definition.

Local Authorities have a duty to look at the safeguarding concerns of adults who meet this definition. They will decide with the person whether it is necessary to carry out further investigations and their decision should include the individual involved wherever possible.

15. Care Act 2014 Section 42 (1)
The seriousness of a person’s disability or illness does not affect their likelihood to being an adult at risk of abuse or neglect. For example, an independent person, who is frail, and struggles to manage their finances, may be at risk from financial abuse in the same way that a physically disabled adult might be. The important factor is that the person is at risk of experiencing abuse, or neglect and needs help to stay safe.

Adults experiencing domestic abuse may also be ‘adults at risk’.

Similarly, carers with care and support needs of their own, may be at risk of abuse and neglect. See pages 87 and 88 for further information about domestic abuse and carers.

Adults who misuse substances and alcohol

- Adults who abuse substances can be subject to abuse, self-neglect, or violence. This may be because of chaotic lifestyles, or because their addiction exposes them to dangerous situations. Adults who misuse substances, can experience long term physical, cognitive or mental health issues, as a direct consequence of their substance misuse.

- The cumulative risk to individuals can increase the need for care and support. All of which means that adults abusing substances, including alcohol, can be adults at risk of abuse.

- There is a strong correlation between the misuse of alcohol and drugs, and incidence of domestic abuse, including violent offences.

  Note: Parents, who misuse substances including alcohol, may be placing their child at risk. The concept of ‘hidden harm’ refers to damage encountered by children whose parents misuse substances. Up to 40% of all child protection cases involve parental substance or alcohol misuse. A large proportion of children whose parents have problematic alcohol or drug use, will be damaged as a result, even where there are mitigating factors such as reliable financial incomes, or a caring and stable adult in their lives, who ensures daily routines.\(^{16}\)

- If you are concerned about an adult who misuses substances and you know they are the parent/guardian of a child or young person under the age of 18, please liaise with your church Safeguarding Coordinator, or the Synod Safeguarding Officer/s.

Types of Abuse

It is unlikely that just one type of abuse will occur in isolation from another. For example, physical abuse, can give rise to emotional abuse, neglect can result in physical abuse, and self-harm.

**Sexual abuse:** This includes any form of sexual harassment, inappropriate touching or looking, indecent exposure, sexual teasing or innuendo, being subjected to pornography, witnessing sexual acts, and any sexual act that the person did not agree to, or felt pressurised into consenting to, as well as rape.

**Physical abuse:** Physical abuse can include assault, being hit, slapped or restrained. Misuse of medication, to subdue or control a person, or physical abuse, as is denying someone food or water, or failing to help them to keep warm, use the toilet, or conduct their physical care.

**Psychological Abuse:** Sometimes called ‘emotional abuse’ and can involve threatening to hurt someone, to abandon them, preventing access to visitors, friends, and family. Being humiliated, insulted, blamed, controlled, intimidated, bullied, or harassed can constitute emotional abuse. Such abuse can take place face to face, online or in other communications.

Being denied access to aspects of life, which are important to a person’s emotional wellbeing, is a form of emotional abuse. This may include being denied access to religious or spiritual materials that are important to the person, or in some circumstances, being prevented from attending church or other faith and worship settings.

The withdrawal of care services and support which cannot be justified and appear unreasonable may also constitute a form of psychological abuse.

**Domestic Abuse:** Domestic abuse and/or intimate abuse is when a form of violence, or other type of abuse, is inflicted by a partner or family member. It can be a single incident or a recurring pattern which involves controlling, coercive or threatening actions. Forced Marriage and so called ‘Honour Based’ Violence are also forms of domestic abuse.

**Discriminatory Abuse:** This involves unfair treatment because of a person’s race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, or religion. It can include some forms of harassment, verbal abuse, and slurs upon the person’s character. Physical abuse and other forms of abuse can arise because of discrimination.

**Financial Abuse:** This occurs when monies and valuables have been stolen, or where someone uses coercion or deception, to gain access to money and possessions, and uses them in ways that the person does not wish. It might involve theft of money or valuables, fraud, scams, gaining access to a bank account, or benefits, providing financial services in full knowledge that someone lacks capacity, or inappropriate use of money by someone appointed to look after financial assets on the person’s behalf. Financial abuse is a common form of abuse against adults at risk.

**Neglect:** Neglect occurs when there is a deliberate withholding of help, care or other basic requirements, with the intention of causing harm or abuse. Failures to attend to someone’s personal care or to provide the right sort of help, or medical care are all forms of neglect. Examples include not having access to enough food and drink, or the right type of food and drink, or not being provided with warmth or basic hygiene arrangements. Being denied access to medication or the inappropriate use of medication, is also a form of neglect. Although neglect is a form of abuse, it has close overlaps with other types of abuse such as psychological or physical abuse, because the action of omission leads to other harms as a direct consequence.
Institutional Abuse: Institutional abuse occurs when a place, company, organisation or charity undertakes practices which cause harm and abuse. Examples include: care homes where rotas are arranged for the benefit of staff, instead of the wellbeing of the people in the home, prisons which fail to address practices known to cause harm and when known abuse is ignored to protect adults and/or limit reputational damage.

Forced Marriage: When an adult is coerced, pressurised or deceived into a marriage, to which they would/do not consent, this is a forced marriage. It differs from arranged marriages, which are agreed to by both parties.

Trafficking/Modern Slavery: This is an increasing form of abuse which is prevalent in all areas of the UK. It involves the purposeful movement of an adult for economic benefit to a third party, often involving forced labour, unpaid labour, sexual exploitation, rape or prostitution.

Online Abuse: Cyber bullying, internet fraud and stalking through social media, are all forms of abuse.

Self harm: Self harm is any form of self-inflicted injury or hurt. This can include self-neglect and/or a failure to attend to basic needs. Adults, who harm themselves for whatever purpose, can be adults at risk.

Hoarding: Hoarding is a form of self-neglect, because it can arise from a neglect of home and surroundings and may be illustrative of mental health concerns. Hoarding increases the risk of fire and ill health, as well as financial and other types of abuse.

Spiritual abuse: You will not find references to spiritual abuse in The Care Act 2014. However, spiritual abuse is a recognised form of abuse which misuses power and is very relevant to church and faith settings. The term ‘spiritual abuse’ covers a wide variety of behaviours, and can be summarised as the use of spiritual authority or spiritual means in order to demean, manipulate, control or exploit someone. As with any category of abuse, spiritual abuse is most likely to arise when people, often in positions of authority, misuse power. Adults are more at risk if:

- They are isolated, and have little contact with their friends and family or people around them.
- They have difficulties with their memory.
- They have problems communicating.
- They are dependent on a carer (who may be a family member, friend or paid worker).
- If they don’t like their carers.
- If the carer abuses alcohol or drugs.
- If the carer relies upon the adult at risk, for financial support, a home or emotional support.
Mental Capacity, Abuse and the Right to Choose

A fundamental difference between safeguarding adults and children is that adults are presumed to have capacity for making their decisions, and the freedom and right to make choices about their life (unless the law restricts them from doing so, or they are assessed as lacking capacity).

This can mean that people at risk of abuse, may wish to make choices that others deem unwise, and which perhaps expose them to future harms. This can include situations when a person is harmed, or abused by a friend, paid carer, or family member, and chooses not to press charges. This can be a difficult area for churches, particularly where there are pastoral relationships with either party.

An important aspect to understanding whether an adult can protect themselves from abuse and harm, is to consider the extent to which they can understand information, and make decisions. This is known as ‘mental capacity’. For example, someone with severe dementia is unlikely to have the mental capacity to make significant decisions that will affect their lives.

One of the difficulties associated with mental capacity, is that it can fluctuate; so someone may lack capacity at one moment, and sometime later be fully able to make important decisions by weighing up the implications of a situation, having received and understood information. Some adults may have capacity to make some decisions but not all. Lacking mental capacity is not a permanent or fixed state, even though the physical or mental symptoms, illness or disability, which reduces capacity, can be of a permanent nature. For this reason, when health or social care professionals test a person’s mental capacity it will only ever relate to the decision that is being considered.

Principles for working with adults at risk

The 2013 Statement of Government Policy on Safeguarding Adults states safeguarding is everybody’s business, and that communities have a role to play in preventing, detecting and reporting neglect and abuse. Measures need to be in place locally to protect those least able to protect themselves. The statement explains how safeguarding practice should incorporate the following principles:

- **Empowerment**: People being supported and encouraged to make their own decisions and informed consent.
- **Prevention**: It is better to take action before harm occurs.
- **Proportionality**: The least intrusive response appropriate to the risk presented.
- **Protection**: Support and representation for those in greatest need.
- **Partnership**: Local solutions through services working with their communities. Communities have a part to play in preventing, detecting and reporting neglect and abuse.
- **Accountability**: Transparency in delivering safeguarding.
Section 16
Responding to Adult Safeguarding concerns

In Emergencies:

If there is concern that an adult is in immediate danger, or requires medical attention, the emergency services should be contacted immediately, and without delay. See page 90 step 4 about making a referral if you need this information straight away.

Strong foundations

Being well prepared is one of the best ways to ensure you and your church is equipped to handle incidents of adult safeguarding. You might find it helpful to go through this quick checklist:

- Are the contact details for our Church Safeguarding Coordinators easy to find?
- Do we have a church safeguarding policy and procedure which includes adults at risk?
- Do people know where to find the policy and procedure and what they say? Are they on our website?
- Have we placed display notices where they can easily be seen?
- Do we have contact details for the police and our Local Authority* Safeguarding Adults Team, ready to hand? Are they in our policy?
- Do we have the name and contact details of the Synod Safeguarding Officer/s?
- Do we have the contact details for our Moderator?
- Do we have the right recruitment and selection arrangements for people working with adults at risk?
- Do we need to have up to date policies for photo consent?
- Do we have details of domestic abuse helplines?

* Some churches will cover more than one Local Authority, so check if this applies to you and have all the contact details you need. Remember it will be the Local Authority where an individual resides that you will need to contact.

Responding to an adult who discloses abuse

If an adult discloses abuse, it is essential that their information is taken seriously. See pages 89 to 93 of this Handbook.

Some do’s and don’ts are given below.

**Do:**
- Stay calm.
- Let the person talk and listen attentively, giving them your full attention.
- Accept what is said without judgment.
- Reassure the person that they are right to share the information with you.
- Seek medical attention if necessary.
- Reassure the person that you will help to support them or arrange for appropriate support to be put in place.
- Tell the person 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 the person’s mouth.
- Promise confidentiality, instead explain the boundaries to this.
- Investigate anything.
- Use leading questions, such as ‘so it sounds like you have been abused’.
  Instead, use open questions such as ‘tell me’, ‘explain to me’, ‘describe to me’.
- Ask the person to repeat information unnecessarily.
- 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.
It is important to establish:

- What would the person like to happen next?
- What would be helpful to them?
- Are they safe from harm now?

Make sure you have checked if the person is still in danger or at risk of harm from the person or people, who have hurt them.

Responding to Specific Situations

Abuse which occurred when the adult was under 18 years of age.

If someone has chosen to disclose historic abuse to you, it can be because they believe that you will hold their information sensitively, trusting you to respond appropriately, and with understanding.

Previous experience of abuse as a child, or young person, can increase the likelihood of being abused as an adult, and/or the risks of mental or physical illness, later in life.

It is important to establish:

- What the person would like to happen next?
- What would be helpful to them?
- Are they safe from harm now?
- Do they know what happened to the person who abused them?

Even though the alleged abuse may have happened many years ago, it is still important that it is reported. Ideally this will be with the consent of the person/people who experienced the abuse.

Where an incident of alleged abuse occurred in the past, it may be necessary to report the concern if:

- You are aware that more than one person may have been subject to the potential abuse.
- A criminal offence may have been committed.
- The person asks for the situation to be reported.
- No action appears to have been taken, of which you are aware, and someone could still be at risk.
- The perpetrator may still be in a position to inflict harm upon others.

Information can be shared with those who need to know, if others are at risk of harm. See pages 88 and 89 in this handbook.

More information can be found in Sections 5 and 12 of the comprehensive edition of Good Practice 4: www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding
Important: If there are others at risk from an alleged perpetrator, and you believe a criminal offence may have been committed, follow steps 1-4 on pages 89 and 90.

If you become aware of historical abuse, but not directly from the person who has been harmed, it should be followed up. This is to ensure that all necessary steps were taken at the time, and importantly, that no-one is still at risk from a known or alleged perpetrator. In this situation follow steps 1 and 2 on pages 89 to 90 below only. The Synod Safeguarding Officer will be in a position to liaise with appropriate parties, including the local authority, if needed.

It is important that you do not share the information you have, with anyone else.

If you are in any doubt about whether to report your concern, contact your Synod Safeguarding Officer for advice or the URC Safeguarding Officer. You may also contact your Local Authority Adult Safeguarding Team to seek their advice about whether further steps could or should be taken. You can explain the situation to them without providing further details and they will advise you upon a possible course of action to take.

Concerns about domestic abuse
The information below is for quick reference.

More information can be found in Sections 15 and Appendix R of the comprehensive edition of Good Practice 4: [www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding](http://www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding)

If you have concerns about domestic abuse it is important that you read these documents.

If someone begins to disclose domestic abuse, ensure you are in a safe place, away from the presence of others and from any children.

If the person requires a translator to explain to you what is happening, the translator should not be a child. In these circumstances the translator should ideally be a professional.

If someone tells you they are being abused in their home, and there are no children or adults with care or support needs in the household, advice from Women’s Aid [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk) and domestic abuse partnerships suggest you can be of help in the following ways:

- Take the person seriously and believe what they say.
- Be calm and positive.
- Respect their wishes.
- Ask what they want to happen.
- Give them time to tell you what is happening at their own pace. This may be the first time they have opened up, and may be an immense and brave step for them.
- Emphasise that they are not responsible for the abuse, and they are not alone.
- Find out if they need medical help.
- Do not encourage them to do anything they are not ready to do. They will probably be the best person to judge the best way forward and how they can stay safe.
- Help them to access specialist services and sources of professional help and support.
- Help them to keep safe, by making a safety plan.
- Check whether it is safe to contact them and agree how to stay in touch.
Do not offer to talk to or counsel the alleged perpetrator. You may be perceived as a ‘threat’ to the relationship and inadvertently increase the risk to the victim or indeed the risk to yourself.

Remember to ask:
- What the person would like to happen next?
- What would be helpful to them?
- Are they safe from harm now?

Concerns about domestic abuse, if children are in the home
Where domestic abuse is taking place in a household with children, or young people under 18 years of age, this will be a children’s safeguarding matter. See pages 88 to 90 in this Handbook.

More information can be found in Sections 10 and 11 of the comprehensive edition of Good Practice 4:
www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding

Remember to ask:
- What the person would like to happen next?
- What would be helpful to them?
- Are they safe from harm now?
- Where are the children?

Concerns about domestic abuse, when there are adults with care or support needs, in the home
Adults with care and support needs who are experiencing abuse in their home are also experiencing domestic abuse. A safeguarding response may therefore be appropriate for people in these circumstances. 18

Information about Carers
Caring for family members with care and support needs can create stress and difficulties, which can lead to tensions between a person who is being cared for and their family carer. These situations are not unusual; they account for a significant number of safeguarding cases and sometimes may indicate that the carer is not receiving enough help and support.

Although the risk of abuse is most usually from the carer, there are circumstances when the abuse can be inflicted upon their carer or other members of the family by the person being cared for.

Difficulties between the carer and the person being cared for can be exacerbated when there is a history of abuse in the relationship.

Carers can be entitled to support services in some situations. Encouraging carers to access help can be an important step to preventing harm in the home.

More information can be found in Part 3 of the comprehensive edition of Good Practice 4:
www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding

18. Care Act 2014
Young people and children caring for an adult with care and support needs are also entitled to support. They can also be subject to abuse from their cared for parent or family member. In these circumstances this will be a children’s safeguarding matter.

More information can be found in Section 11 of the comprehensive edition of Good Practice 4: www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding

Where domestic abuse is taking place in a household, and adults with care and support needs are at risk, the Local Authority should be notified. Follow steps 1-4 pages 89 and 90. Ideally this will be with the consent of the person experiencing the abuse.

Remember to ask:

- What the person would like to happen next?
- What would be helpful to them?
- Are they safe from harm now?

If you are worried about a friend or family member who is at risk from domestic abuse search online for your local Community Safety Partnership, Domestic Abuse Partnership or Women’s Aid/Refuge for details about local services and sources of help in your area.

Consent and information sharing

Ideally in all situations, the person experiencing the abuse will either, contact statutory authorities directly, or give you their consent, to make the contact on their behalf.

Sometimes this may not happen. If no consent is given because the person is confused, or appears not to understand you and is unable to tell you what they would like to happen next, this could be due to lack of mental capacity. By taking action and reporting your concern, it is likely that you will be acting in the person’s best interests, to keep them safe from harm.

Where the person appears to understand that inaction creates further dangers for them, and continues to choose not to take action, you can still share information with the Synod Safeguarding Officer, and church Safeguarding Coordinator if you believe that a crime may have been or could be committed or that a failure to do so would place a child or adult with care needs at risk of abuse. Examples might include:

- The alleged perpetrator is employed in a position of trust (including professionals) which means others may be endangered.
- The alleged perpetrator works with children or adults at risk.
- Others are in danger or at risk.
- A criminal offence may have been committed.
- There is a serious and high risk to the safety or life of the person.
- The alleged perpetrator works for the church, paid or unpaid.

If you become aware that people are in immediate danger of harm, or a criminal offence has been committed, you should contact the Police immediately. See steps 1-4 on pages 89 and 90.

If you are in doubt about whether to report the situation, contact your Local Authority Safeguarding Adults Team for advice. You can share the circumstances of the situation without providing the name of the person involved.
Confidentiality and information sharing

If someone starts to make a disclosure to you, find an opportunity, early in the conversation, to explain that you cannot keep secret, any information about a possible criminal offence or risk to others. We all have to share certain types of information if people are in danger or a crime has been committed. You can offer assurance that you will only share information with those who need to be made aware. This makes explicit the importance of what is about to be said.

Confidentiality is maintained when information is shared on a ‘need to know’ basis. Details of a potential safeguarding situation should remain confidential to those who must be involved and not shared any wider with anyone else.

It is essential to keep any records with personal information confidential and stored securely, with access only to those who need to see them.

It is possible to share generalised details, sufficient to make people aware of an alleged incident, when this becomes necessary. For example: *A possible safeguarding incident has occurred and our church safeguarding procedures are being followed. Owing to our desire to respect everyone’s right to confidentiality we are unable to share details. We ask that you respect this and trust that every step is being taken to ensure our church is as safe a place to be as we can make it. If we are able to tell you any further information we will do so. However, we may not be in a position to give any other details for some time. If you have any concerns of a safeguarding nature, please contact the church Safeguarding Coordinator. Please pray for all involved.*

Reporting concerns about potential abuse or neglect

If you are in any doubt about whether to report your concern, contact your Synod Safeguarding Officer for advice or the URC Safeguarding Officer. You may also contact your Local Authority Adult Safeguarding Team to seek their advice about whether further steps could or should be taken. You can explain the situation to them without providing further details and they will advise you upon a possible course of action to take.

1. **Contact your church Safeguarding Coordinator when:**
   a) Someone has disclosed abuse to you, and/or
   b) You become aware that possible abuse is taking place.

If the church Safeguarding Coordinator is not available, speak to your Synod Safeguarding Officer/s.

*Note: If the alleged perpetrator is a worker within the church see pages 91 and 92.*
Do not share the information with anyone else. Do not investigate the situation, or check out any further facts, other than ensuring that the person is safe.

2. **The church Safeguarding Coordinator must discuss the situation immediately with the Synod Safeguarding Officer.**

If the Synod Safeguarding Officer is not available, speak to the Moderator or Synod Clerk instead.

3. **Contact the Local Authority to tell them about the concern. The Synod Safeguarding Officer or the church Safeguarding Coordinator can do this.**

It is important that if you see or have information about something of concern, that you report it. You may be providing a vital piece of the jigsaw and information that helps others to make decisions.

Do not worry if you do not have all the details about a situation.

Remember it is not the church’s role to investigate, or compile all the facts about a situation, that is the role of the statutory agencies. Sometimes, even when statutory agencies do not take further action, the information you provide can be invaluable at a later stage.

The people taking your call will be trained and experienced in talking to callers who are hesitant about contacting them. They will help you to give the information that they need.

Do not delay reporting your concern because you want to ensure the person who may have carried out the abuse, cannot access the alleged victim, or others at risk. The statutory agencies may wish to be involved in this step, dependent upon who is involved and the severity of the situation.

4. **Information you may need when contacting the local authority or Police.**

- The name of the person concerned.
- Their address and date of birth, if you have them.
- Has the person consented to you giving the information? If the answer is ‘no’, explain why you are calling.
- Why you are concerned.
- What you were told, what you saw, or what you heard.
- Any other relevant details about the situation.
- If there are children or young people aged under 18 involved, their names and ages, if you know them.
- **If the alleged perpetrator is:**
  - A member of staff (lay or ordained)
  - Involved in the church in an unpaid capacity,
  - Continues to have access to adults at risk or children,
  - Is in an occupation of trust (e.g. solicitor, accountant, other professional)
  - Known to have a history of safeguarding concerns, for example, is subject to a contract.
- Your contact details.
- The Synod Safeguarding Officer’s contact details.

See **Section 17** for information about the steps churches can take to support alleged victims of abuse.
Responding to abuse when the alleged perpetrator is a volunteer in the church

If the situation is urgent, and someone is at immediate risk of harm or neglect, contact the emergency services without delay.

Where there is no immediate danger:

i. Contact the church Safeguarding Coordinator. [If you believe the church Safeguarding Coordinator has a relationship with the people involved, or other potential conflict of interest, seek the advice of the Synod Safeguarding Officer. If you believe the Synod Safeguarding Officer may have a potential conflict of interest, contact the URC Safeguarding Officer for advice.]

ii. The church Safeguarding Coordinator and/or Synod Safeguarding Officer, will agree who will contact statutory agencies, as appropriate. See steps 1-4 above.

iii. The Local Authority will wish to be involved in decisions/actions about informing the alleged perpetrator, including removing them from their duties. Always discuss this with statutory authorities before taking any steps. This is because you may alert a perpetrator to remove evidence or important information.

iv. The safeguarding personnel reporting the concern to the authorities will agree who will inform the Minister and Moderator.

v. Consider carefully the appropriate steps to take in advising church and Synod Safeguarding personnel, if there is a potential conflict of interest.

vi. Following discussions with statutory agencies and in accordance with their requirements a decision will be made about whether to suspend the alleged perpetrator, or to move them to a role which does not involve working with children or adults at risk. Advice can be sought from the Human Resources Department at Church House on this matter.

More information can be found in Part 2 of the comprehensive edition of Good Practice 4: www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding

vii. Please note churches should not undertake any investigatory process until statutory agencies have advised this can take place. This is because statutory processes will take precedence and it important not to contaminate any evidence they may need.

viii. Advise the URC Safeguarding Officer about the situation.

ix. Other URC officers may be contacted as required, including Human Resources and Communications to manage any media enquiries.

x. See Section 17 for information about how churches can support alleged victims of abuse.

xi. See Section 18 for information about the actions churches should take to keep people safe from alleged perpetrators of abuse.
Responding to abuse when the allegation involves a paid church worker, or a minister, or a Synod employee

i. If the situation concerns a minister, or synod employee contact the Synod Safeguarding Officer [If you believe the Synod Safeguarding Officer may have a relationship with the people involved, or other potential conflict of interest, seek the advice of the URC Safeguarding Officer.]

ii. If the situation involves a church employee contact the church Safeguarding Coordinator [If you believe the Church Safeguarding Coordinator may have a relationship with the people involved, or other potential conflict of interest contact the Synod Safeguarding Officer directly.]

iii. The church Safeguarding Coordinator will contact the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

iv. The church Safeguarding Coordinator and Synod Safeguarding Officer will agree who will contact the statutory agencies, as appropriate. See steps 1-4 above on page 89 and 90.

v. The Synod Safeguarding Officer will inform the Moderator and the URC Safeguarding Officer.

vi. If the situation involves a minister, and statutory agencies decide to proceed with an investigation, the Moderator will advise the General Secretary.

vii. The Local Authority will wish to be involved in decisions/actions about informing the alleged perpetrator including removing them from their duties. Always discuss this with statutory authorities before taking any steps. This is because you may alert a perpetrator to remove evidence or important information.

viii. Following discussions with the statutory agencies and in line with their requirements, a decision will be made about whether to suspend the alleged perpetrator, or to move them to a role which does not involve working with children or adults at risk. Advice can be sought from the Human Resources Department at Church House on this matter.

More information can be found in Section 12 of the comprehensive edition of Good Practice 4: www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding

ix. Other URC officers may be involved including Communications for the management of any media enquiries.

x. If the alleged perpetrator is a paid worker for a church, or the synod, the employing body should refer to its disciplinary procedures to follow the correct steps. Guidance can be
sought from Church House in these situations.

xi. If the alleged perpetrator is a minister, the matter must be referred into the ministerial disciplinary process by contacting the Synod Moderator.

xii. Please note no investigatory process should be undertaken until statutory agencies have advised this can take place. This is because statutory processes will take precedence and it important not to contaminate any evidence they may need.

xiii. Careful thought should be given to informing safeguarding personnel if it is known they have a relationship with the alleged perpetrator, or victim or other potential conflict of interest.

xiv. See Section 17 for information about steps churches can take to support alleged victims of abuse.

xv. See Section 18 for information about actions churches should take to keep people safe from alleged perpetrators of abuse.

Record keeping is essential in these situations. Please follow the guidance below on page 94. It is important to ensure that contemporaneous notes are maintained throughout an alleged incident and any subsequent investigations and actions.

What will happen next?

• The Local Authority will look at the safeguarding concerns raised with them and decide upon the best course of action. They will take account of the person’s wishes and preferences as far as possible and they may carry out further enquiries or begin an investigation. They may provide advice and support and decide no further action is required at this stage.

• If there is an investigation it could be undertaken by a range of professionals, depending upon the nature of the case. You may find the investigation is led by social workers or police, or both. Sometimes health professionals become involved and the Local Authority can call upon a range of organisations and individuals to assist with its enquiries.

• The church may be asked to share information with the Local Authority and/or Police and we are duty-bound to assist.

• Please ensure that your Synod Safeguarding Officer and the URC Safeguarding Officer are contacted in these situations.

More information can be found in Part 3 of the comprehensive edition of Good Practice 4: www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding
Responding to general concerns about an adult’s wellbeing

There are times when you may have general concerns about an adult’s wellbeing because of their frailty, mental ill health, learning or physical disabilities. If you have concerns about an adult’s wellbeing it might be appropriate to encourage them to find more help to remain independent and well.

If you are concerned about an adult carer, who may be experiencing difficulties with their situation, you can encourage them to seek the help they may need.

If you want to find more information about services in your area, your Local Authority will be a good place to start. Local Authorities are required to provide information to residents about sources of help and support. Many charities produce very helpful guidance and advice and some suggested links are given on page 99.

Record keeping

Record keeping is a very helpful way to reduce difficulties with recalling events. Keeping written notes of what has been heard or seen can be invaluable at a later date.

- Always write down details of events, as soon as possible after the event occurs.
- Make a note of dates and times, of what happened.
- Remember to record the facts about what has happened.
- Record the outcome of discussions held, and with whom.
- Remember to write in full the names of people contacted. If they have a role in the church or elsewhere, it helps to include this too.
- Include details of actions taken, who has taken responsibility for the situation.
- If no action follows, it is important to explain the rationale for this decision.
- Always sign and date your records and include your role in the church.
- Always keep your records safe and secure.
- Ensure your records are shared on a ‘need to know’ basis only.
- Follow the URC guidance on record keeping.

More information can be found in Section 11 of the comprehensive edition of Good Practice 4: www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding
Section 17
Keeping People Safe

Supporting survivors of abuse

It is important to be sensitive and alive to the fact, that at all times, there may be adults in a congregation who are facing issues relating to current or past abuse. Churches can help by ensuring worship and services always use materials that are appropriate.

If someone in the congregation has alleged abuse, and the authorities have decided not to investigate further, it is important to continue to offer appropriate pastoral support to the individual. Maintaining support will include keeping a watchful eye, being vigilant to any signs of self-harm, or form of distress.

Where an adult who has been abused, seeks support from individuals or ministers, this can create relationships imbued with emotions and complex concerns. Providing appropriate support that does not breach boundaries is important. The United Reformed Church ensures ministers receive training and information about professional boundaries.

More information can be found in Part 3 of the comprehensive edition of Good Practice 4: www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding
Managing allegations made against people in the church

An allegation of abuse against someone in a church can be a difficult time for all involved. The first priority is to ensure that everyone is safe and that the right steps have been followed.

In doing so, it is essential that compassion, care and support are given to the person who makes the allegation, their family and friends.

Similarly, the alleged perpetrator may equally require pastoral support and care from the church body.

Close attention to the needs of all parties, can help the church community to find ways to handle the situation sensitively and with gentleness. It can often be helpful for the person making the allegation, and the alleged perpetrator, to be found people to support them, who are not within the same church congregation.

How to respond to the Church congregation

When an alleged abuse has occurred within a church setting, the pastoral concerns are manifold; individuals who allege abuse, those accused, concerned families and members of the congregation, all require support. Balancing these, sometimes conflicting needs, is not an easy task. Confidentiality of the names and details of a situation is essential, and therefore information needs to be shared in a structured way that allows the congregation to process what has happened. There is no blueprint for successfully dealing with these situations and Elders may feel ill-equipped to handle them.

It may be helpful for the synod to offer additional pastoral support to the local leadership, facilitating a safe environment for people seek help if they wish to.

Some churches have found that being open and honest, whilst working within perimeters of confidentiality, has been a route to securing the confidence of people within the congregation.
Managing and supporting those who may endanger an adult at risk

The United Reformed Church, in common with all churches, believes in the reality of God’s forgiveness held out to a broken world. A welcoming environment to all requires wise, loving and careful attitudes in every local church.

At their best, churches can offer compassion, love and care to those who have experienced abuse, and those who may have caused harm or abuse to others.

Where it is known that someone has been convicted of abuse to an adult at risk, or alleged to have committed an offence of that nature, a contract between the church and the individual is a transparent approach to manage the risks.

If this situation arises in your church, contact the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

The Synod Safeguarding Officer can establish that the church Safeguarding Coordinator has no known conflict of interest.

If the person convicted of or alleged to have committed abuse of an adult at risk is under the age of 18 years, a different process from that outlined below will be required. Your Local Authority will be able to offer advice in these circumstances.

When it is necessary to draw up a contract involving adult perpetrators, this should be done in conjunction with the church Safeguarding Coordinator, the Synod Safeguarding Officer and the minister.

It is possible that statutory agencies, including Probation Services, may already be involved with a known or alleged perpetrator. They will assist in undertaking the risk assessment necessary, to inform the contract details.

If statutory agencies are not involved, a risk assessment should be undertaken. Speak with your Synod Safeguarding Officer or the URC Safeguarding Officer about this. Your Local Authority may also be able to offer advice.

The Synod Safeguarding Officer will seek the advice of the URC Safeguarding Officer in this task.

A copy of the contract can be shared with the URC Safeguarding Officer.

Please note that if an individual is convicted of committing crimes associated with domestic abuse, a contract is required.
Process for writing a contract

In summary, the process for writing a contact is:

- If you become aware that someone in the congregation has been convicted of abuse against a child or an adult at risk of abuse or exploitation, or alleged to have committed an offence of that nature, contact your minister.

- If the minister is not available, contact the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

- The minister and Synod Safeguarding Officer will establish that all steps have been taken with regard to contacting the relevant authorities.

- The Synod Safeguarding Officer will advise the Moderator of the situation.

- The Synod Safeguarding Officer and church minister will ensure that the church Safeguarding Coordinator is not related to the individual involved, and/or has no other conflict of interest.

- The minister, the church Safeguarding Coordinator and the Synod Safeguarding Officer will consider which members of the congregation can be trusted to support the individual, hold them accountable, and help them fulfil the conditions of the contract. These people may require specialist training before carrying out this role.

- The minister will liaise with the individual and all involved to arrange a meeting to agree the contract, including the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

- **Note**: This meeting may be initiated and attended by statutory authorities including Probation and Police services, if the individual is, or has been released from prison, is on bail, or subject to public protection measures.

More information can be found in Section 13 of the comprehensive edition of Good Practice 4: [www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding](http://www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding)

- The contract will be devised to provide protection to all children and adults at risk of neglect or abuse, engaging with the church on any day of the week. Examples of these can be found via the URC website. 19

- The contract will take account of risk factors relating to the church congregation, the building and location, and any other factors relating to the conviction or allegation, and risks posed.

- The contract also exists to afford protection for the individual concerned. Abiding by the conditions set can limit false allegations, rumours and circulation of incorrect information.

- The responsibility for devising the contract will rest with the church attended by the alleged perpetrator.

- If the perpetrator wishes to attend a church of another denomination, their area Safeguarding Officer, will need to be involved, to follow the guidelines and procedures applicable to that denomination. Continued liaison between all parties will be required.

Helpful sources of information

Sources of help and information about adults who need protecting from risk of neglect and exploitation:

*The Care Act 2014* sections 42-46.

You might also find it helpful to read the accompanying Care and Support Statutory Guidance, [see Chapter 14 for information about safeguarding responsibilities.]

Your Local Authority website will have a safeguarding page with additional information and details of local contacts and support.

Act Against Harm (Scotland) [http://www.actagainstharm.org/](http://www.actagainstharm.org/)

Action on Elder Abuse (operates across all UK) [http://elderabuse.org.uk/](http://elderabuse.org.uk/)

Age UK [http://www.ageuk.org.uk/](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/)

Alzheimers Society [https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/)


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

Macmillan Cancer Support [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

MIND [http://www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)


Refuge [http://www.refuge.org.uk/](http://www.refuge.org.uk/)


Women’s Aid [https://www.womensaid.org.uk/](https://www.womensaid.org.uk/)


Social Services Improvement Agency (Wales) [http://ssiacymru.org.uk/](http://ssiacymru.org.uk/)