

The United Reformed Church



Good  
Practice 4

**Safeguarding** children and adults at risk

**Handbook for Churches**

# Good Practice 4th edition Handbook for Churches

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This Handbook is produced in both printed and online formats for the use of United Reformed Churches. A copy has been sent to every United Reformed Church and additional copies can be purchased from the URC bookshop.

This handbook is a shorter version of the United Reformed Church's *Good Practice 4* document which is used at Synod and Assembly level.

Both *Good Practice 4* and this *Handbook for Churches* are supported by a number of appendices which are available online or from the Safeguarding Office of the United Reformed Church.

**Promoting** safeguarding  
**Preventing** abuse  
**Protecting** everyone



*We have to treat one another carefully,  
and church should be a place of respect,  
support and proper sensitivity*

## 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 handbook 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 handbook 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 why 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 Good Practice 4 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

## ii) 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
- the growing emphasis on safer recruitment practices and the changes to legislation and procedures relating to criminal records checks
- the need to recognise and respond to the risks arising from advancements in technology

### Purpose and scope

The purpose of this document is to provide information about the URC's good practice for safeguarding children and adults at risk, offering sample policies and guidance where appropriate.

Safeguarding is a broad area and this document cannot provide detailed guidance on every issue. Therefore it includes signposting to sources of more specialised information and support on certain issues which are beyond its scope.

The guidance in this document applies to the whole of the URC. This includes Councils of the church (at local, Synod and Assembly level), Resource Centres for Learning, church members, adherents, trustees, paid and volunteer staff as well as lay and ordained ministers.

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**

*(anticipated publication date 2015)*

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# Part 1

## Safeguarding: an overview



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# Section 1

## Introduction

### Safeguarding – a whole Church responsibility

Churches and places of worship reflect society as a whole, with children and adults sharing together in the activities taking place in and around them. 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.

Safeguarding in the United Reformed Church (URC) is underpinned by Jesus' command 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. All who profess to follow Jesus Christ continue to have a collective responsibility to uphold the rights of the

least powerful and protect the most vulnerable in society as an expression of God's love.

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. Consequently the URC seeks to go beyond the minimum safeguarding requirements of statute by fostering best practice as an expression of God's loving concern for all. A collective approach to safeguarding aims to 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, so that 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 any abuse or harassment is unacceptable
- taking seriously any concerns, allegations or complaints of abuse and harassment and 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 as follows:

*'The challenge to the church 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 ... a healing community, the accused find ... a supportive community and abusers find ... 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.'*<sup>1</sup>

The Church  
aspires to  
be a loving  
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environment in  
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flourish, safe  
from harm

1. adapted from *Safe To Grow*, sixth edition, 2011, Baptist Union of Great Britain

# Section 2

## Definitions

### Relating to children

#### Child

For the purposes of 'Good Practice 4', a child is anyone under the age of 18 years<sup>2</sup>.

#### Child protection

Activity undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm.

#### Safeguarding children

More than simply child protection, the practice of safeguarding children seeks to promote the safety and welfare of children by being preventative as well as reactive.

### Relating to adults

#### Adult

For the purposes of 'Good Practice 4', an adult is anyone aged 18 years or over, whilst recognising that, for certain purposes, Scots law treats 16 and 17 year olds as adults<sup>3</sup>.

#### Adult at risk

The term refers to: '*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.*'<sup>4</sup> This replaces the previous term 'vulnerable adults'

2. H.M. Government, *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015*, p.92

3. The Scottish Government, *National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2014*, p.9 §21

4. CCPAS: *Help, I want to protect adults at risk* p.3

## Safeguarding adults

Involves the prevention, empowerment and protection of adults, enabling them to retain independence, wellbeing and choice as well as ensure that they can access the support necessary to live a life free from harm and abuse.

# General terms

## Worker

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

## Safeguarding Coordinator

A person appointed by the local church to take the lead on safeguarding matters.

## Synod Safeguarding Officer

A person appointed by a Synod to take the lead in safeguarding matters. Acts as the first point of contact in the Synod for all safeguarding related issues.

## Assembly Safeguarding Officer

The person appointed to work at denominational level to develop, manage and implement the URC's safeguarding policies as well as 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 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.

More information relating to this section can be found in Section 2 of the comprehensive edition of *Good Practice 4*: [www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding](http://www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding)

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## Section 3

# Safeguarding policy statement

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 also agrees 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'.<sup>5</sup>*

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the European Convention on Human Rights, the Human

Rights Act 1998 and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008) all state that adults should be free from abuse. 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 informed vigilance about the dangers of abuse
- building constructive links with voluntary and statutory agencies

5. Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

# 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
- follow legislation, statutory guidance and recognised good practice
- safely recruit all those with any responsibility within the church
- ensure the relevant people undertake regular safeguarding 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
- cooperate with the police, Children's and Adult Services in any investigation
- work with those who have suffered abuse, offering appropriate pastoral support
- challenge any abuse of power, especially where the person is in a position of trust
- offer support and supervision to those known to pose a risk to children and adults
- report to the appropriate Councils of the Church
- review safeguarding policy and procedures annually


More information relating to this section can be found in Section 3 of the comprehensive edition of *Good Practice 4*: [www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding](http://www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding)

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# Section 4

## Division of responsibility for safeguarding in the 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 adults at risk. They must also be willing to attend appropriate training for this important role, including refresher training. A sample role description is provided in  *Appendix A2: The role of a church safeguarding coordinator.*

It may not be possible to find one person who is able or willing 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. A sample poster is provided in  *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 any 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 children or adults at risk attending in the future.



## 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 delivered by the Synod Safeguarding Officers and covers all aspects of good practice.

## Policy and procedures

Each church should have policies and procedures for safeguarding children and adults at risk which are suitable for people to work with. These should be made readily available to anyone who wishes to see them. 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. A sample policy statement is provided in  *Appendix A1: 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. LEPs should keep their Synod Safeguarding Officer informed about which denominational policy and procedures they have decided to follow.

## Reviewing and reporting

The Safeguarding Coordinator of each local church 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.

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 and good practice guidance. 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 complete one, refer to  *Appendix H: Annual Safeguarding Returns Form*.

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

The Safeguarding Coordinator of each local church should report regularly to the eldership or church council

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## Section 5

# Confidentiality and information sharing

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 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 information sharing is carried out *appropriately* and with due regard to *proportionality*, which simply means ensuring that whenever information is disclosed 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 child(ren) or adult(s) at risk 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 (see below).

**If in doubt, advice should be sought from the Synod Safeguarding Officer.**

## 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. In a local church context, 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 (such as Children's or Adult Services, the police or others). Local churches should share all relevant information in their possession with such organisations and follow multi-agency decisions

Decisions about whether others need to be informed (eg parents/carers of children or adults at risk) would be made by those managing the case following the same strictly 'need to know' basis, as there may well be situations in which information should not be disclosed to groups.

The whole eldership of a local church 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.

## An important note about record keeping

When confidential safeguarding 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 such information should also be recorded.

More information relating to this section can be found in Section 5 of the comprehensive edition of *Good Practice 4*: [www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding](http://www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding)



# Section 6

## Safer Recruitment



### Safer recruitment process

The church has a responsibility to appoint workers carefully in order to deter and identify the small minority who seek to harm children and adults at risk. Operating safer recruitment procedures is an essential element of our safeguarding arrangements, particularly as those who pose a risk are not easily identifiable. These procedures apply to both paid and volunteer staff.

Operating a safer recruitment policy sends a powerful message to parents, children and visitors, not to mention those intent on causing harm, that safeguarding children and adults at risk is taken seriously.

In addition, this is a requirement of the Charities Commission.


The safer recruitment process includes providing a clear and up to date job description including duties, role and responsibilities for work with children or adults at risk and a person specification detailing the experience, knowledge and/or qualifications required.

Applicants should also submit an application form containing their:

- full name, previous names or aliases
- current address
- education and employment history
- contact details for two referees (not family members)
- reasons for applying for the position
- personal qualities and experience relevant to the post

In addition, there should be a declaration that all the information provided by the applicant is true and that they agree to a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check or Protecting Vulnerable Groups Scheme (PVG) check where necessary (see section 7 of this Handbook for more information on criminal records checks).

## Self-declaration of criminal history

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. A sample form is provided in  *Appendix N: Sample Self Declaration Form*.

## Face to face interview

An interview provides opportunity for discussion about previous experience, knowledge, skills and motivation. A formal interview should generally be conducted by at least two people with leadership or supervisory responsibilities within the church, one of whom will supervise the person who is appointed.

## Checking references

References are a crucial aspect 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.

## Criminal records checks

A criminal records check must be carried out if the post is eligible for such a check. For more information see *Section 7: Criminal Record Checks*. 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.

## Trial Period

It is beneficial for both the worker and the church to have a probationary period (usually 3-6 months). During this time the church will provide relevant training and policies (for example safeguarding, code of conduct, disciplinary and grievances) and arrange support for the worker.

## Volunteers

Every person has the right to expect the same standards of recruitment and professionalism irrespective of whether an individual is paid or works voluntarily. It is therefore important to be rigorous in selecting volunteers. Not doing so could invalidate a church's insurance and potentially incur personal financial liability for elders and ministers.

A potential volunteer's willingness to complete any necessary forms and undertake interviews 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.

Churches must satisfy themselves 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.

More information relating to this section can be found in Section 6 of the comprehensive edition of *Good Practice 4*: [www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding](http://www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding)

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# Section 7

## Criminal Records 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.

## DBS 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:

**Standard Disclosure** – contains any information held on the Police National Computer

**Enhanced Disclosure** – contains any information held on the Police National Computer as well as local police information.

**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
- whether or not, and how the work will be supervised

## DBS eligibility for those who work with children

There is a requirement to carry out an enhanced DBS check plus barred list check for all roles that are categorised as 'Regulated Activity'. **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 (for example leaders of weekly children's and youth groups)
- any role which involves teaching, supervising or providing advice and guidance to children intensively on at least four days in a 30 day period, such as leaders at a children's holiday club lasting four days or more
- any role which involves supervision of children overnight, irrespective of how many nights or how often (for example leaders staying overnight at a residential event)
- any role which includes personal care of children on account of their illness, disability or age irrespective of how often this takes place, such as leaders helping children with eating, drinking, toileting, washing, bathing or dressing
- those who drive children as part of their church role weekly, four or more days in a 30 day period, or overnight (for example someone who has been asked by the church to transport children to and from a church activity)
- workers and volunteers on church premises used for Ofsted registered childcare, any role which gives opportunity for unsupervised contact with children during childcare (for example church office worker or caretaker in a building where toilets are shared with the children)
- any role which includes the management or supervision of the above regulated activity

## Supervised workers

Supervision covers situations where the person being supervised is in sight of a supervisor who holds an enhanced DBS check plus a barred list check, at all times. If a worker is supervised in this way the role no longer falls within the current definition of Regulated Activity, but the role is still eligible for an Enhanced DBS check **without** a barred list check.

## Regular, but less frequent work

Those who work on a regular basis, but less often than every week, such as leaders on a monthly rota for a children's activity, are still eligible for an Enhanced DBS check **without** a barred list check.

## Helpers who are under 18 years of age

Helpers under the age of 18 years should be supervised at all times by an adult. However, the lowest age at which someone can apply for a DBS check is 16 years old and therefore 16 and 17 year olds can apply for a DBS check (without a barred list check) if required.

## Activities in which parents/carers are present

If the role of the worker does not involve supervision or care of children because of the presence of parents or carers, such as supporting toddler groups or Messy Church, they do not require a DBS check.

## 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
- the provision of social work, by a social care worker, which is required in connection with any health services or social services
- providing assistance, arranged by a third party, with an adult's financial transactions, money handling, bills or shopping on account of their age, illness or disability
- providing assistance 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' and an Enhanced DBS plus barred list check must be carried out.

'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).

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.

## Carrying out a DBS check

A DBS application can be completed electronically or via a paper form available 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. After completion of the relevant sections by the applicant, the church verifier will check the documentary evidence and complete the verifier section of the form. For detailed guidance on the process, consult our 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, they may not need to complete further DBS applications in future for posts within the same



workforce (ie the child or adult workforce). Ideally, the registration should be completed at the same time as completing a DBS application form, using the unique DBS form reference number given on the form (although it can be submitted within 19 days of the issue of a DBS certificate). The verifier should still carry out ID checks and check the applicant's original certificate.

If a worker has already subscribed to the DBS online Update Service, with the applicant's permission the church can check the current status of their disclosure online at [www.gov.uk/dbs-update-service](http://www.gov.uk/dbs-update-service) and a record of the result should be kept. More detailed guidance about the online Update Service is available on the DBS website: [www.gov.uk/dbs-update-service](http://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 a 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 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 sent to the organisation, whether it is recruiting someone or renewing a disclosure check, but goes directly to the person in question.

The URC's procedure is managed by its service provider. The service provider will gather the necessary information and liaise with the Assembly Safeguarding Officer who will conduct a risk assessment regarding the safety of the appointment. Verifiers will be notified of the outcome. For more details regarding the process see: [www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding](http://www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding)

## Certificate usage, storage and disposal

For advice on secure storage, handling, use, retention and disposal of DBS certificates and certificate information please check the latest information on the DBS website: [www.gov.uk/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service](http://www.gov.uk/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service)

# 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 (for example convictions or cautions) 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 ensure they are suitable 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 a 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.

More information relating to this section can be found in Section 7 of the comprehensive edition of *Good Practice 4*: [www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding](http://www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding)

# Part 2

## Safeguarding Children



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# 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. 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.

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.

Good working practices are applicable to all activities organised by the church for children both on and off the church premises. Such activities include:

- regular groups run by the church on church premises
- 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

Please note this list is not exhaustive.

For activities in which all children present are being supervised by their own parents/carers (such as parent & toddler groups or Messy Church), 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 section examines the key areas of:

- prevention of harm – 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 – keeping appropriate information, consent and records to help leaders exercise their duty of care
- particular types of activity – making specific considerations when engaging in certain types of activity

There is obviously overlap between these points, and therefore they should not be considered 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 their buildings. 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

Duties include:

- ensuring all rooms used for activities with children are fit for purpose
- undertaking a safety check of all rooms 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
- ensure 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, including equipment, exits, regulations and signs, making sure they are clearly visible to all
- appointing designated people to be fire marshals and ensuring 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. Best practice encourages there to be at least one trained first-aider on the premises if at all possible.

**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.

**Record** – make sure that accidents are recorded in the recommended accident book. Visit [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) to obtain a first aid book.

**Report** – notify parents/carers of any accidents and of any first aid given.

**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 protocol.

## 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).

## 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, unless the welfare of the child requires it. 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](mailto: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:

- types of activity
- 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





Risk assessments should be carried out in writing and passed on to those responsible for the maintenance and safety of premises. 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.

## 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. See  *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 insurable risks associated with all activities. The level of cover must be adequate to ensure that all participants are covered in the event of an accident or incident. Check with your insurance provider to ensure sufficient cover is in place for all activities and risks such as:

- Public and Employer's Liability
- personal accident cover for staff
- high risk activities (mountaineering, etc.)
- damage or loss of equipment (whether owned or hired)
- compensation against cancellation, delays, loss of personal effects whilst travelling
- legal assistance in the recovery of claims

Local churches should contact their 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.

Most church policies cover standard events for public liability. However, churches should check with their insurance company whether additional insurance is required for one off events and off site activities.

## 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 church premises or providing space to groups/organisations whose work involves children, the URC recommends 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 states clearly that the organisation either has a policy or are prepared to abide by the church's policy, with a signature from the organisation to confirm this. 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, such as a nursery, pre-school or out of school hours childcare, is required to register with OFSTED, the church should ask to see the registration certificate and record that this 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. The recommended ratios are:

0 to 2 years	1 member of staff to 3 children
2 to 3 years	1 member of staff to 4 children
4 to 7 years	1 member of staff to 6 children
8 to 11 years	1 member of staff to 8 children
12 to 18 years	1 member of staff to 10 children

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 or other personal care of younger children or in the context of overnight stays.

Remember that the above ratios are a minimum and may need to be increased in certain circumstances taking into account the nature of the group or activity; the purpose of the group; the abilities and experiences of leaders or any unforeseen contingency.

## Insufficient workers

If there are insufficient workers present for the planned activity, the leaders will need to carry out a risk assessment to decide if it is safe to continue. 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.

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. Their role should include ensuring that peer-group leaders receive support and training, including how to lead a group in accordance with *Good Practice 4*. 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.

## 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. 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.

If concerns arise these should be recorded and reported to the church Safeguarding Coordinator and/or Synod Safeguarding Officer immediately.

Workers should nurture a culture of dignity and respect towards children which involves listening; respecting boundaries and privacy; having an awareness of issues of equality and knowing how to deal with matters of discipline.

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 the person to whom they are responsible.

It is good practice to introduce a code of conduct which all workers can agree to follow. A sample is provided in  *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.

## 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/carers 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.

*Involvement* – encourage the child to be as involved as possible in their own intimate care, asking them if they can do each task themselves.

*Sensitivity* – workers should keep their actions in check by asking questions such as “How do you normally do that?” or “Is it OK to do it like this?” 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 on the approach which is most suitable for the children concerned.

*Competence* – only carry out acts of intimate care when appropriate knowledge has been obtained about how to perform them safely and well.

*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

## 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

Children are entitled to respect and privacy at all times

- 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

Children, like adults, can experience a range of mental health problems and may need different support from others. The following organisations can provide information and advice:

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

# 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 cliques
- health and safety, not least the behaviour necessary to maintain appropriate health and safety standards (eg walking rather than running in corridors or on stairs)
- 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 participants to formally offer positive feedback. It should make clear who children or parents/carers 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  
Do encourage one another  
Do stop when you hear the whistle  
Do play fair  
Do listen carefully  
Do care for people and property  
Do tell the truth

Don't disobey them  
Don't be nasty or rude  
Don't carry on what you're doing  
Don't cheat  
Don't ignore other people  
Don't hurt each other or damage things  
Don't lie



The behaviour policy and code of conduct should be available and made known to children, parents/carers and workers. 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 (such as annoying habits)
- 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 the situation.

Workers should not use any form of degrading treatment to punish a child and under no circumstances should they ever chastise a child physically. 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 (for example aggravation from other children; peer pressure; boredom; misunderstanding the activity; finding an activity difficult).

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 (eg "*Sarah, should you be doing that?*")
- try to give positive instructions (eg "*Peter, it would be really helpful if you came over here and sat down, please.*")

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

- warn them, 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 remove 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. In all cases where physical intervention is employed, the incident and subsequent actions should be documented on an incident form and reported to the leader in charge. The parents/carers should be informed on the same day.

# 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

Each regular group or event should record:

- the date, time and venue of event/group
- an attendance list of both children and workers (with a note of their role)
- consent forms for attendance at regular groups and occasional events
- a brief outline of the 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 (such as 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, allowing workers to check everybody in the group is accounted for in the event of an emergency evacuation of the premises
- pastoral care, allowing workers 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 attending
- 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 church should also record significant incidents which occur during activities for 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 workers (eg to prevent an accident or used in self-defence)
- accidents (details, including action taken, should also be recorded in the church's accident record)
- details of any time spent by a worker 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, such as 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 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

Parental responsibility is concerned with the power to make decisions in relation to a child. It is therefore imperative that churches know who has parental responsibility for every individual child in their care.

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

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:


### Information on:


- name, date of birth and address of child
- parent/carer contact details
- emergency contact details
- relevant medical information (medical conditions, allergies, family doctor, etc)

- details of any additional needs (due to disability, etc)
- any other information relevant to the activities, (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 communications*)
- online communication between workers and children (for more information, see *Section 9: Safeguarding and digital communications*)

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

Parents/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 (eg children playing outside or wandering the streets with no adult supervision). In these circumstances it is important to:

- welcome them, but try to establish their name, age, address and telephone number and 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 a standard letter to the parent/carer inviting them to make contact
- 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 (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 (eg response to medical incidents such as allergic reactions). 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/government/publications/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions)

## Particular types of activity

### Requirements for registration of children's activities

Some churches provide groups for children under the age of six 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 regulatory agencies.

### Home visits

Workers may need to make home visits from time to time. When doing so they should:

- 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 workers 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 (for example not going into a separate room with them)
- 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)
- have some means of identification and an explanation for the visit that can be given to them
- keep a written record of the visit detailing the following information: 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
- 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 usual. 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, workers 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: 33)

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.

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](http://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](http://www.hse.gov.uk/education/visits.htm) .

## 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 fully into account: the venue, number of children, age, gender mix, etc. *Good Practice 4* must be consulted for further details and guidance.

More information relating to this section can be found in Section 8 of the comprehensive edition of *Good Practice 4*: [www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding](http://www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding)

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## Section 9

# Safeguarding & digital communications

To be read in conjunction with  *Appendix W: URC Communication Department – Guidelines for the use of social media.*

## 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.



# 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 online), children are most at risk of sexual harm from people already known to them and that 'stranger danger' is less prevalent. 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. In just one example, a 14 year old girl thought she was being befriended by a 15 year old boy who 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 whom 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.

## 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 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 (PCs, laptops, mobile phones, tablets, games consoles and so on) is itself neutral, as are the technologies and digital spaces which children use and inhabit (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.

## 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 the 'Click Clever, Click Safe' code.

In December 2009, the Government unveiled a 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, offline or online, 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 (age, name, address, mobile number, 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](http://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 (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 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 easily be 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 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 the moral and legal issues surrounding the posting of material involving others (for example a negative comment about someone could be considered libellous)
- 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.

More information about Identity Fraud and Phishing can be found in *Section 9 of Good Practice 4*: [www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding](http://www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding)

## 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.



## 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?

Sexting can involve a variety 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

### 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 has been uploaded, it is very difficult to retract
- encouraging children not to pass on these kinds of images, even if they are being encouraged to do so by their peers
- explain that, under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, it is illegal to take, hold or share 'indecent images' (which includes any sexually explicit 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: [www.iwf.org.uk](http://www.iwf.org.uk) hotline 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 real life, it is also right to offer guidance and support for their use of 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 kinds of website they can visit, which games they are permitted play, limiting the amount of data they can download to their mobile phone, etc.

## Church websites

To be 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
- obtain 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 (using fonts which are easier for people with dyslexia to read etc)
- appoint an appropriate adult(s) to monitor the content of the website
- place the CEOP, 'Report Abuse' button on websites along with the link to [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://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. 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

## 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 as to safeguard children:



- permission must be obtained from parents/carers before a photograph is taken or film footage recorded. A sample form is provided in  *Appendix F: Sample Information and Consent form*
- 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 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. However, if this is not possible, it is important to record where the photographs and digital media are stored

## Abusive/Illegal Images of Children

The possession of abusive/illegal images is a form of child exploitation. 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.

## 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 18s, making it clear what type of communication will be used (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 (for example 'lol' could be interpreted as 'laugh out loud' or 'lots of love')
- using standardised group communications where possible (group emails and social networking messages etc)
- making communications transparent (such as ensuring that another leader or a parent will also see what is shared by copying them in or keeping a record of any communication which is not visible to others online)

- 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.
- 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

The URC recommends that workers only engage with children on social networking 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.

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

## 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 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 comprehensive edition of *Good Practice 4*: [www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding](http://www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding)

# Section 10

## Child Abuse

### What is child abuse?

Child abuse covers various forms of maltreatment of a child, caused either by inflicting harm or failing to act to prevent harm.

### Definitions of abuse

The following definitions of physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect are taken from 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015' ([www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children)).

Please note that variations exist in Wales and Scotland. See *Safeguarding Children: Working Together Under the Children Act 2004* ([www.wales.gov.uk](http://www.wales.gov.uk)) and *The National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2014* ([www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)) for further details.

### 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. 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. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women also commit acts of sexual abuse, as do other children (*see Section 14: Children with sexually harmful behaviour*).

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

# 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 such as racial background, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

Bullying usually falls into two categories:<sup>6</sup>

- emotionally harmful behaviour, such as taunting, spreading hurtful rumours, threats, excluding people from groups; and
- physically harmful behaviour, such as kicking, hitting and pushing.

Cyber bullying is also a major concern; again 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: 'Safe Network'<sup>7</sup>.

6. [www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk)

7. [www.safenetwork.org.uk](http://www.safenetwork.org.uk)

## Self-harm

Self-harm can take on various physical forms and can include (but is not limited to) cutting, burning, bruising, scratching, hair-pulling, poisoning, overdosing, and otherwise intentionally putting oneself in risky situations.

## Possible indicators of self-harm

According to the *National Health Service* website<sup>8</sup>, 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 they need
- explore possible options for them to access support such as from school, parents, local support groups, Children's Services, child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), their GP (especially if medical assistance is needed) and specialist organisations.

## 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.

More information relating to this section can be found in Section 10 of the comprehensive edition of *Good Practice 4*: [www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding](http://www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding)

8. [www.nhs.uk/conditions/self-injury](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/self-injury)

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# Section 11

## Responding to safeguarding concerns relating to children

If a child trusts an adult enough to disclose abuse it is vital s/he is taken seriously. It is equally important that all are aware of how to respond. It is also 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 not always possible to stop children in mid-flow, but when you are listening to children making 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, but 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 okay 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? (ie 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 (ie 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, for example, the minister
- 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 and 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.




A sample incident record form is provided in  *Appendix A8: Safeguarding Incident Recording 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.

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 abuse, sexual abuse or neglect. Please see  *Appendix R: A guide to domestic abuse* for further information.

In some cases, particularly those involving sexual and/or 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 or inform parents or carers. It should be remembered that actions should not in any way compromise possible future 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.

## 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. 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.

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.

More information relating to this section can be found in Section 11 of the comprehensive edition of *Good Practice 4*: [www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding](http://www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding)

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# Section 12

## Managing allegations against those working with children

### Allegations against workers

Most workers 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' (paid and unpaid, lay and ordained) conduct with children to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) in England, Designated Senior Manager in Wales or 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
- 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 on 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 page 110 of the comprehensive edition of *Good Practice 4* 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 or commissioned minister. Moderators will inform the General Secretary as appropriate.

Where there is potential reputational risk to the Church, the 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.

More information relating to this section can be found under the following headings in Section 12 of the comprehensive edition of *Good Practice 4*: [www.urchurch.org.uk/safeguarding](http://www.urchurch.org.uk/safeguarding)

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# Section 13

## Managing and supporting those who pose a risk of harm to children

The United Reformed Church (URC) 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. Not all will have committed sexual offences. Some may have neglected a child, 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. They may also be

respected and well-liked within the church, which can affect people's judgement. Abusers not only groom children, but also manipulate the adults around them, making it more difficult for adults (who trust and may know the individual well) to accept even the possibility that there could be a cause for concern. Advice should, therefore, always be sought.

In order to keep children safe, boundaries will need to be set with 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. This is a highly confidential process involving a select group of people within the church. Any information sharing should be given careful consideration and be done in consultation with the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

Further details about contracts and information sharing can be found within Section 13 of the comprehensive edition of *Good Practice 4*: [www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding](http://www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding)

There may be situations where an alleged offender and a victim and/or their family are in the same church. If this is the case, 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. In these circumstances it is prudent 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 offenders 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 offender 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.

More information relating to this section 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)

In order to keep children safe, boundaries will need to be set with the individual, which they will be expected to keep

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# 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.

It is important that everyone has the information needed to recognise the warning signs of harmful sexual behaviour at an early stage and to seek appropriate help. Every adult who cares about children can take responsibility for preventing abuse and ensuring that those involved receive the help they need. 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 to 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.

Some patterns of behaviour 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 extra 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

## Conclusion

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. More information can be found in  *Appendix U: Children with sexually harmful behaviour*.

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.



# Part 3

## Safeguarding Adults at Risk

*To follow in 2015*







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