

Appendix two

General Assembly and Offices of the General Assembly

Safeguarding policy

1. Aims and purpose of this policy

The aim of this policy is to ensure that good practice in protecting people from abuse, harm or neglect is embedded in the culture and practice of the denominational level bodies and activities of the United Reformed Church (URC).

The policy should be read in line with the URC's Good Practice Guidance and resources which can be found here: www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding/safeguarding-good-practice/

2. Who this policy applies to

As set out below, the policy directly applies to General Assembly and General Assembly staff. The policy applies to both the regular work of these bodies and any specific events or activities organised under their auspices. It may also be helpful for Synods and local churches as it helps to demonstrate the responsibilities of the denominational level bodies to both support and monitor safeguarding practice across the church.

General Assembly

General Assembly is the URC's highest decision-making body and meets once a year. Assembly Executive is the executive body which meets once a year to review and continue the work of General Assembly. In applying to the General Assembly, this policy also applies to the work of the Assembly Committees, Advisory Groups, sub-committees and any other activity carrying out the work of the General Assembly. General Assembly Committees under delegated authority carry out the specialist work of the General Assembly and this includes the Safeguarding Committee. General Assembly supports Synods and local churches by overseeing the development and implementation of best practice in safeguarding.

General Assembly 2021 passed Resolutions to make additions to the structure to clarify safeguarding responsibilities. These specified that the functions of General Assembly include:

- a) To appoint a Designated Safeguarding Lead.
- b) To have oversight of local churches and Synods, monitoring practice.
- c) To adopt a safeguarding policy statement and procedures for use throughout the whole United Reformed Church.
- d) To advise on all matters of safeguarding throughout the church.
- e) To adopt best safeguarding practice for all its own activities and events.
- f) To appoint a Designated Safeguarding Lead.
- g) To have oversight of local churches and Synods, monitoring practice.
- h) To adopt a safeguarding policy statement and procedures for use throughout the whole United Reformed Church.
- i) To advise on all matters of safeguarding throughout the church.
- j) To adopt best safeguarding practice for all its own activities and events.

The staff of the General Assembly

This covers employees (including interns) of the URC including those based in Church House and those with contracts for remote, home-based or hybrid working.

All staff are safer recruited and as part of their induction are required to complete safeguarding training.

Information on how to report concerns will be displayed in public areas in Church House.

3. Statement of safeguarding principles

This statement was approved by General Assembly in 2021.

The United Reformed Church (URC) is committed to safeguarding in every area of its life and ministry.

Safeguarding is the action taken to promote and protect the well-being and human rights of individuals. This means we will:

- do all we can to create and maintain a safe and caring environment for all people
- respond promptly and effectively to any form of abuse and neglect, including reporting abuse to statutory agencies as necessary
- seek to prevent abuse in any form from occurring.

We will seek to identify individuals who may pose a risk to others and take necessary actions to minimise risk whilst supporting these individuals in our communities when safe to do so.

The URC confirms that safeguarding is the responsibility of everyone: to prevent abuse and neglect of children, young people and adults; to act upon concerns of abuse; and to support the wellbeing of each person within all communities in which the Church is placed. Safeguarding is a requirement and a duty in all Councils of the Church. Safeguarding in the URC is supported with relevant policies, practice, guidance and training.

The Church acknowledges that the wellbeing of the child or adult who is experiencing or is at risk of experiencing abuse, harm and neglect is paramount, and it will always act in their best interests, in line with national legislation, relevant statutory guidelines and good practice guidance. The United Reformed Church believes that all people have the right to be and feel part of this community, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. We will operate in line with the Human Rights Act 1989, the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Equality Act 2010.

Commitments

The URC will adhere to the policy statement above by committing to:

- promote safe and healthy cultures in which good practice standards in safeguarding are updated and disseminated
- ensure everyone in a position of trust is carefully recruited/selected/appointed/elected and trained in safeguarding children and adults at risk
- respond promptly and appropriately to any safeguarding allegation or concern (including reporting any allegations to statutory agencies) including those who may pose a risk to children, young people or adults at risk

- care pastorally for all children and adults at risk, and all those who have experienced abuse in the past
- ensure that all those who pose a risk to children, young people or adults at risk, and those who are the subject of allegations, receive appropriate pastoral care and supervision
- exercise informed vigilance about risks in all forms of abuse and neglect
- work together with other denominations, statutory agencies and voluntary organisations.

4. Definitions

Children includes anyone aged under 18 years. The Children Act 2004 (section 11) places a duty on a range of organisations to have in place arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Details of the arrangements required are set out in Chapter 2 of 'Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children' ([bit.ly/4fVVyfu](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/262696/Working_together_to_safeguard_children_-_a_guide_to_multi-agency_working_to_help_protect_and_promote_the_welfare_of_children.pdf)) and this includes specific reference to the need for faith-based organisations to have procedures in place.

Adults at risk includes any adult of any age, who may be vulnerable due to a permanent or temporary illness or disability, or who have been made vulnerable by their circumstances which include domestic abuse and discrimination. There are some differences in the definitions used across the UK and Crown Dependencies but the common elements are that adults at risk:

- are aged 18 or over and,
- by reasons of mental or other disability, age, illness or other situation are permanently, or for the time being, unable to take care of themselves; and/or
- are unable to protect themselves against actual or potential abuse or neglect.

5. Duty of care and confidentiality

We have a duty of care to beneficiaries of the URC, either adults or children. We will maintain confidentiality except in circumstances where to do so would place the individual or another individual at risk of harm.

6. Promoting good safeguarding practice across the URC

Good Practice 6 sets out the key responsibilities at denominational level in five core areas:

Safer culture

- Have a safeguarding policy which is reviewed annually and updated when necessary
- Lead on the development and review of Safer Culture processes
- Manage the process for blemished disclosures
- DSL to provide an annual safeguarding report to General Assembly
- DSL to report to the URC Trust matters of a safeguarding nature.

Safer activities

- Obtain legal advice where necessary on legal and regulatory requirements.

Recognising and responding to concerns

- Provide additional advice in cases with particular complexity or high public profile

- Report serious cases related to ministers or the work of Assembly to the URC Trust who will notify the relevant charity regulator¹.

Managing allegations, and people who may pose a risk

- Provide additional advice in cases with particular complexity or high public profile
- DSL to lead/advise if a situation arises where the SSO has a conflict of interest
- The URC Trust will report to the relevant charity regulator if a case is related to the work of the Trust.

Supporting victims and survivors

- Manage and develop the URC's practice with regard to ensuring the voices of those who have experienced abuse are heard within the church
- Incorporate the perspectives of those who have experienced abuse into the ongoing development of policy and training.

Activities carried out by the central safeguarding team in support of these responsibilities include:

- designing and providing training at national level
- case management advice for Synod Safeguarding Officers
- liaison with other denominations and faith-based organisations
- updating Good Practice guidance
- providing resources and templates for local churches and Synods.

7. Preventing abuse or harm

Activities will be organised in accordance with URC good practice guidelines (www.urch.org.uk/safeguarding/safeguarding-good-practice/) so as to promote a safe environment and healthy relationships whilst minimising opportunities for harm and misunderstanding or false accusation. For each event, risk assessments will be carried out, appropriate consent forms will be used for activities with children and young people, appropriate records will be kept (see URC Record Keeping policy for further details), and adequate insurance will be in place for each event.

We are committed to safer recruitment and appointment of all paid staff and volunteers and will ensure that all relevant procedures are followed. Safeguarding training will be provided at the appropriate level required for different roles.

All members of the General Assembly, officer holders, paid staff and volunteers will agree to work within a Code of Conduct (see *Good Practice 6*, www.urch.org.uk/safeguarding/safeguarding-good-practice/) and understand that there may be action taken if this code is not followed, possibly involving suspension or termination of working/volunteering with us.

8. Responding to safeguarding concerns and allegations

All concerns and allegations of abuse will be responded to appropriately, including referring to the Police and Social Care if necessary, either Adult or Children's.

We will co-operate with the Police, Children's and Adult's Services in any investigation, will follow multi agency decisions and will maintain confidentiality of any investigations to those directly involved.

¹ Either the Charity Commission (for England & Wales), the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR), or the relevant regulatory bodies for the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

All concerns or allegations should be addressed to the URC Designated Safeguarding Lead:

Name: Sharon Barr

Email address: sharon.barr@urc.org.uk

Contact phone number: 07776 178 246

If the DSL is unavailable, please contact safeguarding@urc.org.uk and a member of the safeguarding team will respond to the concern.

What are we protecting from?

The definitions of abuse differ between children and adults. A copy of the definitions relating to children and adults can be found in *Good Practice 6*.

It is important to be aware of possible signs and symptoms of abuse. A list of such possible signs and symptoms in relation to children and in adults can be found in *Good Practice 6*. Some signs could be indicators of a number of different categories.

It is essential to note that these are only indicators of possible abuse. There may be other, innocent, reasons for any of these signs and/or behaviour. They will, however, be a guide to assist in assessing whether abuse of one form or another is a possible explanation for a child or adult's behaviour or appearance.

What to do if you notice indicators of possible abuse

If indicators of possible abuse give cause for concern, then the worker should inform the person responsible for safeguarding at the event as soon as possible. This is often the leader in charge of an event. Alternatively inform the DSL directly. *Do not discuss with anybody else.*

What to do if there is a disclosure or allegation of abuse

If a child or an adult makes a disclosure that they are being abused and/or an allegation of abuse against someone, it is important that the person being told:

- stays calm and listens carefully
- reassures them that they have done the right thing in telling you
- does not investigate or ask leading questions
- does not promise to keep secret what they have been told
- explains that they will need to tell someone else.

Inform the person responsible for safeguarding at the event as soon as possible. This is often the leader in charge of an event. Alternatively inform the DSL directly. *Do not discuss with anybody else.*

If a concern or allegation relates to the DSL, please contact the Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship).

Recording concerns

Make a **written** record of the allegation, disclosure or incident and **sign and date** this record and pass this onto the DSL. Resource F1 (www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding/safeguarding-good-practice/) from *Good Practice 6* provides a template for recording concerns. Any such records will be stored securely on the URC case management system.

Procedure in the event of a concern

If there is an immediate threat of harm, the police should be contacted.

Where it is judged that there is no immediate threat of harm, the following will occur:

- A confidential record will be made of the observations/conversation and the surrounding circumstances. Records will be kept securely on the URC case management system
- The DSL will consider whether the concern warrants a referral to statutory agencies
- The DSL will consult with the relevant Synod Safeguarding Officer(s) if the initial concern indicates that there may be a risk to others in the church
- The person about whom the allegation has been made must not be informed by anyone in the church if it is judged that to do so would place a child or adult at increased risk of further harm.

Managing allegations against staff or volunteers

Chapter 5 of *Good Practice 6* provides further information on processes to follow when a worker (paid or volunteer) is alleged or known to have harmed children or adults.

The DSL will contact the Local Authority Designated Officer/Designated Officer (as appropriate depending on local terminology) or the Local Safeguarding Board for Wales. A decision will be taken about when to inform the member of staff or volunteer. The timing and method will be discussed and agreed with the LADO/DO/Board.

If the worker is involved in other areas of church life, the DSL will inform the relevant staff in the Synod to which that person belongs and advise on the implications for that person's involvement with children or adults at risk in the local church and in Synod activities. Information will be shared on a strictly 'need to know' basis.

In accordance with legal requirements, a referral will be made to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) or Disclosure Scotland if the church withdraws permission for an individual to engage in regulated activity/work OR would have done so had that individual not resigned, retired, been made redundant or been transferred to a position which did not involve regulated activity/work because the employer believes that the individual has engaged in relevant conduct or satisfied the harm test or has committed an offence that would lead to automatic inclusion on a barred list.

As a registered charity, the URC Trust is required to notify the relevant charity regulator of any safeguarding serious incidents, and may delegate this task to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

9. Complaints

For any complaints on the handling of safeguarding matters, please follow the procedures set out in Section Q of the Manual: www.urch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Q-Complaints-Procedure-Nov-2023.pdf

10. Review

This policy should be reviewed and updated annually. It should also be updated at other times as required in the light of changes such as: amendments to URC Good Practice guidance; changes to statutory safeguarding requirements; changes to procedure arising from review of safeguarding cases.

Date of most recent review:

Date of next review:

Signed:

Name:

Role: