

The United Reformed Church

GOOD PRACTICE 6 – SCOTLAND

Safeguarding for everyone

Safeguarding in the URC

The URC is committed to safeguarding in every area of its life and ministry.

WHAT?

Policy Statement (General Assembly 2021)

- Create and maintain a safe environment for everyone
- Respond promptly to any form of abuse or neglect
- Seek to prevent abuse from occurring.

WHY?

- Theology, beliefs and values
  - God's concern for justice and care for the vulnerable
  - The Church's call to live out a 'ministry of caring, forgiving and healing love'
- Legal and regulatory requirements.

WHO?

- Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility
- Local churches, Synods and General Assembly working together
- People in specific roles will have additional responsibilities.

HOW?

- Safeguarding Strategic Plan
- Good Practice 6
- Training
- Templates for policies / forms
- Links to additional and specialist resources
- Giving a voice to those who have experienced abuse.

Letter from the General Secretary

As the resurrected Jesus stood before his disciples, his words were: ‘Peace be with you’.

Peace is a foundational Christian practice. Peace is not the absence of violence or oppression. It is about living well with one another; it is about integrity and honesty; it is about seeking the common good; it is about seeking the thriving of all as beloved creatures of God. This is all contained within the sense of the biblical word ‘Shalom’ – peace. This is what Jesus desires for his disciples. This is what Jesus still desires for his disciples – and for all creation.

It is easy to think of safeguarding as ‘yet another thing to do’, or as ‘yet more compliance’. It is not. It is foundational to what it is to be followers of Jesus. It is about seeking the flourishing of all. It is about taking an active stand against that which degrades, dehumanises, and leads to the opposite of peace and fullness of life. Safeguarding is an expression of the gospel of Christ’s resurrection.

In the United Reformed Church, no individual congregation is an Island. We are all interconnected and interdependent upon one another as valued parts of the body of Christ. Taking the promotion of resurrection peace through safeguarding seriously can feel demanding. It is vital to remember that this is something we do together, as Christ’s body. There is always someone to turn to for help, guidance, and support. If you are feeling unsure about how best to approach something, please pick up the phone or drop a line to your Synod Safeguarding Representative – they will only be too glad to help.

As something gospel shaped, safeguarding is a labour of love. It has been for those who have worked hard to prepare Good Practice 6, and it is for the many of you who through your engagement with safeguarding are promoting peace and flourishing. I want to say thank you to you all for the vital work you do – it is appreciated by many, far more than you will realise.

As the Body of Christ, the promotion of peace and flourishing is part of our fundamental call to discipleship. Safeguarding is therefore something that each one of us is called to take responsibility for. My prayer is that the wisdom Good Practice 6 contains, and our faithfulness to our call to discipleship, will lead us to becoming an ever safer Church, in which peace and flourishing becomes a reality all experience.

Yours in Christ,



John Bradbury
General Secretary of the United Reformed Church

Finding your way around the guidance

Good Practice 6 – Scotland is structured around this model:

Safeguarding in the URC



Chapters 1-6

Chapter 1
'Our URC commitments, values and responsibilities' outlines the ***foundations underpinning all URC safeguarding practice***.

Chapter 2-3
'Safer culture' and Chapter 3 'Safer activities' outline practices and procedures which can help to ***reduce the likelihood of harm occurring***.

Chapters 4-5
Provide guidance on responding appropriately ***when safeguarding concerns and allegations occur***.

Chapter 6
Considers the ***needs of victims and survivors***, including creating a supportive culture and responding to the individual experiences of those who have experienced abuse.

Resources
There are links throughout the guidance to further **Resources**. These provide a range of materials including additional guidance on some topics, forms, templates, and links to external resources.

Who the guidance is for
Good Practice 6 (GP6) provides information relevant to people with many different roles in the URC. Some material will only apply to certain roles but even if a section does not directly apply to your role it can still be helpful to know what other people are doing. GP6 is not just there for when things 'go wrong' but is more of a handbook for all to use to help build a safer culture across the URC.

How to use the guidance
Think about how the following questions could apply to your particular setting and role:
- How can we use GP6 to help embed good practice in the regular routines of our church life / our work to help prevent harm occurring?
- How can we use GP6 to improve the way we respond to safeguarding concerns, to both comply with our legal responsibilities and provide meaningful pastoral care for those involved?
- How can we use GP6 to better support those who have experienced harm or abuse?

The United Reformed Church

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Chapter one

Our URC commitments, values and responsibilities

1.1 URC Safeguarding Policy Statement (General Assembly 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 1988, 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.

The full statement (paper T4) and further details can be found here: **www.bit.ly/urcbor2021**

1.2 Why safeguarding matters

Safeguarding is part of the URC's mission. Churches and places of worship reflect society, with children and adults sharing together in the activities taking place in and around them. We journey alongside those who have been abused and those who have abused, and we all go forwards together as one body. The challenges for the URC are to foster a community of care where everyone – children, adults and, especially, those in greater need – finds in the Church a place where they feel safe and respected and can seek pastoral care and support when needed.

URC theology of safeguarding
Safeguarding involves all of us. Safeguarding is integral to the mission of the United Reformed Church and a part of its response and witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ. Safeguarding is underpinned by Jesus' command to his followers to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34-35). Because His ministry is continued in and through the church, the whole people of God called and committed to his service and equipped by him for it, it is our call to "to live out, in joyful and sacrificial service to all ….that ministry of caring, forgiving and healing love which Jesus Christ brought to all whom he met" *(The Manual A 11)*. As such, we, the Church, aspire to be a loving community, offering a welcoming environment in which people can flourish, safe from harm.

Safeguarding is a theme which runs throughout the whole Bible where God commends to his people those who are of special concern: widows, orphans and strangers. With over 2000 references concerning matters of justice and injustice in the Bible, God shows Godself as one who cares for the vulnerable: in Psalm 46 God provides safety and security and stands against domination, exploitation and abusive power; in Psalm 121, God is the keeper, the 'safe-guarder' of Israel. God wants the very best for all his people. The theological imperative of God then is the safety of all his children.

Jesus had a very clear message about the most vulnerable people too. The Good News is about human flourishing in its deepest sense. It matters so much to God that human beings should flourish that God sent Jesus to die for us. Safeguarding is affirmed in the theological idea of the word 'Salvation' where the root of the word is safekeeping. We believe that God wants human beings to flourish and grow in loving relationship with one another and with God. John's Gospel uses the image of abundant life for this: "I am come that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Jesus says that abuse in all its forms at its heart denies people that opportunity to flourish.

Therefore, the ways in which Christians relate to one another and others are vital for both human flourishing and the witness of the Church. In Matthew 18, when the disciples ask who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven and Jesus places a child in the middle of them, his reply about change and becoming like little children, shows us the strength of his teaching about the most vulnerable in our midst. Jesus teaches that, in the Kingdom, we are judged by what is in our hearts and how we put their faith into action, rather than knowing what we should do like the Pharisees who knew the Law but failed to put it into practice. Power over others does not play a part in the Kingdom. As Christians, we are called to imitate that radical hospitality which Jesus showed through his Incarnation by affirming the dignity and worth of all people in our Church structures, policies, processes and patterns of relating. Safeguarding is one aspect of this. Matthew 18 also reminds us that we will need to challenge bad behaviours and abuse which prevent flourishing and have the confidence to report those we have concerns about, knowing that we do so in a safe environment.

We have a wealth of skills and experience in our Head of Safeguarding, our Synod Safeguarding Officers and the URC Safeguarding Committee whose professional advice we do

well to heed as they guide us. We are called as witnesses to the God who offers healing, hope and life in all its fullness through the Good Shepherd who seeks to protect us and helps us to protect others.

Another aspect of our witness is advocacy. Throughout the Bible, God is attentive to the cries and needs of the those who are vulnerable and commands that his people are similarly attentive. This must always lead to action. Advocacy is about giving voice to others and their concerns. One way we do this is by making good use of our opportunities and using our own voice to speak up on behalf of others. Proverbs 31: 8 gives us the imperative to do this: "Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the powerless."

Another way is to give a platform to others to enable and empower their voice to be heard because it deserves to be heard. Victims and survivors have their own unique and personal experience which can be effective in advocacy for others as well as pursuers of justice in their own right, if empowered to do so. With this intergenerational understanding from Proverbs, safeguarding becomes a partnership: not something done to people who are vulnerable, or about them, but with them. Therefore, speaking up for them and alongside them is a deeply Biblical principle as well as God's wish for the Church, not only that we are safe, but we all work together for safety for all people.

Legal and regulatory requirements
In addition to legislation relating specifically to protection of children and adults at risk, other legal requirements in areas such as data protection, human rights and equality must also be considered. Relevant legislation and statutory guidance will be highlighted in each of the following chapters.

The Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR)
Local congregations and the Synod will need to follow the guidance and expectations of the Scottish Charity Regulator. Guidance states that 'charities have a wider responsibility to protect their staff, volunteers and beneficiaries in general'.[1] In the context of safeguarding, the role of the OSCR is to make sure that charities deal appropriately with any alleged safeguarding concerns. OSCR look to see that charity trustees take steps to protect vulnerable beneficiaries from harm and minimise the risk of abuse.

Other parts of the UK
Churches in England and Wales are regulated by the Charity Commission. Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man each have their own charity regulator. While the legal and regulatory framework is defined slightly differently in these jurisdictions, the same general principles apply.

Insurance
Failure to follow relevant legislation, policies and guidance may invalidate a church or synod insurance policy if a significant incident occurs.

1.3 The challenge of safeguarding

We cannot avoid these issues just because they are difficult. In our current social context, failure to take care over safeguarding can cause real reputational damage not only to the church but also to the Gospel message of love and acceptance. This guidance sets out some of the ways churches large and small can ensure they are seen to proclaim the Gospel message and protect and promote human dignity and also protect the reputation of the whole church.

1 https://www.oscr.org.uk/managing-a-charity/trustee-duties/safeguarding-guidance/

It is recognised that small churches in particular can find it difficult to manage expectations regarding safeguarding practice. Mutual support and partnerships between churches are one way to help overcome some of these challenges; further guidance in this area will be made available.

1.4 Division of responsibilities

Who is responsible for safeguarding in the URC? Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

The different parts of the Church are interrelated and co-dependent: Assembly and its staff, Synods and local churches. The URC is a small denomination, where it is common to find people who are related to one another, who have other strong non-familial connections, and where individuals may hold more than one position of responsibility. Therefore, the risks and likelihood of conflicts of interest are potentially high, and the need for clarity of responsibilities is essential.

Additions to URC Structure and Rules of Procedure (sections B and C of the Manual) were approved by General Assembly 2021 to 'make explicit where various responsibilities lie'.[2] These are listed below and further guidance on how this applies in practice is provided in the 'Safer Culture' chapter.

Local Churches
Primary responsibility for safeguarding in local churches is exercised through Church Meetings and Elders' Meetings.

Additions to the Structure agreed in 2021	
Functions of Church Meeting:	Functions of Elders' Meeting:
a) To appoint a Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator. b) To adopt and promote implementation of safeguarding policy in line with General Assembly recommendations. c) To receive regular safeguarding reports from the church safeguarding co-ordinator.	a) To satisfy themselves that all necessary procedures are in place to achieve the aims of the church's safeguarding policy. b) To adopt best safeguarding practice for all church activities. c) To report to Church Meeting and to Synod. d) To report to the building trustees, charity regulators and insurers when advised to do so by the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

Synods
Synods support local churches with their safeguarding responsibilities. They do so by:

- Assisting with the development of safeguarding policy
- Assisting with the appointment of, and offering support to, Church Safeguarding Co-ordinators
- Ensuring training is provided in accordance with the Safeguarding Training Framework.
- Monitoring safeguarding implementation through the annual safeguarding return

2 Paper T2: www.bit.ly/urcbor2021

Additions to the Structure agreed in 2021	
Functions of Synod	
a) To appoint a Synod Safeguarding Officer or equivalent. b) To have oversight of, and to support, monitor and report safeguarding related activities and issues within local churches, and amongst ministers, officers and staff of the Synod.	c) To take all necessary powers and actions positively to promote implementation of good practice in accordance with the safeguarding policy statement adopted by the General Assembly. d) To adopt best safeguarding practice for all its own activities and events.

General Assembly
General Assembly supports Synods and local churches by overseeing the development and implementation of policy and best practice in safeguarding.

Additions to the Structure agreed in 2021	
Functions of General Assembly	
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.

Safeguarding Committee
General Assembly has appointed a Safeguarding Committee to monitor the implementation of the URC Safeguarding Policy Statement and to oversee strategic matters of safeguarding throughout the Church.[3] The Committee includes a representative from the URC Synod of Scotland. The Committee reports to the Assembly Executive and General Assembly.

Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service
The URC Synod of Scotland has a service agreement with the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service who assist local URC congregations by providing safeguarding training, responding to safeguarding concerns and working with those who may pose a risk to other members of the church. Further details will be provided in the chapters below of the different responsibilities of the Synod and the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service.

1.5 Good Practice 6 (GP6)

The URC aims to foster best practice in safeguarding as an expression of God's loving concern for all.

3 Paper T3 SAG - Safeguarding Committee www.bit.ly/urcbor2021

Whilst formal processes are not enough on their own to protect children and adults at risk, having good procedures in place is an essential starting point.

Scope and purpose
Good Practice 6 constitutes the URC's only guidance document for safeguarding throughout the denomination. The guidance in this document and its associated resources applies across all levels 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 of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers (CRCWs).

Good Practice 6 is not itself a policy. Its purpose is to provide information about the URC's arrangements and procedures for safeguarding, and to offer model policies, resources and templates to help apply the guidance in practice. It is the responsibility of churches, Synods and General Assembly to create and implement safeguarding policies for their own context which fit with Good Practice 6 guidance.

There are some links in the document to Church of Scotland guidance. These relate to specific areas of practice for which the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service has responsibility (e.g. managing a Covenant of Responsibilities).

1.6 Key definitions

The following definitions are used throughout the guidance and additional resources.

Child
In Scotland, the definition of a child varies in different legal contexts, but statutory guidance which supports the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, includes all children up to the age of 18. This is in line with the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* and UK legislation.

Where a young person between the age of 16 and 18 requires support and protection, services will need to consider which legal framework best fits each person's needs. In some circumstances, the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007 can be applied to over 16s when the criteria are met. Further details are provided in the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland https://bit.ly/4szlepo.

Please note: even though we often refer to teenagers who are under 18 years of age as young people, legally they are defined as children (regardless of whether or not they are living independently).

Adult
An adult is defined as anyone who has reached their 18th birthday.

Adult at risk
The Adult Support and Protection Act (Scotland) 2007 defines an adult at risk as a person aged 16 or over who meets all of the following criteria:

- is unable to safeguard their own wellbeing, property, rights or other interests;
- is at risk of harm; and
- because they are affected by disability, mental disorder, illness or physical or mental infirmity, is more vulnerable to being harmed than adults who are not so affected.

Minister
The term ‘minister’ is used to refer to both Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers (CRCWs).

Worker
A person who is appointed by the church to work with children or adults at risk on behalf of the church, on a paid or voluntary basis. This term is used to describe ministers, youth workers, adult workers, Elders, pastoral assistants and others, including volunteers, who may be involved in regulated work and activities with children and adults at risk.[4]

Charity trustees
Those responsible for the general management and administration of a charity. In the URC, this includes local church trustees who may be called Elders, Deacons or trustees (or equivalents in Local Church Partnerships), the board of trustees for each Synod Trust Company, and trustees of the URC Trust.

4 Use of the term ‘worker’ does not imply or confer any employment rights for those undertaking voluntary roles

Chapter two

Safer culture

Building a safer culture helps to reduce the likelihood of harm occurring and provides the basis for more effective responses when problems do occur.

Key practice points

- Clear safeguarding policies and procedures are needed at all levels within the church
- No-one within the URC should be in a paid or voluntary position without having undergone some form of safer recruitment or safer election process
- Criminal record checks are a necessary part of the safer recruitment process but are not sufficient on their own
- Safeguarding training helps ensure that staff and volunteers have the knowledge and skills appropriate for their roles
- Good safeguarding practice is underpinned by compliance with other relevant policies and procedures e.g., data protection and confidentiality.

Key responsibilities

Local church

- Appoint a Church Safeguarding Coordinator and Safeguarding Panel
- Ensure contact details are publicly available for anyone to report a concern
- Have a safeguarding policy which is reviewed annually and updated when necessary
- Practice safer recruitment/election procedures for paid and volunteer roles
- Ensure those working with children or adults at risk are given copies of the Codes of Conduct
- Follow the requirements of the training framework
- Comply with legal requirements in respect of data protection
- Complete the Annual Church Safeguarding Return
- Ensure safeguarding is a regular agenda item for Church and Elders' meetings

Synod

- Appoint a Synod Safeguarding Administrator
- Have a safeguarding policy which is reviewed annually and updated when necessary
- Oversee implementation of the training framework
- Advise local churches on safer recruitment processes
- Collate information and provide an annual report to the Head of Safeguarding
- Report to Synod meetings matters of a safeguarding nature
- Review and maintain a Service Agreement with the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service
- Ensure safeguarding is a regular agenda item for Trustee meetings

Head of Safeguarding/Denomination

- 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 for Ministers and CRCWs
- Provide an annual safeguarding report to General Assembly
- Report to the URC Trust matters of a safeguarding nature

2.1 Promoting awareness of safeguarding

Creating a safer culture includes raising awareness across the denomination that:

- Both children and adults can be at risk of harm, abuse or neglect
- Safeguarding covers responding to abuse, but also other concerns about vulnerabilities (e.g., due to ageing) and issues of self-harm and suicide risks
- Concerns will be responded to in a caring way, maintaining confidentiality as far as possible
- Any allegations will be taken seriously, and will be referred to and investigated by the appropriate agencies

People may feel uncomfortable talking about painful experiences or vulnerabiltiies. They may at times be unaware that they have been a victim (e.g. of financial abuse). Examples of ways to raise awareness and make it easier for people to talk about concerns could include:

- Provide information in the church or Synod buildings (e.g., leaflets, Feel Safe poster ***Resource D3***)
- Acknowledge the impact of abuse in public prayers (in general terms, not individual experiences)
- Talk about issues of mental health and different types of vulnerabilities
- Speak out against abuse in preaching and teaching
- Build relationships with local specialist services and pray for their work (e.g., local charities providing support for those experiencing domestic abuse or dealing with addictions).

Safeguarding roles, policies and reporting

2.2 Roles with specific safeguarding responsibilities

Within the URC there are specific roles which carry particular responsibility for promoting good safeguarding practice.

Trustees
Trustees have oversight of all aspects of safeguarding and this applies at local church, Synod and URC Trust level. They are accountable to the relevant regulatory bodies for safeguarding in any local church and body of the URC, even if certain aspects of the work are delegated to other staff.

Church Safeguarding Coordinator (CSC) and Deputy CSC
Each church must have a Safeguarding Coordinator. A deputy should also be appointed, if possible. See *Resource S1: The Role of a Church Safeguarding Coordinator* for a role description.

It may not be possible to find one person willing and able to perform both the safeguarding children and safeguarding adult roles. In this case, separate Safeguarding Coordinators should be appointed for children and adults at risk. Ministers/CRCWs are not allowed to take up the role of Safeguarding Coordinators because of their overall pastoral responsibilities. It is also not advisable for their spouses or close family members to take on the role within the same church community to prevent any conflict of interest. Churches may consider appointing one Coordinator for a group of churches.

Churches must display information detailing who to contact and a list of helpful phone numbers. See *Resources D1: Model church safeguarding poster (Scotland)* and *D2: Suggested safeguarding wording for websites*. Churches also need to notify the Synod Safeguarding Administrator of the name and contact details of their Safeguarding Coordinator(s) and deputy Safeguarding Coordinator(s), whose information will be stored on the URC database. It is important to have a specific email address for the CSC (e.g., churchnamesafeguarding@gmail.com) to avoid using personal accounts for safeguarding correspondence, to protect confidentiality and to ensure that information is not lost when someone new takes on the role.

Even if a church currently has no children attending, a Safeguarding Coordinator should still be appointed. This is because all churches can have adults at risk in attendance, especially considering that some vulnerabilities can be hidden. Children or adults at risk could attend and/or access services of the church at any time, and good safeguarding practice needs to be in place already. In addition, adults may disclose about their own children or others they have encountered, and these concerns will need to be raised through relevant safeguarding processes.

Church Safeguarding Panel
This is a group of at least three people who manage safeguarding matters on behalf of the church. The suggested membership of a Panel is the Church Safeguarding Coordinator, the Minister, and one or two other church members with relevant experience. More information on the role of a Panel can be found in *Resource S6*.

Synod Safeguarding Administrator
The Synod Safeguarding Administrator is the first point of contact for:

- Criminal records checks
- Safer recruitment queries
- Completing the annual church safeguarding return
- Training records

Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service
Under the Service Agreement, the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service provides training, and takes the lead on responding to all concerns and allegations.

Head of Safeguarding (HoS)
The URC appoints an Assembly-level Head of Safeguarding (HoS) to oversee and advise on matters of safeguarding across the denomination. As part of their role, the HoS provides support to Assembly and Synod staff in helping local churches with serious safeguarding situations, as well as helping them comply with Good Practice.

2.3 Safeguarding policies and reporting

Local church

Safeguarding policies
Each church should adopt the URC's safeguarding policy, practices and procedures for safeguarding children and adults at risk. *Resource P1: Model Church safeguarding policy* provides an example safeguarding policy for local churches.

- This should be made readily available to anyone who wishes to see it.
- Each policy should be reviewed and updated on an annual basis, approved by the church meeting and compliance monitored by the Elders' meeting
- A safeguarding policy statement should be prominently displayed in the Church (and on a Church's website), summarising the principles and intent of the policy. *Resource P2* provides examples of template policy statements which can be adapted as required.

The exceptions to this are:
i) Churches in a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP)

An 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, and are not permitted to create their own policy or make a hybrid policy – it must be the policy of one of the denominations. They should also be aware that policies can interact with each other e.g., the Methodist Safeguarding Policy is linked with the Methodist data privacy policy. They should also inform the Synod Safeguarding Administrator, via the church return forms or the URC Church Update portal, which denominational policy and procedures they have decided to follow in operating all relevant business, including reporting safeguarding incidents, safer recruitment, training, and so on. See *Resource G1: Guidance on Safeguarding for Local Ecumenical Partnerships* for more information.

Local church annual safeguarding return (ASR)
The Church Safeguarding Coordinator should complete the annual safeguarding return (ASR) each year. The information provided in ASRs assists the Synod in providing appropriate support and guidance to local churches. It can be completed online via the URC Church Update Portal (https://churchupdate.urc.org.uk/dmz/login) or on paper. The Synod Safeguarding Administrator can help with questions about completing the ASR.

Annual review
A review of safeguarding policy, practice and procedures at the church is required once a year, perhaps around the same time as the church AGM. The Safeguarding Coordinator of each local URC should report annually to the Eldership or Church Council. The report should include a summary of any safeguarding concerns that have arisen in the period (minus any identifying details), lessons learned, and any implications for the review of safeguarding policy and procedures.

Synod

Safeguarding Policy
The Synod should adopt policy, processes and procedures for safeguarding children and adults at risk during Synod activities. These should be reviewed, updated and approved annually by the Synod trustees, in accordance with *Good Practice 6*. *Resource P7* provides a template for a Synod safeguarding policy.

Synod annual safeguarding report (SSR)
An annual safeguarding report should be provided to the Synod trustees summarising any safeguarding concerns which have arisen from within the Synod (minus any identifying details), any actions taken in individual cases, lessons learned, and any implications for the review of safeguarding policy and procedures. In Synods where a safeguarding reference group has been set up by the Synod and its trustees to take primary responsibility for safeguarding, the annual report should be received by this group, with a summary going to the trustees. In addition, the annual safeguarding report should give a summary of the annual safeguarding return information provided by local churches, and details of the safeguarding training and support provided by the Synod.

A copy of this Annual Synod Safeguarding Report should be given to the URC Head of Safeguarding. This will allow the Church as a whole to review its commitment to safeguarding children and adults at risk, and provide suitable support and guidance to Synods and local churches.

General Assembly
The 2021 General Assembly issued a safeguarding policy statement which will be reviewed and updated as needed (see Paper T4).

All Synod Safeguarding Officers, and the Synod of Scotland Safeguarding Administrator, meet regularly to review existing safeguarding practices of the Church. The URC Head of Safeguarding collates all Synod safeguarding annual reports, and then reports to the Safeguarding Committee and the URC trustees.

Safer recruitment

2.4 What is safer recruitment?

Safer recruitment is a framework for designing your recruitment process to deter unsuitable applicants from applying for roles with vulnerable groups, and to identify and reject them if they do. Operating a safer recruitment policy sends a powerful message to all those involved in church life, including those intent on causing harm, that safeguarding is taken seriously by the URC. Failing to carry out a safer recruitment process can put people at risk and could also invalidate insurance policies if a serious safeguarding incident occurs.

Key stages of safer recruitment
The key principles of safer recruitment apply in all cases, but the process should be proportionate to the role e.g., it will be more detailed for a paid employee than for a volunteer.



All these different elements are important as information may be missed if just relying on one part of the process. For example, an individual might not have any convictions but a reference might reveal inappropriate conduct which indicates that they would be unsuitable for a particular role.

All checks and references must be received before an individual takes up their role. This will reduce the risk of exposing people to potential harm, as well as the embarrassment of having to remove someone from a role if they prove unsuitable. It also reduces the risk of committing an offence by inadvertently placing someone into a role they are prohibited from doing (see section 2.5 below).

The **Resources** page has a range of materials to help with the safer recruitment process, including: *SR1 volunteer application form; SR2 volunteer reference request; SR3 sample questions for interviews and discussions..*

Safer recruitment of volunteers
Churches will need to use their own judgement in applying these procedures, and it may vary for different roles, but key steps typically include:

Stage	Typical activities
Preparation	• Provide a role description • Specify what level of criminal records check will be required • Decide where and how to advertise the role
Application process	• Application form • For certain roles, a self-declaration form will be needed
Interview or discussion	• Safeguarding issues taken into consideration e.g., reasons for taking on role, relevant experience, any problems in previous roles
References and checks	• Appropriate level of criminal records check • References, ideally at least one from someone who knows of their work with children or adults at risk and preferably has known them in the last 5 years
Induction, training, support	• Ensure volunteers have copy of church safeguarding policy and relevant Codes of Conduct • Attend relevant level of safeguarding training • Volunteer knows who to contact with any queries or concerns • Set expectation on how work will be supervised

Safer recruitment of employees
For employees, each stage of the process will be more detailed, for example:

Stage	Typical activities
Preparation	• There is a written job description and person specification • Specify what level of criminal records check will be required • The job description makes clear the duties expected of regarding contact with, and responsibility for, children or adults at risk, and what level of supervision will be provided for these duties. • The position is advertised
Application process	• Application form • Self-declaration form
Interview or discussion	• Interviewed by a panel (not just one person) • Safeguarding has been discussed at interview
References and checks	• Written references have been obtained and followed up • Qualifications have been verified • Appropriate level of criminal records check completed • An applicant's UK residency status and/ or right to work in the UK will be checked when recruiting for a paid role
Induction, training, support	• A suitable induction training programme is provided • The applicant has been given a copy of the church/organisation safeguarding policy and knows how to report concerns • Copies of relevant Codes of Conduct have been provided • A probationary period has been agreed • Supervision expectations are set • Safeguarding training has been attended.

Safer Election of Elders
Elders are called into ministry by the church meeting. However, the URC acknowledges that those who are in positions of responsibility should be properly equipped for the ministry to which they are called.

The key provisions in relation to safeguarding are that a newly elected Elder shall:
a) undertake a suitable induction training programme
b) be given a copy of
- URC Guidelines for the Conduct and Behaviour of Elders
- the church's safeguarding policy with knowledge of how to report concerns

c) apply for a relevant Disclosure Scotland check
d) attend safeugarding training within 6 months of ordination and/or induction

See here for further details: https://urcresourceshub.org.uk/safer-election-of-elders/

There is a self-declaration form specifically for Elders, *Resource F2*.

2.5 Criminal Records Checks

The Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020 introduced significant changes to the levels of checks required.

The different disclosure levels are:[5]

Level 1
This is the lowest level of disclosure which anyone can apply for. It shows unspent convictions.

Level 2
This is only used for some specific roles, none of which are currently relevant for URC activities.

Level 2 with barred list check
This is only used for specific activities, such as adopting a child.

Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) scheme
The PVG scheme is a membership scheme for people working in regulated roles. These are roles which involve work with children or protected adults, or holding a position of power in an organisation working with these groups. It's a legal requirement for anyone doing a regulated role to join the scheme. https://www.mygov.scot/pvg-scheme

Which church roles and positions require a check?
Roles within the URC will need either a Level 1 check or PVG membership.

A full list of the types of checks currently required for different roles is provided in *Resource S3 - Scotland.*

PVG scheme continuous monitoring
Disclosure Scotland will provide continuous monitoring of members and will update their system if a new conviction or relevant police information is added to a PVG member's record. Disclosure Scotland will notify the URC if the new information indicates the person may pose a potential risk to children or adults at risk. A risk assessment will then be needed to determine if the individual is suitable to continue in their role.

How often should Level 1 checks be renewed?
For Level 1 disclosures, the URC currently requires this to be renewed every 5 years.

Practicalities of carrying out criminal record checks
Due Diligence Checking Ltd (DDC) carries out all checks on behalf of the URC.

Who can be the verifier in a local church?
The Church Secretary and Church Safeguarding Coordinator are automatically on the list of approved verifiers. The church can ask for additional people to be added as verifiers via the URC Church Update portal or by completing the 99SG form which is available via the safeguarding section of the URC's website here https://bit.ly/4kgv8eo. Family members cannot act as verifiers for each other so another approved verifier would need to confirm identity documents in such situations.

5 https://www.mygov.scot/disclosure-levels

Consent from applicants
It is essential that criminal offence data obtained are obtained lawfully, fairly and transparently. Any application for a check should, therefore, be initiated with the consent of the applicant to ensure protection of the rights of people who apply to work or volunteer for the URC. Where a local church or Synod has a Privacy Notice, this should be provided to applicants before a check is made so that they can understand what will be done with their data, and why they are providing it. A model Privacy Notice can be found on the URC website.[6]

How does a church check the suitability of people who have spent time abroad?
Disclosure Scotland cannot access criminal records held overseas, therefore a check may not provide a complete picture of an individual's criminal record, regardless of whether they are a British Citizen or not. A Certificate of Good Character - also sometimes referred to as 'Certificate or Letter of Good Conduct' - can be requested by an applicant, usually from the home embassy of the country(ies) that they have lived or worked in. The application process for the certificate varies from country to country and up-to-date guidance can be found on GOV.UK.

DDC can also carry out international criminal record checks at the request of the Synod and the Offices of General Assembly Safeguarding Administrator. Seek advice from Synod if you become aware that someone lived abroad more than five years ago (the Disclosure Scotland application asks for addresses over the last five years so would not necessarily pick up details from before then). This information could come from an employment history (for paid roles) or from an application form for volunteer roles (see *Resource SR1*) for example.

If checks from other countries cannot be obtained or are not available, extra care should be taken when obtaining references or checking any previous employment record. In such cases, it would be advisable to seek additional references, as well as actually speak to referees by phone or video call. It is acknowledged that if someone has been travelling abroad, e.g., on a gap year where a number of countries might be visited, it will not be possible to obtain the information in this format. Therefore, it is even more important that other steps in the safer recruitment process are followed and that the references, and any previous employment or volunteer experience, are verified.

Recruitment of ex-offenders
The Disclosure Scotland Code of Practice[7] states that organisations must treat applicants who have a criminal record fairly and not discriminate automatically because of a conviction or other information revealed. Organisations, including churches, need to have a- policy on the recruitment of ex-offenders, a copy of which can be given to applicants at the outset of the recruitment process. *Resource P4* provides a model policy statement on the recruitment of ex-offenders. The URC is committed to equality of opportunity and, while not being complacent about risk, understands that people are capable of reform. We will consider all offences on an individual basis and many offences will not prohibit people who are otherwise suitable to work with children or adults at risk from doing so.

Under GDPR, extra protection is given to 'personal data relating to criminal convictions or offences' (known as criminal offence data). Data processing should be lawful, fair, transparent and in line with all the principles and requirements of GDPR.[8]

6 https://urc.org.uk/gdpr
7 https://www.mygov.scot/disclosure-code-of-practice
8 www.bit.ly/4sDAPVK

Blemished Disclosures
If a criminal records check reveals detail of convictions, cautions or other relevant information added to the certificate by the Police, a risk assessment will be carried out by the Recruitment Subcommittee of the Church of Scotland's Safeguarding Committee to evaluate whether it is safe for the individual to take up their proposed role. A Synod representative will attend any meeting of the Subcommittee where URC cases are being discussed.

In cases where there is content on a Disclosure Scotland certificate, the individual should not start in their role until the Subcommittee has confirmed whether this is appropriate (and set out any conditions that they need to comply with).

If the outcome of the risk assessment is that the individual can take up their role, and the conviction is unspent, the Synod will liaise with the Head of Safeguarding about contacting the URC insurers, to seek agreement for them to cover the risk of someone with an unspent conviction having that position within the church.

In cases relating to Ministers of the Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers, Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers, the process is managed by the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries), in consultation with the Head of Safeguarding.

Individuals who are barred from Regulated Roles
This opportunity to potentially make an appointment, subject to a risk assessment and/or certain conditions, does not apply to roles involving regulated work where an individual has been barred from working with children and/or adults at risk.

An individual who is barred and seeks to work (either paid or unpaid) in a Regulated Role is committing a criminal offence. An organisation which knowingly seeks to appoint an individual who is barred from working in a Regulated Role from which they have been barred is also committing a criminal offence. A church therefore **must not** allow anyone who is on either of the barred lists to work or volunteer in a Regulated Role from which they have been barred.

Barring decisions for people living in England, Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man are made by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). The different schemes all recognise each other's decisions so, for example, an applicant who is barred from working with children or adults at risk in one part of the country is barred across the whole of the British Isles.

Storage, handling, use, retention and disposal of disclosure information and certificates
The Disclosure Scotland Code of Practice states that organisations must ensure that disclosure information is handled, stored and securely disposed of appropriately. Organisations receiving disclosure information:

- are responsible for the information provided to them
- should have a data handling policy which sets out how information will be processed securely and which adheres to the Disclosure Act and Data Protection legislation.
- should ensure methods for destruction of data, and any agreements in place for this, are appropriate to prevent breaches of personal data prior to, during or after destruction.

See: https://www.mygov.scot/disclosure-code-of-practice

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Training and Codes of Conduct

2.6 Training

The URC recognises that it is everyone's responsibility to safeguard others and thus needs to ensure that people holding specific roles and responsibilities are specifically equipped to protect vulnerable groups.

Safeguarding Training Framework
The URC has a Service Level Agreement with the Church of Scotland regarding safeguarding training.

The matrix on page 30-34 of the URC Safeguarding Training Framework shows the **mandatory** levels of training required for different roles. For those who have more than one role in the church, training must be completed at the highest level required.

As our churches differ slightly, we require at least one Elder/Deacon to complete the Leadership level of training if they are in leadership in a church where there is no Minister and no plan for there to be a Minister imminently. This should ideally be the Elder/Deacon who sits on the safeguarding panel for the church. This training will be delivered specifically for those Elders/ Deacons and will be co-facilitated by the URC Training and Development Coordinator.

The URC also provides a range of bespoke training modules and the training matrix indicates which of these are most relevant for different roles. Details of the modules available and how to book can be found at: https://urc.org.uk/safeguarding/training-and-webinars/

Training records
Church Safeguarding Coordinators are responsible for:

- Ensuring all relevant church members undertake safeguarding training at the level required for their role/s
- Reminding church members to renew relevant training when required
- Advising the Synod Safeguarding Administrator of training undertaken by church members

The Synod Safeguarding Administrator will:

- Record details (provided by local churches and the Church of Scotland) of who has completed mandatory training

The Safeguarding Administrator for the Offices of General Assembly will:

- Record details of who has completed training delivered by the URC Training & Development Officer on the URC database

2.7 Codes of Conduct

The Church Safeguarding Coordinator or Church Secretary need to provide copies of the relevant Codes of Conduct to anyone in a role working with children or adults at risk at local church level. For Synod or Assembly events, organisers should ensure staff/volunteers have copies of the Codes of Conduct, in addition to any specific guidance or ground rules for that particular event.

Relevant resources are *C1: Code of Conduct for Working with Children (Under 18s) and C2: Code of Conduct for Working with Adult (Over 18s)*.

Data protection

2.8 Data protection and information sharing

When dealing with any data relating to safeguarding concerns or allegations, it is necessary to understand **both**:

i) individuals' rights concerning their own data; *and*
ii) when and how information can be shared for the purpose of preventing harm

Privacy and individuals' rights
It is important that workers are aware the *Data Protection Act 2018* and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) place duties on organisations and individuals to process personal information fairly and lawfully, and to keep the information they hold safe and secure. Under GDPR, individuals have eight rights in relation to their personal data. The most relevant ones for safeguarding purposes are:

- Right to be informed about collection and use of personal data
- Right to access data held about them by a data controller
- Right to rectification of inaccurate information
- Right to erasure
- Right to object to processing of personal data in certain circumstances
- It is therefore important to ensure that all data is as accurate and fair as possible, recognising that records (including emails) can be seen by individuals if they request it.

Sharing information for safeguarding purposes
Nothing in the Data Protection legislation seeks to limit the appropriate disclosure of information in order to protect an individual who is, or may be, at risk of harm. The Data Protection Act 2018 contains 'safeguarding of children and individuals at risk' as a processing condition that allows practitioners to share information. What matters is that the process of information sharing is carried out appropriately.

Workers must, therefore, decide whether sharing information is a *necessary and proportionate* response to the need to protect an individual. The decision-making process must weigh up what might happen if the information is shared against what might happen if it is not shared. If in doubt, always seek advice from the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service.

Consent for sharing information
Consent from individuals should be sought to share information whenever possible. However, sharing confidential information without consent can be justified in the public interest when:

- there is evidence or reasonable cause to believe that a child or an adult is suffering, or is at risk of suffering, significant 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.

NB: If you are concerned that there is an immediate risk of harm to a child or adult at risk, information should be passed on to the relevant person without delay, regardless of whether or not consent can be obtained.

Recording decisions about information sharing
When information is shared, a record should be made of when it was shared, with whom, in what form, for what purpose, and whether it was disclosed with or consent. Similarly, any decision not to share information, and the reasons why, should also be recorded.

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. This means that it should only be shared with individuals and agencies who have a responsibility for the reporting of, or decision making about, a particular safeguarding situation.

For a local church, such people would normally include:

- the Church Safeguarding Coordinator
- the Church Minister, leader, CRCW or Interim Moderator
- the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service
- the statutory agencies to whom a safeguarding referral is being made.

For a Synod or Assembly event, this could include:
- the person appointed to act as Safeguarding Officer for the event
- the Synod or Assembly Safeguarding Officer
- the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service
- the Synod Moderator or the URC General Secretary
- the statutory agencies to whom a safeguarding referral is made.

Decisions about whether others need to be informed, such as the parents or carers of children or adults at risk, would be made by those managing the case, and would be on a strictly 'need to know' basis. There may well be situations where they should not be told.

The whole Eldership of a local URC, or the trustees of a Synod or Assembly, might be informed that a safeguarding case is being dealt with and the actions that are being taken, without divulging confidential details of the case. These details might include the people and churches involved, or the precise nature of the issue. Synod Moderators should always be informed when the general well-being of a church is affected by a serious safeguarding incident, or when the whole Eldership of a local church are failing to take appropriate steps to protect a child or an adult at risk.

Top Tips

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

Storing information

All paper and electronic records should be stored appropriately, in line with legislation and guidance. Paper records should always be stored securely on church or office premises, rather than in private homes. Confidential, sensitive or important records should always be stored in locked filing cabinets or safes, and must be disposed of in a secure manner, such as by shredding. A well-organised filing system should include appropriate procedures for the retention and disposal of records. Emails are also electronic records which need to be managed appropriately, and any filing system used for this type of communication must also have appropriate procedures for retention and disposal, as listed below.

Record retention periods

Records must be kept only if they are required for operational, legal and historical purposes. When records are no longer required for any of these purposes, they should be destroyed in an appropriate manner.

The Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service advises that:

- Safeguarding Panels should not retain PVG applications (even a copy). The most that congregations should keep is the PVG application number.
- Covenants of responsibilities should be retained for 100 years for those convicted of a sexual offence.
- Records of concerns relating to potential/actual sexual offending should be retained for 100 years.
- Records relating to child protection concerns should be retained for 50 years.

- Records relating to adult protection concerns should be retained for 50 years
- Advice from the Safeguarding Service should be retained for 3 years (unless it falls under one of the previous categories, in which case it should be dealt with as set out above).[9]

Subject Access Requests (SARs)
Under GDPR, individuals can request to see data which a church, synod or the Offices of General Assembly holds about them (Subject Access Request). Responses to SARs should normally be provided within 30 days unless there are exceptional circumstances. For advice on responding to SARs, contact the Synod PA/Administrator (pa@urcscotland.org.uk).

Requests for data rectification and data erasure
If an individual demonstrates that information held about them is inaccurate, they have a right to data rectification under GDPR and the data controller must correct inaccurate data. The right to data erasure is unlikely to apply in safeguarding cases as documents are required to be retained for long periods as shown above. Contact the Synod PA/Administrator (pa@urcscotland.org.uk) for advice on dealing with these types of requests.

Other relevant policies

2.9 Whistleblowing

To fulfil its commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and adults at risk, the URC recognises the importance of creating a culture where there is a mechanism in place for workers to be able to raise legitimate concerns about other workers. This is commonly referred to as whistleblowing. The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 gives workers legal protection against being dismissed or penalised as a result of publicly disclosing certain serious concerns. While the Act does not provide the same protection for volunteers, churches should endeavour to adopt the same practice for all. All staff, volunteers and members of a congregation should be encouraged to acknowledge and take individual responsibility by bringing matters of unacceptable practice, performance or behaviour to the attention of any of the following:

- Church Safeguarding Coordinator or deputy
- Elders
- Minister or Interim Moderator
- Synod Moderator

The URC Whistleblowing Policy is available for reference here https://bit.ly/4yLOIls.

9 Taken from Church of Scotland guidance for safeguarding coordinators https://bit.ly/4zbWK9b

2.10 Bullying and harassment

The United Reformed Church acknowledges that bullying and harassment do occur within local churches and the wider councils. It is important that people should know where to find help if they believe themselves to have been bullied, and that those responsible for pastoral care should be vigilant for signs that bullying may be occurring.

There is no legal definition of bullying but it is often characterised as: 'Offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, or an abuse or misuse of power, intended to cause hurt or pain, or to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient'.

Harassment is defined in the Equality Act 2010 as: 'Unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment for that individual.'

Someone who believes they have been the target of harassment or bullying, or a third party witnessing such behaviour, should not hesitate to seek help. The sooner this is done the better, even if they are not certain that it is bullying, but they feel that someone's conduct displays unwanted behaviour. Dealing with concerns early can often prevent situations escalating into more serious conflict and such requests for help should therefore always be treated seriously. In a local church, the minister, church secretary or chair of the local CRCW committee, would normally be the first port of call. Where that is inappropriate, the Synod Moderator may be contacted. An allegation against a Synod Moderator should be directed to the General Secretary.

See also *Resource G5: Guidance on responding to allegations of bullying and harassment*. In some cases, it may be necessary to use the complaints process set out in Section Q of the Manual or the Disciplinary Process (Section O).

Chapter three

Safer activities

It isn't possible to guard against every eventuality, but churches can do their best to provide a safe environment by making sure they follow good working practice in every area of church life. This applies to activities organised by the church, both on and off church premises, including:

- regular groups run by the church (e.g., junior church, Pilots, fellowship groups, Messy Church, lunch clubs) on church premises
- groups run by the church which take place on other premises (e.g. in people's homes)
- pastoral visits in homes or hospitals
- occasional events (e.g., holiday clubs and outings)
- residential events (e.g., youth camps, all-age church weekends away)
- other work amongst children or adults at risk offered by the church (e.g., mentoring, detached youth work, prayer ministry)
- groups which include adults and children when children attend without parental supervision (e.g., all-age choir, music group or craft group).

Key practice points

- Good practice in relation to 'safer culture' (e.g., safer recruitment, training, codes of conduct) provides a foundation for safer activities
- Health & Safety overlaps with safeguarding but needs to be considered separately
- Some general principles apply to activities with any age group (e.g., risk assessments, obtaining consent)
- Some guidelines are specific to particular activities with children or adults at risk
- Data protection requirements will be relevant in a number of ways such as safe storage of registration and consent forms, use of images, storage of notes from home visits.
- The Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service also provides guidance on some of the topics covered here https://bit.ly/4ss0FvS Church of Scotland Safeguarding Handbook chapter 5.

Key responsibilities

Local Church / Synod / Denomination

- Ensure appropriate insurance is in place for buildings and activities
- Consider data protection and health & safety requirements for specific activities
- Carry out risk assessments for relevant activities or events
- Ensure adequate staffing for activities and that leaders have suitable training, are aware of relevant guidance and agree to follow the appropriate Codes of Conduct

Local church

- Ensure appropriate safeguarding measures are in place when other organisations use church premises
- Seek advice from the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service when needed

Synod

- Provide a template hiring agreement for local churches to use

Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service

- Provide advice on good practice and on managing complex risks for specific events

Head of Safeguarding/Denomination

- Obtain specialist advice where necessary on legal and regulatory requirements

Safer locations, buildings and facilities

3.1 Health and safety

Churches have a responsibility to provide a safe environment all who use their building(s), and so should take reasonable measures to minimise the chance of people getting hurt by ensuring appropriate Health and Safety processes are in place.

Health and Safety overlaps with safeguarding but those with specific responsibilities in safeguarding (e.g., church safeguarding coordinator, synod safeguarding representative) will not generally be responsible for Health & Safety matters so this is an area that needs to be considered separately.

Advice and guidance on Health & Safety matters will be provided separately on the URC resources hub and the link is https://bit.ly/4eFIu07.

3.2 Lettings

Many local churches allow other organisations to use their premises. Those hiring the premises are responsible for ensuring that when children or adults at risk are present, appropriate legislation and best practice in connection with their supervision and safety is observed. They must also notify the Church Safeguarding Coordinator if any concerns arise relating to people or activities for which they are responsible. Further details are found in the Hirer's agreement (available from the Synod) which applies to all cases where premises are hired out to any individual or organisation. Safeguarding clauses to use in the agreement are provided in *Resource SA6*.

If the hiring organisation is required to register with an inspection body such as the Care Inspectorate (for example, if it is a nursery, pre-school or out-of-school-hours childcare), then the church should ask to see the registration certificate, and record that it has been seen.

All lettings should be reviewed annually. Your Synod or Synod Trust may be able to offer advice or information about leasing and hiring of premises responsibilities.

Please note: Groups which are sponsored by local churches (such as Scouts and Guides) will follow the safeguarding policy of their organisations. Partner groups (such as Boys' or Girls' Brigade and Pilots) will follow denominational policy whilst also ensuring compliance with their own organisational procedures.

3.3. Church activities in private dwellings

The use of private dwellings can raise particular issues in relation to safeguarding, for example the presence of bedrooms and bathrooms, the potential for individuals to use private spaces within the venue unobserved, and the presence of other people not part of the activity. Any church activities hosted in private dwellings come under the safeguarding policy of the church. See here for details https://bit.ly/48lXxIN.

General principles for safer activities

This section outlines some key guidelines relevant to a range of activities with different groups. More specific details for particular activities are then provided in sections 3.7-3.21 below.

3.4 Risk assessments

While it is not possible to avoid all risks when working with children or adults at risk, it is possible to try and minimise those risks. This can be achieved through careful planning and preparation and by providing a written record of the thought processes and actions taken. Risk assessments should be undertaken by the activity leader/s before any activity takes place and retained in case they need to be seen at a later date, for example as a result of an accident taking place. These are not onerous, and can be broken down into five easy steps:

1. Identify the risks / hazards
2. Decide who might be harmed, and how
3. Evaluate the risks (likelihood and impact) and decide on precautions/actions
4. Record findings
5. Regularly review and update

In an activity risk assessment, it is important to take into account:

- the type of activity
- the space and setting being used
- the ages, abilities and special needs of participants in the group
- staff ratios
- levels of experience of staff
- contingency or emergency planning, such as what happens if a leader doesn't turn up, or if there is an accident and someone needs to be taken home or to hospital.

For more information and guidance on completing an activity risk assessment, see *Resource SA1: Risk assessment template (with guidance).*

3.5 Insurance

Insurance cover is required to protect property, staff, volunteers and participants. The level and range of cover must be adequate, and should be reviewed annually.

Insurance policies require the insured to take all reasonable steps to prevent injury, loss or damage occurring, and to follow legal, statutory and Charity Regulator requirements and guidelines. Failure to take such precautions may impact the insurance arrangements, and therefore it is recommended for the insured to adopt the guidelines set out in this Good Practice 6 document.

URC insurance is in place for Assembly-appointed staff to organise and lead nationally arranged events. However, this does not cover Synod or local area events, which require their own insurance.

All local churches should have their own insurance cover. Church policies should include public and employer's liability cover as standard but additional insurance will be required for specific events such as international trips or events involving higher-risk activities/sports.

It is recommended that all Synods have indemnity insurance to cover them for any claims that might be made against them, including claims arising from the actions of their safeguarding personnel, providing they have acted legally and responsibly.

The URC record retention schedule indicates that records documenting the arrangement and renewal of insurance policies should be kept permanently (given the potential for historic claims).[10]

3.6 Registration and consent forms

Where the church is running a dedicated service for children or adults at risk, good practice would be for all activities to have:

i) a registration form
ii) an attendance register

All personal details and consent forms (either paper-based or digital) must be stored securely and not shared unless it is legally permissible to do so.

Registration form
Registration forms should be updated annually, and include the following:

- name and address
- date of birth
- parent/carer contact details (or emergency contact details if different)
- medical information

10 https://urcresourceshub.org.uk/record-retention-schedule/

- details of any additional needs, including any activities the individual cannot take part in
- any other information relevant to the activities, such as dietary requirements, or who is allowed to collect a child at the end of the activity
- consent for emergency medical treatment if a parent/carer cannot be contacted
- consent for photographs or videos.
- consent for online communication between workers and children where relevant

Separate consent should be obtained for one-off events or activities, including any outings or trips.

Consent
Under the Age of Legal Capacity (Scotland) 1991, a person has full legal capacity at the age of 16. Young people aged 16 or over will therefore be able to give consent to participate in activities or for images to be used, unless there is a reason to think that they do not have capacity to do so.[11]

For those under 16, it is good practice to ask children who have the maturity and mental capacity to make their own decisions about whether they want to be involved in an activity. Most young people over 12 are likely to come into this category, although an assessment should be made based on their individual needs.

Age of Child or Young Person	***Consent Required***
Under 12	parent or carer
12-15	parent or carer & young person where appropriate
16+	young person

See also *Resource SA2: Information and consent form.*

Seek advice from the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service if there are concerns that contacting a parent to ask for consent (or inform them of an activity involving those aged 16+) might place a child or young person at risk of harm.

Attendance registers
Where possible, it is best practice to keep a record of the children and adults in attendance for groups and activities organised by the church. A register of attendance might include:

- the name and type of group or activity
- the date, time and venue of the group or activity
- a list of children present (ages may also be helpful)
- a list of adults present

Please note: URC guidelines on record retention indicate that records of children's activities and events (e.g., registers, risk assessments, consent forms, health & safety records) should be kept for 25 years after the date of the activity/event.

11 https://www.publicguardian-scotland.gov.uk/adults-with-incapacity-(scotland)-act/definition-of-incapacity

3.7 Insufficient workers for an activity

Ideally, there will be a pool of workers who have undergone safer recruitment procedures, and who can be called upon at short notice if other workers are suddenly unavailable. However, if no other safely recruited workers are available to stand in, the leaders who are present should carry out a dynamic risk assessment of the activity to decide if it is safe to continue with the number of leaders available. This might result in changing the planned activities to reduce risks. Decisions and reasons for any such alterations should be recorded. If there are adults willing to help who have not completed the safer recruitment process, they can assist alongside other workers but must not be left alone with children and must always be supervised by someone who has been safely recruited. If it is decided that the risks to the participants' safety are unacceptable, then the activity should be cancelled.

Please note: Under no circumstances should the church run children's groups with only one leader available.

Safer ways of working

This part of the guidance covers some specific aspects of church life relevant for all age groups. Sections 3.16-3.22 go on to look at particular topics for children and adults at risk.

3.8 Photography and filming

For convenience, this section uses 'images' to include still photographs, digital images or films.

Images count as sensitive personal data under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and should only be used with the consent of the person in the image.

Images taken by church workers/for church purposes

Purpose and storage

- It must be made clear why images are being made, what they will be used for, who might see them and where they will be stored
- All images should be appropriate and respectful of the subject/s
- Images should be stored in a secure location, ideally on a church computer. If this is not possible, it is important to record where the images are being stored

Consent

- Consent forms should contain a section covering consent for use of images. This should specify how images will be used and options to give/withhold consent for different types of use e.g. some parents may be happy for images of children to be included in a resources used within the church but not on social media.
- If an adult lacks capacity to consent, do not use their image
- Permission should be obtained from parents/carers before images are taken
- Where age appropriate to do so, children should be asked if they want to be filmed or photographed (see table in 3.6 above for suggested age boundaries).

Privacy and protection

- Use group photographs of children where possible to ensure that individuals cannot be identified by any personal details such as their name, school badge, age or address
- Take particular care in cases where children may not wish to be photographed or filmed or where it may place them at additional risk (for example, where there has been domestic abuse or where they are living away from their family for their own safety)

See also *Resource SA2: Information and consent form*.

Images taken by attendees/participants/church members
The use of smartphones and the ability to easily edit images digitally means that additional care needs to be taken regarding photos or videos taken 'informally' by church members or attendees of an event.

Images taken by parents/carers/other attendees
Clarify and promote the photography guidelines for the event to all participants:

- Advise parents/attendees that there can be negative consequences to sharing images linked to information about their own or other people's children on social media
- Advise that care should be taken about 'tagging' other people/their children online
- Make sure there are procedures to respond to and manage any concerns arising, including a named person for attendees to contact with any concerns about inappropriate or intrusive photography.

This can be achieved in various ways e.g., pre-event information, event programmes, signage around the venue, announcements during an event.

Images taken by participants themselves e.g., young people
For young people, you may wish to consider a discussion amongst the group regarding how they wish the images they take of each other to be used, and what restrictions they feel should be observed. This will be more meaningful and effective than a set of rules imposed by adult leaders.

3.9 Recording or livestreaming services

As with photographs and images on websites/social media, some church members or visitors may not feel comfortable appearing in recorded or live services and for others it may compromise their safety.

Key points to note:

- Adults appearing in livestream or recorded video must give their permission
- Consent from parents/carers will be needed for any video involving children
- Create a space in the building where people may sit and know they will not be included in any video ('image free zones')
- Ensure people know the service is being recorded and give them an opportunity to move to the designated part of the building where they will be out of camera shot
- Avoid singling out any individual in the congregation, use group shots in passing instead

Further guidance will be added to the online **Resources** page as practice develops in light of changing technology.

The Church of Scotland also provides guidance on livestreaming (https://bit.ly/4zhAXNu) which may be helpful.

3.10 Online safety and safe use of technology

A policy statement about online safety, including the expectations of workers in their electronic communications with children and adults at risk, should be included in either the main safeguarding policy document for a local church or in a separate online safety policy.

The Codes of Conduct for working with children and adults at risk (see *Resources C1 and C2*) contain provisions relating to online communication. See also *Resource P3: Model church online safety policy*.

The URC Digital Charter also highlights the importance of social media and the internet being as safe a place as possible for everyone.

3.11 Video conferencing

Guidelines for maintaining safety when using Zoom or other video conferencing platforms include:

- Use subscription versions of platforms which contain more security measures than the free versions.
- If a meeting is infiltrated by uninvited visitors it should be terminated immediately. If the meeting organisers feel that the breach poses any risk to participants, this should be reported to a safeguarding officer.
- When using breakout rooms, ensure there are at least 3 people in each group
- For youth groups or other online meetings for children:
    - There must be a minimum of 2 leaders per breakout room.
    - Prevent participants from sending each other private chats

See also *Resource P3: Model church online safety policy* and further guidance will be added to the online Resources page as practice develops in light of changing technology.

3.12 Driving

The safety of people being transported to and from church activities is the responsibility of whoever makes the transport arrangements. If parents/carers make those arrangements themselves, then they are responsible for ensuring the safety of those being transported. If the church makes the arrangements, safety becomes the responsibility of the church.

Driving can also put someone in a position of power over others which could be misused by those seeking to cause harm. Appropriate procedures therefore need to be followed.

Where the church is making travel arrangements:

- Details of travel arrangements need to be in the consent form for any activity or event
- Safer recruitment procedures (section 2.4) must be followed
- Ensure drivers are aware that they will need appropriate insurance for their car, tax and MOT. (Resource SA4: volunteer driver agreement gives an optional template that could be used)
- Those driving a minibus must have the appropriate D1 licence

Additional options for promoting safe practice could include:

- An annual licence check can be undertaken for all drivers via the website below. The driver can obtain a check code, which can be passed to the church to check the licence. The code is valid for one single use within 21 days. Further information can be obtained here https://bit.ly/4BxU6w6.

The Church of Scotland also provides guidance on issues to consider when arranging transportation: Church of Scotland Safeguarding Handbook chapter 5 https://bit.ly/3UnFG0D.

3.13 Guidelines on touch

Church groups and activities should provide a warm, nurturing environment for children and adults, whilst avoiding any inappropriate behaviour, or the risk of allegations being made.

- All physical contact should be an appropriate response to the needs of the child or adult at risk, and not the worker
- Keep everything public. Giving someone a hug in the context of a group is very different from a hug behind closed doors
- Be sensitive to the individual's reaction to touch. If someone is not happy with physical contact, respect this and find another way of conveying your concern for them
- Touch with children should be age-appropriate, and initiated by the child (unless there are exceptional circumstances e.g., they need medical attention)
- As far as possible, be aware of the individual's culture, and the meaning touch has to them
- Workers should be able to monitor each other's behaviour with regard to touch and physical contact. They should feel safe and confident to check out issues, discuss any concerns and to constructively challenge anything which could be misunderstood or misconstrued.

Healing ministry and laying on of hands
When prayer with the laying on of hands is ministered this should be done with the recipient's consent and understanding of what is being offered. Touch must be appropriate, and it is usually inappropriate to lay hands on the affected part. Hands laid on the head acknowledge the Lord's healing touch in body, mind, and spirit for the whole person including the affected part.

3.14 Supporting those with additional needs

Churches should be sensitive to any additional needs, to enable all to participate as fully as possible. This includes being aware of:

- accessibility issues
- additional support needs (ASN)
- dementia and memory issues
- mental health needs
- which children and adults at risk are carrying and taking medication themselves

Group leaders / activity organisers need to know:

- who is required to administer medication, where medication is stored and who has access
- who on the team has appropriate knowledge and training to deal with medical issues
- circumstances in which participants may take non-prescription medicines such as painkillers
- emergency procedures, including the appropriate response for allergies, epilepsy or diabetes
- any specific instructions from parents/carers about a child's or adult's medical needs

See also *Resource SA3: Request to administer medication form*.

3.15 Overnight stays

When organising overnight stays and residential events, it is important that:

- there is a nominated safeguarding person(s), and all participants and leaders know who it is
- there is a qualified first aider in attendance
- a risk assessment of the venue and activities has been completed beforehand
- adequate insurance cover is arranged for any activities and the premises used
- participants provide emergency contact details, and have been given contact details of the leader or an identified worker
- all church workers have completed safeguarding training, and have sufficient criminal record checks prior to the event
- all medical information and emergency contact numbers are easily accessible
- if using an established residential centre, confirmation is made that it has a suitable safeguarding policy, carries out training and criminal records checks on workers, and has full risk assessments for health and safety.

In the specific case of overnight stays with children:

- consent forms have been completed, with medical requirements, travel and collection arrangements, sleeping arrangements, dietary requirements
- workers do not sleep in the same room as children, unless there are exceptional circumstances where children require supervision (e.g., medical needs)
- appropriate nightwear is worn
- changing and showering facilities are separate for children and adults. If there are limited facilities, timetables are used to ensure separate access times for children and adults.

Safer working with children

Resource C1 'Code of Conduct for working with children (Under 18s)' underpins all work with children, including group activities, 1-1 interaction and online contact.

3.16 Ratios of leaders to children

The Church of Scotland recommends the following ratios:

Age of child	***Ratio***	
0–2 years	1:3	one adult to three children
2 – under 3 years	1:5	one adult to five children
3 – under 8 years	1:8 (if attending a church group for more than 4 hours a day)	one adult to eight children
3 – under 8 years	1:10 (if attending a church group for fewer than 4 hours a day)	one adult to ten children
Over 8 years	1:10	one adult to ten children

- There must be at least two adults present, even with smaller groups.
- Where possible, at least one female and one male leader should be present for mixed-gender groups. This is essential in the context of overnight stays.
- Adults who assist on one or two occasions must be responsible to an appointed worker who has completed safer recruitment processes. If they start to help more regularly, they will need to complete appropriate training and safer recruitment processes themselves.
- If there are young people helping to supervise younger children, only those aged 18 or over should be included as adults when calculating adult-to-child ratios.

These ratios are the recommended minimum and may need to be increased to take into account the nature of the group, such as if children with additional needs will be present, the type of activities and the venue – activities spread across a number of rooms, outings and residential events will require more adults.

Please note: It is important to make sure parents and carers are clear about when the responsibility for the care of their children returns to them following the activities or events.

The reality of church life is that getting enough people to help can be challenging. The guidance provided here is recommended 'best practice'. On individual occasions (i.e., a Sunday in the summer holidays) it may not always be possible to meet all of the requirements outlined above but this should be the exception rather than the rule.

However, the requirement to always have at least 2 adults present should always be followed without exception.

If only one adult is available to lead the activity, it should be postponed until an appropriate number of adult leaders are available. If it is consistently impossible to meet the recommended ratios, Elders will need to consider the sustainability of the children's work being offered and whether a different model could be used.

International trips
The recommended ratio for international trips is:

up to 10 children	three adults
1–10 additional children	one additional adult: for example, 30 children would require a minimum of five adults

More detailed advice can be obtained from the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service.

3.17 Young leaders

It is recommended that a minimum three-year difference is required between the age of young workers and the age of the children they supervise.

All those in leadership roles need to know that it is inappropriate to have a romantic or sexual relationship with a child or young person in their care, even if that young person is over the age of legal consent. This may have implications for some young leaders and their relationships with people in their peer group or social circle (for example, a 19 year old youth group leader may mix with 16 or 17 year olds in social settings but should not enter into a relationship with any member of the youth group whilst in a leadership role).

3.18 Lone working with children

It is not advised that workers meet with children alone. However, if such a situation arises, such as a child wanting to discuss a personal matter with a worker, the worker should:

- inform the leader or a co-worker about the contact beforehand
- if possible and safe to do so, obtain the agreement of a parent/carer, but remember that telling a parent/carer might put the child at risk, depending upon what they wish to disclose
- meet in a public place, such as a room with an open door with other people present close by in the building. Avoid meetings in remote, secluded areas.
- carefully consider the needs and circumstances of the child
- record and report to the leader any situation where a child becomes distressed or angry
- inform the leader or a co-worker when the lone working starts and finishes

If a situation arises 'out of the blue' and is unavoidable, the group leader and/or Church Safeguarding Coordinator should be notified promptly afterwards.

Resource P8 provides a template for a lone worker policy.

3.19 Registration of children's activities with regulatory bodies

Most church activities with children and young people do not need to be registered with the Care Inspectorate.

If a church provides a club or activity where the *primary* purpose is the provision of childcare, however, then it may need to be registered (see https://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/register-a-care-service/registering-holiday-food-activities-and-childcare-programmes).

Safer working with adults at risk

The 'Code of Conduct for working with adults (over 18s)' (*Resource C2*) underpins all contact with adults at risk, including group activities and 1-1 contact. As noted in the Code of Conduct, key principles for working with adults at risk include promoting empowerment and supporting people to make their own choices and decisions whenever possible.

3.20 Visiting adults at home

This guidance applies to 'formal' pastoral visiting done in the name of the church (rather than informal, neighbourly contact).[12]

Care must be taken, to protect both those being visited and those doing the visiting. There should be accountability and transparency in the way in which church workers engage in lone working or home visits. The following guidelines are recommended good practice:

Arranging visits

- Ideally let people know in advance that you are coming, particularly if it is your first visit.
- If there are any concerns or risks known before a visit is made, visiting in pairs may be advisable, especially if you do not know the person.

12 This section does not cover visits to provide assistance with personal care or financial affairs as this would be Regulated Work (see section 2.5 above).

- Carry some identification on the first visit and be proactive in letting the person see it.
- Carry a mobile phone and let someone know where you are and when you expect to return.
- Ask the person whether they would like repeat visits, whether and how they would like to be contacted again, and so on. Leave them feeling empowered to make choices about their level of contact with you.

Providing care and support

- Be clear about what support you can offer and the purpose and limitations of any pastoral care/ support that is available.
- Do not make referrals to any agency that could provide help without the adult's permission, and ideally encourage them to set up the contact, unless there are safeguarding concerns
- Never offer 'over-the-counter' remedies to people on visits or administer prescribed medicines, even if asked to do so.
- If you are asked to make any purchases, always retain receipts and return both them and any change to the person immediately. Keep a record of any transactions and the reason for them.
- Take care regarding accepting any gifts other than token items, to avoid misunderstandings or subsequent accusations from the person or their family. If courtesy demands that you accept a small gift, declare it to someone at church, for instance an elder or the treasurer, to ensure transparency. If someone wants to make a donation to the church, put it in an envelope, mark it on the outside as a donation and obtain a receipt from the treasurer.

After a visit

- Make a note of the visit and store them in accordance with data protection requirements.
- Notify the Church Safeguarding Coordinator of any concerns arising from a visit

3.21 Financial matters

It is important to be aware of the possibility of financial abuse occurring within a church setting. If an adult at risk wishes to name a church worker as the executor of their will or asks them to take on power of attorney, this should be discussed with the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service. The worker may also wish to seek their own legal advice. Similar care should be taken when an adult at risk is considering a bequest to a church worker or a church and this should be referred to the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service for advice.

3.22 Support plans

In cases where it would be helpful to provide a written record of the support that a church can provide for an adult at risk, *Resource SA5: Template for a support plan* provides a suggested format for recording this.

Chapter four

Recognising and responding to concerns

Developing a ‘Safer Culture’ and ‘Safer Activities’ will help to protect all those in contact with the Church but some concerns will still arise and it is important to know how to respond well.

Concerns can arise because of information someone discloses or something which is observed by others. This can relate to harm caused to an individual and/or forms of self-harm and self-neglect.

Important elements of responding well include: listening to concerns, recording information appropriately and considering who else may need to know.

Key practice points

- Concerns can relate to abuse of children or adults, self-harm, or other vulnerabilities caused by factors such as ageing, illness or disability
- Abuse can take many forms and occurs in many settings, including within the church
- Responding well to concerns requires both sensitivity and clarity about the need to report information to relevant people and authorities
- If you suspect, witness, or are told about harm or abuse, always report it
- It is important to obtain professional advice from the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service, the Police, and Children’s or Adult’s Social Care services

Key responsibilities

Local Church
- Promote awareness of different kinds of abuse and other vulnerabilities
- Seek to create a ‘listening culture’ and help people develop listening skills to respond appropriately in situations where sensitive information is disclosed
- Make a referral to the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service when a safeguarding concern or allegation is raised
- Share information with statutory services as appropriate and co-operate with them during any investigations

Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service
- Provide verbal and written advice on safeguarding referrals from local churches
- Notify the Synod Safeguarding Administrator of referrals received
- Immediately report any referrals relating to a URC Minster or Church Related Community Worker to the Synod Moderator

Synod
- Keep records of referral details provided by Church of Scotland on the URC case management system

Head of Safeguarding/Denomination
- Report serious cases related to ministers or the work of General Assembly to the URC Trust who will notify relevant charity regulators as needed

Types of safeguarding concerns

Concerns can take different forms and arise from a variety of different circumstances.

4.1 Understanding and recognising abuse

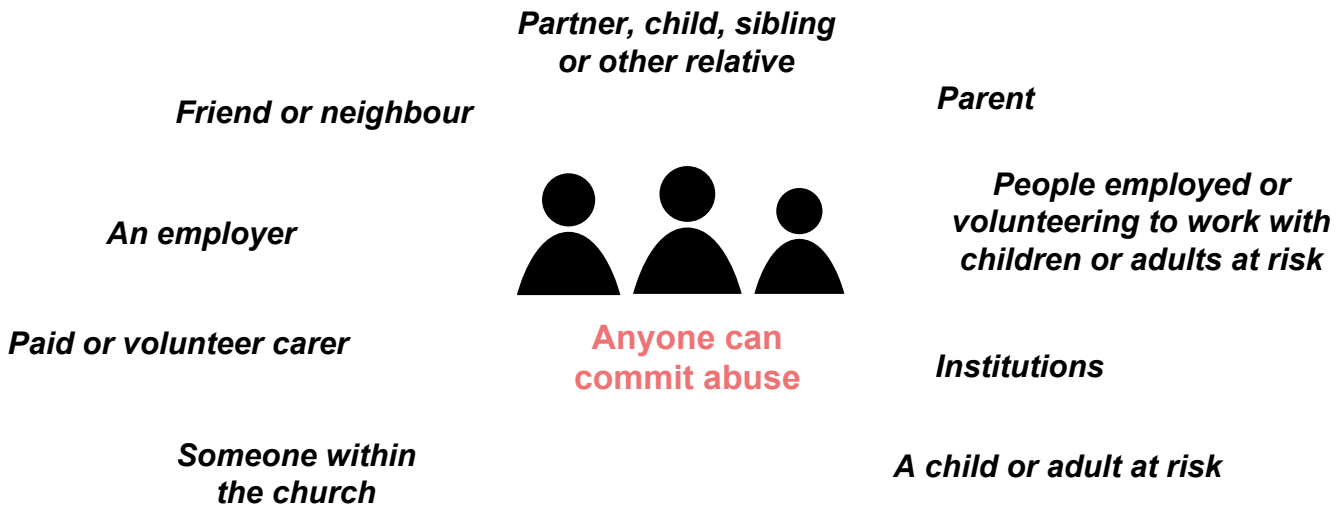
The consequences and the pain of abuse are long-lasting and, for children who are abused, the effects are likely to reach into their adulthood.

What is abuse?

Abuse is the violation of an individual's human rights, and it arises from misuse of the power and control that someone has over another. Abuse disrespects the (God-given) individual dignity and integrity of the person abused and usually undermines their sense of self-worth. It may consist of a single act or many repeated acts, and it can occur in any relationship with a child or adult. Abuse may be perpetrated as the result of deliberate intent, negligence or ignorance.

Who commits abuse?
Abusers come from all sections of society, and may well be perceived by others as respectable, reliable and trustworthy people. The majority of abusers are known to the victim and may often hold a position of trust or authority.

Abuse may be perpetrated by an individual or a group, including:



Who is at risk?
Anyone can be at risk, but some groups are more vulnerable to abuse than others.

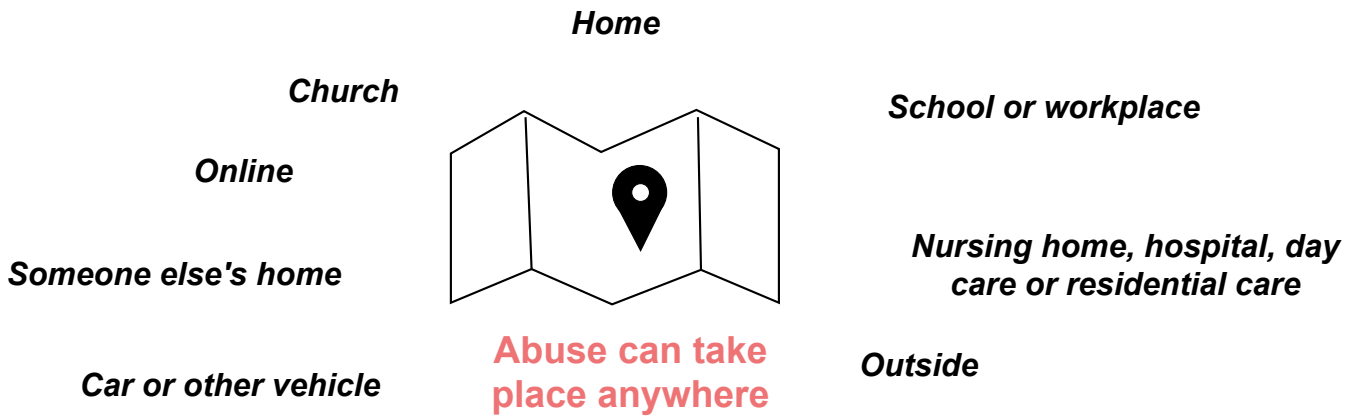
Children are more at risk of being abused if they:

- have disabilities or learning difficulties
- have parents with substance misuse issues or other acute needs
- have caring responsibilities

Adults are more at risk of being abused if they:

- are isolated and have little contact with friends, family or those around them
- have difficulties with their memory
- have problems with communication
- are dependent upon a carer, whether this is a family member, a friend or a paid worker
- have a carer who is reliant upon them for financial or emotional support.

Where does abuse take place?
Abuse can take place in all kinds of different settings, including:



Grooming
Churches offer excellent opportunities for children and adults at risk to grow in faith, and are often one of the main places where they develop appropriate trusting relationships with those outside family or formal education/employment settings. However, as a result of these positive characteristics, churches can also provide opportunities for someone to target and groom children and those who are vulnerable.

Grooming is when someone builds a relationship, trust and emotional connection with a child or someone who is vulnerable, with the intention of manipulating, exploiting and abusing them. It can take place over short (days or weeks) or long (months or years) periods of time.

Groomers may also build a relationship with the victim's family or friends to make them seem trustworthy or authoritative. This could include members of the victim's family, people within the church. For example, an adult who wanted to abuse a child might spend significant time and energy building a friendship with the child's parents/carers, the minister and members of the congregation. By grooming the adults around the child, developing a reputation of respectability, helpfulness or popularity within the church, the abuser makes it more difficult for the child to disclose abuse, or

for adults who may know the individual well to accept even the possibility that there could be a cause for concern or, if allegations are made, that they could be true. It is also possible for a whole congregation to be groomed, sometimes by those holding positions of leadership within the church.

4.2 Types of abuse

Abuse can take many forms and often there will be more than one type of abuse occurring at the same time. For example, there is an emotional aspect to all types of abuse, including witnessing abuse.

The lists below are not exhaustive but outline the main types of abuse affecting children and adults.

Children

Physical	Physical abuse is the causing of physical harm to a child or young person. Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning or suffocating. Fabricated or induced illness is physical harm that may be caused when a parent or carer feigns the symptoms of, or deliberately causes, ill health to a child they are looking after.
Sexual	Sexual abuse is any act that involves the child in any activity for the sexual gratification of another person whether or not it is claimed that the child either consented or assented or is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative or non-penetrative acts. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of indecent images or in watching sexual activities, using sexual language towards a child or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.
Emotional	Emotional abuse is persistent emotional neglect or ill treatment that has a severe and persistent adverse effect on a child's emotional development. Some level of emotional abuse is present in all types of ill treatment of a child. It can also occur independently of other forms of abuse.
Neglect	The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of their health or development.
Self-harm	Their intention may be to injure themselves but not to endanger their lives, or it may be to attempt suicide.

Other types of abuse
There is no universally agreed definition of "child abuse". The types of behaviour defined as abusive, and the range of people deemed to be perpetrators of abuse, develop over time to reflect society's changing awareness and attitudes. Other types of abuse include:

- Organised, multiple or institutional abuse
- Child trafficking
- Online abuse
- Domestic abuse experienced by children
- Foetal abuse
- Substance abuse by parents/carers
- Female genital mutilation
- Forced marriage

Child abuse linked to faith or belief
This is where concerns for a child's welfare have been identified, and could be caused by, a belief in witchcraft, spirit or demonic possession, ritual or satanic abuse features; or when practices linked to faith or belief are harmful to a child.

Radicalisation
This can apply to both children and adults who become susceptible to extremist ideology. This may occur directly through a relationship, through social media or other online material. Extremism is the vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different beliefs. Radicalisation refers to the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups.

Adults at risk

Physical	Hitting, slapping, pushing, inappropriate touching, kicking, being threatened with a weapon, burned, scalded or bitten, inappropriate sanctions or holding the person down. It includes inappropriate restraint that is not part of an agreed plan. Restraint can be chemical (medication) or physical.
Sexual	Can include any sexual activity that the person does not understand or want, as well as degrading or inappropriate photographs.
Psychological or emotional harm	Threats, abandonment, humiliation, intimidation, bullying, harassment, verbal abuse, controlling behaviour, name-calling, insults, preventing the person from seeing others, misuse of authority or power over the adult at risk.
Neglect and acts of omission	Can include not being given the correct medication or care, not allowed to see a doctor or other health professional, or restricting access to educational services, appropriate medication, food or heating.
Financial or material abuse	Theft, fraud, exploitation, pressure to hand over or sign over property or money, misuse of property, possessions or welfare benefits.
Self-neglect	Lack of self-care to an extent that it threatens personal health and safety. It can include neglecting to care for one's personal hygiene, health or surroundings, being unable to manage personal affairs, or failing to seek help to meet health and social care needs.
Self-harm	The intention may be to injure self but not to endanger own life, or it may be to attempt suicide.
Spiritual abuse	Religious abuse is the control of one individual by another and may include manipulation and exploitation, enforced accountability, censorship of decision making, requirements for secrecy and silence, pressure to conform, misuse of scripture or using the pulpit to control behaviour, requirement of obedience to the abuser, the suggestion that the abuser has a 'divine' position.
Historical (non-recent) abuse	The term 'historical abuse', often referred to as non-recent abuse, refers to reports of neglect, emotional, physical and sexual abuse which took place before the victim was 16 (or 18, in particular circumstances) and which have been made after a significant time lapse.

The Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007 states that 'harm' includes all harmful conduct and no category of harm is excluded just because it is not named. Other forms of harm include:

- Domestic abuse
- Gender-based violence
- Forced marriage
- Female genital mutilation (FGM)
- Human trafficking
- Stalking
- Scam trading
- Hate crime
- Mate crime

For further details see: **https://www.gov.scot/publications/adult-support-protection-scotland-act-2007-guidance-general-practice/pages/3/**

Signs and symptoms of abuse
It is important to be able to recognise the possible signs of abuse. Observing any of the signs or symptoms does not necessarily mean that a person is being abused; there could be perfectly ordinary explanations. However, the observation of multiple signs and symptoms, together with explanations which are inconsistent or do not ring true, should give more cause for concern. There can also be an overlap between the signs and symptoms for different types of abuse.

Resource S5: Signs and symptoms of abuse includes a more comprehensive table of definitions, signs and symptoms of the different types of abuse.

Key points to remember
- all abuse involves the misuse of power
- secrecy is fundamental to abuse continuing, and victims are often trapped before they know what has happened
- if a child sees or hears domestic abuse, this is considered to be child abuse
- any type of abuse committed within the church can also have a negative impact on someone's faith and relationship with God

4.3 Other safeguarding concerns

In addition to being aware of different kinds of abuse, it is also important to be alert to other types of safeguarding concern including:

Dementia and memory loss
Memory loss can obviously be very difficult and distressing for the individual. Particular concerns may arise if their behaviour is:

- putting themselves and/or other people in danger (e.g., hoarding which creates a fire risk)
- causing fear or alarm in others (e.g., unintentionally frightening a child or making inappropriate comments)
- out of character and not typical of their usual behaviour

Resource S5: Signs of possible dementia/memory loss provides some prompts which might help to identify concerns and whether a formal diagnosis may then be needed.

Recognising and responding to safeguarding concerns

This section applies to any of the different types of concerns identified in 4.2. and 4.3 above.

4.4 The 4 Rs

The 4 Rs, which are universal in safeguarding, show us what to do if there are concerns about the safety and welfare of someone.

1. Recognise the concern
2. Respond well, acting in an open and transparent way
3. Record what has been seen, heard or said
4. Report concerns, informing the appropriate people.

Recognising the concern
You might become aware of concerns in different ways. For example:

- Something you see. This might be an injury or behaviour consistent with abuse and unlikely to have been caused another way; indications of abuse through artwork, play or posts on social media; or abuse witnessed first-hand
- Something you hear. Someone discloses to you abuse that they have experienced; abuse is disclosed by someone else who knows the person experiencing abuse; indications of abuse through language and conversation, perhaps that is inappropriate for the age or context
- Something that troubles you – that feeling that something is not right with a situation.

Key questions to ask yourself are:

- does it look right?
- does it sound right?
- does it feel right?

In cases of abuse, victims are often reluctant to make direct disclosures. If the abuser is a family member or has shared a long-term relationship with the victim in a trusted setting, or holds a position of responsibility within the church, it can especially painful for victims to acknowledge that abuse has been committed against them. Subsequently, it can be even harder for them

to be open with others about what they have experienced, either at the time or at a later date. Sometimes concerns may arise because of changes in behaviour or physical appearance that you have noticed, or because of something another person has told you, rather than from a direct disclosure.

It is important to act if you suspect abuse – don't wait until you are absolutely sure or have solid proof.

Sometimes a perpetrator will disclose abuse themselves but may offer a minimised version of events. They may also be respected and well-liked within the church, which can affect people's judgement. Abusers may not only groom children or adults at risk, but may also manipulate others around them, making it more difficult for those who may know the individual well to accept even the possibility that there could be a cause for concern.

If anyone is made aware that a person attending their church has been convicted of an offence against a child or adult at risk, or has had an allegation of this nature made against them at any time, they must immediately inform the Church Safeguarding Coordinator or the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service.

Responding well if someone discloses sensitive information
It can be difficult to hear a disclosure of abuse, or that someone is contemplating suicide, or is at risk of being harmed in other ways. If a person chooses to trust you with difficult and sensitive information, don't try to 'interview' them but focus on listening calmly to what they want to say.

Listen and reassure
- listen attentively
- remain calm – be aware of your body language and non-verbal communication
- reassure – they are not to blame and have done the right thing in telling you
- do not promise confidentiality – tell them that this information needs to be shared. Always seek advice if you have any concerns and don't know what to do

Managing the conversation
- ask open questions – Tell me, Explain to me, Describe for me (TED). Do not ask closed or leading questions, and don't try to investigate
- repeat back what you have heard them say
- avoid making comments or judgements
- don't stop an individual who is talking freely about what has happened

Taking appropriate action
- seek medical attention if necessary
- explain to them what will happen next – tell them whom you are going tell, and give them a timescale
- don't confront those alleged to be responsible
- keep quiet – once you have passed the details on to the relevant person, you should not tell anyone else about the disclosure – not even for prayer purposes

Please note: Investigating to see if your suspicions are true is not a correct response.

Whenever someone reports that they are suffering or have suffered abuse or neglect, are at risk in other ways, or that they have caused harm to others, the initial response from all professionals and volunteers should be limited to listening carefully to what they say in order to:

- clarify the concerns
- offer reassurance about how they (and others who may be at risk) will be kept safe
- explain what action will be taken, and within what timeframe.

The individual must not be pressed for information, led or cross-examined, or given false assurances of absolute confidentiality, as this could make the follow-up more difficult and could prejudice police and other investigations.

Recording information
Safeguarding records provide a history of what happened, summarise what the workers did, and ensure that when people move on, the account is not lost. Records should include:

- who was involved – the names of key people, including actual or potential witnesses
- what happened – facts not opinions. Use the person's own words where possible
- where it happened – specific location and address
- when it happened – date and time
- who it was referred on to and, if known, what the outcomes were – what happened next, including full names, roles and contact details
- the name of the person completing the form/record, their signature and date.

Records should be written up as soon as possible after the event. They should be clear and concise, use the individual's own words, and avoid jargon. Notes should be relevant and factual, without including opinions or judgements. It is not your role to verify or prove that the information given is true.

It is important to write a record of what you have recognised, no matter how small or seemingly inconsequential it may appear. A church member or worker may only have made one small observation, but that piece of information may be vital when put together with other details to make the big picture. You can use *Resource F1: Safeguarding Concern Form* to record your concerns. Where possible, use options to help keep the information secure e.g., password protected documents.

Handwritten notes made immediately after the event can act as evidence of them having been written at the time in a future court case. Therefore, these should be kept, even if the details are also later typed. All records should be kept securely, and only disclosed to the appropriate authorities.

Reporting concerns and informing the appropriate people
If you believe that a child or an adult may be suffering or is at risk of suffering significant harm, these concerns must always be acted on, as shown in the diagram at 4.5 below.

Where there is a concern that someone is at immediate risk of harm, you should contact statutory services as soon as possible (see also sections 4.8-4.9 below).

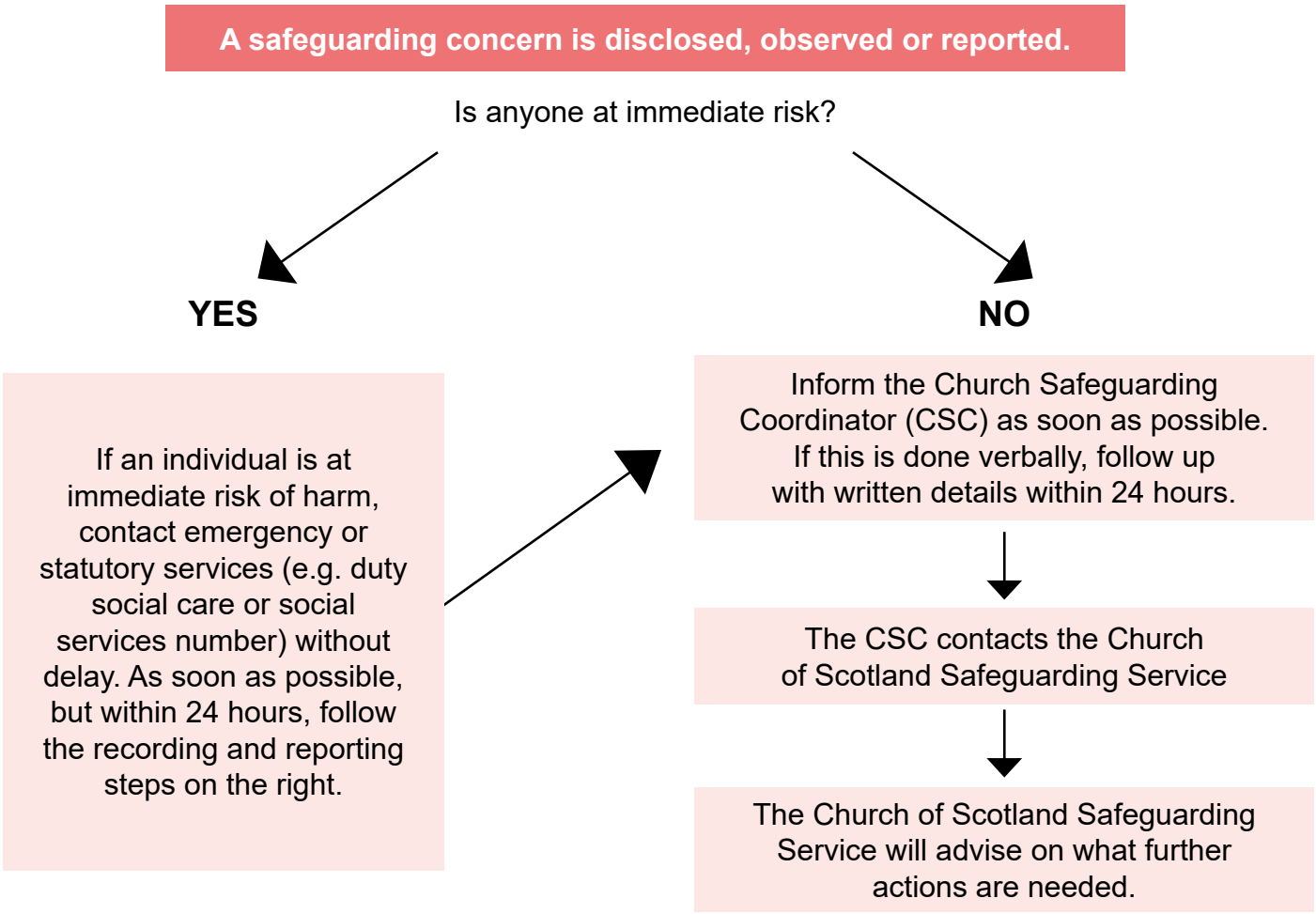
All other concerns should be reported to your Church Safeguarding Coordinator (CSC) as soon as possible. If your concern is about the CSC, please contact the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service.

If you are a Church Safeguarding Coordinator, contact the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service for advice **as soon as possible** if any concern about harm or abuse is reported to you.

Under no circumstances, however, should you contact the person who is the subject of allegations, or share information disclosed to you with them.

4.5 Summary: who to inform about a safeguarding concern

The diagram below summarises the process of who to contact when a concern arises.



4.6 Adult disclosures of non-recent abuse

If someone has chosen to disclose non-recent historic abuse to you, it is important to establish:

- whether they are safe from harm now
- whether they know what happened to the person who abused them
- what the person would like to happen next
- what would be helpful to them

The process shown in the diagram on section 4.5 above, also applies here. If the information disclosed indicates that anyone is at immediate risk of harm then statutory services must be informed.

In cases where there is no immediate risk, ask the individual for consent to share information with the Church Safeguarding Coordinator, even if the events happened a long time ago. If they do not want to give consent for their personal information being shared, concerns can still be recorded with anonymised details and advice sought from the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service.

In situations where a perpetrator may still be in a position to inflict harm, it can be helpful to reassure the individual who has disclosed abuse that you will be passing on the information in order to keep other people safe and there would be no pressure on them to make a statement about their own experience unless they felt they wished to do so.

If you become aware of historical abuse, but not directly from the person who has been harmed, the same process applies.

Where someone discloses past abuse that occurred in another denomination, the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service will need to liaise with safeguarding staff in the other denomination to share information as appropriate and agree what action may be needed.

4.7 Responding to concerns of abuse when an alleged perpetrator is a paid worker, minister or volunteer in the Church

If you believe the alleged perpetrator of abuse against children or adults at risk, is a worker (paid or volunteer), or a minister, you must immediately contact the Church Safeguarding Coordinator who can then seek advice from the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service. If you believe the Church Safeguarding Coordinator has a relationship with the people involved, or another potential conflict of interest, contact the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service directly.

This applies whether the concern relates to current or non-recent abuse. The Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service will advise on the appropriate next course of action and consider whether other investigative/disciplinary procedures are needed (see chapter 5 for further details). If the concern relates to a minister, the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service will notify the Synod Moderator (or the URC General Secretary if the concern relates to the Synod Moderator).

Informing statutory services of concerns about a child or adult at risk

Reporting a concern to external agencies can be difficult, particularly when an individual or family is known and respected within the church community. If you are in any doubt about whether to report a situation, contact the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service or your local Children's/ Adult Social Care Service for advice. **Please note:** Records should be kept of all conversations and any decisions made.

It is preferable for any external referral to be made by the Church Safeguarding Coordinator, but if it is an emergency or they are not available, anyone can do it. A record should be kept and given to the Church Safeguarding Coordinator without delay, and definitely within 24 hours of a referral or report being made.

4.8 Referrals about children

Children's Services should be contacted when:

- you think that a child is currently suffering, or is at risk of suffering, serious harm
- there are indications of abuse or neglect
- you are aware of domestic abuse within the home/family

Incidents of domestic abuse should be referred because of the emotional impact that witnessing domestic abuse has on children, and the increased risk of physical abuse, sexual abuse or neglect.

Consent
Consent is not a condition of making a referral about a child. Where practicable, concerns should be discussed with the parent, and agreement sought for a referral to Children's Social Care, unless seeking agreement is likely to place the child at risk of significant harm through delay, or through the parent's actions or reactions. An example would be where there are concerns or suspicions that a serious crime such as sexual abuse or induced illness has taken place. Where the parent refuses to give permission for the referral, further advice should be sought from the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service, unless it would cause undue delay. If, having taken full account of the parent's wishes, it is still considered that there is a need for referral, then:

- the reason for proceeding without parental agreement must be recorded.
- the parent's withholding of permission must form part of the verbal and written referral to Children's Social Care.
- the parent should be contacted to inform them that, after considering their wishes, a referral has been made.

If the child can understand the significance and consequences of making a referral to Children's Social Care, they should be asked their view. However, it should be explained that whilst their view will be taken into account, the professional or the volunteer has a responsibility to take whatever action is required to ensure the child's safety, and the safety of other children.

Child-on-child abuse
There can be particular challenges in responding to peer-on-peer abuse, where all those involved are under 18. Help and support should be given for any children whose behaviour towards other children is a cause for worry, as well as for those children on the receiving end of such abuse. Seek advice from the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service in these situations.

4.9 Referrals about adults at risk

Adult safeguarding should be person-led and outcome-focused. It engages the person in a conversation about how best to respond to their safeguarding situation in a way that enhances involvement, choice and control, as well as improving quality of life, well-being and safety. Wherever possible, safeguarding concerns should be discussed with the adult to get their view of what they would like to happen, and keep them involved in the safeguarding process.

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

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

Mental capacity, abuse and the right to choose
When deciding whether an adult can protect themselves from abuse and harm, it is important to consider the extent to which they can understand information and make decisions. This is known as 'mental capacity'. The starting assumption must always be that a person is able to make a decision, unless it can be established that they lack mental capacity. For example, someone with severe dementia is unlikely to have the mental capacity to make significant decisions. One of the difficulties associated with mental capacity is that it can fluctuate. Someone may lack capacity at one moment, and later on may be fully able to make decisions, having received and understood information. Some adults may have capacity to make some decisions, but not all. Lacking mental capacity is not a fixed state, even though the physical or mental symptoms, illness or disability that reduce capacity can be permanent. For this reason, when health or social care professionals test a person's mental capacity, it will only ever relate to the decision that is being considered. Churches can get advice around mental capacity from the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service or their local Adult Social Care Services.

Consent
Ideally, the person experiencing the abuse will either contact statutory authorities directly, or give you their consent to make contact on their behalf. Sometimes this may not happen. If no consent is given because the individual appears not to understand you, and is unable to tell you what they would like to happen next, this could be because of a lack of mental capacity. By taking action and reporting your concern, it is likely that you will be acting in the person's best interests to keep them safe from harm.

Where the person appears to understand that inaction creates further dangers for them, and chooses not to take action, you nevertheless still have a duty to share information with the Church Safeguarding Coordinator and/or Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service in circumstances which indicate that they or others are at continued risk: Examples would include:

- the alleged perpetrator is employed in a position of trust or works with adults at risk which means other people may be endangered
- a criminal offence may have been, or could be, committed
- there is a serious and high risk to the safety or life of the person
- the alleged perpetrator works for the church, whether paid or unpaid (see sections 4.7 and 5.1)

4.10 What happens after raising a concern with statutory services

Once an external referral or report has been made, there are several options open to the statutory services, including assessments, strategy meetings, case conferences, investigations and interventions.

In some situations, the reporter might NOT be contacted, and may not be kept informed or given updates. This can be frustrating, but it is important for maintaining confidentiality. If there is a statutory investigation ongoing, this takes precedence over any internal URC procedures.

Pastoral care
Pastoral support offered at the local church is paramount. Disclosing and sharing can be difficult for victims and for others in need of significant support, and it is important that pastoral care is available for them. Pastoral care is one of the responsibilities of the Elders' meeting, which is exercised jointly by the Ministers and Elders of the church. Ministers and Elders need to relate with compassion, kindness and within appropriate boundaries, taking slow steps to avoid raising expectations and causing additional damage by being unable to deliver what might be promised as a church. The Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service should be informed and kept up-do-date if any further concerns emerge.

This can be a difficult area for churches, for example, where a member makes an allegation against another member who says they have been unfairly accused. In such situations, different people would need to be involved in providing support for each party (see also section 5.6 below).

See *Resource L1* for contact details for organisations and specialist services who may be able to provide additional support.

Chapter five

Managing allegations and people who may pose a risk to others

Where allegations are made against individuals within the Church, the URC is committed to following all required investigative and regulatory procedures. The URC believes it is called to share its ministry with all people. As a result, congregations may have people within their membership who are suspected or accused of causing harm or are known to have caused harm to others. The duty to share God's universal offer of love and forgiveness places a duty on all within the URC to ensure that those who pose a potential risk are welcomed to participate in church life in ways which do not compromise the safety of others.

This can be a complex area and nobody should try to manage it on their own. It needs to be a collaboration between the local church, Synod, Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service, statutory agencies and other organisations.

Key practice points

- Referrals to statutory services will be needed when allegations meet the relevant criteria
- Investigations by statutory services take priority over internal URC procedures
- The Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service must be involved where someone is considered to present a risk of harm to others
- Managing risks effectively involves a combination of monitoring and setting boundaries alongside the provision of pastoral care and professional support

Key responsibilities

Local church
- Co-operate with any investigative or disciplinary procedures
- Inform the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service on becoming aware of evidence indicating that someone in the church may present a risk to others
- Work with the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service and contribute relevant information for risk assessments
- Alert the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service to known breaches of a Safeguarding Covenant

Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service
- Undertake risk assessments and manage Covenants of Responsibilities
- Represent local churches in multi-agency meetings

Synod
- Contribute to disciplinary processes where required/appropriate
- Deal with concerns relating to a Minister or Church Related Community Worker (CRCW)
- Moderator will advise the General Secretary if an allegation involves a Minister or CRCW and statutory services proceed with an investigation

Head of Safeguarding/Denomination
- Nominate a Synod Safeguarding Officer for an Assembly Commission of Discipline in a Section O disciplinary process for a Minister or CRCW
- Report to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) if required

Managing allegations against Church workers

The URC believes that any allegations of abuse or inappropriate conduct by paid staff, ministers or volunteers need to be dealt with in a careful, thorough and fair way.

Note for Church Safeguarding Coordinators: The Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service (or URC Synod in cases relating to ministers and CRCWs) will take the lead on some of the actions outlined below. The information is given here to help explain the different processes, but you should always follow the advice given by the Church of Scotland or the Synod.

5.1 Referrals to statutory services

Any allegation against people who work with children or adults-at-risk should be reported immediately to the Church Safeguarding Coordinator who will then contact the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service for advice on contacting statutory services. If the Church Safeguarding Coordinator is unavailable, or the allegation relates to someone who is not a member of a local church, contact the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service directly.

If an allegation relates to a Minister or CRCW, the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service will notify the URC Synod of Scotland.

Criteria for making a referral
Following advice from the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service, a referral to social care services must be made as soon as possible, where it is alleged a worker has:

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

In relation to allegations against individuals working with children, these procedures may also be used where concerns arise about:

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

If an allegation requiring immediate attention is received outside normal office hours, the out-of-hours emergency team for social care services or Police should be contacted.

If an allegation is made against an individual working with children who lives in England, a referral should also be made to the Local Authority Designated Officer for the area where they reside. Their role is to provide advice and guidance to employers and voluntary organisations, including the faith sector, where there are concerns about a worker in relation to children. Contact details can be found on Local Authority websites. An allegation against an individual working with either children or adults at risk who lives in Wales should be reported to the relevant Local Safeguarding Board. [13]

Information needed

Information that will need to be provided to children's or adult social care services includes:

- nature of the alleged harm or abuse
- what was said or witnessed, and by whom
- the names of those involved, and addresses where known
- whether or not there are any witnesses
- details of any previous concerns/discussions about the worker in question
- any actions already taken

Additional information to include for allegations about a person working with children:

- whether the parents/carers of the child have been informed
- dates of birth of the child/children where known

Additional information to include for allegations about a person working with adults at risk:

- relationship between the worker and the adult at risk
- details of whether the person posing a risk is living with the adult at risk

Role of Social Care Services

Their role is to make proportionate enquiries (or to make sure that, as the lead agency, enquiries are carried out by the relevant organisation) where there is an allegation against a worker.

The aim is to gain fuller information and discuss immediate steps, such as whether the member of staff should be suspended (see section 5.2 below for further details on suspension and other disciplinary procedures), or if there is an alternative way of ensuring proper enquiries can be undertaken.

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

- enquiries relating to the safety and welfare of any children or adults-at-risk who are, or may have been, involved
- a Police investigation into any possible offences
- consideration of disciplinary action, including the possibility of suspension.

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

13 This situation could arise when, for example, an individual lives in England but currently works/worships at a church in Scotland or because they previously worked in Scotland but have since moved to England or Wales.

Informing the member of staff
The worker who is the subject of the allegation needs to be informed as soon as possible ***after*** consultation with statutory services. Where the Police and/or Children's Services/Adult social care are involved, an agreement needs to be made regarding when, and what, information can be disclosed to the worker in question. The Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service can also advise on this taking account of the specific circumstances in each case.

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

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

Informing others
Some information about the allegations may need to be shared with others.

Parents/carers
There are some circumstances where a church may need to directly advise parents/carers of an incident involving their child. In these circumstances, care should be taken not to say anything which could jeopardise the ability to conduct a proper investigation. The Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service and/or statutory services will advise on this.

Church family/congregation
It is possible to share generalised details to make people aware of an alleged incident, for example:

> *'A possible safeguarding incident has occurred and, our church safeguarding procedures are being followed. Owing to our desire to respect everyone's right to confidentiality, we are unable to share details. We ask that you respect this, avoid speculating about the people or circumstances concerned, and trust that every step is being taken to ensure our church is as safe a place to be as we can make it. If we are able to tell you any further information, we will do so. However, we may not be in a position to give any other details for some time. If you have any concerns of a safeguarding nature, please contact the Church Safeguarding Coordinator. Please pray for all involved.'*

When it is necessary for such a statement to be made, this should be agreed with the Synod and the URC Communications Team.

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

Concerns which do not meet the threshold for referral to statutory services
Concerns which fall outside the above criteria may still amount to inappropriate conduct. The church should seek advice from the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service on how to handle this, for example, through advice, supervision, training, disciplinary processes, or a combination of these. A record should always be kept of all allegations made.

5.2 Investigative and Disciplinary Procedures

It is in everyone's interests to resolve cases as quickly as possible, consistent with a fair and thorough investigation. Every effort should therefore be made to avoid any unnecessary delay. The aim is to complete most cases as quickly as possible, although cases which require a criminal prosecution, or a complex Police investigation will inevitably take longer.

Please note: Statutory processes always take precedence and churches should not undertake any investigatory or disciplinary process until statutory agencies have advised this can take place.

Suspension

Following discussions with statutory agencies, a decision will be made about whether to suspend a worker who is the subject of allegations, or to move them to a role which does not involve working with children or adults at risk. This action protects the worker from further allegations of abuse, protects the organisation from allegations of not dealing with the situation appropriately and, most importantly, protects the child from possible further abuse or intimidation.

Staff or volunteers should not be suspended automatically, and strategy meetings may discuss alternative courses of action. However, suspension should always be considered where there is reason to suspect a child is at risk of significant harm, an allegation warrants investigation by the Police, or an allegation is so serious that it might be grounds for dismissal.

Suspension of a worker, pending the outcome of an investigation, should be carried out in consultation with the statutory authorities. Timing can be crucial, as the Police and statutory services need to be able to conduct investigations which are not compromised by a premature suspension. Suspension is not disciplinary action in itself, and does not imply guilt. Rather, it is a precautionary measure which is taken where serious allegations are raised in order for an appropriate investigation to be undertaken.

Process

The exact procedures to follow will depend on the individual's role within the church.

Minister/CRCW: as set out in Section O of the Manual (Section-O-July-23.pdf (urc.org.uk))
Employee: as set out in URC/Synod/Local Church disciplinary process
Office Holder: Disciplinary Process for Office Holders https://bit.ly/48qCWD2

Ongoing involvement in church life

If the suspended worker wishes to remain involved in the life of a church, then it may be neces-sary to put in place a safeguarding agreement following a risk assessment (see 5.12 below). This is to protect children or adults at risk from any potential risk of harm. In this instance, the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service must be contacted for advice. This risk assessment and agree-ment should be produced in consultation with all statutory services involved.

Only relevant people in the church should be made aware of the allegation and subsequent suspension. This may include the Church Safeguarding Coordinator, Minister and an Elder nominated to be responsible for safeguarding.

Further guidance for workers can be found in *Resource G6: A guide for staff facing safeguarding allegations.*

Criminal investigations
If a criminal investigation is initiated, the church/Synod must cooperate with the Police at all times.

Commenting on matters under investigation should be avoided, unless invited by the investigating team at a formal meeting, or in discussion with the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service/ Head of Safeguarding in cases relating to a minister or CRCW. Any comments should be restricted to known facts and first-hand knowledge. The Police advise that the parties should not communicate with each other about the allegation to prevent the contamination of evidence.

The Police will keep the victim of the investigation regularly updated and this is generally done by the allocated officer in the case. There are no set timelines for this to happen as the updates are agreed by the victim with the Police and these are individual to each victim and case being investigated. Some investigations are protracted and can take a significant amount of time to complete. The Police will also keep the employer informed of progress and outcomes. Safeguarding actions taken (such as suspension or use of a safeguarding agreement) should always remain in place until a criminal investigation has concluded.

The Police will gather their evidence and seek advice from the prosecuting authorities regarding the level of evidence needed in order to proceed through the courts. Prosecutors also consider whether or not taking the case to court is in the child's/adult's or the public interest. There are many reasons why a particular case may not come to court or may result in a 'not guilty' verdict. One reason is that the prosecution must prove the case beyond reasonable doubt in order to obtain a conviction. If a case does not go to court, or there is a finding of 'not guilty', this does not mean there are no further risks. Other measures may be needed, as described below, including disciplinary proceedings, referral to Disclosure Scotland, risk assessments or other actions to address unresolved concerns.

Disciplinary proceedings
If the prosecuting authorities decide against criminal proceedings, a disciplinary process must always be considered. Disciplinary proceedings carry a lower burden of proof than criminal proceedings. The employer must be satisfied that in all probabilities it did happen, rather than having to prove that it happened beyond reasonable doubt.

The Police may be able to share some details of their investigation with the employer. The Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service will be able to advise on how to proceed with both the internal investigation, and any subsequent disciplinary action.

If the employer (church or other body of the Church) has a reasonable belief that the individual has acted inappropriately and that it is no longer tenable for them to continue in it, then it is acceptable to dismiss a person from that role, whether it is paid or voluntary.

If the allegations are against a minister and disciplinary action is needed, the Synod Moderator will instigate Section O (the URC's disciplinary procedure for ministers), if the process has not already begun. If the allegations are against an office holder, the Disciplinary Process for Office Holders (Paper H2 General Assembly 2021) can be used. If the behaviour of concern does not meet the threshold of 'misconduct' for Section O (i.e., behaviour which undermines the credibility of a person's ministry or the Church's witness), then it may be appropriate to consider whether the Section Q complaints process would be relevant.

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

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

Employment References
Decisions about whether to give details of a disciplinary investigation in references provided for employees or volunteers will depend on the circumstances of the case. Churches should seek advice from the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service in such situations.

Referral to Disclosure Scotland
The Protection of Vulnerable Groups Act 2007 places duties on organisations to refer individuals to Disclosure Scotland, when certain prescribed conditions are met, to protect vulnerable people from harm.

Organisations must make a referral if a person shows harmful behaviour and they:

- are dismissed as a result
- would or might have been dismissed but left before they could be
- are permanently moved away from work with children or protected adults

If any of these actions were taken, the organisation must make a referral to Disclosure Scotland within 3 months of making the decision. If the organisation does not make a referral within 3 months, Disclosure Scotland will report the organisation to Police Scotland.

More information on the referral process is available here https://bit.ly/4zaMtKk.

Referrals to Disclosure Scotland in relation to URC employees, office holders or volunteers will be made by the Synod Safeguarding Administrator following advice from the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service.

Disclosure Scotland have processes for dealing with referrals and have risk assessment tools which are used to make decisions. A decision not to bar someone from working with children or adults at risk does not necessarily mean that the person poses no risk and it remains the employer's duty to decide whether a person should continue to work with those groups. If necessary, a professional risk assessment should be carried out.

If the individual concerned has moved and now lives in England, Wales, Northern Ireland or the Channel Islands, a referral would need to be made to the Disclosure and Barring Service. https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-barring-referrals-to-the-dbs

Dealing with unresolved concerns
There may be ongoing concerns or risks in cases which did not proceed to court, or where the verdict was 'not guilty' or where a disciplinary investigation has highlighted problematic behaviours but did not result in dismissal.

A risk assessment completed by the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service, consulting with statutory services and/or the Synod as needed, should be used in the process of ascertaining whether or not it is safe for a person to continue work which brings them into contact with children or adults at risk (in either a paid or voluntary role). Depending on the outcome of the assessment, the following actions may be necessary:

- training and supervision
- re-deploying the person to another post
- drawing up a safeguarding agreement
- terminating employment or a volunteer role
- referring the person to Disclosure Scotland

Action in respect of false or unfounded allegations
If an allegation made is shown to be unfounded, malicious or is proven to have been deliberately invented, consideration should be given to referring the matter to Children's/Adult Services in order for a decision to be made as to whether the individual making the allegation is in need of support.

It is crucial to ensure that the member of staff who has been the subject of a false allegation is also properly supported, whilst maintaining appropriate confidentiality and protecting their rights. Such incidents can cause extreme stress to the individual concerned, and the employer may need to offer the services of a counsellor. However, the details of the one making allegations are not to be disclosed.

Notification Requirements

5.3 Reporting serious issues to the charity regulator

Good governance includes trustees knowing what to do in the event that something goes wrong.

Previously, charities were expected to report 'notifiable incidents' to the OSCR but that changed in 2024. The OSCR now expects trustees to try to resolve issues themselves first. If they are successful in doing so there is no requirement to notify the regulator. If they cannot - potentially due to the seriousness of the issue, a failure of trustees to meet their legal duties, or a serious breakdown of relationships amongst trustees – they should now consider raising a concern with OSCR instead of reporting a notifiable event.

Further guidance and details of how to raise a concern online can be found at: https://www.oscr.org.uk/raise-a-concern/

Although it is not a requirement to report on safeguarding issues in the Trustees' Annual Report (TAR), the OSCR guidance also states that there is nothing wrong with including details of what you've learned from difficult or problematic situations. See: https://www.oscr.org.uk/managing-a-charity/charity-accounting/trustees-annual-reports/tar-dos-and-donts/

5.4 Notifying Insurers

It is vital that where there may be liability issues, churches should inform their insurance company as soon as any incident arises which may lead to a claim. Advice should be sought about the insurance cover, and any steps that need to be taken. The claims manager will also need to be kept in touch with developments. The Elders' meeting needs to review any serious situation, and delegate this task to a trusted member of the church.

The Synod should inform their insurance company of safeguarding incidents on premises owned by the Synod Trust.

5.5 Notifying the URC Press Office

The URC Press Office should be informed of cases which may attract media attention. A statement from the URC Press Office will be made available to the Synod office and the local church involved.

Ongoing actions during and after investigations

5.6 Supporting all those affected

During any police investigation or other formal process, those who have made an allegation (and in some cases their families) will need support. A separate person will need to support the alleged perpetrator. People involved in providing support should not be involved with the investigation or disciplinary proceedings, and may be chosen from outside the church or Synod to ensure neutrality.

In the case of allegations against a minister, the Synod Moderator or Synod Pastoral Committee will need to manage the impact of the investigation on the local church, for example by appointing an Interim Minister and establishing clear lines of communication.

The General Secretary of the URC will manage the impact of the investigation on the wider Church.

5.7 Statements of support /character references

Ministers or church members may be asked to attend meetings, provide statements or give evidence in care or criminal proceedings. If this is the case, or if you are asked to give a character reference for someone involved in a case, you should first consult with the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service.

5.8 Recording and retention of records

Records of safeguarding allegations against workers should be retained for 100 years.

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

5.9 Learning lessons

At the conclusion of a case in which an allegation is substantiated, the church should review the circumstances of the case, with the assistance of the Synod. This should consider any improvements which need to be made to procedures or practices in the future. This may include additional commitment to training, a more robust induction process for new staff, the use of codes of conduct, improved guidance for supporting particularly vulnerable groups, and greater clarity over how and when different investigative processes should be used.

Involvement in church life of people who may pose a risk to others

This is a challenging area of practice, and the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service will take the lead in managing cases where someone who may pose a risk to others wishes to be involved in church life. The URC welcomes everyone into its fellowship but recognises that boundaries need to be put in place for some individuals to ensure the safety of everyone in that environment.

Church members may have questions or concerns about how this is managed and *Resource G4(1) Information for local church congregations (Scotland)* provides relevant information for local churches.

The Church of Scotland defines those who pose a risk as including:

- Any person who has been convicted of any offence within the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009 or associated legislation (or any modification, replacement or re-enactment thereof); and/or
- Any person who has been convicted of any other sexual offence; and/or
- Any person who admits to having committed a sexual offence; and/or
- Any person who is currently or who has at any time been a Registered Sex Offender; and/or
- Any person in respect of whom the Safeguarding Service receives a notification from any of the responsible authorities that such person poses a risk of harm; and/or
- Any person found responsible by a court of law or by their professional body or regulator for committing an act which has, even in part, a sexual element, whether or not that individual accepts that finding; and/or
- Any person who, after risk assessment by the Safeguarding Service, is believed to pose a risk of violence or sexual harm and who has contact with the Church, its members and adherents or those individuals who use and access worship, groups and services run by or on behalf of the Church.[14]

The guidance here deals with managing risks posed by adults. If a child is thought to pose a risk to others (e.g., sexual offending against peers or violence towards parents), some differences in process will apply. The Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service will advise, in conjunction with local statutory services.

14 Church of Scotland Safeguarding Handbook chapter 6 https://bit.ly/4idETc1

5.10 Principles of risk assessment and risk management

Information about risks can come to light in different ways, for example, through a Disclosure Scotland check, from another agency, an individual might make a self-disclosure or someone else in the church may share information. Whenever you become aware of a risk of this kind, the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service must be informed and they will take the lead in managing the procedures outlined below.

Assessing risk
The purpose of a risk assessment is to provide an evidence base for any risk management plans/ actions put in place, ensuring these are proportionate and relevant to the specific risks presented in each individual case.

The Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service will undertake risk assessments. The amount of detail involved/length of time taken will vary in each situation (e.g., may need to be quite brief initially when a quick decision is needed or may be more in-depth when dealing with a known serious offender) but the overall process is the same.

Managing risk
It can be helpful to think about different 'lines of defence' that can help prevent harm.

1. The first line of defence is self-risk management i.e. the individual taking responsibility for their own attitudes and behaviour. Where this is strong, it can act as a barrier to prevent people from acting in ways which they know are inappropriate. This may not always be enough to prevent harm, however, for example because an individual is in denial about their behaviour, or because someone is trying to change but finds it difficult to manage their behaviour in particular circumstances.

2. The second line of defence is support/care for individuals which can include pastoral care within the church and other professional help such as counselling and therapy. This helps to strengthen self-risk management and thus reduce the likelihood of harm occurring. There may still be 'gaps' which allow harmful behaviour to occur, however, for example, because someone refuses to accept support or because the nature of the risks means that additional measures are needed.

3. The third line of defence is therefore restrictive measures such as monitoring and boundary setting in order to prevent access to potential victims and keep a check on behaviours of concern. This can include safeguarding agreements, restricting the activities someone can participate in, and sharing information with other agencies.

In each case, the balance between these three different elements will vary depending on the assessed level of risk and the individual's attitudes, behaviours and commitment to change. Where people are unwilling to acknowledge their problematic behaviour, the focus will need to be on careful monitoring and boundary setting. For others who demonstrate a genuine desire to change, more emphasis can be given to providing support to help strengthen self-risk management.

Reviewing risk
The level of risk, and the plans to manage it, will need to be reviewed at regular intervals and if significant new information comes to light at any stage.

5.11 Providing support to strengthen self-risk management

The church can play an important role in the prevention of harm by helping those who present a risk to others to live an offence-free life. In making plans to manage risks, it is helpful to consider:

i) what does the individual already do well to manage their behaviour?
ii) what additional help and support could strengthen their self-risk management?

Elders have responsibility for pastoral care as an integral part of church life. Additional precautions may need to be taken in some situations with people who present a risk (e.g., pastoral visits to be carried out in pairs) and the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service can advise on this.

Signposting to professional services
Some people will benefit from access to specialist expertise e.g., in relation to addictions, sexual behaviour. See *Resource L1* for useful links and information about external resources.

5.12 Monitoring and setting boundaries

If self-risk management and support are not sufficient then various restrictive measures may be needed. These should be proportionate and based on the risk assessment.

Safeguarding Covenants
A Covenant of Responsibilities is a 'behavioural agreement' between a congregational Safeguarding Panel and an individual whose behaviour is assessed as posing a risk to others in the church. It sets out both the restrictions that may apply to an individual's involvement in church life, and also the support that the church will provide for them.

This is a highly confidential process. A Safeguarding Officer from the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service will advise on setting up and managing a Covenant. Further details on the Church of Scotland's procedures can be found here https://bit.ly/3UOEtQi: Setting up and reviewing a Covenant of Responsibilities.

Church Safeguarding Coordinators can give individuals who are subject to a risk assessment and/or Covenant a copy of *Resource G4(2) Information for individuals whose behaviour may pose a risk (Scotland)*, which provides further information for them on the process.

Multi-agency collaboration
There will be a variety of people subject to safeguarding agreements including those who are:

- Convicted and managed by statutory agencies
- Convicted but not currently managed by statutory agencies
- Not convicted and not managed by statutory agencies

The types and intensity of contact with other agencies will depend on the nature and severity of past offences and current risks. Examples of involvement with other agencies include:

- Criminal Justice Social Work supervision
- Police (e.g. when individuals are on the Sex Offenders' Register)
- Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)
- Liaison with other agencies e.g., mental health services, housing providers

Disclosures to third parties
Advice should be sought from the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service before confidential information is shared. A disclosure should only be made if there is a pressing need. A disclosure can have significant consequences, so there must be real and cogent evidence of a pressing need for disclosure.

Each case must be considered on its own merits. Considerations involved in deciding whether there is a pressing need to share information about an individual include:

- the balance between the public interest and the need to protect people, and the right of an individual to a private life
- the person's previous history and current risk assessment, if available
- the level of likely access to children or those they pose a risk to
- the degree of risk posed by the person if a disclosure is not made
- any other factor in the individual case which is thought to be relevant.

Where possible, these matters should be considered on a multi-agency basis. Legal advice should be sought where there is doubt about the lawfulness of a disclosure. In view of the possibility of a legal challenge/complaint by an individual assessed as posing a risk (or a potential future victim) all agencies must, in addition to seeking any legal advice required, maintain a written audit trail of events, actions, discussions and decisions as well as the reasons for them.

Chapter six

Supporting victims and survivors

We want to be thoughtful in our use of language, but this is not always straightforward as, for example, there are different views about the terms 'victims' and 'survivors'. Some people may use them interchangeably whilst others attach specific meanings to them. Sometimes, 'victim' may be used where there is a legal case and/or when the occurrence of abuse is recent. 'Survivor' may be used to focus more on life after the abuse and the process of healing and recovery. Some people may use terms such as 'overcomer', whilst other people who have experienced abuse may not identify with any of these terms. This chapter generally uses 'people who have experienced abuse', whilst recognising that individuals will choose to describe themselves in different ways and it is important to respect that.

The key principle underpinning good practice in this area is that all those who have experienced abuse, whether recently or in the past **'will be listened to and offered the pastoral care and support they deem appropriate and relevant, irrespective of type of abuse, context, or when this occurred**' (General Assembly policy statement 2021).

Key practice points

- Each person's experience of, and reactions to, abuse will be different, so responses need to be adapted to each individual's needs
- Abuse has a long-term impact and people may need support over extended periods of time
- Those who have been abused have experienced a loss of control, and support should be aimed at helping them find their own preferred means of help
- Support is generally best provided at local level by those who are willing to listen to, and walk alongside, people who have experienced abuse
- Nobody should feel pressured into quickly offering forgiveness, there needs to be recognition that this can be a long and difficult process, and may never happen for some people

Key responsibilities

Local church
- The Elders' meeting has responsibility for provision of pastoral care
- Be aware of local support services that people can be referred or directed to
- Ensure those in relevant roles attend appropriate training
- Seek advice from the Synod or Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service about provision of appropriate support when necessary

Synod
- Advise local churches on the provision of support for those who have experienced abuse
- Provide / encourage churches to engage with relevant training
- Equip Synod Pastoral Committee to help people access appropriate support

Head of Safeguarding/Denomination
- 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

6.1 Building a supportive culture

Whilst the guidance in this section is focused more on local congregations, it is important to remember that the Church, at all levels, needs to be sensitive to the suffering, pain and subsequent issues facing those who have experienced abuse. One part of this is to raise awareness of abuse and help build a culture where people can feel safe in disclosing difficult experiences.

Awareness
It is important to be aware that, at all times, there may be those in a congregation who are facing issues relating to current or past abuse. It is likely that there will be people within the church who may never have disclosed or come to terms with what they have experienced. This can relate to any kind of abuse in any setting. For example, those who have experienced abuse in the past may be re-traumatised by learning of another case of abuse in the church as painful memories resurface.

Sensitivity in worship
There are a number of things within the regular pattern of worship that might present problems to those who have experienced abuse. For example:

- While most visitors appreciate a warm welcome, some who have been abused may find certain physical aspects of welcome uncomfortable.
- Some people like to be invited to sit beside other members of the congregation, while others prefer a more solitary place.
- Different words, actions, smells will set off memories for different individuals
- Special services such as Mothering Sunday or Father's Day can be difficult for some people

(Source: Responding Well to Survivors of Sexual Abuse, 2021, Church of England)

It is not possible to prevent all triggers from occurring, but helpful approaches can include:

- Be prepared – and not surprised – that someone may react negatively to an aspect of church life or worship that most people see as normal
- Be willing to make changes and find ways to help people feel more comfortable within church
- Consider options for providing details of service content in advance, e.g., within notice sheets or orders of service or on the website, as this may be helpful preparation for those who might otherwise struggle with something within the worship.
- Display a safeguarding poster so those who may need support in church know who to contact and know that safeguarding is taken seriously.
- Have appropriate identifiable people available after worship to listen to those who want someone to talk to e.g., a minister or duty elder.

Signposting sources of support
Another element of creating a supportive culture is to publicise contact details for support organisations that people may wish to contact independently. Sometimes people may wish to contact a helpline or service without necessarily telling anyone in church.

- Have brochures and posters in places visible and easily accessible places
- Provide contact details for local services and national helplines
- Some of this information could be placed in a private location, such as toilets, where people can process the information without fear of discovery.

6.2 Caring for individuals who have experienced abuse

The guidance here relates to provision of support and care for those who have experienced abuse. Procedures for responding to concerns or disclosures are covered in chapter 4.

Some general principles are covered here and more information on specific topics (e.g., domestic abuse, modern slavery) can be found in the online Resources page.

Pastoral care for individual needs
Pastoral care is one of the responsibilities of the Elders' meeting, which is exercised jointly by the Minister(s) and Elders of the church. Ministers and Elders need to relate with compassion, kindness and within appropriate boundaries, taking slow steps to avoid raising expectations or causing additional damage by being unable to deliver what might be promised as a church.

Individuals may be seeking different outcomes when they disclose abuse or ask for help:

- For some, just being able to talk to a trusted person about their experiences can be a powerful, healing event.
- Some may be seeking pastoral support from the Church.
- Some may need advice about how best to seek professional help. This may involve support to access local specialist services. Children or young people who have experienced abuse will require specialist support. If you need advice about how best to support someone who has experienced abuse, please contact the Synod Safeguarding Representative.

As a church, we need to be aware of cases that don't "fit" some definitions and to be flexible in the way we offer support over time. It is important to cater for people's different needs, recognizing that not everyone copes in the same way. Each experience is unique and personal, depending on the age at which the abuse happened, the relationship to abuser, the frequency, severity and duration of abuse, and the response to their first disclosure.

> 'Relational and survivor-centred approaches mean prioritising the needs of victims or survivors. The responses recognise the trauma experienced by victims or survivors, and their potential to heal and recover with appropriate support. Conversely, an inappropriate response can compound the harm and distress that victims and survivors feel.'
> (From Responding Well to Survivors of Sexual Abuse, 2021, Church of England)

Listening and building trust
Each Church needs to have people ready to listen. Evidence suggests that those who have experienced abuse do not need great experts to listen to them; just another human being who listens at their pace, does not push them too hard and recognises that abuse is not their whole story. They want people who can trust them to be the expert in their own life and offer them the chance to say no to help or withdraw their involvement if it is difficult for them and their needs change over time. Listeners also need to be aware of their own limits, however, and be able to signpost to other sources of support rather than trying to deal with everything themselves.

It is essential for those who have experienced abuse to know that they can trust those who are supporting them and it may take time to build up this trust. Many people will not readily disclose their experiences. Those who are affected by modern slavery or who have experienced difficult outcomes from statutory agency engagement may fear and mistrust their involvement. They may fear their involvement due to past experience in the UK or originating countries. They can lose contact with family, friends and community through feelings of shame, manipulation or fear of reprisals, and social isolation can be an additional source of vulnerability. The absence of support may result in people returning to damaging situations so taking time to build trust can be vital in preventing further harm.

Listeners should be alert to the fact that the person telling their story may disclose for the first time part of their abuse. Such new disclosure should be treated in accordance with the guidance in section 4.4 abeve), whilst also recognising the importance of empowerment (see next section below) and not taking control away from them.

Empowerment
People who have been abused have experienced a loss of control, and it is important not to compound that by e.g., taking decisions on their behalf, ignoring their views or imposing particular kinds of 'help'.

Interventions that take power away from someone who has experienced abuse will not help to foster their recovery no matter how much it may appear to be in their immediate best interest. (Source: Trauma and Recovery by Judith Herman)

The principle of empowerment that underpins adult safeguarding work is therefore paramount i.e., people being supported and encouraged to make their own decisions. This can include:

- Providing information about relevant support services so that someone who has experienced abuse can choose what they feel comfortable with/find most helpful
- Accepting that someone may decline help or withdraw from support services at any time
- Helping someone work out options they can use to overcome barriers that may make it difficult for them to access support

Provision of support in cases where no action is taken by relevant authorities
If someone within the congregation has alleged abuse and the authorities have decided not to investigate further, it is important to continue to offer appropriate pastoral support to the individual and/or signpost them to specialist services with their consent.

Provision of support in cases where there is an ongoing/current case against the church
Every situation will be different but some people may not want to discuss their needs with a church worker or accept support from a church body that they associate with a traumatising experience. Provision by other groups or organisations may be appropriate in such circumstances. In cases where a victim or survivor wishes to continue worshipping within the church, consideration may need to be given about how to limit contact with the alleged perpetrator and/or their family members.

Synods normally have a pastoral adviser/consultant who can offer support or advise on other appropriate means of help.

Financial provision for professional help in cases of abuse committed by church workers
Decisions about funding for provision of counselling, therapy or other professional support can be made on an individual case-by-case basis, following advice from the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service. The URC legal advisors may also need to be consulted e.g., about issues relating to insurance or liability.

Formal apologies
In some circumstances it will be appropriate for local church/Synod/URC trustees to apologise to a victim or survivor e.g., where a church worker has been convicted of abuse against them, or there is evidence that previous allegations were not properly investigated. The Head of Safeguarding must be involved and will seek legal advice on when and how this should be done.

6.3 Forgiveness

Forgiveness and healing are crucial concepts in Christian life, work and teaching, but they are not quick fixes. They are long and difficult processes which people should have the choice to work through if and when it is right for them. There should not be any pressure or expectation from the church on someone who has experienced abuse to quickly forgive, but rather a recognition that this will be a long and difficult journey and for some people may never happen.

For further discussion of this issue, see 'Forgiveness and Reconciliation in the Aftermath of Abuse' from the Church of England Faith and Order Commission, available here https://bit.ly/4zrQZ7e.

6.4 Summary: general principles for responding well and helping recovery

Recovery after any form of abuse is complex and will vary among individuals. The following aspects may be important for those who have experienced abuse (but not all will apply in every case):

- the opportunity to tell the story (to name the sin and share the experience)
- for someone to hear their story (that is, to believe and acknowledge the harm done and the fact that they are not to blame)
- receiving a compassionate response (that is, to 'walk with' the person rather than try to 'problem-solve' immediately)
- an effort to protect people from further harm (both the individual and any others who may be at risk)
- the community holding the perpetrator to account
- an act of restitution in as far as this is possible
- being made aware of support groups so they have the choice to engage with others who have had similar experiences if they feel this is helpful.

(Source: The Faith Trust Institute)

Resources

These provide a range of supplementary materials including:

- Additional information and guidance on specific topics
- Codes of conduct
- Forms (not to be amended)
- Templates and model documents which can be adapted for local contexts
- Links to external resources and other organisations

Supplementary Information
S1: The role of a Church Safeguarding Coordinator
S2: URC safeguarding training matrix
S3: Roles which require a Disclosure Scotland check within URC
S4: Signs of possible dementia / memory loss
S5: Signs and symptoms of abuse
S6: The role of a Safeguarding Panel

Codes of Conduct
C1: Code of conduct for working with children (under 18s)
C2: Code of conduct for working with adults (over 18s)

Forms
F1: Safeguarding concern form
F2: Self-declaration form
F2: Self-declaration form for Elders
F3: Church Safeguarding Coordinator Declaration Form (CSC7)

Templates and model documents
These are sample / model documents that can be adapted to fit local circumstances.

Policies and procedures
P1: Template for local church safeguarding policy
P2: Template safeguarding policy statements for local churches
P3: Model church online safety policy
P4: Template for church policy statement on the recruitment of ex-offenders -
P5: Local church safeguarding checklist
P6: Handling, use, retention and disposal of criminal records certificates
P7: Synod and Synod Trust Safeguarding Policy
P8: Template for a lone worker policy

Display materials
D1: Model church safeguarding poster
D2: Suggested safeguarding wording for websites
D3: Feel Safe poster

Safer recruitment
SR1: Volunteer application form
SR2: Volunteer reference request form
SR3: Sample questions on safeguarding for interviews and discussions

Safer activities
SA1: Risk assessment template (with guidance)
SA2: Information and consent form
SA3: Request to administer medication form
SA4: Sample volunteer driver agreement
SA5: Template for a support plan
SA6: Safeguarding Clauses for Letting Agreements

Guidance leaflets
G1: Guidance on safeguarding for Local Ecumenical Partnerships
G2: A guide to adult safeguarding
G3: A guide to domestic abuse
G4: Guidance on the involvement in church life of people who may pose a risk to others
- G4(1): Information for local church congregations
- G4(2): Information for individuals whose behaviour may pose a risk
- G4(3): Information for church leaders and support groups

G5: Guidance on responding to allegations of bullying and harassment
G6: Guidance for staff facing safeguarding allegations
Guidelines on the safer election of Elders
Guidelines on safer recruitment of those who lead worship

Useful links and external resources
L1: Contact details for relevant organisations (Scotland)

Additional material may be added to this list of Resources as new topics arise or additional guidance is requested. This will be available online at https://urc.org.uk/safeguarding/

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