



Safeguarding Policy, Procedures and Guidance

for the Methodist Church in Britain



The **Methodist** Church 

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MARCH 2023

SUMMARY OF THE CHURCH'S SAFEGUARDING POLICY

Introduction

The provisions outlined in the Methodist Church's safeguarding policy, procedures and guidance are informed by current legislation and accepted good practice from within the Church, statutory agencies and other community organisations with safeguarding responsibilities. The procedures and guidance in the policy have been reviewed and agreed by the Methodist Church Safeguarding Committee on behalf of the Church's trustees, under their responsibilities designated in Standing Order 232 (2) v of the Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church.

This summary provides the key statements on the policy position of the Church in respect of safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults. For full details in respect of procedures for implementing the policy, please see the document in full which can be found [here](#).

1. Safeguarding in the Methodist Church

Safeguarding is defined as protecting the health and wellbeing of children, young people and vulnerable adults. It is about implementing the necessary measures to prevent harm to children, young people and vulnerable adults who are most at risk of abuse and harm. It is integral to the mission of the Methodist Church to value every human being as part of God's creation.

At the heart of the Methodist community is a deep sense of the place of welcome, hospitality and openness, which demonstrates the nature of God's grace and love for all. Our church communities are called to be places where the transformational love of God is embodied and life in all its fullness is a gift, which is offered to all people.

Everyone has the right to protection from abuse and to be treated no less favourably than others, irrespective of any personal or protected characteristic. There are no distinctions regardless of age, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion/ beliefs, pregnancy/maternity, marriage/civil partnership and gender reassignment.

- Safeguarding is about the action the Church takes to promote a safer culture. This means we will: promote the welfare of children, young people and adults
- work to prevent abuse from occurring
- seek to protect and respond well to those that have been abused.

We will take care to identify where a person may pose a risk to others, and offer support to them whilst taking steps to reduce such risks. The Methodist Church affirms that safeguarding is a shared responsibility. Everyone associated with the Church who comes into contact with children, young people and adults who may be vulnerable has a role to play, supported by consistent policies promoting good practice across the whole Church. The Church will undertake all appropriate steps to maintain a safer environment. It will practise fully and positively Christ's ministry towards children, young people and adults who are vulnerable and respond sensitively and compassionately to help keep them safe from harm.

2. Commitments

The Methodist Church commits to:

- Promote a safer environment and culture.
- Safely recruit and support all those with any responsibility for children and adults within the church.
- Respond promptly and appropriately to every safeguarding concern or allegation.
- Care pastorally for victims and survivors of abuse and other people who have been affected.

Care pastorally for those who are the subject of concerns of allegations of abuse and others who have been affected.

Carry out risk assessments and put safeguarding measures in place where individuals pose a present risk to children, young people or vulnerable adults. This will be done in accordance with the Church's safeguarding policy, procedures and guidance.

2.1 Promote a safer environment and culture

The Methodist Church commits to safely recruiting and supporting all those with any responsibility for children and adults within the Church. The Church will select and scrutinise all those with any responsibility for children and adults within the Church, in accordance with the Church's safeguarding policy and practice guidance. It will train and equip church officers to have the confidence and skills they need to care for and support children, young people and adults and to recognise and respond to abuse. This will be done by providing consistent and accessible safeguarding training.

Churches, circuits and district bodies need to ensure that these commitments are integrated into a local safeguarding policy. Safeguarding policies throughout the Church are active statements underpinning safeguarding work.

3. Definitions of abuse and neglect

Abuse is any action that hurts or injures another person either through deliberate action or through acts of neglect. This can be intentional or unintentional: if the behaviour hurts or harms another, then abuse has occurred.

Abuse may manifest in a variety of ways, including:

- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- emotional or psychological abuse (e.g. humiliation, isolation either in person or online)
- bullying
- financial abuse (e.g. theft of money/assets, extortion, predatory marriage)
- domestic abuse
- spiritual abuse

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of individual's health or development. Examples include:

- ignoring medical, physical or emotional care needs

- failing to provide access to health, care and support or educational services
- withholding necessities of life, such as food, medication and heating
- self-neglect (this can cover a wide range of behaviour such as neglecting your personal hygiene, health or surroundings, and can include behaviours such as hoarding).

4. PROMOTING SAFER PRACTICE

Safer working practices is critical to good safeguarding. The Church has developed procedures informed by legislation and government guidance. As such, we aim to:

- carefully select and train all those with responsibility within the Church in line with safer recruitment principles
- ensure that any church activities are organised in such a way to avoid the risk of harm to everyone participating
- promote safe spaces that are inclusive and welcoming.

4.1 Code of Safer Working Practices with Children

Church officers will respect all children, young people and adults and promote their well-being. You should dress appropriately when working with children and not wear anything revealing or that is not practical for carrying out the tasks as part of your role. There may be occasions when children give you gifts. It is polite to accept a gift but your group leader should be informed. If you receive any gift of significant value, e.g. more than £15.00, you should talk with your group leader about whether it is appropriate to accept it. As a general rule, expensive gifts should not be accepted.

The Church will create and maintain environments that:

- are safer for all
- promote well-being
- prevent abuse
- create nurturing, caring conditions within the Church for children, young people and adults.

It will work to continue to strengthen and review these environments. This will be done by training, support, communication, learning and quality assurance processes. The Church will challenge any abuse of power within church communities by ensuring church officers adhere to safe working practice, and are supported in challenging bullying and abusive behaviour. It will ensure that children, young people and adults will be listened to, supported and will know that they will receive care.

You should:

- Be aware of and understand the local safeguarding policy
- Treat all children and young people fairly and without prejudice, discrimination or favouritism
- Respect differences in gender, sexual orientation, culture, race, ethnicity, disability and faith and challenge behaviour that demonstrates discrimination and/or prejudice
- Ensure that your own language, tone of voice and body language is respectful

- Always aim to work with or within sight and hearing of another adult
- Ensure that another adult is informed if a child needs to be taken to the toilet (toilet breaks should be organised for young children)
- Ensure that children and young people know who they can talk to or contact if they need to speak to someone about a personal concern and encourage them to speak out if they feel uncomfortable or concerned. They should be made aware of organisations that can provide support.
- Respond warmly to a child who needs comforting but this should not involve physical comfort e.g. cuddles.
- Advise children, young people and their parent/carers/guardians in advance if any activity requires physical contact and provide an opportunity to opt out or agree alternative activities.
- Administer any necessary first aid with others around
- Obtain consent for any photographs/videos to be taken, shown or displayed via any medium. (This should be from the parent, carer or guardian and the young person if 12 years or over. Images should not be taken or stored on personal devices).
- Record any incidents that concern you or make you feel uncomfortable and give the information to your group leader in the first instance. Although you must also contact the church, circuit or district safeguarding officer immediately if you believe you have acted in a way which others may have interpreted as inappropriate or if a child has acted inappropriately towards you. Records must be signed and dated.
- Always share concerns about a child or the behaviour of another worker with your group leader and/or the safeguarding officer.

You should not:

- Initiate physical contact and if this is initiated by the child, do not pull away abruptly but do so gently so physical contact is for the minimum amount of time
- Invade a child's privacy whilst they are washing or using the toilet
- Play rough physical or sexually provocative games
- Use any form of physical punishment
- Be sexually suggestive in the presence of or to a child, even as a joke
- Touch a child inappropriately or forcefully
- Scapegoat, ridicule, reject or ignore a child, group or adult
- Allow abusive peer activities (e.g. initiation ceremonies, ridiculing or bullying)
- Show favouritism to any one child or group
- Allow a child or young person to involve you in excessive attention-seeking that is clearly physical or sexual in nature
- Give lifts to children or young people on their own or on your own
- Smoke any substance, vape or consume alcohol in the presence of children or when responsible for them

- Provide personal contact details to a child or young person such as mobile number, email or social media contact
- Share sleeping accommodation with children
- Arrange social occasions (this includes online activity) with children or invite them to your home outside organised group occasions (other than with the consent of parent, carers or guardians and where at least one other adult is present)
- Allow unknown adults access to children (visitors should always be accompanied by a known person)
- Allow strangers and those who are not authorised to give children lifts.

4.2 Code of Safer Working Practices with Vulnerable Adults

You should:

- Treat all adults with respect and dignity
- Ensure that your own language, tone of voice, and body language are respectful
- Record any incidents of concern and give the information to your group leader, sign and date the record
- Share concerns about an adult or the behaviour of another worker with your group leader and/or safeguarding officer.

You should not:

- Invade the privacy of an adult who is washing and toileting
- Use any form of physical punishment or restraint (apart from car seat belts)
- Be sexually suggestive about or to an adult, or scapegoat, ridicule or reject an adult or group permit abusive peer activities (e.g. initiation ceremonies, ridiculing or bullying)
- Show favouritism to any one adult or group
- Allow an adult to involve you in behaviour that is overtly physical or sexual
- Allow unknown adults access to adults deemed at risk of harm (visitors should always be accompanied by a known person)
- Allow strangers to give lifts to adults in your group.

Visiting adults at home

Most visits to adults in their own home will be straightforward as they will be well known to the church. However, when visiting someone new for the first time, visitors should let someone else know whom they are visiting (and when).

- Visiting in twos may be advisable, especially if the adult lacks capacity. It is also advisable to take a mobile phone.
- Do not call unannounced. Call by appointment, telephoning the person just before visiting if appropriate.
- Be clear about what support can be offered to the adult if they ask for help with particular problems and refer back to the church if uncertain.

- 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.
- Never offer 'over the counter' remedies to people on visits or administer prescribed medicines, even if asked to do so.
- Do not accept any gifts from adults other than token items, to avoid misunderstandings or subsequent accusations from the person or their family. 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.
- Pastoral visitors should note the date when they visit people, report their visit to the pastoral secretary and say what is concerning or going well. The pastoral secretary will report safeguarding concerns to the minister and safeguarding officer as appropriate and agree what action should take place and who should record the incident.

5. Responding well to Safeguarding Incidents

There are many situations about which a member of the Church may have concerns, or be made aware of concerns, regarding a child or adult. The concerns may be about current or past events, but the response should be the same. Past events can still give rise to current safeguarding concerns. This may relate to allegations made about an officeholder, employee, member or volunteer or someone not connected with the Church where anyone is seeking help or support from someone in the Church.

In such circumstances, the person receiving the disclosure must consult the minister, church or circuit safeguarding officer and DSO within 24 hours. The only exception to the above is if one of them is the subject of the concerns. If that is the case, then they will be excluded. Under no circumstances, should the person who is the subject of the allegations be informed until after the allegations have been discussed and agreement reached with the statutory authorities. Further action will be decided in discussion and agreement with the statutory agencies.

Allegations that do not fall into the above categories but still amount to inappropriate conduct within the Church may mean that consideration needs to be given to invoking disciplinary processes or handling it by way of advice, supervision and training. In these situations, the employer/supervisor/line manager will need to decide the course of action.

Anyone who brings any safeguarding suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation of current or former abuse to the notice of an officeholder within the Church will be responded to respectfully and actively. All suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations that reach the threshold for reporting to the statutory authorities, will be reported. This will be done irrespective of the status of the person. All officeholders and employees within the Church will work in partnership with statutory authorities where relevant. In responding to concerns or allegations of abuse relating to ministers, the Church will act in accordance with the requirements of criminal and civil law and the Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church, and so will respect the rights and uphold the safeguards afforded in these, to both the victim/survivor and the subject of concerns or allegations.

Whether an allegation is made about a member or volunteer, the Church Council will need to consider what additional action, aside from a referral to the statutory agencies, may be necessary

to safeguard other people from potential harm. If the concern is about a minister, then this is referred to the chair of the district.

5.1 Listening to those who raise concerns

If approached by anyone wishing to talk about a concern, follow the basic guidelines below:

- Consider whether the time and place are appropriate for you to listen with care and security. Do not defer listening, but seek the other person's agreement to find a suitable place to listen.
- Stay calm and listen to the information very carefully, showing you are taking seriously what you are being told. Do not pass judgement, minimise or express shock or disbelief at what you are being told.
- Listen with undivided attention and help the other person to feel relaxed. Do not put words into their mouth.
- Take into account the person's age and level of understanding. It may be appropriate to ask if they mind you taking notes while they talk or at the end so you can check with them that you have understood everything correctly – but only if it is appropriate.
- Do not make promises you cannot keep.
- Do not promise confidentiality but explain what you will do with the information
- Find out what the person hopes for.
- Reflect back key points of what has been said to confirm you have understood what has been communicated.
- Provide a privacy notice and explain in a clear and simple manner the information contained in it.
- Either during (if appropriate) or after, make notes of what was said, including the date, time, venue and the names of people who were present. Sign the record.
- The DSO should always be advised when a referral is made to Children's Services/the police.
- Provide the person with the means to contact you and be clear about how and when you will give feedback. Be prepared to continue to be there for the person. Be dependable.
- Do not contact the person about whom allegations have been made.
- Offer reassurance that disclosing is the right thing to do.

5.2 Low-Level Concerns

A low-level concern is any concern that an adult has acted in a way that is inconsistent with the **Codes of Safer Working Practice** (see section 4 above). It includes conduct that does not meet the threshold of harm or is not considered serious enough for more formal intervention measures. Government guidance states that 'low-level' concerns should not be considered as insignificant

and that any behaviour that causes those observing it to have a 'sense of unease' or 'nagging doubt', should be taken seriously 'no matter how small'.

Serious case reviews and research have consistently shown that before the abuse escalates into serious harm, there are behaviours that were observed that caused those around to feel uneasy. However, as the behaviour did not meet the threshold it was not reported and therefore it could not be prevented from escalation. The importance of sharing and recording the information is vital. Even if it appears to be thoughtless or inappropriate, it is critical to keep a record of the behaviour so that preventative measures can be taken to avoid it becoming more serious. This allows for any emerging patterns of worrying behaviour to be identified and acted upon early. The staff code of conduct provides a guide for what is safer working practice and must be viewed as a guide to interacting appropriately with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

5.3 Recording

Safeguarding records are needed in order to:

- ensure that what happened and when it happened is recorded
- provide a history of events so that patterns can be identified
- record and justify the action/s of advisers and church workers
- promote the exercise of accountability
- provide a basis of evidence for future safeguarding activity or formal proceedings
- allow for continuity when there is a change of personnel.

All records must be kept in a secure place and only shared in accordance with legislation, government guidance, Methodist Church policy, procedure and guidelines.

- When making records the following practice should be followed:
- Wherever possible, take notes during any conversation (or immediately after if more appropriate).
- Ask consent to make notes, taking age and understanding into account.
- Explain why you want to take notes, and that they can have access to the information they have shared with you. Include:
 - who was involved: including any actual or potential witnesses to what happened. Where possible, exact quotations of what was said, identified by quotation marks, are helpful, particularly when recording something that has been said of significance.
 - Where it happened: Record specific details of the location and context.
 - When it happened: Be specific about the timing and frequency of the situation, where possible.
 - How it happened: Describe how actions were carried out including the nature and level of any force used, the period over which the behaviour was experienced.
 - The context in which it took place: Note any connections between the parties, particularly where the connection resulted in a power differential between one party and another.

- The impact on any party: If the survivor or other party shares how they felt about what happened, record this information.
- Keep a log of all actions you have taken and details of referrals to statutory agencies.
- Make sure your notes are legible, clear, concise, relevant, thorough and jargon free.
- Use the person's own words and phrases. Do not attempt to sanitise language or improve grammar.
- Ensure the notes are up to date, signed, dated and timed.
- Ask the person to review the notes and confirm that they are accurate.
- Pass records to the DSO as soon as possible but at the latest by noon of the next day.

6. Caring for those who have suffered abuse

The Church will offer care and support to all those who have been abused, regardless of the type of abuse, when or where it occurred. Those who have suffered abuse within the Church will receive a compassionate response, be listened to and believed. They will be offered appropriate pastoral care, counselling and support, according to their expressed and agreed need, as they seek to rebuild their lives. For the purpose of this document, the terms victim and survivor are used to refer to people who have experienced abuse. However, it is the policy of the Methodist Church to demonstrate ask etiquette so that victims and survivors determine how they are identified.

An appropriate pastoral response to the family, local church, circuit and wider community will be provided, with due regard to the right of privacy of those directly involved, and to the administration of justice. The Methodist Church recognises that abuse of an individual by someone within a church can have a negative impact on not only the survivor, but their family, the perpetrator's family and the church community. The impact will be different for different people and assumptions cannot be made about the severity of the impact and its perceived seriousness. The Church aims to respond to those affected by abuse in accordance with legislation and guidance but also with respect and compassion, providing pastoral support and additional support where appropriate.

The ethos behind the structure of the Methodist Church remains true to the original values of its founder, John Wesley: valuing consultation, shared decision-making and responsibility across the Connexion. An outline of the Church's structure can be found on our website:

www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/structure.

In line with the values of cooperation and consultation, all members, employees, office holders and volunteer workers at all levels of church life play a significant role in implementing safeguarding procedures. It is important to recognise that it is people who protect – not just procedures. The aim is to create a culture of informed vigilance at all levels in the Church.