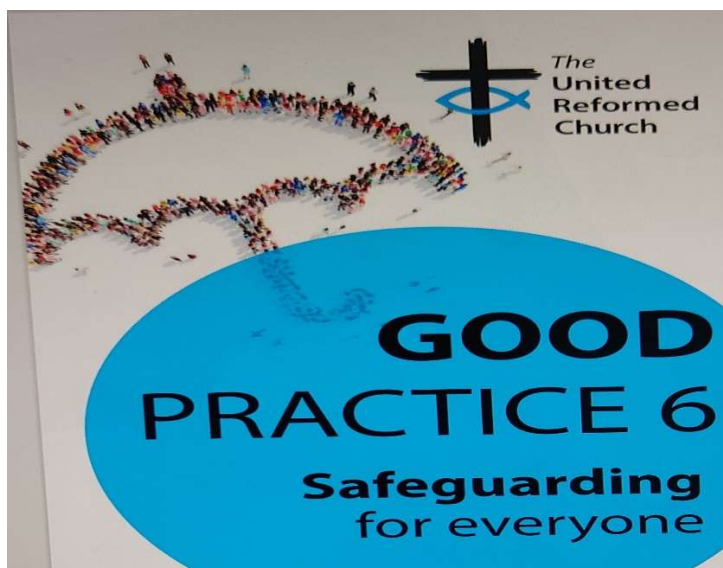


SAFEGUARDING POLICY:

The United Reformed Church Of Halstead, Eastern Synod



Safeguarding Policy 2 2 3 3

Introduction:

The United Reformed Church of Halstead takes Safeguarding seriously

We acknowledge children's and adults' right to protection from abuse regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or beliefs.

We consider that the welfare of children is paramount.

We will follow legislation, statutory guidance and recognised good practice in order to protect vulnerable people in our church.

We will seek to establish a caring environment in which there is an informed vigilance about the dangers of abuse.

We will implement, maintain and regularly review the procedures outlined in this policy, which are designed to prevent and to be alert to such abuse.

We have appointed a Safeguarding Coordinator and two Deputy Safeguarding Coordinators, who will have specific responsibilities for safeguarding, although we recognise that safeguarding is a whole church responsibility. The Safeguarding Coordinator is the person to whom all concerns or allegations should be addressed. In her absence, one of the Deputy Safeguarding Coordinators should be contacted. Their contact details can be found in Key Contacts, P9/10.

We will organise activities in such a way as to promote a safe environment and minimise the risk of harm to children and adults.

We will follow a safer recruitment process for the selection and appointment of people to work with children or adults at risk, whether voluntary or paid, lay or ordained. We are committed to providing support, supervision, resources and training to those who work with children and adults.

We will use rigorous and careful supervision to protect people from the risks associated with known offenders within the congregation, including implementing contracts with known offenders and those who have been assessed as posing a risk.

We believe that domestic abuse in all its forms is unacceptable and inconsistent with a Christian way of living and recognised that it can affect both adults and children. All concerns and allegations of abuse will be responded to appropriately, including referring to the statutory authorities if necessary.

We will co-operate with the statutory authorities in any investigation, will follow multi-agency decisions and will maintain confidentiality of any investigations to those directly involved.

We will refer concerns about staff – volunteers and paid, lay and ordained – that meet the relevant criteria to the Local Authority Designated Officer.

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Aim and purpose of this policy

The aim of this policy to ensure that protecting people from abuse, harm or neglect is central to our culture. It provides procedures for promoting safeguarding, preventing abuse and protecting children, adults at risk and staff. This includes clear procedures for taking appropriate action when safeguarding concerns are raised involving children and adults within our church, or those who attend our activities and events.

This document is supported by the following seven appendices, also available online at <https://urc.org.uk/safeguarding/safeguarding-good-practice>

A1 – Safeguarding policy statement

A2 – The role of a Safeguarding Co-ordinator

A3 – Code of conduct for working with children or young people

A4 – Code of conduct for working with adults at risk

A5 – Safeguarding incident recording form

A6 – Signs and symptoms of abuse

A7 – Short summary for display

Who is covered by this policy

This policy is approved and endorsed by the Elders and applies to:

- all members of our church
- all those who attend and serve our church/place of worship and its services • our trustees and elders
- paid staff (both internal and external, such as consultants)
- volunteers
- organisations who hire our building with written agreement to operate under the church safeguarding policy

The values and safeguarding principles within the United Reformed Church are described in Appendix A1. The policy and procedures should be interpreted in the light of these principles and the most recent URC good practice guidance on which they are based. If the URC guidance is updated this document will be updated accordingly. All those responsible for safeguarding children, and adults at risk will be informed of this policy and our procedures.

Definitions

The term 'children' refers to those under the age of 18 years.

The term 'adult at risk' refers to any adult aged 18 or over who, by reason of mental or other disability, age, illness or other situation, are permanently, or for time being, unable to take care of themselves, or to protect themselves against significant harm, abuse or exploitation.

Duty of care and confidentiality

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

Preventing abuse

The church will appoint Safeguarding and Deputy Safeguarding Coordinators for safeguarding children and adults. A description of the role is attached as **Appendix A2**.

Activities will be organised in accordance with the URC's safeguarding policy and guidance so as to promote a safe environment and healthy relationships, whilst minimising opportunities for harm, misunderstanding or false accusation. For each event, risk assessments will be carried out, appropriate consent forms will be used (for children's activities or activities for people with special needs), appropriate records will be kept, and adequate insurance will be in place.

We are committed to safer recruitment and selection of all paid staff and volunteers with emphasis on those in regulated activities. We will treat applicants who have a criminal record fairly and will not discriminate because of a conviction or other information revealed (see **Appendix D** for the church policy statement on the recruitment of ex-offenders) and ensure that all safer recruitment-related procedures are followed, which include:

- asking applicants to complete an application form
- providing workers with job descriptions and person specifications
- completion of self declaration forms
- obtaining Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) / Protecting Vulnerable Groups scheme (PVG) checks for eligible roles and positions
- taking up two references (not from family members)
- interviewing candidates
- providing workers/volunteers with written contracts/agreements.

All trustees, paid staff and volunteers will work within a code of conduct (code for workers attached as **Appendices A3 and A4** depending on the vulnerable group) and understand that there may be action taken if this code is not followed, possibly involving suspension or termination of people's service.

If we become aware of someone within our congregation known to harm or to have harmed children or adults, we will inform the Church Safeguarding Coordinator or Synod Safeguarding Officer within 24 hours and co-operate with them and the relevant statutory authorities to put in place a plan to minimise the risk of harm to children, young people and adults.

When any church premises are let to an external organisation, informal group or individual, those hiring the premises should hold and abide by their own safeguarding policy. If a hirer does not have a policy, they must abide by the church's own safeguarding policy, a copy of which should be made available. They must confirm in writing that they will follow the principles of this safeguarding policy as a condition of the letting agreement. If they have their own safeguarding policy, they will be asked to provide a copy. Each hiring body or individual hirer is required to ensure that children and adults at risk are always protected by taking all reasonable steps to prevent injury, illness, loss or damage occurring.

How to recognise abuse

It is important to be aware of possible signs and symptoms of abuse. Appendix A6: Signs and Symptoms of Abuse provides definitions of different forms of abuse and

further help and guidance. Some signs could be indicators of several different categories of abuse.

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

Church workers and members will also pay attention to online safety and their electronic communications with children and adults. Grooming and abuse of any form can occur offline (both physically and verbally) and online. **Appendix C: Model church online safety policy** includes an acceptable use policy in relation to the use of church computers by both workers and children and provides sample forms which children and workers could be asked to sign.

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

If a child, young person or adult makes a disclosure that they are being abused or and have been abused, it is important that the person being told:

- stays calm and listens carefully
- reassures them that they have done the right thing in telling
- does not investigate or ask leading questions
- explains that they will need to tell someone else if anyone is at risk of harm, in order to help them
- does not promise to keep secret what they have been told
- informs the church Safeguarding Coordinator within 24 hours (or, if the Safeguarding Coordinator is implicated in the allegation, informs either of the Deputy Safeguarding Coordinators or the Synod Safeguarding Officer)
- makes a written record of the allegation, disclosure or incident and signs and dates this record (using the template in Appendix A5). This should be given to the church Safeguarding Coordinator or the Synod Safeguarding Officer and stored securely in a locked filing cabinet

Procedure in the event of a concern of abuse

If there is an immediate threat of harm, the Police should be contacted without delay.

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

- The concern should be discussed with the Church Safeguarding Coordinator or the Synod Safeguarding Officer within 24 hours and a decision made as to whether the

concern warrants a referral to statutory authorities (see Key Contacts, P9/10 for the relevant statutory contacts)

- A confidential record will be made of the conversation and the circumstances surrounding it using the template at Appendix A5. This record will be kept securely and a copy passed to statutory authorities if a referral is made
- The person about whom the allegation is made must not be informed by anyone in the church if it is judged that to do so could place a child or adult at further risk. If the statutory authorities are involved, they should be consulted beforehand
- The Synod Safeguarding Officer should be kept informed of any serious concerns and referrals to police and statutory authorities.

Prior to any referral to children's services, the child's wishes and rights should be considered when determining what action to take. There should also be a verbal consultation with local authority's children's services to ensure that making a referral is an appropriate action. The parent/carer will normally be contacted to obtain their consent before a referral is made. However, if the concern involves, for example, alleged or suspected child sexual abuse, domestic abuse, Honour Based Violence, fabricated or induced illness, or the Synod Safeguarding Officer has reason to believe that informing the parent at this stage might compromise the safety of the child or a staff member, nothing should be said to the parent/carer ahead of the referral, but a rationale for the decision to progress without consent should be provided with the referral.

In the case of referrals to adult social care or other services for adults at risk, information should be shared with consent if the adult has capacity within the meaning of the Mental Capacity Act and if this does not place them, the referrer, or others at an increased risk. A person's right to confidentiality is not absolute and may be overridden where there is evidence that sharing information is necessary to support an investigation or where there is a risk to others. See section 14 of Good Practice 5 for further advice and guidance.

If the allegation is regarding a church staff member or church volunteer

If someone in the church is alleged or known to harm/have harmed children or adults, it is essential to inform the Synod Safeguarding Officer so that they can offer advice and support.

For any concerns relating to children, the Designated Officer (previously known as LADO) will be contacted. The timing and method of any action to be taken will be discussed and agreed with the LADO. This will cover communication with the worker, suspension, investigation and possible strategy meetings. A decision will be taken by the DO about when to inform the worker and the church will follow this advice. For DO contact details, see **Key Contacts**, P9/10.

For concerns relating to adults, Adult Social Care will be contacted. See **Key Contacts**, P9/10 for details.

In the case of an individual in regulated activity about whom there is a concern, if for safeguarding reasons the church (or organisation hiring the premises) has either terminated that person's employment or failed to appoint, or would have terminated the employment had the person not moved on through resignation, retirement or re-deployment, the church still has a legal obligation to make a referral to the DBS for consideration of barring. The Synod Safeguarding Officer also needs to be informed.

Depending on the seriousness of incidents or allegations, a report to the Charity Commission will also need to be considered at the elders/trustees' meeting, as they deem such a referral to be a 'serious incident' and require notification.

Managing those who may pose a risk to the welfare of people

The use of rigorous and careful supervision is paramount to protect people from the risks associated with known offenders within the congregation, including implementing safeguarding contracts with known or alleged offenders and those who have been assessed as posing a risk. Where it is known that someone has a caution or conviction for committing a sexual offence, the church can play an important role in the prevention of further abuse by helping the offender to live an offence-free life.

If anyone is made aware that a person attending their church has been convicted of an offence against a child or has had an allegation of this nature made against them at any time, we will immediately inform the Synod Safeguarding Officer and Minister or Interim Moderator.

It is important to provide known or alleged offenders with a group of people who will offer support, friendship and supervision. Following advice from the Synod Safeguarding Officer, when appropriate, a formal safeguarding contract will be drawn up between the church, the person who is considered to pose a risk to the welfare of people in the church, and any statutory agencies when involved.

Training

Safeguarding training will be provided and volunteers and paid staff will be given support and supervision in their role. All relevant staff members and volunteers will receive appropriate safeguarding training delivered by the synod. The Safeguarding Coordinator should ensure that elders and people involved in regulated activities with children or adults (including ministers, staff and volunteers) have undergone safeguarding training, as recommended by the URC.

Concerns, Complaints and Compliments regarding this policy

Should anyone have any concerns, complaints or compliments **regarding the content of this document** (as distinct from safeguarding concerns) please contact:

Diane Stock

Telephone No: 07826 295904

Or

Fred Koranteng-Addo

Telephone No: 07947945199

Email: secretary@urcofhalstead.org.uk

It would be helpful to have complaints in writing, as this avoids any possible misunderstanding about what the issue is. However, whether verbal or in writing, complaints will be acted upon. Any written complaint will be responded to within 10 days.

Review

The elders will review this policy annually, amending and updating it as required, and informing Church Meeting that this has been done.

Date of the most recent review: Sept 2023

Date of the next review: Sept 2024

Signed: Janet Daw on behalf of the church elders

Key Contacts: Sources of advice and support

- The church **Safeguarding Coordinator** is the person to whom all concerns or allegations relating to children, young people or adults should be addressed:

Name: Janet Daw

Telephone No: 01787 473650 / 07826 295904

Email: janetpeter@gmail.com

- In the absence of the Safeguarding Coordinator, the Deputy Safeguarding Coordinator can be contacted:

Name: Gill Felton

Telephone No: 01787 472591 / 07879 272805

Email: gillfelton49@mail.com

• Synod Safeguarding Officer

Name: Candice Hart

Telephone No: 07849 276 750

Email: safeguarding@urceastern.org.uk

- **URC Safeguarding Office** (This should only be used for urgent advice if you are unable to contact your Synod Safeguarding Officer)

Telephone No 020 7520 2729

- **ThirtyOne: Eight** available until 10 pm, 7 days a week. (This should only be used for urgent advice if you are unable to contact the URC)

24 Hour helpline: 0845 120 4550

- Local Authority Designated Officer (DO)

Name: Lucy Wilson

Telephone No: 01376 552525

Email: safeguarding@braintree.gov.uk

- **Statutory contact** in the case of a child Essex Council Children's Single Point of Entry: 0345 603 7627

- **Statutory contact** in the case of an adult at risk: Essex Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub: 0345 603 7630. **Out of hours or bank holidays**, call the emergency duty team on 0345 606 1212. Email: initialresponseteam@essex.gcsx.gov.uk

NOTE: A list of useful contacts for all forms of abuse of children and adults can be found in Appendix U online at <https://urc.org.uk/safeguarding/safeguarding-organisations>