



Promoting Safeguarding

Preventing Abuse

Protecting All – children, adults and staff

Safeguarding Policy Children & Adults

Immanuel with Highworth Church

South Western Synod

July 2025

Aim and purpose of this policy

The aim of this policy is 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.

Who this policy applies to:

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

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

This policy will be interpreted in accordance with the values and safeguarding principles of the United Reformed Church and the most recent URC good practice guidance. Children, parents/carers, adults at risk and those responsible for safeguarding them 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, children or young people. We will always maintain confidentiality, 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 Coordinator(s) for safeguarding children and adults.

Activities will be organised in accordance with URC's safeguarding policy and guidance to promote a safe environment and healthy relationships, whilst minimising opportunities for harm or misunderstandings. For each event, risk assessments will be carried out, appropriate and accessible consent forms will be used (for children's activities or activities for people with additional 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. We will treat applicants who have a criminal record fairly and do not discriminate because of a conviction or other information revealed and ensure that all safer recruitment-related procedures are followed, which include:

- asking applicants to complete an application form
- providing workers with job or role 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/volunteer agreements.

All trustees, paid staff and volunteers will work within a code of conduct and understand that there may be action taken if this code is not followed, possibly involving suspension or the termination of people's service.

If we become aware of someone within our congregation known to have harmed or harm children or adults, we will inform the Church Safeguarding Coordinator and 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, 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. This will be checked for relevant details. Each hiring body 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. 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. There might be domestic abuse that requires a different approach. 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. The URC Good Practice 5 guide 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 will 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 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 (if they are implicated in the allegation, inform the Synod Safeguarding Officer)
- makes a written record of the allegation, disclosure or incident and signs and dates this record. 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 will be discussed with the Church Safeguarding Coordinator or the Synod Safeguarding Officer **within 24 hours** and a decision needs to be made as to whether the concern warrants a referral to statutory authorities (**NOTE:** Key Contacts of relevant statutory contacts in our local authority are in this policy)
- A confidential record will be made of the conversation and the circumstances surrounding it. 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 will be kept informed of any serious concerns and referrals to police and statutory authorities.

Consideration will be given to consulting the child and the parent/carer before a referral is made. However, our duty to refer and the need to protect vulnerable groups will be prioritised. If the concern involves, for example alleged or suspected child sexual abuse, domestic abuse, Honour Based Violence, fabricated or induced illness, or the Local Authority or 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 will be said

to the parent/carer ahead of the referral. A rationale for the decision to progress without consent will be provided with the referral.

In the case of referrals to adult social care or other services for adults at risk, information will be shared with consent if the adult has capacity within the meaning of the Mental Capacity Act and if this does not place the referrer, them 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.

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, the Synod Safeguarding Officer will be informed 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. DO contact details are included in the Key Contacts section of this policy.

For concerns relating to adults, Adult Social Care will be contacted. Likewise, their contacts details are included in the Key Contacts section of this policy.

In accordance with the law, a referral needs to be made to the DBS for consideration of barring to share information about any individual in regulated activity where for safeguarding reasons the organisation has either terminated the employment, failed to appoint, or would have terminated the employment had the individual not moved on through resignation, retirement or re-deployment. In such cases, the Synod Safeguarding Officer will 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 requires notification. This will be done by either the Elder Trustees or the Synod Safeguarding Officer on their behalf. Serious Incidents, other than a referral to the DBS, will also be reported to the Charity Commission.

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.

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, we will immediately inform the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

It is important to provide known or alleged offenders with a group of people who will offer support 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. Specialist training will be provided by the Synod Safeguarding Officer to anyone supporting or supervising anyone known to pose a risk to vulnerable groups.

Training

Safeguarding training will be provided to volunteers and paid staff. They will also be given support and supervision in their role. The Safeguarding Coordinator(s) should ensure that trustees/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

Should anyone have any concerns, complaints or compliments please contact:

Name Mrs Jean Batten

Telephone No 07748 508208

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 Mrs Jean Batten

Telephone No 07748 508208

Highworth local contact

Name Mr Bryan Elkington

Telephone No 07870 819416

Synod Safeguarding Officer

Name - Claire Partridge Telephone No. 07875 454064

URC Safeguarding Office (This should only be used if you are unable to contact your Synod Safeguarding Officer)

Telephone No 020 7520 2729 Email safeguarding@urc.org.uk

ThirtyOne: Eight (This should only be used for urgent advice if you are unable to contact URC)

helpline: 0303 003 1111

Designated Officer (DO) relating to children

Name Swindon Borough Council Social Services

Statutory contact in the case of a child 01793 466903

Statutory contact in the case of an adult at risk 01793 445500

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: July 2025

Date of the next review: July 2026

Signed:

(on behalf of the church Elders)