Amersham Free Church

(Woodside Road, Amersham, Bucks HP6 6AJ)

Charity Number 1137287

Safeguarding

Policy and Procedure

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

Date Reviewed: March 2025

Date of the next review: **March 2026**

Signed: Ian Green

Print Name: IAN GREEN

(Revd. Ian Green on behalf of the Church Elders)

Contact Details

Safeguarding Co-ordinators for Amersham Free Church:

Name: Beverley Underwood
Contact Number: 07955 190688

Name: Amela Munro
Contact Number: 07711 476429

Synod Safeguarding Officer (away until late 2025)
Name: Belinda Herbert
Contact Number: 07716 640596

Covering for Belinda:

Natalie Van Camp
Synod Safeguarding Officer Thames North and Southern Synods | The United Reformed Church
07483 994590 | www.urc.org.uk
safeguarding@urcthamesnorth.org.uk

First Response Team (For Children & Young People – Buckinghamshire County Council

01296 383962 Option 5 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm) or 0800 999 7677

Adult Social Care – Buckinghamshire County Council

01296 382 522 (Mon-Fri 9am to 5pm) or 0800 999 7677

Emergency – Police

101 or 999

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P1. Amersham Free Church Safeguarding Policy

1. Aim and purpose of Amersham Free Church Safeguarding Policy.

The aim of this model 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 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 and groups which 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 **P2**. The policy and procedures should be interpreted in accordance with these principles 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.

Principles underpinning the policy

- Our theology and values
- Our commitment to put the welfare of children and adults at risk first
- A willingness to be open and listen
- A commitment to comply with relevant legal and regulatory requirements.

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.

2. Creating a Safer Culture

We are committed to creating a safer culture in our church which will help us to prevent harm from occurring and provide an environment in which all can flourish.

In line with Chapter two of Good Practice 6, we will:

- Appoint 2 Church Safeguarding Co-ordinators and ensure contact details are available for anyone to report a concern.
- Have a safeguarding policy which is reviewed annually and updated when necessary.
- Practice safer recruitment procedures for paid and volunteer roles.
- Ensure all those working with children and/or adults at risk are given copies of relevant 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.

3. Ensuring safer activities

Whilst it is not possible to guard against every eventuality, we are committed to providing as safe an environment as possible for activities both on and off church premises.

In line with Chapter three of Good Practice 6, we will:

- Ensure appropriate insurance is in place for buildings and activities.
- Consider the implications of data protection and health and 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 relevant Codes of Conduct (C1 and C2).
- Ensure the hirer's agreement is in place for other organisations using church premises.
- Seek advice from the Synod Safeguarding Officer for complex or sensitive risks.

4. Recognising and responding to concerns

We acknowledge that, although promoting Safer Culture and Safer Activities will help to protect all those in contact with the church, some concerns will inevitably arise and we are committed to responding well in such circumstances.

In line with Chapter four of Good Practice 6, we will:

- Promote awareness of different kinds of abuse, other vulnerabilities and types of safeguarding concern.
- Seek to create a 'listening culture' and help people develop listening skills to respond appropriately in situations here sensitive information is disclosed.
- Inform the Synod Safeguarding Officer as a minimum of any situations where involvement from statutory services is/may be required.
- Share information with statutory services as appropriate and co-operate with them during any investigations.
- Report any serious safeguarding incident to the Charity Commission and notify the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

5. Managing allegations and people who may pose a risk to others

Where allegations are made against individuals within the Church, we are committed to following all required investigative and regulatory procedures. We will work in collaboration with the Synod, wider Church staff, statutory agencies and other relevant organisations.

In line with Chapter five of Good Practice 6, we will:

- Co-operate fully with any investigative or disciplinary procedures.
- Inform the Synod Safeguarding Officer immediately on becoming aware of anyone in the church who may present a risk to others.
- Work with the Synod Safeguarding Officer and contribute relevant information for risk assessments.
- Alert the Synod Safeguarding Officer or statutory agencies to known breaches of a safeguarding agreement.

6. Supporting victims and survivors

The key principle underpinning our policy and 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).

In line with Chapter six of Good Practice 6, we will:

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

Key Contacts: Sources of advice and support

The Church **Safeguarding Coordinators** are the persons to whom all concerns or allegations relating to children, young people or adults should be addressed:

Amersham Free Church Safeguarding Coordinators

- Name: **Beverley Underwood**
- Telephone No: **07955 190688**
- **Email:** secretary@amershamfreechurch.org.uk

- Name: **Amela Munro**
- Telephone No: **07711 476429**
- Email: amela@chrysaliscounselling.co.uk

Synod Safeguarding Officer (in the absence of Belinda Herbert)

- Name: **Natalie Van Camp**
- Telephone No: **07483 994 590**
- Email: safeguarding@urcthamesnoth.org.uk

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

First Response Team [Children's]

- Telephone: 01296 383 962 (Monday to Thursday 9am to 5.30pm. Friday 9am to 5pm) or
- Emergency : Emergency Duty Team (EDT) on 0800 999 7677
- Email: secure-cypfirstresponse@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

Adult Resolution and Safeguarding – Buckinghamshire County Council (contact in the case of an adult at risk)

- Telephone: 01296 382522 (Monday –Thursday 9am to 5.30pm and Friday 9am to 5pm)
- Out of Hours: 0800 999 7677
- Email: ascfirstresponse@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

Emergency - Police

- Tel: 101 or 999

P2 Policy Statement

Safeguarding Children, Young People and Adults at Risk at Amersham Free Church

The following statement was agreed by the Church Meeting of Amersham Free Church.

The vision of Amersham Free Church ("the Church") is: To offer worship to God through our Lord Jesus and to celebrate the Gospel sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion,: to make the good news of Jesus Christ known in Amersham and beyond through words, actions, lifestyle and pastoral care; to encourage the growth, both in numbers and spirituality, of our own congregation and the use of their gifts in the Church and community life; and to work and pray for Christian unity, world mission, global justice and peace.

We will always acknowledge that the welfare of the child and adult at risk is paramount, and that the priority is always to act in their best interests, following legislation, statutory guidance and recognised good practice guidance to enable them access to support and protection.

Safeguarding is taken seriously by Amersham Free Church. We define safeguarding as the promotion of the safety and welfare of children and adults who are at risk of, or experiencing, harm, abuse or neglect in all forms. We acknowledge children's and adults' right to protection from any form of abuse or neglect regardless of age, gender reassignment, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity. 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. As members and workers of the Church, we are committed to:

- the care and nurture of all children and adults,
- the safeguarding and protection of all children and adults at risk,
- the establishment of a loving church environment which is safe and caring for all people and where the dignity of each person is respected,
- an informed vigilance about the dangers of all forms of abuse, harm and neglect within all aspects of work in the Church, and how to respond appropriately,
- ensuring everyone who engages with the life of the Church is responsible for keeping people safe,
- working together with voluntary/statutory agencies and other denominations and faith-based organisations.

We recognise that we all have a responsibility to help prevent any form of abuse and neglect of children and adults and to ensure the wellbeing and pastoral care of those who are, or may be, at risk.

We will prevent abuse related to extremism or radicalisation and put all suitable health and safety arrangements in place as well as safeguarding, first aid, fire safety and online safety policies that everyone understands.

We will create and maintain a safe and inclusive environment for all, especially children, young people and adults at risk, in which the dignity and rights of each person are respected.

We believe that domestic abuse in all its forms is unacceptable, inconsistent with a Christian way of living and it can affect both adults and children.

We will always acknowledge that the welfare of the child and adult at risk is paramount, and that the priority is always to act in their best interests, following legislation, statutory guidance and recognised good practice guidance to enable them to access support and protection.

We will support everyone to ensure that as a community of Christians we will all work within the agreed procedures of our safeguarding policy. The Safeguarding Co-ordinators (when available) are the persons to whom all concerns or allegations should be addressed for appropriate actions to be taken. In the absence of either of them, the Synod Safeguarding Officer should be contacted. Their contact details will be always available on our posters, websites, or in other communications with the public.

We will exercise proper care in the appointment and selection of trustees and those who will work with children or adults at risk within the Church, whether paid, volunteers, lay or ordained. We will ensure that trustees, staff and volunteers are suitable and legally able to act in their positions. We will use DBS checks as part of a wide range of checks on trustees, staff and volunteers to ensure that we have a broad and informed view to assist us in minimising the risk of abuse, harm or neglect.

P2 cont

Policy Statement (cont)

We will support, supervise, resource and train all those who undertake work with children and adults in need of protection.

We will respond without delay to every concern, incident or complaint which suggests that a child or adult has been harmed, or is at risk of harm, and cooperate with the Police, Synod Safeguarding Team and Children's and Adult Social Care Services in any investigation, while maintaining the confidentiality of any investigations to those directly involved.

We are committed to working with those who have suffered or suffer any form of abuse, offering appropriate pastoral support where possible as well as challenging any abuse of power, especially where it involves someone in a position of trust.

We will manage risks, and those who might pose a risk to the welfare of people and the life of the Church, offering support to those known to pose a risk to children and/or adults, including supervision, referral to the appropriate agencies, and implementation of safeguarding contracts, when appropriate.

We are committed to ensuring that any allegations, concerns and complaints about abuse or neglect are recorded accurately, reported promptly and shared safely within and outside of the denomination.

We will review our safeguarding policy, practices and procedures annually, considering lessons learned from safeguarding cases and changes in legislation, statutory guidance and good working practice.

We will ensure processes and practices in all aspects of safeguarding, including discipline, risk management, whistleblowing and bullying/harassment are in alignment with *Good Practice 6* – the United Reformed Church's policy and guidance in safeguarding children, young people and adults at risk.

Any local policy changes will be formally approved by the local church trustees.

P3 Online Safety Policy at Amersham Free Church

Technology is now a major part of daily life for most people and recent developments have enabled many new initiatives in the way churches use technology as part of their ministry. While this opens new and welcome opportunities to engage with people, we recognize there are also risks associated with this. We should therefore all pay attention to how we can safeguard children and adults at risk to help ensure their online safety.

This policy is based on the guidance provided in the URC Safeguarding - *Good Practice 6* which should be used alongside our Safeguarding Policy and our Data Protection Policy.

Aim and purpose of this policy

The aim of this policy is to safeguard children and adults at risk when we are ministering on behalf of the church through the internet, social media, or mobile devices, and to provide guidance on our approach to online safety.

Who this policy applies to:

- All those in the church working with children and adults at risk
- Those involved in managing IT systems within the church
- All those engaged in any form of online ministry, including group activities.

All those working with children and/or adults at risk will be given copies of the relevant *Codes of Conduct* which include guidance about working safely online.

Scope of the policy

The policy covers the following areas:

- IT systems and resources
- electronic communications and use of social media
- video conferencing
- livestreaming and use of recorded video
- appropriate use of images online
- responding to online safety concerns.

Definition of online abuse

Abuse that is facilitated through technology like computers, tablets, mobile phones and other internet-enabled devices. It can happen anywhere that allows online digital communication. Examples can include:

- bullying/cyberbullying
- sexting
- emotional abuse
- sexual abuse
- financial exploitation
- sexual exploitation
- scamming
- grooming and harassment.

It is possible that victims may not always understand that they are being abused in this way. The impact can be significant, however, particularly in the way it may create fear and isolation.

We will maintain and use our IT resources to support good safeguarding practice

This covers both the hardware and software used within the church, along with decisions about the use of particular apps, services or websites. This policy does not try to cover all aspects of IT use but highlights actions we will take to support safer practice.

This will include:

- reviewing and updating the security of our IT systems regularly
- risk assessing any emerging new technologies before they are used within the church
- installing filtering software on devices owned and used by the church as appropriate
- reminding staff and volunteers of the need to keep login and password details secure.

We will promote safe use of electronic communications and social media

This will include:

- using clear unambiguous language to reduce the risk of misinterpretation
- keeping copies of messages
- obtaining parental/carer consent for email or text contact with children
- using church accounts where possible instead of personal ones
- all social media interaction between workers (paid or voluntary) and children or adults at risk will be limited to church-administered groups
- all participants to be above the minimum age limit for the social media platform being used
- Paid staff and Volunteers will take care with their social media privacy settings to prevent participants seeing personal information which is not linked to communication within the group.

We will create safe online spaces when using video conferencing or video calls

We will follow the guidance outlined in *Good Practice 6* (section 3.11) regarding use of video calls.

One-to-one calls

One-to-one communication via video with a child or adult at risk is the equivalent of meeting that person in a room alone with no one around. We will put appropriate boundaries and safeguards in place, depending on the age or needs of the child or adult at risk, for example:

- have an additional adult in the room with the caller
- ask a parent or carer to be present with the child or adult at risk
- keep a record of when meetings take place, length of meetings, frequency.

Group video calls

We will take appropriate measure to ensure the safety of participants in our group activities via video call or video conferencing. This will include:

- communicating expectations around appropriate behavior to participants
- ensuring there are at least two adults on a call before a child or adult at risk joins
- using organisational profiles and devices wherever available rather than personal accounts
- not recording group calls unless there is a compelling reason to do so
- terminating a call if necessary (eg problematic behavior by uninvited visitors).

-
- **We will apply appropriate safeguards when livestreaming or using recorded video**

We will follow the guidance outlined in *Good Practice 6* (section 3.9) and regarding livestreaming and recordings. This will include:

- ensuring anyone appearing in livestream or recorded video has given appropriate consent
- ensuring people know if an event is being recorded and giving them an opportunity to move to the designated area where they will be out of camera shot
- using group shots of the congregation and not singling out any individual.

We will ensure appropriate use of images online or publications

We will follow the guidance outlined in *Good Practice 6* (section 3.8) regarding the use of images taken during church activities. In relation to online use of images, this includes:

- ensuring appropriate consent is obtained before posting any images online or in publications, such as church magazines
- ensuring that children or adults at risk cannot be individually identified by any personal details provided alongside the images
- discussion with parents and children about appropriate use of images eg where children may take pictures of each other during an activity.

We will respond appropriately and sensitively to all online safety concerns

In the event of concern that there may be an online/publication safety incident of any kind, we will follow the process set out in chapter 4 of *Good Practice 6* to respond to safeguarding concerns.

If anyone is in immediate danger, this will be reported to the police or other statutory services straightaway.

Other concerns will be reported to the Church Safeguarding Co-ordinators (CSC), who will seek advice on what action is needed. If the CSCs are unavailable, the matter will be reported to the Synod Safeguarding Officer (SSO).

We will provide support to those affected, seeking advice from the SSO or other specialist services as required.

P4. The Church Policy Statement on the recruitment of ex-offenders

Introduction

The DBS Code of Practice, published under section 122 of the Police Act 1997, makes it a requirement that DBS applicants who have a criminal record are treated fairly and are not discriminated against because of a conviction or other information revealed in a DBS check. The Code also obliges bodies that undertake checks to have a written policy on the recruitment of ex-offenders; a copy of which can be given to DBS applicants at the outset of the recruitment process. The sample policy statement below can be used or adapted for this purpose.

Policy statement

Amersham Free Church:

- complies fully with the DBS Code of Practice when assessing an applicant's suitability for positions within the church which are included in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order. We are committed to treating all applicants fairly and to not discriminate against any subject of a criminal record check based on convictions or other information revealed.

- will only request that an individual disclose details of convictions or cautions that we are legally entitled to know about. Where the position advertised is included in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exemptions) Order, a DBS certificate at either a basic, standard or enhanced level can legally be requested. Where a position falls within the legal definition of Regulated Activity, a check against the Barred Lists for Children and/or Adults will also be undertaken.

- will only ask potential candidates about convictions and cautions that are not protected in law. We actively promote equality of opportunity for all and encourage applications from a wide range of candidates, including those with criminal records and regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, responsibilities for defendants, age, physical/mental disability or offending background. We select all candidates for interview based on their skills, qualifications and experience.

- will only make an application for a criminal record check through the DBS service where the law indicates that this is proportionate and necessary to the position advertised, such as those roles which involve working with children and adults at risk in a regulated or unregulated activity. Where this is the case, application forms, job adverts and recruitment information will contain explicit reference to the fact that this position requires a criminal record check in the event that the applicant is offered the position.

At interview or during an appropriate discussion,

Amersham Free Church:

- will ensure that an open conversation takes place with the applicant regarding any offences or other information that may be relevant to the position. Failure of the applicant to share any information that is relevant to the position sought may result in the withdrawal of an offer of employment or voluntary position.

- ensures that all those who are involved with the recruitment process have been suitably trained to identify and assess the relevance and circumstances of offences.

- will also ensure that they have received appropriate training and guidance in the relevant legislation and understand the importance of confidentiality throughout the recruitment process.

- will discuss any matter revealed on a DBS certificate with the individual seeking the position before a decision is made whether to continue with the offer of employment. A risk assessment will be conducted with the applicant and only in cases where the disclosure impacts upon the applicant's ability to safely hold the offer of employment will it be withdrawn. This is provided that the information revealed has been brought to the Safeguarding Co-ordinators' attention prior to disclosure being received.

- makes every subject of a criminal record check submitted to DBS aware of the existence of the Code of Practice, and makes a copy available on request.

P6. Policy on the handling, use, retention and disposal of DBS Certificates

Introduction

All individuals or organisations using the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) to help assess the suitability of applicants for positions of trust and who are recipients of DBS certificate information must comply fully with the DBS Code of Practice. Amongst other things, this obliges them to have a written policy on the correct handling, use, storage, retention and disposal of DBS certificates and certificate information. As an organisation using the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checking service we have adopted the following policy.

General principles

Amersham Free Church complies fully with the DBS Code of Practice regarding the correct handling, use, storage, retention and disposal of certificates and certificate information. We also comply fully with our obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Data Protection Act 2018 and other relevant legislation pertaining to the safe handling, use, storage, retention and disposal of certificate information.

Storage and access

Certificate information is kept securely on the Church database and content on the management system, with access strictly controlled and limited to those who are entitled to see it as part of their duties.

Handling

In accordance with section 124 of the Police Act 1997, certificate information is only passed to those who are authorised to receive it in the course of their duties. We maintain a record of all those to whom certificates or certificate information has been revealed and it is a criminal offence to pass this information to anyone who is not entitled to receive it.

Usage

Certificate information is only used for the specific purpose for which it was requested and for which the applicant's full consent has been given.

Retention

Once a recruitment (or other relevant) decision has been made, we do not keep certificate information for any longer than is necessary. This retention will allow for the consideration and resolution of any disputes or complaints, or be for the purpose of completing safeguarding audits. Throughout this time, the usual conditions regarding the safe storage and strictly controlled access will prevail.

Safeguarding

Risk assessment recommendations and a safeguarding agreement / risk management plan arising in cases of a DBS disclosure with content will be retained in line with our record retention schedule.

Disposal

Once the retention period has elapsed, we will ensure that any DBS certificate information is immediately destroyed by secure means.

We will not ordinarily keep any photocopy or other image of the certificate or any copy or representation of the contents of a certificate unless for safeguarding purpose. However, notwithstanding the above, we may keep a record of the date of issue of a certificate, the name of the subject, the type of certificate requested, the position for which the certificate was requested, the unique reference number of the certificates and the details of the recruitment decision taken.

S1. The role of Church Safeguarding Coordinator(s) (CSCs)

Context

We believe that children and adults at risk deserve the best possible care that the Church can provide and that Amersham Free Church should be a safe place for everyone involved. We recognise and give thanks for the time and devotion given by anyone carrying out this role.

Purpose of the role

- To coordinate safeguarding policy and procedures in the church
- To be the first point of contact for safeguarding issues
- To be an advocate for good safeguarding practice in the church.

Responsibilities

- To coordinate safeguarding policy and procedures in the church
- To familiarise themselves with church policies and procedures and URC good practice guidance in safeguarding and to keep abreast of any changes and developments
- To ensure that church policies and procedures are reviewed annually, kept up to date, and are fit for purpose
- To ensure that Elders and others in the church understand church safeguarding policies and procedures, including URC guidance and Charity Commission responsibilities
- To collaborate with each other, the Ministers, and the Synod Safeguarding Officer on all matters around Safeguarding
- To act as the DBS verifiers
- To ensure safer recruitment practices are operated in the recruitment of all workers (both volunteers and paid) including, but not exclusively, ensuring that the relevant workers have up to date DBS checks.
- To follow the measures set out in the Hirer's agreement when any church premises are let to an external organisation, informal group or individual
- To be the first point of contact for safeguarding issues
- To be a named person that children / adults at risk, church members and outside agencies can talk to regarding any issue to do with safeguarding
- To be aware of the names and telephone numbers of appropriate departments and teams within Social Care and the Police in the event of a referral needing to be made
- To be aware of when to seek advice, and when it is necessary to inform the Police or statutory services of a concern or incident
- To take appropriate action in relation to any safeguarding concerns which arise within the church
- To ensure safe practice is in place for supporting people who may pose a risk to children and adults at risk at church
- To cooperate with statutory services and the Police in safeguarding investigations relating to people within the church
- To ensure that appropriate records are kept by the church, and that information in relation to safeguarding issues is handled confidentially and stored securely
- To inform the Synod Safeguarding Officer about any referrals made to the statutory authorities, or of any information received from the statutory authorities
- To report safeguarding information annually to the Eldership / Church Meeting and the Synod Safeguarding Officer, as part of the annual returns process, to enable them to monitor safeguarding in the Synod
- To be an advocate for good safeguarding practice in the church
- To promote sensitivity within the church towards all those affected by abuse
- To promote positive safeguarding practice and ensure procedures are adhered to
- To arrange and / or promote opportunities for training in safeguarding to any relevant members of the leadership team and all people involved in regulated activities with children or adults (including Ministers, staff and volunteers), as recommended by the Synod, and ensure that their training is renewed every three years
- To seek appropriate support and advice in carrying out this role (eg, from the SSO)
- To make arrangements for the Deputy CSC (or other suitable person if there is no deputy) to carry out this role when on leave, and to publicise who the substitute is and the dates of the alternative arrangements.

Requirements for the role

- To have knowledge of policy and practice for safeguarding children and / or adults at risk
- Good communication (written and oral) skills
- Be willing to attend appropriate safeguarding training / refresher training and keep updated on matters related to safeguarding
- Be willing to be easily contactable – and prepared to make contact details public to enable direct contact when needed.

S4 Signs of possible dementia/memory loss

For further information, please see Good Practice 6 (copy in the church office/online on URC website) section S4.

Any information or concerns shared with the Safeguarding Co-ordinators will be managed sensitively and we aim to encourage individuals, or their family, who may need support to seek medical assistance.

S5. Signs and symptoms of abuse

Signs and symptoms of abuse can be broadly grouped into three areas

- physical indicators
- behavioural indicators
- emotional indicators.

Some indicators may be common to different types of abuse, others may be more specifically linked to one particular kind of abuse. Observing any of the signs or symptoms does not necessarily mean that a person is being abused; there could be a perfectly ordinary explanation. 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.

As in Section 4.2 of Good Practice 6, abuse defined in statutory guidance or procedures is covered first here, followed by additional detail on some other safeguarding concerns which combine these different types of abuse.

1. Definitions used in statutory guidance or procedures

Children (under 18s)

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Neglect.

Adults (over 18s)

- Physical
- Sexual abuse
- Psychological abuse
- Neglect and acts of omission
- Financial or material abuse
- Domestic abuse
- Organisational abuse
- Self-neglect
- Modern slavery
- Discriminatory abuse.

2. Other types and examples of abuse

- Child sexual exploitation (CSE)
- Child criminal exploitation (CCE)
- Child-on-child abuse
- Domestic abuse experienced by children
- Child abuse linked to faith or belief
- Radicalisation
- Spiritual abuse
- Mate crime.

Definitions used in statutory guidance or procedures

Children (under 18s)

For children, there are four main types of abuse (taken from Keeping Children Safe in Education 2023, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018).

Physical abuse

Bumps and bruises don't always mean a child is being physically abused. However, signs of particular concern include:

- if a child regularly has injuries
- there is a pattern to the injuries
- the injury has not received medical attention or proper care
- the explanation given doesn't match the injuries.

What it includes	Signs you may see
• Hitting, slapping and beating • Shaking, pinching, throwing and pushing • Kicking, biting, burning, drowning and hair pulling • Squeezing, suffocating, poisoning • Parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child (or misuses medication) • Inappropriate use of restraint techniques or other physical sanctions • Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is also a form of physical abuse.	• Cuts, puncture wounds, open wounds, welts • Bruising and discolouration: a) particularly if there is a lot of bruising of different ages and in places not normally exposed to falls, rough games etc. b) in unusual places (e.g. the mouth), in unusual patterns (e.g. symmetrical) or in particular shapes (e.g. fingertip bruising or belt marks). • Black eyes, burns, broken bones, bite marks • Loss of hair, loss of weight, loss of appetite • Flinching away from others • Keeping fully covered, even in hot weather • Head injuries in babies and toddlers can be signs of abuse and visible signs may include: a) swelling, bruising, fractures b) being extremely sleepy or unconscious c) breathing problems, seizures, vomiting d) unusual behaviour, such as being irritable or not feeding properly.

Sexual

Knowing the signs of sexual abuse can help give a voice to children. Sometimes children won't understand that what's happening to them is wrong. Or they might be scared to speak out.

What it includes	Signs you may see
The activities may involve: • physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. • they may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. • sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. • sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.	• Avoiding being alone with or frightened of people or a person they know • Language or sexual behaviour you wouldn't expect them to know • Having nightmares or bed-wetting • Self-harm • Changes in eating patterns • Alcohol or drug misuse. If the abuse is online, a child might: • spend a lot more or a lot less time than usual online, texting, gaming or using social media • seem distant, upset or angry after using the internet or texting • be secretive about who they're talking to and what they're doing online or on their phone • have lots of new numbers, texts or email addresses on their phone, laptop or tablet. Children and young people might also drop hints and clues about the abuse.

Emotional

There might not be any obvious physical signs of emotional abuse and a child might not tell anyone what's happening until they reach a 'crisis point'. As children grow up, their emotions change and this may also make it difficult at times to tell if they're being emotionally abused.

What it includes	Signs you may see
• Conveying to a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person • Not giving the child opportunities to express their views • Deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate • Age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children • Overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning • Preventing the child participating in normal social interaction • Seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another • Serious bullying (including cyber bullying) • Causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger.	Children who are being emotionally abused might: • seem unconfident or lack self-assurance • struggle to control their emotions • have difficulty making or maintaining relationships • act in a way that's inappropriate for their age. Babies and pre-school children who are being emotionally abused or neglected might: • be overly-affectionate to strangers or people they don't know well • seem unconfident, wary or anxious • not have a close relationship or bond with their parent • be aggressive or cruel towards other children or animals. Older children might: • use language or know about things you wouldn't expect them to understand at their age • act in a way or know about things you wouldn't expect them to know for their age • have extreme outbursts • seem isolated from their parents • lack social skills • have few or no friends.

Neglect

Neglect can be difficult to spot but is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development.

Having one of the signs doesn't necessarily mean a child is being neglected. But if you notice multiple signs that last for a while, they might show there's a serious problem.

What it includes	Signs you may see
• Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to: • provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment) • protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger ensure their child is provided with education • ensure adequate supervision (e.g. by using of inadequate care-givers) • ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.	Poor appearance and hygiene: • being smelly or dirty • being hungry or not given money for food • having unwashed clothes or having the wrong clothing (such as no warm clothes in winter) • frequent and untreated nappy rash in infants. Health and development problems: • regular illness, infections or dental issues • missed medical appointments (eg for vaccinations) • poor language or social skills • tiredness • repeated accidental injuries (eg due to lack of supervision) • skin issues, such as sores, rashes, flea bites, scabies or ringworm. Housing and family issues: • living in an unsuitable home environment, such as having no heating • being left alone for a long time.

What it includes	Signs you may see
	Changes in behaviour: • becoming clingy • becoming aggressive • being withdrawn, depressed or anxious • changes in eating habits • displaying obsessive behaviour • finding it hard to concentrate or take part in activities • missing school • showing signs of self-harm • using drugs or alcohol.

Adults

For adults, Government guidance on the Care Act 2014 indicates ten main types of abuse.

Physical

Physical injuries don't always mean someone is being physically abused, but signs of particular concern include:

- the injuries are regular or recurring
- there is a pattern to the injuries
- the injury has not received medical attention or proper care
- the explanation given doesn't match the injuries.

What it includes	Signs you may see
• Assault, hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, hair-pulling, biting, pushing • Rough handling • Scalding and burning • Physical punishments • Inappropriate or unlawful use of restraint • Making someone purposefully uncomfortable (eg opening a window and removing blankets) • Involuntary isolation or confinement • Misuse of medication (eg over-sedation) • Forcible feeding or withholding food.	• Bruising, cuts, welts, burns and/or marks on the body or loss of hair in clumps, broken bones • Flinching away from others • Always covering up, even in warm weather • No explanation for injuries or inconsistency with the account of what happened • Injuries are inconsistent with the person's lifestyle • Frequent injuries or unexplained falls • Subdued or changed behaviour in the presence of a particular person • Signs of malnutrition • Failure to seek medical treatment or frequent changes of GP.

Sexual

What it includes	Signs you may see
• Rape • Indecent exposure • Sexual harassment • Inappropriate looking or touching • Sexual teasing or innuendo • Sexual photography or filming, • "Revenge porn" • Subjection to pornography or • Witnessing sexual acts • Sexual assault • Sexual acts to which the adult has not consented or was pressured into consenting.	• Excessive fear/apprehension of, or withdrawal from, relationships • Fear of receiving help with personal care • Reluctance to be alone with a particular person • Self-harming • Poor concentration, withdrawal • Sleep disturbance • The uncharacteristic use of explicit sexual language or significant changes in sexual behaviour or attitude • Bruising, particularly to the thighs, buttocks and upper arms and marks on the neck • Pregnancy in someone who is unable to consent to sexual intercourse.

Psychological

What it includes	Signs you may see
• Enforced social isolation – preventing someone accessing services, educational and social opportunities and seeing friends • Removing mobility or communication aids or intentionally leaving someone unattended when they need assistance • Preventing someone from meeting their religious and cultural needs • Preventing the expression of choice and opinion • Failure to respect privacy • Preventing stimulation, meaningful occupation or activities • Intimidation, coercion, harassment, use of threats, humiliation, bullying, swearing or verbal abuse • Addressing a person in a patronising or infantilising way • Threats of harm or abandonment • Cyber bullying.	• An air of silence when a particular person is present • Withdrawal or change in the psychological state of the person • Insomnia • Low self-esteem • Uncooperative and aggressive behaviour • A change of appetite, weight loss/gain • Signs of distress: tearfulness, anger • Apparent false claims, by someone involved with the person, to attract unnecessary treatment.

Neglect and acts of omission

What it includes	Signs you may see
• Ignoring medical, emotional or physical care needs • Failure to provide access to appropriate health, care and support or educational services • The withholding of the necessities of life, such as medication, adequate nutrition and heating.	• An out of character failure to engage in social interaction and activities • Inconsistent or reluctant contact with support, such as medical and social care organisations • Poor personal hygiene • Inappropriate or inadequate clothing • Poor state of home environment • Malnutrition or unexplained weight loss • Untreated injuries and medical problems • Accumulation of untaken medication.

Financial or material abuse

What it includes	Signs you may see
• Theft of money or possessions • Fraud, scamming • Preventing a person from accessing their own money, benefits or assets • Employees taking a loan from a person using the service • Undue pressure, duress, threat or undue influence put on the person in connection with loans, wills, property, inheritance or financial transactions • Arranging less care than is needed to save money to maximise inheritance • Denying assistance to manage/monitor financial affairs • Denying assistance to access benefits • Misuse of personal allowance in a care home • Misuse of benefits or direct payments in a family home • Someone moving into a person's home and living rent free without agreement or under duress • False representation, using another person's bank account, cards or documents • Exploitation of a person's money or assets, eg unauthorised use of a car • Misuse of a power of attorney, deputy, appointeeship or other legal authority • Rogue trading – eg unnecessary or overpriced property repairs and failure to carry out agreed repairs or poor workmanship.	• Missing personal possessions • Unexplained lack of money or inability to maintain lifestyle • Unexplained withdrawal of funds from accounts • Power of attorney or lasting power of attorney (LPA) being obtained after the person has ceased to have mental capacity • Failure to register an LPA after the person has ceased to have mental capacity to manage their finances, so that it appears that they are continuing to do so • The person allocated to manage financial affairs is evasive or uncooperative • The family or others show unusual interest in the assets of the person • Signs of financial hardship in cases where the person's financial affairs are being managed by a court appointed deputy, attorney or LPA • Recent changes in deeds or title to property • Rent arrears and eviction notices • A lack of clear financial accounts held by a care home or service • Failure to provide receipts for shopping or other financial transactions carried out on behalf of the person • Disparity between the person's living conditions and their financial resources, eg insufficient food in the house • Unnecessary property repairs.

Domestic abuse

What it includes	Signs you may see
• Any incident of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality • It includes psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse, as well as 'honour'-based violence and forced marriage • It can happen inside and outside the home over the phone, on the internet and on social networking sites. It can continue even after a relationship has ended • Both men and women can be abused or be abusers.	Physical signs: • visible bruising or single or repeated injury with unlikely explanations • change in the pattern or amount of make-up used • change in the manner of dress: for example, clothes that do not suit the climate which may be used to hide injuries • substance use/misuse • fatigue/sleep disorders. Changes in behaviour or demeanour: • conduct out of character with previous employment history or social engagement • changes in behaviour: for example, becoming very quiet, anxious, frightened, tearful, aggressive, distracted, depressed • isolating themselves from colleagues or friends • obsession with timekeeping • secretive regarding home life • worried about leaving children at home. Productivity signs: • change in the person's working patterns: for example, frequent absence, lateness or needing to leave work early • reduced quality and quantity of work: missing deadlines, a drop in usual performance standards

What it includes	Signs you may see
	• change in the use of the phone/email: for example, a large number of personal calls/ texts, avoiding calls or a strong reaction to calls/texts/emails • spending an increased amount of hours at work for no reason. Other signs: • partner or ex-partner following employee in or around the workplace or Church setting or repeatedly turning up at the workplace or Church setting • partner or ex-partner exerting unusual amount of control or demands over work schedule or social activities • flowers/gifts sent to employee for no apparent reason • isolation from family/friends.

Organisational abuse

What it includes	Signs you may see
• Including neglect and poor care practice within an institution or specific care setting such as a hospital or care home, or in relation to care provided in one's own home • Insufficient staff or high turnover resulting in poor quality care • Abusive and disrespectful attitudes towards people using the service • Failure to manage residents with abusive behaviour • Not offering choice or promoting independence • Inappropriate use of restraints • Misuse of medication.	• An unsafe, unhygienic or overcrowded environmet • A strict or inflexible routine • Lack of adequate procedures, poor record-keeping or missing documents • Lack of privacy, dignity, and respect for people as individuals • Withdrawing people from community or family contacts • No choice offered with food, drink, dress or activities • No respect or provisions for religion, belief, or cultural backgrounds • Treating adults like children, including arbitrary decision-making.

Self-neglect

What it includes	Signs you may see
• Lack of self-care to an extent that it threatens personal health and safety • Neglecting to care for one's personal hygiene, health or surroundings • Inability to avoid self-harm • Failure to seek help or access services to meet health and social care needs • Inability or unwillingness to manage one's personal affairs.	• Very poor personal hygiene, wearing the same clothes every day • Unkempt appearance • Lack of essential food, clothing or shelter/ heating • Malnutrition and/or dehydration • Living in squalid or unsanitary conditions. Neglecting household maintenance • Hoarding • Collecting a large number of animals in inappropriate conditions • Non-compliance with health or care services, Inability or unwillingness to take medication or treat illness or injury.

Modern slavery

What it includes	Signs you may see
• Human trafficking, where people are moved from one place to another into a situation of exploitation, using deception, coercion and violence • Forced labour • Domestic servitude • Criminal exploitation – pick pocketing, shoplifting, drug trafficking • Sexual exploitation • Organ removal, forced begging, forced marriage and illegal adoption • Removal of travel and identity documents.	• Shows signs of physical or psychological abuse and untreated injuries • Looks malnourished or unkempt, or appears withdrawn and neglected • Seems under the control or influence of others • Wears the same clothes every day • Wears no safety equipment even if their work requires it • Living in dirty, cramped or overcrowded accommodation • Living and working at the same address • Appears unfamiliar with their neighbourhood or where they work • Rarely allowed to travel on their own • Collected and dropped off on a regular basis early in the morning or late at night in a crowded minibus with other workers • Has no control of their identification documents such as their passport • Reluctant to seek help and avoids eye contact • Appears frightened or hesitant to talk to strangers • Fear of police, don't know who to trust or where to get help • Afraid of deportation, and risk of violence to them or their family.

Discriminatory abuse

What it includes	Signs you may see
• Unequal treatment based on age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex or sexual orientation (known as 'protected characteristics' under the Equality Act 2010) • Verbal abuse, derogatory remarks or inappropriate use of language related to a protected characteristic • Denying access to communication aids, not allowing access to an interpreter, signer or lip-reader • Harassment or deliberate exclusion on the grounds of a protected characteristic • Denying basic rights to healthcare, education, employment and criminal justice relating to a protected characteristic • Substandard service provision relating to a protected characteristic.	• Overhearing harassment or abuse • A person appearing to be excluded from activities or groups for discriminatory reasons • The support on offer does not take account of the person's individual needs in terms of a protected characteristic • The person appears withdrawn and isolated • Expressions of anger, frustration, fear or anxiety.

2. Other types of abuse

In addition, there are other types of harm that may not be specifically mentioned in legislation or statutory guidance, but which are relevant for safeguarding children and adults at risk. These often combine elements of the different types of abuse listed above.

Child sexual exploitation

What it includes	Signs you may see
• This occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity: a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. • The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual • Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through use of technology. Exploitation can take place between a child and an adult as well as between one child and another • When a child is sexually exploited online they might be persuaded or forced to: send or post sexually explicit images of themselves film or stream sexual activities, have sexual conversations. Once an abuser has images, video or copies of conversations, they might use threats and blackmail to force a young person to take part in other sexual activity. They may also share the images and videos with others or circulate them online. Gangs use sexual exploitation: • to exert power and control • for initiation • to use sexual violence as a weapon.	Sexual exploitation can be difficult to spot and sometimes mistaken for "normal" teenage or pre-teen behaviour. Signs include: • signs of sexual abuse and grooming • unhealthy or inappropriate sexual behaviour • being frightened of some people, places or situations • being secretive • sharp changes in mood or character • having money/things they can't/won't explain • physical signs of abuse, like bruises • alcohol or drug misuse • sexually transmitted infections • pregnancy. Other signs may include: • having an older boyfriend or girlfriend • staying out late or overnight • having a new group of friends • missing from home or stopping going to school or college • hanging out with older people, other vulnerable people or in antisocial groups. • involved in a gang • involved in criminal activities like selling drugs or shoplifting.

Child criminal exploitation

What it includes	Signs you may see
• This occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity: a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or c) through violence or the threat of violence. • Victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual • Child criminal exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology • It also includes 'County Lines', a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of 'deal lines'. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money, and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.	• Frequently absent from and doing badly in school • Going missing from home, staying out late and travelling for unexplained reasons • In a relationship or hanging out with someone older than them • Being angry, aggressive or violent. Being isolated or withdrawn • Having unexplained money and buying new things • Wearing clothes or accessories in gang colours or getting tattoos • Using new slang words • Spending more time on social media and being secretive about time online • Making more calls or sending more texts, possibly on a new phone or phones • Self-harming and feeling emotionally unwell • Taking drugs and abusing alcohol • Committing petty crimes like shop lifting or vandalism • Unexplained injuries and refusing to seek medical help • Carrying weapons or having a dangerous breed of dog.

Child on child/peer on peer abuse

What it includes	Signs you may see
• This can include physical, sexual, emotional (including coercive control) or financial abuse directed at a child by another child. The signs and symptoms of these are described in the relevant sections above • It can also include bullying which is intentional behaviour to hurt someone. This includes name calling, hitting, spreading rumours, threatening or undermining someone. It can happen anywhere – at school, at home, online, at work or in church. Cyberbullying can include: • sending threatening or abusive text messages • creating and sharing embarrassing images or videos • trolling – the sending of menacing or upsetting messages on social networks, chat rooms or online games • shaming someone online • encouraging someone to self-harm • revenge porn.	• Being afraid to go to school or youth groups (or work or church) • Being mysteriously 'ill' each morning, or skipping school/youth group • Being nervous, losing confidence, or becoming distressed and withdrawn • Problems with eating or sleeping • Belongings getting 'lost' or damaged • Spending a lot more or a lot less time than usual online, texting, gaming or using social media • Seem distant, upset or angry after using the internet or texting • Being secretive about who they're talking to and what they're doing online or on their mobile phone • Physical injuries, such as unexplained bruises • Not doing as well at school • Asking for, or stealing, money (to give to whoever's bullying them) • Bullying others.

Domestic abuse experienced by children

What it includes	Signs you may see
• The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 now recognises that children are victims of domestic abuse as well as their parents. This can occur: • due to witnessing domestic abuse between family members • for 16-17 year olds, within their own intimate relationships.	It may be harder to detect in children than adults, but signs you might see include: • aggression or bullying • anti-social behaviour • anxiety, depression or suicidal thoughts • attention seeking • bed-wetting, nightmares or insomnia • constant or regular sickness, like colds, headaches and mouth ulcers • drug or alcohol use • eating disorders • problems in school or trouble learning • withdrawal.

Child abuse linked to faith or belief

What it includes	Signs you may see
This can include: • abuse as a result of a child being accused of being a 'witch' • abuse as a result of a child being accused of being possessed by 'evil spirits' • ritualistic abuse which is prolonged sexual, physical and psychological abuse • satanic abuse which is carried out in the name of 'satan' and may have links to cults • any other harmful practice linked to a belief or faith. A range of factors can contribute to the abuse of a child for reasons of faith or belief, such as: • belief in evil spirits that can 'possess' children is often accompanied by a belief that a possessed child can 'infect' others • A child could be singled out as the cause of misfortune within the home, such as financial difficulties, divorce, infidelity, illness or death • Sometimes bad behaviour is attributed to spiritual forces, or a child could be singled out for having a physical difference or disability • If a child has a particular skill or talent, this can sometimes be rationalised as the result of possession or witchcraft.	• Physical injuries, such as bruises or burns (including historical injuries/scaring) • A child reporting that they are or have been accused of being 'evil', and/or that they are having the 'devil beaten out of them' • The child or family may use words such as 'kindoki', 'djin', 'juju' or 'voodoo' – all of which refer to spiritual beliefs • A child becoming noticeably confused, withdrawn, disorientated or isolated and appearing alone amongst other children • A child's personal care deteriorating (eg rapid loss of weight, being hungry, turning up to school without food or lunch money, being unkempt with dirty clothes) • The child's parent or carer does not have a close bond with the child • A child's attendance at school or college becomes irregular or there is a deterioration in a child's performance • A child is taken out of a school altogether without another school place having been arranged • Wearing unusual jewellery/items or in possession of strange ornaments/scripts.

Radicalisation

What it includes	Signs you may see
• Religious extremism • Political extremism (including far-right and far-left groups) • Single issue extremism • Other eg Incel ideology is recognised as an extremist ideology by the Metropolitan Police. Those most at risk of radicalisation may have low self-esteem, or be victims of bullying or discrimination. Extremists might target them and tell them they can be part of something special. Some of the causes that lead to an individual becoming radicalised are no different to other factors that can lead vulnerable individuals towards concerning activity such as substance misuse, child sexual exploitation, or gangs. Other factors may include: • the need for belonging • looking for a cause or reward • isolation • a sense of injustice or grievance • access to extremist material online • a desire for power, respect or status.	• Isolating themselves from family and friends • Talking as if from a scripted speech • Unwillingness or inability to discuss their views • A sudden disrespectful attitude towards others • Increased levels of anger • Increased secretiveness, especially around internet use • Changes in mood, patterns of behaviour or secretive behaviour • Possession of violent extremist literature or use of inappropriate language/speech • The expression of extremist views or sympathy to their causes • Seeking to engage or recruit others to extremist ideologies, extreme groups, literature, online social media groups • Preaching or imposing their views on others • Change in language or use of words • Fixation on a new subject or person.

Spiritual abuse

What it includes	Signs you may see
Spiritual abuse is a form of emotional and psychological abuse. It is characterised by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour in a religious context. Spiritual abuse can have a deeply damaging impact on those who experience it and can be experienced in a variety of different relationships. This abuse may include: • manipulation and exploitation • enforced accountability • requirements for secrecy and silence • coercion to conform, for example, seeking to enforce rather than encourage behavioural changes; failing to allow an individual autonomy to make their own choices • exercising control through using sacred texts or teaching to coerce behaviour • requirement of obedience to the abuser • the suggestion that the abuser has a 'divine' position • isolation as a means of punishment • superiority and elitism.	• Use of scripture to justify abusive behaviour • Use of scripture to manipulate or force a person into acts they would not wish to consent to • A warning sign of spiritual abuse can be exercising control through invoking fear of spiritual consequences for disobedience. The issue is not the discussion of spiritual consequences as provided in the Bible, but the exercise of control over another person through instrumentalising their fear • Exercising control through the suggestion that obedience to the abuser is equivalent to obedience to God • Emotional manipulation in the guise of righteousness • Being manipulated or feeling pressured into service or conformity • Feeling unable to say no to increasing demands for time, service and obedience • Pressure to conform to expectations and believe exactly the same as others in the church.

Mate crime

What it includes	Signs you may see
This can include financial, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Those who are more vulnerable to Mate Crime include people: • with a learning disability • experiencing mental health issues • with no close family or friends • with a physical disability • with verbal communication constraints • who are isolated from the community • who have low self-worth or esteem. Mate Crime: • starts with people saying they are their target's friend • does not start with bullying but can become bullying • often happens in private where it is not seen by others.	• Changes in routine, behaviour, appearance, finances or household (eg new people visiting or staying over, lots of new 'friends', lots more noise or rubbish than there normally is) • Unexplained injuries • Sudden sexualised behaviour • Losing weight/gaining weight • A 'friend' who does not respect them, bullies or undermines the person • Bills not being paid, suddenly short of money, losing possessions or changing their will • 'Doing what they are told' by a 'friend' • Showing signs of mental ill health • Not being with usual networks of friends/ family or missing regular activities • Goods or packages arriving at a person's house (then collected by someone else soon after) • People coming around when benefits are paid, taking their target out to spend their money • Being secretive • Alcohol/drug use.

F1 Safeguarding Concern Form

The United Reformed Church **Safeguarding Concern Form**

If you have immediate concerns about someone's safety, please contact the police or your Local Authority Children or Adult Social Care Services (England) or your Local Safeguarding Board (Wales).

- Please fill in this form with the information available within 24 hours after becoming aware of a safeguarding concern and send it to your Synod Safeguarding Officer (SSO).
- Please provide as much detail as you can but don't worry if you can't complete all sections.

It is more important to send the form promptly to the SSO who will then follow it up and obtain more information.

Church name: ***Synod:***

1. What the concern is about

Does the concern relate to: (tick any that apply)

- ☐ Children
- ☐ Adult
- ☐ Adults and children
- ☐ Current event
- ☐ Past event

2. Type of concern

If you feel able, please indicate which of these you think apply:

- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Spiritual abuse
- ☐ Child sexual exploitation
- ☐ Adult sexual exploitation
- ☐ Radicalisation
- ☐ Mental Capacity Act
- Other
- ☐ Physical abuse
- ☐ Sexual abuse
- ☐ Emotional abuse
- ☐ Neglect
- ☐ Domestic abuse
- ☐ Self-harm
- ☐ Online abuse
- ☐ Self-neglect
- ☐ Financial abuse
- ☐ Modern slavery
- ☐ Institutional abuse
- ☐ Discriminatory abuse

Who is involved

Details of person suspected of causing harm/presenting a risk/causing concern:

Name:

Contact details (if available):

Other relevant information about them:

If there are specific individuals who have been harmed / are at risk of harm, give details: Name, age, where they live:

Details of other significant people involved (eg family members, carers)

3. What has happened

Please tell us what you are worried about, what happened, when and where it happened:

How did the information come to light?
For example, something you saw or heard, victim disclosure, information from other 42rganization:

If the events happened in the past, do you think there is an ongoing risk to anyone now?

☐ Y ☐ N

If, yes, please give details:

4. Who else knows about the concern

Have any statutory services or other organisations been informed of these concerns?
If yes, please give names and contact details if possible:

Are there other people in the church/family/wider community who know about it?

5. Consent for information to be reported

For children:
Have parents/carers/guardians given consent for this information to be reported?

☐ Y ☐ N

If not, reason for no consent:

For adults:
Has the individual given consent for this information to be reported?
☐ Y ☐ N
If not, reason for no consent:

6. Any other relevant information

Anything else you think it would be helpful to explain about this situation:

7. Your details

Name: *Church role:*

Signature: *Date:*

Email address: *Phone number:*

Safeguarding Office, The United Reformed Church, 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT

C1. Code of conduct for working with children

All those working with children in the church (in either paid or voluntary roles) should agree to the following code of conduct. The word 'child' refers to all those under the age of 18.

Training, policies and procedures

- Attend all necessary training which helps to support you in your role
- Have a good awareness of, and comply with, Amersham Freen Church policies, procedures and guidance
- Refresh all necessary safeguarding training at least every three years
- Be aware of different types of abuse and the key signs and symptoms of abuse.

Safer ways of working

- Do not spend time alone with children out of sight of other people
- Be aware that it is illegal for an adult in a position of trust to engage in any sexual activity with a 16 or 17 year-old
- Use of physical contact/touch should be: only in public; appropriate to the situation and to the age, gender and culture of the child; in response to the needs of the child, not the adult.

Respectful and inclusive working

- Respect and promote the rights of children to make their own decisions and choices
- Encourage respect for difference, diversity, beliefs and culture
- Make all reasonable adjustments for children with disabilities and additional needs.

Managing behaviour

- Encourage everyone to follow any ground rules and apply sanctions consistently
- Don't show favouritism or encourage excessive attention from a particular child
- Refer to a more experienced or senior worker if a child does not respond to your instructions despite encouragement and warning.

Photos and videos

- All images should be appropriate and, beyond first names, not reveal any personal information about children if uploaded to the Internet. Images should only be uploaded with permission from the parent/carer, as well as the child (for those old enough/able to give their consent)
- Avoid taking images on personal devices. If this is necessary in exceptional circumstances, it should be agreed in advance or reported promptly to the Church Safeguarding Coordinators
- Images of children should be stored securely on the church computer, never on personal devices, including memory sticks.

Reporting concerns

- Know who the Church Safeguarding Coordinators (CSCs) are and how to contact them
- Tell the CSCs if you have any concerns about a child's welfare
- Do not promise to keep anything a secret; if a child is being harmed, or is at risk of harm, you will need to share that information but only on a need-to-know basis.

Working with children online

Make sure that any electronic communication is done with parental consent and is transparent, accountable, recorded and adheres to safeguarding policies.

Approval/consent

- Ensure that all types of online communication and activity you engage with have been formally approved by Eldership
- Inform your line manager or point of contact of your intention to communicate online with families or young people and keep a record of times and dates when you do this
- Ensure that you have parental consent for every type of online communication and activity you engage with – if need be, issue multiple consent forms (as for other activities and events). If signed consent forms are difficult to obtain, confirm emailed consent by phone/video call and keep a register of consent given (when, by whom, for what).

How to engage online

- Ensure that any communication online is done through a church account and do not engage with children or young people through your personal social media or mobile account – this may require setting up an extra account for that purpose
- Ensure, where possible, parents or guardians are present in the building or other workers are aware when children are communicating with you via social media. Communication with a child via social media should only ever take place when their parent or guardian and other adult workers are aware of these online interactions
- Where possible, ensure that another adult is present in the room with you if communicating 1:1 via social media with a child or young person, or ensure that a second leader is present online and communicate in a group chat environment
- Do not use private messaging
  Tell the CSCs of any attempt by children or young people to contact you through your personal accounts and profiles, and block any further contact.

Use of content generated online

- Ensure any images or videos from online engagement are stored in the safe place designated by the church and not on your personal accounts or equipment
- Ensure you have clear parental and participant consent (for older children) before sharing any content from online engagement more widely, and only use it in the ways agreed, in line with URC good practice guidelines.

I agree to abide by the above code of conduct while working with children and young people. On behalf of:

Amersham Free Church

Name of Volunteer:.....

Signed: ..... Date: .....

C2. Code of conduct for working with adults

This code describes the standards of conduct expected of all those working with adults, including adults at risk (p3 provides definitions of 'adults at risk'). It sets out general principles for good practice but cannot cover every type of activity or situation. Further details on specific issues can be found in Good Practice 6 and the accompanying resources.

Training, policies and procedures

- Attend all necessary training which helps to support you in your role
- Have a good awareness of, and comply with, Amersham Free Church policies, procedures and guidance
- Refresh all necessary safeguarding training at least every three years
- Be aware of different types of abuse and the key signs and symptoms of abuse
- Be familiar with your church safeguarding policy and know who to raise concerns with.

Promote the privacy, dignity, rights and wellbeing of people

- Always protect the rights of people and treat them with dignity, respect and compassion
- Ensure that an adult at risk is not treated, without justification, any less favourably than other people would be treated in a comparable situation
- Put people's needs, views and wishes first and ensure they participate as fully as possible in decisions being made, helping them control and choose the help they receive
- Always gain consent before providing help and support. You must respect a person's right to refuse if they can do so, but also report any concerns if you feel that someone does not have the capacity to consent
- Promote people's independence, while helping them maintain existing family and social contacts
- For home visits, follow the guidance in Good Practice 6.

Uphold and promote equality, diversity and inclusion

Treat all adults equally and inclusively and do not discriminate on grounds of age, gender reassignment, ethnicity, race, religion/belief, cultural background, sexual orientation or disability.

Effective communication

- Make efforts to assist and facilitate communication, using whatever method is appropriate to the needs of the individual
- Always explain and discuss any help and support you are offering with the person
- Communicate respectfully with people in an open, accurate, effective and straightforward way
- Maintain clear and accurate records of any help and support the church provides.

Respect people's right to confidentiality

- Treat all information about people you are working with, and their family or carers where applicable, as confidential
- Only discuss or disclose information in accordance with legislation and Amersham Free Church policy, and seek advice from your Church Safeguarding Officers about information sharing.

Online engagement

- Ensure you are familiar with your church guidelines are recorded here
- Apply the principles of respect, inclusion, clear communication and confidentiality to online work as you would with in-person interaction
- When engaging online with adults at risk, additional care should be taken, for example:
- Ensure another adult is present, either with you or the other person
- Use a work or church account rather than a personal one.

Physical contact/touch

- Physical contact should be appropriate to the situation and the age, gender, culture of the other person
- Physical contact should be in response to the needs of the other person, not the wishes of the worker.

Financial matters

- Do not accept offers of loans, gifts or benefits from anyone you are supporting or anyone close to them (unless to do so would cause serious offence, in which case it should be declared to someone at church, eg treasurer or elder)
- Report any concerns about adults who might be subject to financial abuse to the Church Safeguarding Coordinators.

Challenging inappropriate behaviour

- Challenge and report dangerous, abusive, discriminatory or exploitative behaviour
- Tell your leader/supervisor or person in charge of safeguarding if you are concerned that another worker is acting outside of this code of conduct.

Feedback and complaints

- Share any feedback received with your leader/supervisor/colleagues to promote learning and continued development of good practice
- Refer any complaints to your leaders/supervisor/elders as appropriate.

I agree to abide by the above code of conduct while working with adults, including adults at risk. On behalf of:

Amersham Free Church

Name of Volunteer: :.....

Signed: ..... Date: .....

Adults at risk

Safeguarding adults at risk means protecting an adult's right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect.

There is specific legislation for England, Wales and Scotland which reflects common themes.

Key principles:

- Adults are empowered to have a voice
- Prevention and early intervention
- Adults are supported with an interest in their wellbeing
- Working in partnership is encouraged

Defining 'adults at risk'

In England, the Care Act 2014 states that safeguarding duties apply to an adult who:

- has care and support needs (whether or not the adult is being provided any services from the local authority or other statutory body to meet their needs) and;
- is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect; and
- as a result of those care and support needs is unable to protect themselves from either the risk of, or the experience of, abuse or neglect.

SR Safer Recruitment

At Amersham Free Church, the Elders use their judgement in promoting safer recruiting for various roles. This includes safer election for Elders. Elders are called into ministry by the Church Meeting. The Church 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:

- undertake a suitable induction training programme
- be given a copy of URC Guidelines for the Conduct and Behaviour of Elders
- be given a copy of the church's safeguarding policy with knowledge of how to report concerns
- apply for relevant DBS Checks
- sign a self-declaration form
- attend training within six months of ordination and induction

G5 Responding to Allegations of Bullying and Harassment

Bullying and harassment

1. Introduction

This guidance has been written in consultation with the URC Equalities Committee.

The Amersham Free 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. These guidelines are offered to enable the parties concerned to respond appropriately.

Conflict is a reality in every human organisation. It can be positive when it presses us to confront difficult issues and disagreements that we might prefer to avoid. It can be creative. However, abuse against individuals or groups within the church is unacceptable.

ACAS provide information for employees and employers on dealing with bullying and harassment which can be downloaded from: **www.acas.org.uk/discrimination-and-bullying**

2. Definitions

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.

Harassment of a sexual nature is one of the most common forms of harassment and, along with harassment related to any of the protected characteristics listed here, is outlawed by the Equality Act 2010.

- Age
- Sex
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation.

Further details on how these characteristics are defined can be found at:

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/4

There is no legal definition, in the same way, of bullying. However, it is usually 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.***

Most people use the terms interchangeably and it is not always easy to distinguish between the two.

Bullying is persistent. It exploits imbalances of power, as between stronger and weaker children in a playground – or between a church treasurer and a minister claiming expenses. It includes online and text/telephone bullying. Section 3 below provides a list of behaviours which can legitimately be regarded as bullying, and these may be helpful to an individual seeking confirmation that the treatment s/he has been receiving does indeed constitute bullying.

Ministers are sometimes the targets of bullying. They can also be bullies themselves. Elders have a duty of care to both ministers and church members.

Churches may unwittingly bully a minister or member. There may be a situation where one person is singled out for public criticism, as in the case of a fabric committee convener, organist or youth leader being "reviewed" by an elders or church meeting. Individuals may find themselves isolated because they have expressed an unpopular opinion. Where a church is in pain it will sometimes look for a scapegoat and bullying becomes the oppressive tool.

Churches can also be the victims of a bully. It is not uncommon for someone with an aggressive personality to intimidate an entire congregation.

Cases of bullying and harassment create safeguarding concerns about emotional (and often discriminatory) abuse for adults as well as children. *Good Practice 6* (the URC's safeguarding handbook) recognises a broad spectrum of situations that might affect any child or adult who, due to disability, mental function, age, or illness or traumatic circumstances, may not be able to take care or protect themselves against the risk of significant harm, abuse, bullying, harassment, mistreatment or exploitation.

In the context of the Church there is accountability and mutual responsibility for leadership, especially in the Elders' Meeting. This means that Ministers and Church officers should expect healthy debate and sometimes correction about the way they function. Bullying only starts when that proper discussion gets seriously out of hand.

3. Examples of bullying/harassing behaviour

This list of behaviours is not exhaustive but gives a clear indication of the sorts of actions that constitute bullying or harassment:

- removing areas of responsibility without discussion or notice
- isolating someone or deliberately ignoring or excluding them from activities
- consistently attacking someone's professional or personal standing
- setting out to make someone appear incompetent
- persistently picking on someone in front of others
- deliberate sabotage of work or actions
- deliberately withholding information or providing incorrect information
- overloading with work/reducing deadlines without paying attention to any objections
- displays of offensive material
- use of e-mails to reprimand, insult or otherwise inform someone of their apparent failing, either to the individual or to third parties
- cyber bullying including on social media
- repeatedly shouting or swearing in public or in private
- spreading malicious rumours to third parties
- public humiliation by constant innuendo, belittling and 'putting down'
- personal insults and name-calling
- aggressive gestures, verbal threats and intimidation
- persistent threats about security
- making false accusations
- aggressive bodily posture or physical contact
- talking/shouting directly into someone's face
- direct physical intimidation, violence or assault.

Bullying and harassment are not necessarily face to face. They may also occur over the phone, in written communication including email and texts and through social media.

4. Theological reflection

Every person is made in the image of God and reverence should undergird all our relationships. This is an easy thing to say but a lifelong challenge to live. The very fact of our diversity puts us at odds with one another: this has been the human experience from Cain and Abel to the present day.

The domination of the weak by the strong is a dynamic built into the natural world of which we are a part. But we believe that we are called to a better way. In Christ we see a God for whom no one is expendable. Indeed, it is precisely in "the least of these" that we are invited to encounter Christ in our own lives. To follow Christ is to treat each person with respect and to negotiate disagreements honourably.

This challenge is not merely a matter of individual discipleship. It is also the basis for a calling which rests upon the church as a community seeking to follow Jesus' command "Love one another as I have loved you". The church must constantly strive to reflect the highest standards in personal and corporate behaviour.

5. Consequences of harassment and bullying

A person who is harassed or bullied may experience any number of stress responses: tears, anxiety, low morale, vulnerability, lack of confidence, anger, shame or depression. S/he may want to withdraw in self-protection. S/he may also find it impossible to pray, with a resulting crisis of faith. Destructive behaviours may develop: a victim-like refusal to engage, a loss of sensitivity to others, aggressiveness, self-harming or alcohol or drug misuse, to name a few. There may be physical symptoms such as asthma, hypertension, sleeping or eating disorders, sexual dysfunction or migraine.

Congregations that are bullied may develop a bullying culture with "no-go areas" to avoid discussion of painful issues. They may allow destructive behaviour to continue because they do not have the strength to confront it. A minister or member may find him/herself continually rushing around soothing ruffled feathers and persuading others not to resign in the face of behaviour which goes unchallenged. Where such dynamics operate, church meetings cannot do their work, and worship may begin to feel hollow. The church may also acquire a negative reputation in the community.

These effects may be serious and long-lasting. It is essential that cries for help be taken seriously. It is also important to recognise that a person who is the victim of bullying may be reluctant to seek help, either because his/her confidence has been undermined, because s/he feels ashamed or responsible, or because s/he believes that objecting to inappropriate behaviour will cause unacceptable disruption to important relationships. In such cases it may fall to a third party, whether an elder, another minister, a friend, etc. to call the attention of the wider church to what is happening.

In the Amersham Free Church there are distinctions between those who are subject to grievance and disciplinary procedures and those who are not, and this has consequences in dealing with bullying.

6. Prevention

Identifying bullying is not always easy, but the best prevention is the church's determination not to tolerate unacceptable behaviour. While all of us have bad days and say or do things that we later regret, a healthy community will be a place where apologies are offered, and forgiveness is expressed. However, these are difficult issues and apologies may not bring peace to either party, without support to discuss the pain experienced and space to work through the conflict constructively.

The Church has structures in place which offer the foundation for good relationships and mutual understanding:

- Separate Guidelines on Conduct and Behaviour for Ministers of Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers and Elders
- Role descriptions for ministers and other leaders through LMMR – the Local Mission and Ministry Review – so that expectations are clear
- Terms of settlement for ministers, which should be explicit on such matters as holiday entitlement, working hours and claimable expenses

Given that money and conflicting role expectations, as well as power and position, can be frequent triggers for bullying behaviour, clarity on these matters provides a framework for good relationships. Not everyone is covered by these guidelines, so it is helpful to remind everybody that treating others with respect and dignity is an essential part of life in church.

Ministers should take responsibility to ensure that they have the pastoral support they need. It is not realistic for the Synod Moderator to be the sole provider of support. Ministry is demanding, particularly in a time of change and uncertainty, and it is inevitable that ministers will sometimes find themselves at the receiving end of someone's distress or strong disagreement. While intimidating behaviour is always undesirable, a one-off loss of control can be forgiven in the context of a relationship of trust. It is important that every minister has someone to turn to in times of stress and difficulty both for personal and pastoral support and for technical support to help them change the environment by working through the processes available.

7. Acting on bullying and harassment

Making an allegation

Someone who believes that s/he has 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. Such requests for help should always be treated seriously. In the church, the Minister and Church Secretary, would normally be the first port of call. Where that is inappropriate, the Synod Moderator may be contacted.

The following steps will assist others in addressing the problem, and support should always be provided so that adequate disclosure can be made.

- Assemble the facts. Keep a log with the date of each incident and a description of what happened. Keep a record of emails and letters, as well as notes of conversations and telephone calls.
- Where possible, note the names of witnesses.
- Provide a copy of whatever role description may exist if the bullying or harassment has been about the performance of duties.
- Record consequences as well as actions, including any impact on health, emotional well- being, role performance and/or other relationships.
- If other people have been affected, note this too. Consult them as to whether they would be prepared to disclose their experiences as well.
- Make sure that you have the personal support you need. Put this in place yourself if it is not adequately forthcoming from the church.

Intervening on behalf of someone else

Where bullying is suspected to be occurring, it is important not to remain silent. In the first instance a witness should speak privately with the person(s) perceived to be the victims of bullying. Several questions should be explored:

- Is the behaviour untypical and associated with a contained situation of conflict or is it part of an ongoing pattern? (Remember that each separate incident may appear trivial. The bullying may lie in the persistent nature of the harassment.
- What action, if any, has the recipient taken to challenge the aggressive behaviour?
- If no action has been taken, what is the reason for this?
- If action has been taken, what effect has it had?

Following such exploration there will be a judgment to be made. If the person on the receiving end of aggressive behaviour sees it as an isolated incident or otherwise feels in control, it is possible that the situation should simply be monitored over an agreed period to determine whether further action is needed. However, a witness should not hesitate to report the situation to the Minister or Church Secretary as an act of intervention if s/he believes that persistent bullying is occurring, and that the person being bullied is unable or unwilling to act in his/her own defence. This decision must be taken with sensitivity as it could be experienced as compounding the bullying. However, Amersham Free Church can only act if those who witness harassing behaviour do not conceal or deny it.

Responding to an allegation of harassment or bullying

Whenever an allegation is made, the person receiving it should take it seriously. Such accusations are often hard to make, but care needs to be taken that the accusation is not malicious. Steps should be taken to ensure that pastoral support is made available to the complainant, the alleged perpetrator (as appropriate), and any others who may be affected, such as the family of the complainant or other people involved in the situation.

Confidentiality should be carefully maintained for the protection of all concerned: the complainant, the alleged perpetrator, innocent bystanders, and the church itself. Where there is any danger of reputational damage to the Church, particularly if there is the possibility of media interest, the URC Communications Officer, is available to offer guidance (020 7520 2715).

The following strategies are recommended as good practice.

1. An exploration of whether there is anything to investigate further. It is not always easy to tell where the fault lies. It might be with an alleged perpetrator or with a malicious complainant.

2. Informal approach. Sometimes a complainant may want support in an honest discussion with the other person involved about what has happened with the expectation that the person who has acted inappropriately will be prepared to hear and apologise. (See Matthew 18:15-17, which indicates that when one person has been unable to make an offender take notice, two people should then go.)

3. Mediation. After an informal approach and if both parties want to find reconciliation and healing of the relationship, a trained mediator can lead them through a process of listening, extending and accepting apologies, and identifying solutions for the future. Mediation is future-oriented: it is not concerned with past grievances as much as future well-being. This mediation should be exercised by someone other than those involved upto then so that they remain available for oversight of the broader picture and care for all concerned.

4. A complainant should never be pressured to confront an alleged perpetrator.

5. Formal procedures:

   a. The URC Complaints Procedure (Section Q of The Manual) which can be accessed by anyone involved in the life of the church.
   b. In the case of an allegation against a minister or Church-Related Community Worker, the Investigation stage of the Ministerial Disciplinary Process offers a suitable procedure (see The Manual, Section O).
   c. In the case of an allegation by a minister against a church member or members, a local church/post, a ministerial colleague, the Synod Moderator or Synod officers, the grievance procedure pertains.
   d. The right of appeal exists in these procedures.
   e. It is always essential that those using the procedures should be well trained in using them.
   f. Outcomes. Where bullying or harassment has taken place, successful resolution of the situation includes an acknowledgement on the part of the perpetrator, identification of any underlying causes with strategies for addressing them where possible, the offering and receiving of apologies, and the willingness of the perpetrator to accept help in changing his/ her behaviour. A formal mechanism to review the situation in an appropriate time frame should be agreed.

6. Legal action. Where there has been physical violence or serious psychological or sexual abuse, it is a police matter.

7. False allegations. Where investigation reveals that an accusation has been made maliciously, this is a disciplinary offence. There may be issues of mental illness or other mitigating circumstances to consider. However, given the damage to the reputation of the person accused, some form of public exoneration may be appropriate.

8. Evaluation. There will always be lessons to be learned from intervention in a situation of bullying or harassment. Time should be set aside for serious consideration of what has been learned and how new insights might be shared, including the suggestion of amendments to URC guidelines and procedures.

If accused of bullying or harassment

- Take the matter seriously. Consider your behaviour and do not be too quick to dismiss an accusation as a sign that the other person has a problem.
- Where apologies are due, offer them. But recognise that an apology might not be enough to restore right relations.
- Allegations must be proven and there is no automatic assumption that you are guilty. However, denials will not be taken at face value. Bullying and harassment are serious matters and require investigation.
- Do not hesitate to seek help and support from the wider church where you fear that local church processes are not strong enough to address serious accusations. Trained mediators are available to advise and assist: these may be recruited from outside the Synod if necessary.
- If formal procedures are instigated, give them your full cooperation.
- Make sure that you have the personal support you need. Put this in place yourself if it is not adequately forthcoming from the church itself.

Additional Information Guidance on Specific topics (refenced in Good Practice 6):

3.1 Health and Safety

Amersham Free Church has a responsibility to provide a safe environment to all who use the building, and so take responsible measures to minimise the chance of people getting hurt by ensuring appropriate Health and Safety processes are in place.

Health and Safety Policy is available in the church office or can be requested from the Church Secretary.

3.2 Lettings

Amersham Free Church allows other organisations to use its premises. Those hiring the premises are required to ensure that when children or adults at risk are present, appropriate legislation and best practice in connection with their supervision and safety are observed. They must also notify the Church Safeguarding Coordinator(s) if any concerns arise relating to people or activities for which they are responsible. For further information, please contact **the Church Administration** Office.

3.3 Church Activities in private dwellings

Any church activities hosted in private dwellings come under the Safeguarding policy of the church.

The Charity Commission

With England and Wales, every local church falls under the regulatory direction of the Charity Commission regardless of whether or not they are registered with the Charity Commission. Synod Trust companies and the URC Trust are also subject to regulation by the Charity Commission.

All charities **must** undertake five actions:

1. Identify and manage risks
2. Have suitable policies and practices in place
3. Carry out necessary checks
4. Protect volunteers and staff
5. Handle and report incidents appropriately.

The Charity Commission makes clear that having safeguards in place not only protects and promotes the welfare of children and adults at risk, but also enhances the confidence of trustees, staff, volunteers, parents/carers and the general public in the church, protecting its reputation and helping it to fulfil its mission of encouraging all in their journey of faith.

END