

Paper T4

Safeguarding policy statement

Safeguarding Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Adrian Bulley adrian.bulley@urc.org.uk
Action required	Adoption.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 47 General Assembly adopts the safeguarding policy statement outlined in this report and commends it to church meetings, elders' meetings and synods for consideration and implementation.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This safeguarding policy statement seeks to underpin the implementation of safeguarding through all the councils of the United Reformed Church, and provide an important reference point in the governance of the church.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Good Practice 1-5.
Consultation has taken place with...	URC Safeguarding Adviser Synod Safeguarding Officers Dr Lisa Oakley (external safeguarding consultant) Members of SAG.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

The United Reformed Church (URC) is committed to safeguarding in every area of its life and ministry.

Safeguarding is the action taken to promote and protect the well-being and human rights of individuals. This means we will:

- Do all we can to **create** and maintain a safe and caring environment for all people
- **Respond** promptly and effectively to any form of abuse and neglect, including reporting abuse to statutory agencies as necessary
- Seek to **prevent** abuse in any form from occurring.

We will seek to identify individuals who may pose a risk to others and take necessary actions to minimise risk whilst supporting these individuals in our communities when safe to do so.

The URC confirms that safeguarding is the responsibility of everyone: to prevent abuse and neglect of children, young people and adults; to act upon concerns of abuse; and to support the wellbeing of each person within all communities in which the Church is placed. Safeguarding is a requirement and a duty in all Councils of the Church. Safeguarding in the URC is supported with relevant policies, practice, guidance and training.

The Church acknowledges that the wellbeing of the child or adult who is experiencing or is at risk of experiencing abuse, harm and neglect is paramount, and it will always act in their best interests, in line with national legislation, relevant statutory guidelines and good practice guidance. The United Reformed Church believes that all people have the right to be and feel part of this community, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. We will operate in line with the Human Rights Act 1989, the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Equality Act 2010.

Commitments

The URC will adhere to the policy statement above by committing to:

- Promote safe and healthy cultures in which good practice standards in safeguarding are updated and disseminated
- Ensure everyone in a position of trust is carefully recruited / selected / appointed / elected and trained in safeguarding children and adults at risk¹
- Respond promptly and appropriately to any safeguarding allegation or concern (including reporting any allegations to statutory agencies) including those who may pose a risk to children, young people or adults at risk
- Care pastorally for all children and adults at risk, and all those who have experienced abuse in the past
- Ensure that all those who pose a risk to children, young people or adults at risk, and those who are the subject of allegations, receive appropriate pastoral care and supervision
- Exercise informed vigilance about risks in all forms of abuse and neglect
- Work together with other denominations, statutory agencies and voluntary organisations.

¹ Definitions of 'child' and 'adult at risk' in Wales, Scotland and England in Appendix One

Promoting safe and healthy cultures:

- The URC is committed to the development of safe and healthy cultures in which the risk of harm is minimised, abuse is responded to effectively, and children, young people and adults are respected, nurtured and fully valued. We will ensure there are clear channels of communication to hear the voices of children, young people and adults.
- The Church and its individual members will take all appropriate steps to make sure a safe and caring environment and good working practices for all in their ministry with children and adults.
- We will do all we can to promote healthy cultures by adhering to Good Practice policy and guidelines.
- We will promote safe cultures by challenging any abuse of power and holding to account.
- We will do all we can to promote safe and healthy cultures by ensuring we act with care, accountability, and transparency. We will embed a culture that encourages reporting concerns, challenging abuses of power, and holding to account those in positions of leadership and responsibility. We will not tolerate any form of abuse, harm or bullying.
- We will embed a culture that provides care and support for those who are subject to any form of abuse.
- Safeguarding is foundational to safer, healthier cultures, and it is underpinned with effective policy, procedures and training. We will actively promote safeguarding and relevant training and support those engaged in safeguarding roles in our communities.

Ensuring everyone in a position of trust is carefully recruited / selected / appointed / elected and trained in safeguarding children and adults at risk:

- We will appoint officers with care, carefully recruit and select those in safeguarding roles and follow safer recruitment processes for all those who engage and work with children or adults.
- The safeguarding training framework will ensure regular accessible and consistent safeguarding training for all engaged in working with children, young people and adults at risk. It will ensure that everyone is well versed in the 4R's (Recognise, Respond, Report, Refer).

Responding promptly and appropriately to any safeguarding allegation or concern, including those who may pose a risk to children, young people or adults at risk:

- All safeguarding concerns, disclosures, allegations and suspicions will be responded to promptly and with respect following URC guidelines.
- All safeguarding records will be made in accordance with good practice guidance, kept and stored correctly and be shared in line with Data Protection legislation and statutory requirements.
- We will report to relevant statutory authorities and agencies when safeguarding concerns or allegations meet their thresholds. We are committed to working co-operatively in partnership with statutory authorities.
- Any actions taken will respect the rights and dignity of all those involved.

Caring pastorally for all children and adults at risk, and all those who have experienced abuse in the past:

- Survivors and those who have experienced abuse 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.
- Training and supervision for those with pastoral care responsibilities will be available so that they are equipped to recognise and respond to disclosures of abuse, and act in preventative and proactive ways.
- As part of embedding safe and healthy cultures, we commit to raising awareness of abuse and its impact in order that moving forward the whole church operates with an understanding and compassionate response to survivors.

Ensuring that all those who pose a risk to children and adults and those who are the subject of allegations receive appropriate care and supervision:

- Where an allegation is raised against a Church officer or anyone else within the Church, this will be responded to promptly in accordance with Church policies and procedures, as contained within its Good Practice documentation. We recognise that those who pose a risk may themselves be vulnerable. We will therefore consider support for them, with possible referrals to appropriate agencies.
- The Church will put all necessary safeguards in place to manage any risk to children and adults. Following a risk assessment, safeguarding contracts will be used to establish appropriate and clear boundaries and to mitigate identified risk.
- The Church is aware of the need for care and support to be available for family members or members of Church communities who are impacted by the allegation or subsequent outcome of investigation

Exercising informed vigilance about risks in all forms of abuse and neglect:

- The Church will take care to identify risks in circumstances where a person experiences abuse or an individual may present a risk to others.
- Safeguarding risks will be assessed diligently and locally, managed in accordance with civil and criminal law, and the church's good practice guidance.
- Trained safeguarding professionals will undertake risk assessments.
- The Church will take steps to mitigate risks and prevent abuse from happening.

Working together with other denominations, statutory agencies and voluntary organisations:

- We will form ecumenical partnerships and work closely with other denominations to have clear and mutually agreed arrangements that keep people safe in our local communities, and to create environments in which people can safely disclose safeguarding concerns.
- The Church will act in an open and accountable way in working in partnership with relevant agencies to safeguard children and adults at risk.
- Arrangements to work effectively with partners will be in place, and regularly reviewed to promote the wellbeing of children and adults at risk.

Appendix One

Definitions

Safeguarding designated person refers to an experienced and trained employed professional or volunteer who is delegated to lead safeguarding children and adults at risk in each council of the Church. In a local church that person is the Safeguarding Co-ordinator, in a synod that person is the Synod Safeguarding Officer, or equivalent, and for the General Assembly that person is the URC Designated Safeguarding Lead. The major responsibility of the designated persons is to deal with all concerns, disclosures, complaints, and allegations of a safeguarding nature.

Safeguarding concerns are matters relating to an individual and reported to a safeguarding designated person for advice, guidance or action; this may or may not result in a referral to statutory agencies.

The term '**children**' refers to those under the age of 18 years (Social Services and Well-being Act 2014 in Wales, Children and Young People Act 2014 in Scotland, The Children Act 1989 in England)

The term '**adult at risk**' refers to:

An individual in Wales aged 18 years and over who:

- a) is experiencing or is at risk of abuse or neglect, and
- b) has needs for care and support (whether or not the authority is meeting any of those needs) and
- c) as a result of those needs is unable to protect himself or herself against the abuse or neglect or the risk of it. (Social Services and Well Being Act 2014)

An individual in Scotland aged 16 years and over who:

- a) is unable to safeguard their own well-being, property, rights or other interests,
- b) is at risk of harm, and
- c) because they are affected by disability, mental disorder, illness or physical or mental infirmity, is more vulnerable to being harmed than adults who are not so affected (Adult Support and Protection Act 2007)

An individual in England aged 18 years and over who:

- a) has needs for care and support (whether or not the local authority is meeting any of those needs) and
- b) is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect, and
- c) 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 (Care Act 2014)