

Safeguarding newsletter



Newsletter issue: 1

Date: September 2020

Introduction

With the support of an excellent team, it is with great joy to launch this newsletter. In a joint effort to provide people with the right information about child protection and safeguarding adults, and to make those who manage safeguarding in the United Reformed Church more aware of relevant developments and changes, this first edition is, and will be, in your hands each quarter from now on.

Our newsletter reflects the continuing awareness of the need to protect adults at risk and vulnerable children in any congregation, synod, office, school, group, property and community of the Church. The Office of National Statistics stated in January that around 7.5% of adults aged 18 to 74 in England and Wales experienced sexual abuse before the age of 16: around 3.1 million people. Additionally, in the financial year ending March 2019, an estimated 2.4 million adults aged 16 to 74 experienced domestic abuse (1.6 million women and 786,000 men). The figures do not show how many people are affected indirectly by abuse in any form, or anyone's personal experiences. We should be aware that abuse happened, happens, and might happen again.

Jesus taught us to 'love one another as I have loved you.' And, as survivors of abuse alerted us to in November 2019, when one suffers in the Church, the whole body suffers. What this newsletter and the adoption of a safeguarding strategic plan (from 2020 to 2025) attempts to do, is to further the ethos of love and care, and the good work currently going on in every part of the Church. As the General Assembly resolution on 10 July 2020 reminds us, *safeguarding is everybody in the URC's responsibility*, and we all, together, need to promote the welfare of all the individuals with whom the Church comes into contact.

We will be particularly interested to know what you prefer to see included in this newsletter in the future, so any feedback or comments will be very welcome. Please email your feedback to safeguarding@urc.org.uk. Thank you for your commitment and continuing support to keep people safe.

Ioannis Athanasiou

*URC Safeguarding Adviser and Secretary
to the Safeguarding Advisory Group*

Around 3.1 million people experienced sexual abuse before the age of 16 in England and Wales

URC places safeguarding as a high priority for the life of the Church

Having already endorsed the safeguarding strategic plan 2020-2025 through Mission Council, the General Assembly resolution 29 (July 2020) acknowledged that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility in the United Reformed Church. In 2018, General Assembly noted that the URC needed to adopt a more systematic and attentive approach in safeguarding matters, and nurture a culture where vulnerable adults, children and young people are prioritised. Since then, the URC has developed its safeguarding arrangements in many aspects and worked in collaboration with governments, parliamentary groups, and contributed to public inquiries by offering insight and providing information on matters relating to child sex abuse and protection. Penny McGee, a social worker, has been appointed as URC Training and Development Coordinator (Safeguarding) and will work with synods to implement the plan over the next three years and coordinate training and awareness opportunities.

The strategic plan's overall aim is to ensure the Church is a sustained community of care where everyone – particularly the most vulnerable – finds a place of love, pastoral care and support. The strategy, over the next five years, requires all parts – people, councils, committees and groups – of the URC to work together on six key objectives to ensure the plan is achieved. These objectives are:

1. Instil a safeguarding ethos of care and service within all congregations, synods and bodies of the URC.
2. Ensure initial and appropriate pastoral care and support to those who were impacted by safeguarding incidents and concerns.
3. Set up secure and appropriate systems and processes of data and information handling and reporting safeguarding.
4. Ensure that the safeguarding policies and procedures are updated, reviewed and implemented in practice throughout the URC.
5. Provide appropriate and accessible safeguarding training for all those who are accountable for and working with children, young people and adults.
6. Encourage and build constructive partnerships with statutory, no statutory bodies, other denominations and faith-based communities

Delivery of the strategic plan will occur in two phases: the first phase, years one to four, will focus on planning, delivery and evaluation. In year five, the Safeguarding advisory group (SAG) will carry out phase two, a review of progress against its published objectives, and will undertake planning and consultation to develop a new strategic plan for 2025 onwards.

LEP Safeguarding Guidance

A guidance on safeguarding in Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) is under development by a joint working group with the Methodist Church and the Baptist Union of Churches. Thanks to those LEP safeguarding leads and coordinators who completed the survey, the Church will add one more guidance document in the model safeguarding policy for local churches (Appendix A7) to meet the needs of our LEPs. The working group will review 190 responses of the consultation stage this September and produce the guidance by the end of this year, so watch this space.

“A Bill for survivors”

The lockdown has created new ways of working and living for many people across the UK, with many organisations finding that they can continue their work effectively from home. However, for many people, home is not a safe space. Some people have been forced to stay inside with someone who hurts and abuses them. Calls to domestic abuse charities have risen dramatically, with the UK's largest domestic abuse charity, Refuge, reporting a 700% increase in calls in one day. The impact of domestic abuse is significant. Where children are involved, they can be affected long into their adult lives.

The UK government is currently discussing a Domestic Abuse Bill. The Bill has been heralded as a “survivors’ bill”, one that places the needs of survivors and their children at the heart of the law, providing protection by financially supporting refuges and support services, while also placing responsibility on the perpetrator to end their abusive behaviour. Domestic abuse is a public health issue, and we have a responsibility to pledge our support to those who have been, and will continue to be, abused.

There is a wealth of information available online, [here](#). The URC has a policy regarding domestic violence, which can be found [here](#).

You can also send a letter to your local MP, advocating your support for the Bill. Here is a [template](#) for you to use.

Safeguarding training

Due to the global pandemic, church life has changed for many. We have embraced different ways of connecting with each other. Face-to-face training has been suspended but online training packages are available. If you want to know more about safeguarding adults and children, get in touch with your Synod Safeguarding Officer for more information.

Mental health support

Months of isolation, fears about job security and health concerns may have taken their toll on the mental health of those in your congregation, your friends, family, or even on you. There should never be a need to suffer in silence. It is important that you pay attention to your mental health as well as your physical health. There are many organisations out there that can support you, regardless of what is on your mind.

Reporting abuse

If you suspect, or become aware of, abuse then you should follow the four Rs:

1. **Recognise** the [signs](#);
2. **Respond** with compassion;
3. **Record** your [actions](#);
4. **Report** it to your church's Safeguarding Coordinator or Synod Safeguarding Officer.

You can find a list of useful agencies online, [here](#).

Online safety

The internet can be an incredibly positive place. It has enabled people to stay connected with each other throughout the lockdown, and has been a platform for many wonderful initiatives. However, there are risks. The internet can attract people who may wish to groom and exploit people.

If you see something online that causes you to be worried about a child, you can contact your local church safeguarding officer. You can find lots of helpful information [here](#) about spotting online abuse. For more general information about staying safe online, click [here](#).

There has been a steep incline in the amount of people requiring mental health support since the global pandemic was announced. There is a great deal of information and support [here](#) for you. You may also want to consider whether the following suggestions may help:

- Connect with people (virtually if you can, or from a safe distance);
- Eat regularly and stay hydrated;
- Try to keep active;
- Get as much sunlight, fresh air and nature as you can;
- Take care with news and information (check the news once a day if you find it anxiety provoking);
- Try playing games or doing low-stress activities when you are feeling anxious;
- If you are shielding and have to remain inside, try to keep your windows open when you can. Try to change the rooms you spend time in, if possible, and try to keep your curtains open when possible.

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The pandemic's impact on children and young people

Children and young people seem to be far less impacted, from a physical health perspective, by Covid-19. However, the loss of education and social interactions has had a significant impact on the younger generation, who have missed out on many milestones and experiences. The risks for children who are in the care of the local authority, or who fall into other vulnerable groups, is even higher. School provides an opportunity for children to be educated but it is also a space for

children to report welfare issues and to be "seen" by professionals. The Children's Commissioner for England has published an analysis that reveals thousands of teenagers falling through gaps in the system and being exposed to significant risks. The report says that unless these children are re-engaged in society, a whole generation of vulnerable teens could stay at risk of educational failure, unemployment, exploitation or falling into crime. The full report can be found online, [here](#).

Dangers of shame and guilt

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse has published a research report on child sexual abuse in religious institutions, based on accounts shared by survivors that were part of its Truth Project.

The report, based on accounts shared by survivors who were sexually abused in a religious context, found that 48% of survivors knew of someone else being abused in the same institution. Of the survivors that took part in the poll, 68% shared that they did not disclose abuse at the time, and 37% shared that the reason they did not report abuse at the time was feelings of shame or embarrassment. Click [here](#) to read more on this.

Source: [IICSA](#)

Date: 30 May 2019

Further information: [Truth Project thematic report: child sexual abuse in the context of religious institutions \(PDF\)](#)

Read more on NSPCC Learning: [Safeguarding in faith communities](#)

Keep up to date with the URC safeguarding policies! You can find them all on our [website](#).

COVID-19 Guidance

The Government has issued an update to [COVID-19: guidance for the safe use of places of worship and special religious services and gatherings during the pandemic](#) which deals specifically with [special religious services and gatherings](#). Please ensure that you visit our [website](#) for the most up to date guidance.

The update notes that communal worship or prayer can be attended by more than 30 people *but only if the venue can safely accommodate larger numbers in a way which complies with [COVID-19 secure guidance](#)*. The updated guidance provides the following checklist:

Do – Follow the mitigations that places of worship have put in place, for example using booking systems, changes to entrances and exits or staggered arrivals.

Do – Continue to broadcast services online for those who need to stay at home or are able to mark the event at home to avoid large gatherings.

Don't break social distancing (2 metres between households, or 1 metre with mitigations, if 2 metres

is not possible), and especially avoid touching people outside of your household.

Don't interact socially outside of your household, or the group (of 2 households) that you went to the place of worship with.

Do – If you can, you should also wear a face-covering – you must wear these if you travel on public transport or visit a shop.

Do – Make sure you provide contact details to the place of worship to support the NHS Test and Trace service designed to track and help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Don't use shared areas for ablutions – wash at home, unless in an emergency.

Do – Remove communal resources such as prayer mats. Single-use alternatives should be removed after use and disposed of by the worshipper.

Do – Make sure only you touch your belongings, for example, shoes if removed.

Do – Take home personal items brought in to aid worship, such as a prayer mat.

Do – Speak into a microphone to lead devotions or sermons to avoid shouting. Avoid sharing microphones between different speakers.

Do – Use a plexiglass screen in front of a single individual raising their voice, singing or chanting at

Online safety:

Source: London Grid for Learning

Date: 09 July 2020

The London Grid for Learning (LGfL) has released a podcast discussing changes to the 2020 edition of Education for a connected world, published by the UK Council for Internet Safety to equip children and young people for digital life. New topics covered include: voice-activated searching; upskirting; the use of banter; and a more in-depth focus on digital consent, sexting-related technology and protected characteristics.

Read the news story and listen to the podcast: [Education for a connected world: 2020 audio update](#)

Read the guidance: [Education for a connected world framework: 2020 guidance](#)

Safer Recruitment

DBS Outreach Contacts

DBS has recently launched the Regional Safeguarding Outreach role as a pilot programme. The pilot is currently only based in Wales and East Midlands, with the intention of expanding this to have an outreach officer in each region. If you are currently based in a region without a designated outreach officer, you can contact the DBS Partnership and Engagement Team.

Regional outreach officers work closely with organisations in their region to develop relationships and raise awareness of DBS as a safeguarding organisation. They will listen to your needs, discussing further with you any issues or barriers you may have come across; developing and delivering any sessions you are interested in to support you and your colleagues in safeguarding and safer recruitment.

Please feel free to get in touch with your Regional Outreach Officer or the Partnership and Engagement Team if you have any further questions:

Jordan Hayden is the Outreach Officer for Wales and can be contacted via email: Jordan.hayden@dbs.gov.uk or via telephone on 07717 644 842.

Beth Dale is the Outreach Officer for East Midlands and can be contacted via email: Elizabeth.dale@dbs.gov.uk or via telephone on 07867 153 500.

The Partnership and Engagement Team can be contacted via email: DBSEngagement@dbs.gov.uk

Safeguarding symposium to launch strategic plan

The United Reformed Church's (URC) Safeguarding team will launch the denomination's safeguarding strategic plan with its first online symposium on 9 October.

The symposium will bring together those who oversee and lead safeguarding in local URCs and synods.

The purpose of the online event is to discuss how the safeguarding strategic plan (2020-2025) will affect the life of the Church and establish the best collaborative ways to promote the welfare and wellbeing of all individuals with whom the URC comes into contact.

The event runs from 12.30pm to 2pm via Zoom.

Confirmed speakers include the Revd Dr John Bradbury, General Secretary of the URC, Ioannis Athanasiou, the URC's Safeguarding Adviser, the Revd Dr Carla Grosch-Miller, theologian, and Shelly Moss, safeguarding coordinator at Flavel Church in Dartmouth..

The annual denominational safeguarding report 2019 (published for the first time on the URC and it is accessible [here](#)) shows that the Church has made major improvements in the area of safeguarding. Over the next five years, the safeguarding strategic plan requires all parts of the URC – its people, councils, committees and groups – to work together on six key objectives to ensure the Church provides a sustained community of care where everyone, particularly the most vulnerable, can find a place of love, pastoral care and support.

Whilst the Covid-19 crisis has brought unprecedented challenges, both for churches and society, we have been humbled by the faith and community spirit in our communities across the country, as well as the spirit of creativity and collaboration in the Church. From neighbourly acts of kindness to online collective worship, the Church has shone light to the power of its people to overcome challenges and remain resilient at difficult and traumatic moments for everyone.

Safeguarding is everybody's responsibility in the United Reformed Church, General Assembly resolution 29 reinforced in July 2020. "When our responsibilities increase so does our commitment to our community," URC's safeguarding adviser Ioannis Athanasiou said.

"No single worker of the Church can have a full picture of a child's needs or a vulnerable adult's circumstances, and if children, young people, families and adults at risk are to receive the right help at the right time, everyone who comes into contact with them has to understand their role and the role of others. Drawing upon URC's Christian tradition, we always discern things better together than anyone ever could on their own.

This online symposium aims to recognise and value the collaborative and active thinking that makes church life in our denomination unique and is regarded so essential in the safeguarding arena."

[Details of the event](#)

Friday 9 October

12:30-14:00

Please email matthew.baxter@urc.org.uk to register your interest and receive the Zoom details.

Synod updates

As churches prepare to open, the key points Elders and Trustees need to ensure are in place:

- ❖ An up to date Local Church Safeguarding policies in place which are reviewed annually. (Sample Policy Templates can be found on the Safeguarding page on the main URC website).
- ❖ Have a Church Safeguarding Coordinator (and Deputy where possible) covering **both** Adults at risk and Children.
- ❖ Ensure that there is signage to indicate who to report a safeguarding concern to and who the Safeguarding Coordinator is.
- ❖ Have a COVID secure Risk Assessment and review all Activity Risk Assessments.
- ❖ Ensure that church workers, including volunteers are enrolled on to the URC Safeguarding training at least every 3 years.
- ❖ Please get in touch with your Synod Safeguarding Officer, Belinda Nielsen for any safeguarding queries, email: safeguarding@urcthamesnorth.org.uk

URC Online BASIC Safeguarding Training

To adapt with the changing government guidance and to facilitate learning whilst gathering in large groups is still not permitted, the safeguarding team have adapted the physical training module into a virtual format held via Zoom, which has been condensed to suit this platform.

This training has been made mandatory for the following roles:

Church Safeguarding Coordinators and their Deputies, Members of the Safeguarding Advisory Group, Active Ministers, including Synod Moderators and retired ministers who meet the requirements of active ministry, Youth/Children/Adult/Pastoral Workers, Synod Clerks, Section O Investigation, Commission and Appeal Panel Members, Worship leaders, Lay preachers, Pastoral visitors, URC trustees, synod trustees, and Elders as local church trustees.

The following dates are available for this BASIC module:

- **7th September 2020 12pm**
- **24th September 2020 5pm**
- **28th October 2020 12pm**
- **5th November 2020 5pm**
- **24th November 2020 10am**
- **11th December 2020 12pm**

This training will last for approximately 2 hours.

Please note that you will be required to enrol and attend the BASIC training before being enrolled on to the Intermediate training, despite any previous expertise.

To book on to this training, please email their name, church and preferred date to safeguarding@urcsouthern.org.uk

DDC DBS Training

The DDC are hosting a Free training to address all of these questions and more!

Dates available:

12pm 2nd October

12pm 15th October

This session will be held via Zoom for 1 hour and has limited capacity.

To book your place, please email Belinda Nielsen, Synod Safeguarding Officer at safeguarding@urcsouthern.org.uk