

Pilgrim United Reformed Church

Safeguarding Children and Young People

Policy and Guidance Procedures

(Note: References to "Minister" also include Lay Leader.)

1. Policy Statement on safeguarding children and young people

As the people of Pilgrim Church we are concerned with the wholeness of each individual within God's purpose for their lives, the life of the community and the life of the world. We seek to safeguard all members of this church community, irrespective of whether they are Church members, adherents or visitors, and irrespective of their age. We recognise the URC Good Practice document and understand that it is the responsibility of each of us to prevent the physical, emotional and sexual abuse of all people on our premises or involved in any of our activities.

2. To whom does this policy apply?

It is possible to be lulled into a false sense of security believing that those who work with children and young people in the church will never be guilty of abuse because they are part of the Christian community.

Of course, the church must take all possible steps to avoid contact between known abusers and those at risk. It is not however wise to assume that all others are automatically safe to be with children or young people given particular circumstances, temptations and the risk of malicious accusation.

For this reason, all the procedures which are set in place and described in this document to protect children, young people and adults working with them should apply to all those in close contact with them. This includes, for example, Ministers and those who may be in close proximity to children but involved in another task. This is not the same as treating each person as though they were under suspicion. It is more a matter of taking sensible measures to protect children and young people, which are then observed by everyone.

3. Limiting the opportunity for abuse to a minimum.

We believe that the number of people who seek to harm children is very small, Nevertheless, we see the need to make sure that all organisations and people using the church premises take appropriate

steps to reduce the likelihood of abuse occurring to an absolute minimum. With that intention the following recommendations are made:

- On Pilgrim Church premises no adult shall be left alone with a single child or young person. Activities should be observed by others, for example, by leaving a door open.
- Off our church premises no church worker should meet a child or young person without a parent or other adult being present.
- On church premises always have at least two adults present with any group of children or young people.
- Under no circumstances ever take a group of children or young people off the premises with fewer than two adults.
- Do not undertake tasks alone which might result in an accident which would require a second person to give help.
- When transporting children or young people by car or minibus arrange, as far as possible, to have more than one passenger per vehicle. Where this is not possible, the remaining passenger should sit in a rear seat, parent's permission having first been obtained.
- Avoid working with an unknown group or individual unless someone is within calling distance.
- Encourage members of the church to visit the activity.
- Arrange that others can see into any room where an activity is being held, keeping doors and curtains open.
- Invite parents to sit in on activities
- Whenever possible have a number of groups in the premises at the same time.

Photographs and digital media -

Photographs and digital media will only be used for display on the premises, use in the press or on a URC website if, under the Data Protection Act 1988, permission has been received from parents or carers. If a child is adamant that they do not want their photograph or digital image taken this will be respected, irrespective of positive parental/carers permission. Permission of parents/carers will preferably be in writing and, if not, a record will be kept of the verbal consent.

Photographs used publicly will not give the full name of the children, or be able to identify their home address.

4. Providing an opportunity for children and young people to contact an independent person about any concern which they may have.

A poster advertising the services of 'Childline' together with the telephone number is displayed in a prominent position. We recommend that each organisation working with children and young people makes

this organisation and telephone number freely available to its members.

5. Procedures regarding visitors and contractors on church premises.

The vast majority of visitors to the premises come for genuine reasons but it is, however, not safe to assume that all are automatically safe to be with children or young people. The following procedures, therefore will apply to all visitors and contractors.

- I. Adults collecting children from any organisation should be known to the leaders of that organisation and the release of the children and young people to such adults is the responsibility of those leaders.
- II. Unknown visitors seeking a named individual on the premises should be escorted to that person. If the person is not on the premises the person being sought should be telephoned in the company of the visitor and a time of meeting arranged. The visitor should then be escorted from the premises.
- III. It can be beneficial to the visitor, and is part of this church's caring role, to discover sensitively if there is any more fundamental spiritual reason for him/her seeking help from the church. It is worth bearing in mind how we would wish to be treated if the roles were reversed. If it appears, from conversation, that there is a pastoral concern try to satisfy the stated need of the person and suggest that he/she may wish to contact the Minister. Inform the Minister as soon as possible.
- IV. Strangers seeking money, food, shelter etc. should be treated with dignity and sensitivity. Often this area of pastoral need demands particular experience, so try and refer the visitor in need to the Minister. If they are not available at that time, try and suggest a time when it would be convenient to contact them. Try to avoid giving money to strangers. Ensure that someone is with the visitor whenever they are on our premises.

6. Roles and responsibilities of all workers.

Abuse of children and young people is most easily concealed where there is confusion amongst adults about their roles and responsibilities. Paid church employees will have job descriptions which indicate clearly their responsibilities for the protection of children and young people.

Leaders of children's and young people's groups, whether privately or church organised, should have a clear understanding of their own responsibilities and the responsibilities of others who work with them. It is highly recommended that a statement of these responsibilities should be written down and kept by the leader of the Team under whose jurisdiction the activity falls. Where appropriate all workers, paid or voluntary, must hold a valid DBS check.

The leaders responsible for activities with children and young people will be expected to interview any new worker helping in their activity to determine their suitability and previous contacts with children and young people. A volunteer agreement form will be signed by those volunteering and references will be taken up.

It is expected that all leaders and helpers of activities involving children and young people should meet to share their experiences, receive training and talk about their relationships with the children and young people.

If a person is volunteering for a short-term task, such as helper in a holiday club, they should be supervised and hold a valid CRB check.

7. Recognising abuse

The four main areas of abuse - physical, sexual, emotional and neglect - may come to the notice of a person in a number of different ways:

Disclosure by the child or young person. If a child or young person wants to talk about abuse -

- listen, do not question. Never push for information
- accept what the child or young person says, keeping calm and looking at them directly
- reassure the child or young person that they are right to tell you and that you take them seriously
- even when a child or young person has broken a rule they are not to blame
- be aware that the child or young person may have been threatened
- let them know that you need to tell someone else. Do not promise them confidentiality
- let the child or young person know what you are going to do next and that you will let them know what happens. Make notes as soon as reasonably practical, writing down exactly what was said, where possible using the child's own words. Record

dates and times of events, when you were told about them and when you made the record. Sign your notes. Always keep a copy yourself.

Remember that you are not the investigating agency and that the child or young person may need to talk later to a specialist. Any probing may interfere with further investigations and make the child or young person repeat painful information.

Helpful things to say

Use phrases like those below to reassure the child or young person and to encourage them to trust you -

I believe you
I am glad you told me
It is OK to tell
You are brave to tell me
It's not your fault
I will try to help

Try to avoid

Phrases like those below should not be used in talking to a child or young person -

What? Why? How? When? Where? Who?
Are you sure?
I can't believe it!
This is really serious
Don't tell anyone
I am shocked

Receiving information from a third party

If anyone wants to give you information about alleged abuse:

- listen rather than question
- accept what the person says and stay calm
- ask them to make a note of what they have observed
- reassure the person that they are right to tell you
- let them know that you need to tell someone else. Do not promise confidentiality
- let the person know what you are going to do next and that you will let them know what happens
- make notes as soon as possible, writing down exactly what was said, where possible using the person's own words. Record dates and times of the events, when you were told about them and when you made the record. Sign the notes and keep a copy yourself.

Observation of unexplained injury or changes in behaviour

Some children and young people may display one or more of the following signs. They may have an innocent explanation but they can also be the key to identifying potential abuse.

- Bruising, cuts or burns, particularly if these are on parts of the body not normally injured in accidents
- Changes in behaviour, such as a child becoming very quiet or withdrawn
- Aggressive behaviour, particularly with friends, severe tantrums, or lack of attachment to parents
- Loss of weight, which can be sudden or gradual and is not linked to illness
- inadequate and inappropriate clothing
- Sexually explicit games which are inappropriate to the child's age
- The child only seems happy with you
- The child is kept away from social activities and has few friends
- Lack of attachment or lack of trust towards parents and other members of the family
- Having strange secrets
- Persistent self-comforting behaviour, such as rocking
- Over eating or loss of appetite
- Disturbed sleep, nightmares and bed-wetting
- Suicidal feelings
- Overly compliant behaviour

8. Taking Action

- **If you suspect abuse**
- Do not delay
- Consult with the person to whom you are responsible for your work with children or young people
- Consult the Minister
- Contact the statutory services responsible for child protection in your area. The Minister will assist you in doing this.

Such action, even if it later proves to be mistaken or unnecessary, is justifiable if based on concern for the child.

- **What happens next?**
- The Synod Pastoral advisor will ensure adequate pastoral support for all concerned.

The Social Services will:

- Consider what you have told them, together with any other information already held or received.
- Assess the strength of the allegation.

- Investigate if they suspect a child or young person is suffering from harm. Often they will do this with the Police. This will involve
- Visiting the child or young person's home
- Contacting other agencies who might have information on the child or young person, or the family.
- Holding a child protection conference where all the professionals can share their observations and to which parents may be invited.
- Inform the police if they suspect an offence has been committed. This could lead to criminal proceedings.
- Taking action, where necessary, to protect the child or young person.

9. Offering Support

In any church where a case of abuse has been disclosed or suspected there will be people needing different kinds of support. Some will require professional help. Some may need a sympathetic, listening ear.

- **The abused person**
- The abused person may feel a loss of safety, a loss of trust, a loss of power, a loss of self-esteem, guilt, shame, anger, blame, confusion about sexual behaviour, that no one will believe him/her again.
- It is important that the abused child or young person does not feel rejected by the church community. Often, following a disclosure, there will be insufficient evidence to take any criminal proceedings. Full support for the child or young person can then begin straight away.
- **The abuser**
- The abuser may be part of the same church community as the child or young person who has been abused. Reactions of others in the community can vary greatly. There may be great hostility. There may be an attempt to be understanding. There may be those who feel that the abuser has been unfairly accused.
- Whatever the reaction, the abuser needs pastoral support as well. This should not be offered by the person who is caring for the abused child or young person.
- Great care must be taken to ensure that nothing is done which might interfere with the judicial process. The person accused of abuse needs to know where it is possible to turn for legal advice

Alternatively, discussion of the issues surrounding the safety of children and young people can revive their memories and cause them to speak out. Even though their disclosure may have no direct implications for the church community they will need sensitive understanding and pastoral support.

Pastoral support is not just the prerogative of the Minister and the Leadership Team. It can be offered by anyone with a 'listening ear', through the friendship and openness of children and young people as well as adults. When information is shared with someone in the church community it needs to be handled with great sensitivity and discretion. If our concern for those who have suffered abuse is real we will be anxious not to betray the trust which they place in us.

10. Confidentiality

The area of child abuse is one in which it is inevitable that the normal rules applying to confidentiality may have to be waived in the best interests of the abused child or young person.

However, a balance must be obtained between those who have a need to know the facts of situations as they are perceived and those who wish to know to satisfy their curiosity. It is vital to maintain an environment of trust and respect, avoiding a situation where half-truths and rumour abound.

If an abused person or an abuser begins to disclose their experience, they must be warned immediately that absolute confidentiality cannot be maintained - there are some secrets which must be shared.

These guidance procedures are offered to safeguard all the children and young people with whom we have contact. If followed they will also protect those who work with them and who may inadvertently place themselves in a vulnerable position. Physical, sexual and emotional abuse can wreck the lives of those who have suffered from it. Malicious accusations can also wreck the lives of those against whom they are directed.

11. Church contact

In the event of any concerns regarding safeguarding issues the church contacts are:-

Sarah Satterthwaite-Bishop and Marilyn Colquhoun.

Contactable in writing at church address or by e-mail:

safeguarding.pilgrimplymouth@gmail.com

(Updated March 2025)