

E-Learning Foundation Handbook



The
**United
Reformed
Church**

Safeguarding is Everyone's Responsibility!

Safeguarding children, young people, and adults at risk
- a foundation programme



HANDBOOK

Name:

Role/Church:

Contacts

02.

Church Safeguarding Coordinator:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

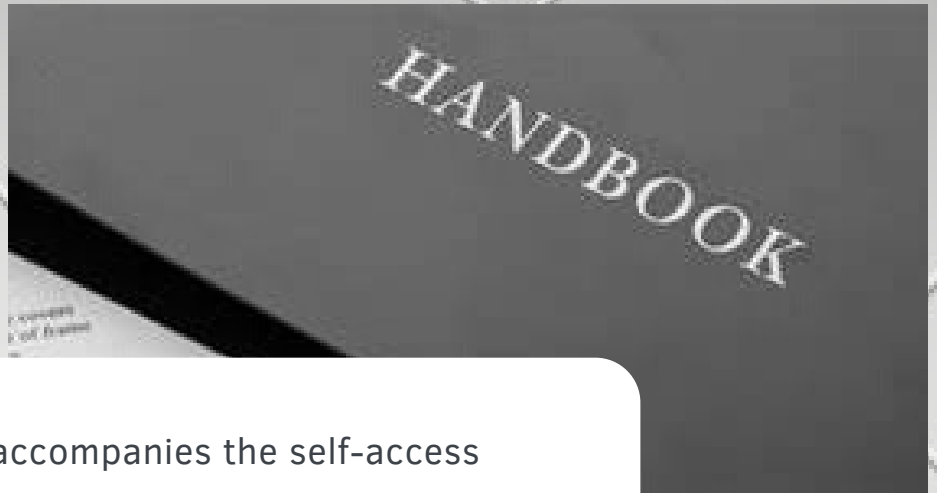
Synod Safeguarding Officer:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

About this handbook

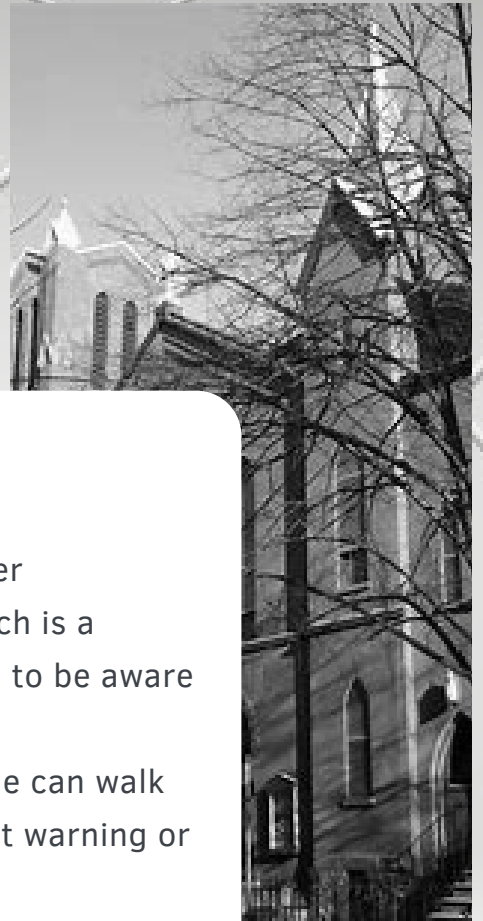


This is the handbook that accompanies the self-access safeguarding foundation course available in the URC Learning Hub. This is available in two formats: firstly, it may be downloaded from the course website and printed off for you to keep or, secondly, a hard copy can be obtained from your local Synod office. You do not need to have a hard copy to access the course, but we do advise you get one at some stage to keep as a reference guide after you have finished.

This handbook contains useful information linked to the exercises you will find in the course and details of further resources relating to the topics covered. We hope that when you finish the course you will find this a useful guide to refer to should you ever need it. You can also access further information at [Safeguarding - United Reformed Church](#). Links to relevant policies and Good Practice 5 can also be found [here](#).

As you progress through the course you will find references to this handbook so you can see where the relevant sections fit in to the information you have learnt. We hope you will find this programme interesting and informative and that it will help you in your relations with others in the church and elsewhere.

Safeguarding within the church



You may already have experience of Safeguarding in other capacities; however, it is important to note that the church is a unique context and there are certain things that we need to be aware of.

- Within the Church we welcome all people, and anyone can walk into a Sunday service or other groups at any time without warning or without us having prior knowledge about them.
- The nature of Church means we are likely to have survivors of abuse attending our services as they seek comfort.
- There is a distinct perception the church is a safe place and that those worshipping within a church are loving, moral Christians.
- We often view those in our church as extension of our own families and we will often have close friendships with those we attend church with this can lead to blurred boundaries especially where friends are also in positions of responsibility for kids work.
- Many of those who oversee the children and youth will do so in a voluntary capacity and may not recognise the need for the same boundaries that they would in a professional setting such as a school.
- Church leaders are often well respected and well liked within their congregations which can present challenges for disclosing abuse.
- There are unique challenges within a church when we consider pastoral work which may occur in a person's home and on a 1-1 basis.

We need to recognise that within a church we may have the vulnerable and those committing abuse worshipping side by side.

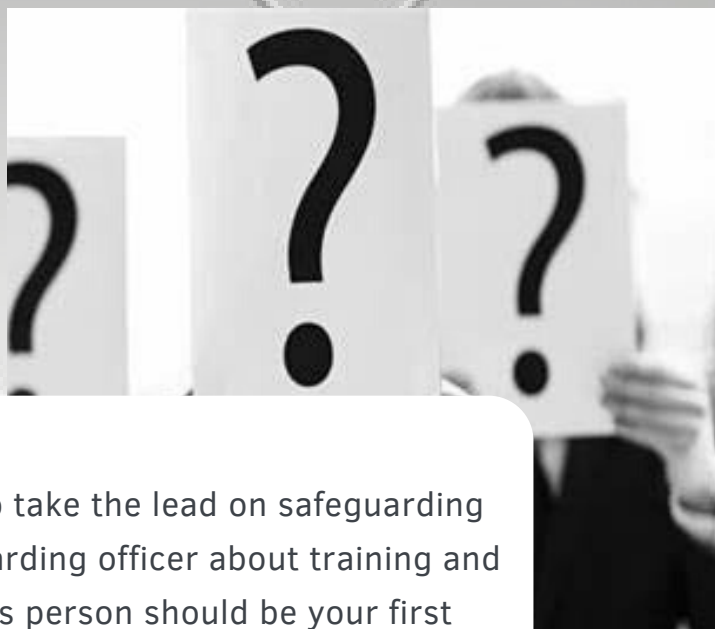
A look at the data



What does the data say?

- A child is usually abused by someone they know or trust, such as a teacher, Scout leader, someone from church, or at home. Over 90% of sexually abused children are abused by someone they know
- There has been a 60% increase in child sexual abuse reported to the police in England and Wales in the past four years. But arrests for child abuse offences have fallen 9%
- Over 23,000 sexual offences against children were recorded in the UK in 2021, of which over 5,500 were against children under 11
- Neglect affects up to 1 in 10 children in the UK – or more than one child on every street in the country
- 73% of UK children know another child who is suffering from neglect
- Neglect is the most frequent reason for a child protection referral to social services and emotional abuse is second
- One in 14 children have experienced emotional abuse by a parent or guardian
- Sexual exploitation among gangs has been prevalent in the UK. South Yorkshire has recorded a 577% increase in reports of abuse following the Scandal in Rotherham. Gangs have also been uncovered in Oldham, Rochdale and Derby
- Over 6,800 children were identified as needing protection from physical abuse in 2021
- 1 in 14 children have been physically abused

Who is who in the URC



·CHURCH SAFEGUARDING COORDINATOR

A person appointed by the local church to take the lead on safeguarding matters. You can ask your church safeguarding officer about training and where to find the safeguarding policy. This person should be your first point of call if you have any concerns.

·SYNOD SAFEGUARDING OFFICER / ADVISER

A person appointed by a Synod to take the lead in safeguarding matters. You can also use this person as your first point of call for safeguarding issues. You can find the information and contact details for your relevant officer on the URC website <https://urc.org.uk/contact-us/safeguarding-contacts/>

·ASSEMBLY SAFEGUARDING ADVISER

The person appointed to act as the designated safeguarding lead for the whole denomination. The Assembly Safeguarding Adviser develops, oversees and implements the URC's safeguarding policies, and provides support to URC Synods in responding to concerns and applying best practice in their work with children and adults at risk.

YOU CAN ALSO REFER SAFEGUARDING QUERIES TO THE DESIGNATED SAFEGUARDING LEAD AT [SAFEGUARDING@URC.ORG.UK](mailto:safeguarding@urc.org.uk)

·ELDERS AND MEMBERS WHO SERVE AS TRUSTEES FOR THE URC

These people have oversight of and primary responsibility for all aspects of safeguarding in each local church and Synod (governance, reporting incidents, checks and recruitment of staff and volunteers, reviews, etc). They are legally accountable to the Charity Commission and other regulatory bodies (when churches are registered charities or subject to certain regulations), and responsible for safeguarding in any local church and body of the URC even if certain aspects of the work are delegated to other staff.

Policies and Procedures



- **EACH CHURCH MUST HAVE A SAFEGUARDING COORDINATOR**
- A deputy should also be appointed, if possible.
- Ministers/CRCWs are not allowed to take up the role of Safeguarding Coordinators because of their overall pastoral responsibilities for their church communities. This should also include spouses and other family members of Ministers/CRCWs to prevent any conflict of interest in handling serious cases and sensitive information.
- Churches can consider appointing one Coordinator for a group of churches, or source safeguarding expertise from another URC local church.
- It is important that churches and offices display a poster detailing who to contact and a list of helpful phone numbers, make sure you know where this is in your church.
- Even if a church currently has no children attending, Safeguarding Coordinators should still be appointed. This is because all churches can have adults at risk in attendance, especially considering that some vulnerabilities can be hidden.
- Each church should adopt the URC's safeguarding practices and procedures for safeguarding children and adults at risk.

Ask to see your churches safeguarding procedure and make sure you have read this before you start working with children or vulnerable adults.

Types of Abuse

Physical abuse	To inflict pain, physical injury, impairment or suffering
Emotional abuse	The use of threats, fear or power, gained by another's position, to invalidate the person's independent wishes. Such behaviour can create very real emotional and psychological stress. In children, it can cause severe and persistent adverse effects on their emotional development.
Sexual abuse	For a child – forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities. For an adult – any non-consenting sexual act or behaviour. No-one should enter a sexual relationship with someone for whom they have pastoral responsibility or hold a position of trust.
Neglect	A person's well-being is impaired and their physical and/or psychological care needs are not met. In a child, neglect is likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect can be deliberate, or can occur as a result of not understanding what someone's needs are.
Self-neglect	An unwillingness or inability to care for oneself and/or one's environment.
Self-harm	The intentional damage or injury to a person's own body. It is often used as a way of coping with, expressing or releasing overwhelming emotions and distress. It may also be about converting emotional pain into physical pain, expressing something that is hard to put into words, or giving a feeling that they are in control.
Financial abuse	The inappropriate use, misappropriation, embezzlement or theft of money, property or possessions.
Discriminatory abuse	The inappropriate treatment of a person because of their age, gender, race, religion, cultural background, sexuality or disability. This is often referred to as hate crime.
Institutional abuse	The mistreatment of a person by a regime or individuals within an institution. It can occur through repeated acts of poor or inadequate care and neglect, or poor professional practice or ill-treatment. The church as an institution is not exempt from perpetrating institutional abuse.
Spiritual abuse	The inappropriate use of religious belief or practice. Coercion and control of one individual by another in a spiritual context. The abuse of trust or misuse of power by someone in a position of spiritual authority, such as a minister. The person experiences spiritual abuse as a deeply emotional personal attack.
Modern slavery	The illegal exploitation of people for personal or commercial gain. Includes human trafficking, where people are moved from one place to another into a situation of exploitation, using deception, coercion and violence.
Radicalisation	The process that moves a person to legitimise their support for, or use of, violence. The promise of an ideology which gives purpose and belonging. Can take place over a long time period, or happen quickly. The person may not understand that they have been radicalised.
Child sexual exploitation	A type of sexual abuse. The child is given gifts, drugs, money, status or affection in exchange for performing sexual activities. The tricking or grooming of children to believe they are in a loving and consensual relationship. Can be in person or on line. The child may not understand that they have been abused. They may seem to be condoning, or even encouraging, the abusive behaviour.

Signs of Abuse

There is a comprehensive guide to recognising abuse in GP5 Appendix A6, this can be found on the URC website.

RECOGNISING the concern

You may recognise abuse through something you see, hear or feel. You may see something that seems to clearly indicate that something is wrong or you may just have a feeling that something is not quite right.



It is not always easy to spot abuse but you do not need to be an expert or make a difference to a child or adult at risk. You are not expected to investigate whether abuse is happening and you do not need to "know for sure" before you report it.



Trust your gut instinct and recognise that something is not right.

Your Role

Your Role is to Follow the 4 Rs

If you are ever in any doubt then contact your Church Safeguarding Officer or Synod Safeguarding Officer.

You can find more information about the 4 Rs in **Good Practice 5 Section 10.1**. This includes information on what needs to be documented if a disclosure is made and how you can respond.

The 4 Rs, which are universal in safeguarding, show us what to do if there are concerns about the safety and welfare of someone.

1. Recognise the concern
2. Respond well, acting in an open and transparent way
3. Record what has been seen, heard or said
4. Report concerns to the appropriate people.

Risk Factors

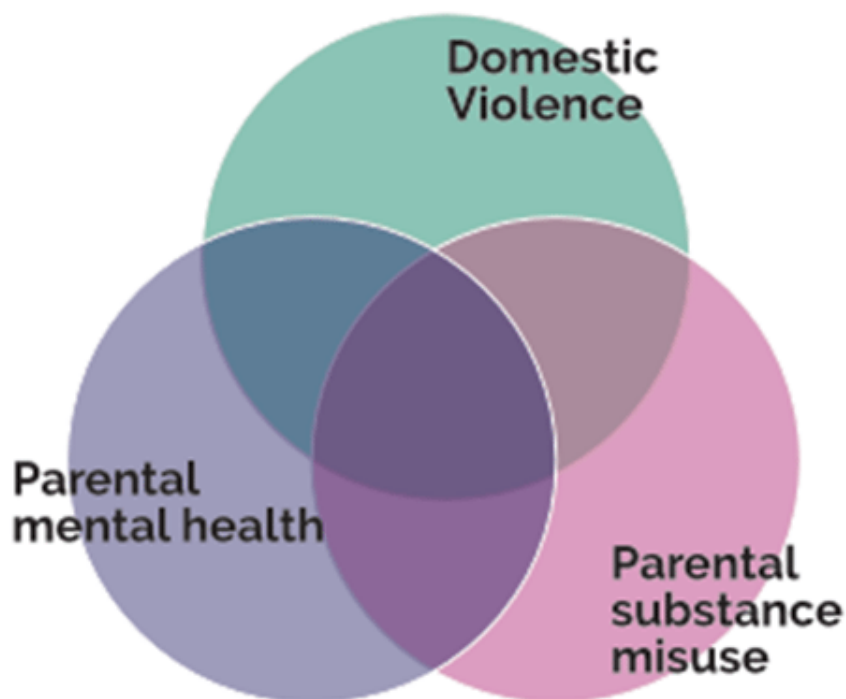


There are certain factors that have been recognised as putting children at greater risk (these were mentioned at the start and can be found in your handbook). The most serious cases of abuse have often been found to occur in families at risk of greater stress.

Some factors have been found to have a greater impact on the chances of abuse occurring within a home. These are known as the toxic trio.

- parent mental health
- domestic violence
- drug and alcohol abuse

If we are aware of any of these issues within a family, we should be particularly vigilant and alert the church safeguarding officer.



Barriers to The 4 Rs.

When we learnt about Victoria, we discovered that no one reported her abuse even though several people were concerned. There are several reasons why someone may fail to report abuse.

- **Fear**

You may be scared to report your concerns for fear of ridicule, being ostracized by the church or you may be scared of making the situation worse. The case of Victoria Climbié highlighted that where there are considerations of race people may be fearful of saying the wrong thing in case it isn't politically correct.

- **Uncertainty**

Abuse isn't always clear, and you may doubt your concerns or convince yourself there is a legitimate explanation – there often is. We need to be mindful that in all situations there are grey areas, pieces of the puzzle we may not be aware of and unknown circumstances. It is always best to report your concerns and make them known. That way they can be followed up by the relevant people.

- **Ignoring reality**

It can be hard to accept that abuse is taking place. Especially in a church where people have strong friendships and close relationships.

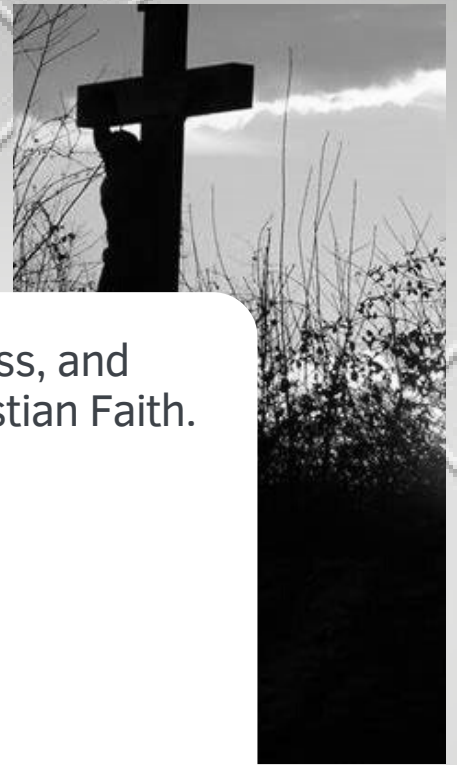
- **Ignorance to our own role.**

We may think that it is someone else's job to respond or if there is a real issue someone else will notice. It is important to remember that Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

- **Preconceived ideas.**

We may dismiss our concerns by making the assumption that abuse couldn't possibly be happening within our church.

Safeguarding and Forgiveness in the Church



We know that the Church is a place of forgiveness, and that forgiveness is a key component to the Christian Faith. However, we need to note the following

Forgiveness is NOT the opposite of justice

- Biblical forgiveness does not silence victims
- Victims need support and encouragement
- Accountability is needed for perpetrators

Forgiveness does NOT remove the need to protect the vulnerable

- We need to ensure there isn't an opportunity for further abuse
- Perpetrators of abuse are still a risk to others

Forgiveness is NOT the same as pretending bad things have not happened

- Abuse should not be hidden away or covered up.
- Forgiveness does not mean we turn a blind eye or look the other way if we know abuse is happening.

Serious Concerns

Remember:

- Any person can make a referral to the Police or Children's Services regardless of their role in the church
- If you receive information that leads you to believe that a child or adult is suffering significant harm, or they are in immediate danger, then you should report your concerns to the police using 999
- If this happens, then you should record the actions that you have taken and make sure to inform your synod safeguarding officer/adviser as soon as possible and always within 24 hours
- Every single person has a responsibility for safeguarding and anyone can make a referral to Children's Services or, in an emergency, the Police.
- However, generally speaking, it is best practice to discuss your concern with a safeguarding professional first (as long as they are not implicated) as they have the most up-to-date information and should know the procedures well. Please note that where your Church Safeguarding Officer isn't available you can report to your Synod Safeguarding Officer.

Self Care

Receiving information about someone else's abuse can be very distressing for the listener for a number of reasons. If someone discloses abuse or you notice something is happening, you may have a number of emotions.

- You may feel disbelief that this could happen to anyone.
 - You may feel that it can't possibly be true because the alleged perpetrator is such a nice person.
- The disclosure may trigger similar personal and painful memories.

We need to recognise that it is normal to feel this way when listening to a disclosure of abuse, and to be able to access support for ourselves if and when we need it. If you encounter a difficult situation, please speak to your Synod Safeguarding Officer for further support.

