Clare Presbyterian Church

To magnify Christ by making disciples in Clare and beyond

Safeguarding Children Procedures

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Procedures for Safeguarding Children

Aim of Chapter

i. To connect with the church policy statements
ii. To explain absolute actions and good practices
iii. To advise on how to use these procedures
iv. To outline roles and responsibilities
v. To outline what the church can expect regarding timescales for responses from the PCI Safeguarding Team

Policy Statements and Procedural Arrangements

In May 2025, the Kirk Session passed resolutions approving new policies regarding Children and Adult Safeguarding within the church.

Policies are the broad statements of belief and intention, foundational to our safeguarding strategies.

Procedures are the thorough working out of those policy statements.

'It is the policy of Clare Presbyterian Church to safeguard all children and young people interacting with its ministry in any form. This includes actively protecting children from all forms of harm or abuse … Safeguarding is imperative for our church and a central component to our mission; when we do it well, we are proclaiming the excellencies of our Lord Jesus.'

(Child Safeguarding Policy, May 2025)

The following procedures advise all within our congregation on how to achieve this.

Absolute Actions and Good Practice Guidance

Procedures are comprehensive and detailed, designed to ensure that the church complies with legal requirements and best practice.

They also contain explanatory commentary.

Absolute Actions

Absolute actions are procedures that cannot be deviated from. They are rooted in legal responsibilities and The Code of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

For example, the chapter 'Recruitment and Selection of Leaders' is a mandatory procedure, and an absolute set of actions with which we all must engage.

Good Practice Guidance

Following good practices is not always a legal requirement. However, it is based on practices that are understood as a strong way to manage something.

As a church we set out in these procedures strong recommendations for good practice that underpin the qualities we strive for in safeguarding.

In accordance with PCI advice, we seek to use the best practice from both jurisdictions (NI and ROI) to inform our work with children.

Good practice is based on evidence of safeguarding practices that have been tried and tested.

Sometimes good practice is simply established regional practice and guidance. Sometimes good practice is specific to our denomination and how we work in our own culture on a biblical basis.

In the case of good practice, humility is always required because we are all always learning, and safeguarding is complex and constantly changing.

Good practice is always going to be recommended by the PCI Safeguarding Team as it is evidence based.

Where our Kirk Session chooses not to follow good practice, it must ensure that it records that decision-making.

For example, the chapter 'Online Safety' contains some elements of good practice and some elements of absolute action. The Kirk Session may not deviate on some points; however, it can make alternative arrangements in others.

How to Use These Procedures

- All safeguarding policy and procedures for our church will be available on our website and are also available on request from the Designated Person
- We will apply the best practice for one part of the island across our safeguarding procedures. For example, child risk assessments in ROI are a strict legal requirement in ROI but are adopted in our congregation as good practice
- Each section contains the associated (PCI and CPC) policy statement
- This is the followed by a series of 'chapters' on the individual aspects of carrying out that policy
- Each chapter includes the procedures for a specific area of safeguarding
- Each chapter will explain its aim
- Each chapter will include associated links to other parts of the procedures that are relevant
- Each chapter will include links to any relevant resource you may need (for example, a link to a form)
- A variety of safeguarding resources to help implement the procedures (e.g., templates and forms, or contacts for relevant statutory bodies) may be accessed on the PCI website

- The PCI website includes an 'alert' function that will highlight if there has been a change to any denominational procedure or an update in legislation; once alerted, the CPC Safeguarding Team will amend our own policy and procedure.

Clare Presbyterian Church is registered with the Charity Commission as a stand-alone charity.

This means that we must have our own local child protection arrangements; that is, a Child Protection Statement, associated risk assessments, a policy and a suite of procedures.

These must be reviewed at least once every two years.

Roles and Responsibilities

When it comes to the protection of children, everyone has a responsibility. This is outlined throughout the procedures.

The text below outlines our specific duties regarding the policy and procedure arrangements specifically.

The PCI Safeguarding Team

1. Must keep its own training up to date
2. Must sit on appropriate external statutory panels to ensure immediate connection with regional and legislative safeguarding developments
3. Must ensure that changes in legislation or regional policy are communicated effectively and in a timely manner to all they affect in the denomination
4. Must keep policy and procedures for the use of the denomination under review
5. Must keep the website up to date and relevant
6. Must keep training presentations up to date and relevant
7. Must ensure that all PCI volunteer trainers are equipped to disseminate appropriate guidance throughout the denomination
8. Must be accountable to the governing bodies of the church
9. Must report to PCI Safeguarding Development Committee at least twice annually on progress against the safeguarding standards for the denomination
10. Must liaise with individual congregations on queries around individual implementation of these procedures
11. Must escalate any concerns with regard to compliance at individual congregational level to Presbytery or the General Secretary's Office, as appropriate

Armagh Presbytery

1. Must ensure that our church has an up-to-date set of policies and procedures for child protection
2. Must ensure that our Kirk Session has attended safeguarding training at least once every three years
3. Should consider appointing a Presbytery Safeguarding Lead, to work alongside the Moderator and Clerk of Presbytery to manage the safeguarding oversight within its remit
4. Must respond to escalated concerns from the PCI Safeguarding Team and work alongside it to take remedial actions

Clare Kirk Session

1. Must have in place a written risk assessment, policy and procedure for the safeguarding of children engaged in our mission and ministries
2. Must review those documents at least once every two years
3. Must ensure that our actual practices adhere to our policy and procedures
4. Must have safeguarding as a standing agenda item for Kirk Session meetings
5. Must support the Designated Person in their role pastorally and with their administrative responsibilities
6. Must attend safeguarding training at least once every three years
7. Must be accountable to Presbytery for its arrangements and give assurances that these are in place

Designated Persons

1. Must keep their training up to date
2. Must review the congregational policy and procedures for safeguarding and update the Kirk Session on any changes required at any time
3. Must keep an active list of volunteers, their AccessNI vetting and training dates
4. Must ensure that all volunteers have access to the policy and procedures, and have attended training
5. Must ensure that they are keeping the Kirk Session appraised of any safeguarding issues
6. Must raise concerns if they believe the Kirk Session is not attending to its safeguarding policies and procedures: firstly, with Kirk Session, then escalated to PCI's central Safeguarding Team if necessary

Leaders in Charge

1. Must keep their own training up to date

2. Must understand the policy and procedures and their responsibilities as stated within
3. Must ensure that all the leaders in their organisation/activity are adhering to the policy and procedures
4. Must raise a concern if a leader does not adhere to the policy and procedure: firstly, to the designated person and Kirk Session, and escalated to PCI's central Safeguarding Team if necessary

Leaders and Volunteers

1. Must keep their own training up to date
2. Must understand the policy and procedures and their responsibilities as stated within
3. Must adhere to those policies and procedures at all times
4. Must raise any concerns they have with the Leader in Charge of their organisation/activity

Members

1. Individual members of our congregation, even if they have no role with children or young people, have responsibilities as members to ensure that children are protected at all times from harm and/or abuse
2. All members should be aware of the child safeguarding policy and procedures, and as a member understand that they too should behave in a manner that cooperates with the procedures
3. All members should know how to raise a concern and to whom

Individuals Who Attend

1. It is incumbent upon every member of society to regard the welfare of children as paramount. Therefore, we all have responsibilities, even if we do not belong to Clare Presbyterian Church or to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland
2. Anyone visiting or engaging with our ministries, even on a temporary or one-off basis, should be aware that we have child safeguarding policy and procedures and that these help form our ethos and approaches to keeping children and young people safe
3. All individuals should be aware of our open and transparent approach and that we will act if we have any reasonable grounds for concern, even if someone is not a member
4. All individuals should know to whom and how they can raise any concerns they have about child safeguarding when they engage in our mission or ministries

CHAPTER END

Chapter 2: Guidance in Recognising Abuse

Aim of this Chapter

i. To describe forms of abuse and indicators of the same
ii. To provide specific cultural and faith-based considerations
iii. To outline abuse of position of trust
iv. To outline reasonable grounds for concern

All those who contribute to the life of our church have a part to play in keeping people safe. We do this in the arrangements we make through well planned, safe environments and with clear procedures for volunteers and staff.

All our leaders play an important role in responding effectively and compassionately when someone comes forward to share concerns or to disclose abuse, or when we believe a child may be at harm or risk of harm.

'Not reporting a relevant offence to the police, including those against children, is an offence in Northern Ireland.' (*Criminal Law Act (NI) 1967)*

Everyone must be alert to the possibility that children with whom they are in contact may be experiencing abuse or neglect.

One of the main ways in which we can remain alert is to ensure that we can **recognise the main signs of abuse**. This chapter outlines the main types and signs of abuse.

This is a written guide and it is mandatory that all leaders and staff engaged with children and/or young people's work in any manner undertake the appropriate level of training, alongside reading this policy.

Recognising abuse in this document is not defined in legal terms but written in line with legislation for the ordinary reader to understand.

This guidance is based on legislation, policy and guidance in our jurisdiction (Northern Ireland). Parallel guidance exists for the Republic of Ireland.

Recognising Abuse: A Broad Look

Child abuse can occur any time, any place and to any child.

Child abuse is not necessarily always through physical contact; children can be abused by omission, failure to act or via non-contact online abuse.

Additional Risk Circumstances

The likelihood of abuse can be affected by a number of other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that could make children more vulnerable to the potential for abuse and harm. These include but are not limited to:

- substance misuse in the household
- parent in jail
- domestic violence
- divorce and other family separation
- parental mental illness
- children in armed forces families
- poverty
- social/racial discrimination
- disability
- refugee families

There are also some stages in a child's own life that could make a child more vulnerable to the potential for abuse and harm. These include but are not limited to:

- age
- disability
- sexual identity
- mental health issues
- communication difficulties
- care-experienced children/care leavers
- young carers
- previous experiences of abuse

There are other factors that could affect the damage to a child's health, development and welfare. These include but are not limited to:

- frequency of the neglect/abuse
- consistency of the neglect/abuse
- positive influences in a child's life

It is important to note that in circumstances where there are additional risk factors, this does not necessarily mean that a child is being abused.

Abusers and those Who May Cause Harm to a Child

Those who harm may be an adult known to the child or a stranger.

It can be anyone who has contact with the child, in person or online, regularly or as a one off.

It can include paid staff, volunteers and include families and friends. Abuse can occur in any setting or organisation.

Children and young people can also cause harm and this should be considered a child welfare and protection issue for both parties. The reporting procedures should be followed for both children involved.

Recognising Abuse and Harm: A Focused Look

Child abuse is defined below as per the Department of Health's Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, October 2024

Types of Abuse

Harm can be suffered by a child or young person by acts of abuse perpetrated upon them by others. Abuse can happen in any family, but children may be more at risk if their parents have problems with drugs, alcohol and mental health, or if they live in a home where domestic abuse happens. Abuse can also occur outside of the family environment. Evidence shows that babies and children with disabilities can be more vulnerable to suffering abuse.

Although the harm from the abuse might take a long time to be recognisable in the child or young person, professionals may be in a position to observe its indicators earlier, for example, in the way that a parent interacts with their child.

Effective and ongoing information sharing is key between professionals.

Harm from abuse is not always straightforward to identify and a child or young person may experience more than one type of harm or significant harm.

Harm can be caused by:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Neglect
- Exploitation
- Ill treatment of another, or abusive behaviour directed at another

Physical abuse is deliberately physically hurting a child. It might take a variety of different forms, including hitting, biting, pinching, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning or suffocating a child.

Sexual abuse occurs when others use and exploit children sexually for their own gratification or gain or the gratification of others. Sexual abuse 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 clothing.

It may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in the production of sexual images, forcing children to look at sexual images or watch sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via e-technology).

Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

Contact Sexual Abuse

Contact sexual abuse is where an abuser makes physical contact with a child or forces the child to make physical contact with someone else. This can include but is not limited to:

- forcing a child to take part in sexual activities (including touching, kissing and oral sex)
- making a child undress or touch someone else
- using a body part or an object to rape or penetrate a child
- any form of sexual touching of a child, clothed or not
- involving a child in an act of masturbation
- inviting or coercing a child to engage in the production of child abuse images (this includes any modelling, posing or exhibition for the purposes of sexual arousal, gratification or sexual acts)

Non-Contact Sexual Abuse

Non-contact sexual abuse is where a child is abused without being touched by the abuser. This can be in person or online and can include but is not limited to:

- any sexual act performed in the presence of a child
- masturbation in the presence of a child
- making a child masturbate
- showing a child any sexually explicit material
- exposing a child to inappropriate or abusive material online, or making them share such material
- coercing a child to take part in sexual activities or sexual conversations via a smart phone or other device (**Link here to Chapter 11 Guidelines for Online Safety**)

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child. It is also sometimes called psychological abuse and it can have severe and persistent adverse effects on a child's emotional development.

Emotional abuse may involve deliberately telling a child that they are worthless, or unloved and inadequate. It may include not giving a child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. Emotional abuse may involve bullying – including online bullying through social networks, online games or mobile phones – by a child's peers.

Neglect is the failure to provide for a child's basic needs, whether it be adequate food, clothing, hygiene, supervision or shelter that is likely to result in the serious impairment of a child's health or development. Children who are neglected often also suffer from other types of abuse.

Exploitation is the intentional ill-treatment, manipulation or abuse of power and control over a child or young person – to take selfish or unfair advantage of a child or young person or situation, for personal gain. It may manifest itself in many forms such as child labour, slavery, servitude, engagement in criminal activity, begging, benefit or other financial fraud or child trafficking. It extends to the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of children for the purpose of exploitation.

Exploitation can be sexual in nature (see section 7).

Ill treatment of another or abusive behaviour directed at another means that a child could be harmed by virtue of witnessing the ill-treatment or domestic abuse of another person. However, it is not necessary for the child to have witnessed such treatment or behaviour or, indeed, to have been present when it happened. Abusive behaviour is behaviour that falls within section 2 of the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (NI) 2021.

Specific Forms of Abuse

(As defined in Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, October 2024)

Complex Child Abuse

The PSNI/HSCNI Joint Protocol defines Complex Child Abuse as 'complex, organised or multiple abuse, whether sexual, physical, emotional or by neglect occurs as part of a network of abuse across a family or community, within residential homes or schools and within an 'on or offline' networked groups of sexual offenders'.

Abuse within Communities

Within some communities, there can be an acceptance of the use of violence as a response to perceived anti-social behaviour, crime committed by individuals or as a method of control over children and young people. Children and young people within these communities may be threatened with violence or forced expulsion from their homes and local areas by those linked to organised gangs or paramilitary organisations or as a result of perceived cultural beliefs. Children may also be abused or exploited by adults who hold power within their communities, where fear is used to coerce the child or young person into compliance.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

FGM involves procedures that include the partial or total removal of the external female genital organs for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons. The practice is medically unnecessary, extremely painful and has serious health consequences, both at the time when the mutilation is carried out and in later life.

FGM is a criminal offence in Northern Ireland. *Serious Crime Act 2015 (Sections 72 and 73) as amended, and the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003*

Forced Marriage

A forced marriage is a marriage conducted without the valid consent of one or both parties and where duress is a factor. Forced marriage is a criminal offence in Northern Ireland. *Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007*

Honour Based Violence (HBV)

The term 'honour-based violence' is used to refer to a range of violent practices used to control behaviour within families or other social groups to sustain or promote perceived cultural and religious beliefs and/or honour.

Fabricated or Induced Illness (FII)

Harm may be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

Online sexual exploitation of children and young people / Abusive images of children / Risks of misuse of digital technologies (see Chapter 11: Online Guidance for specific information)

Bullying

Bullying causes physical and/or emotional harm and can result in significant problems of low self-esteem, social isolation, anxiety and depression for the children and young people subjected to it. Bullying occurs in a variety of settings and can take place off and online. In our context, children are provided with services and participate in activities, so we must be aware of bullying and tackle this at an early stage. In serious cases it may be necessary to make a referral to social services or the police.

Cultural and Faith-Based Considerations

There are a number of additional risk factors that should be considered in recognising abuse in a faith context, like ours.

These risks can cause barriers to disclosure or reporting and include but are not limited to:

- strong beliefs can prevent children, young people and adults from reporting concerns
- a sense of honour or shame can prevent children and young people from seeking help or reporting concerns

- strong cultural or religious belief in the sanctity of marriage may dissuade children, young people and adults from reporting concerns
- opinions expressed by faith communities around children, regarding sex outside marriage, can cause a barrier for children and young people to speak up about abuse
- social isolation can occur if an individual or family are seen to have acted outside of the community of faith in some manner
- religion or faith can be used as an explanation for abusive behaviours or can be used as a distraction, for example, used to accuse professionals of discrimination
- some professionals lack knowledge about specific cultures and religions and do not feel confident in challenging harmful practices
- professionals want to be respectful of families' cultural and religious practices but the desire to be culturally sensitive can result in professionals accepting lower standards of care *(Culture and faith: learning from case reviews, June 2014, NSPCC)*
- some extreme cases mean that children who are seen as 'disobedient' or 'different' are believed to be possessed by a spirit controlling their behaviour. The children can be physically and emotionally abused in an effort to 'exorcise' the spirit
- harmful or unhealthy cultures or ministry practices can be created around the character and personality of a charismatic leader, giving opportunity to abuse a position of trust
- individuals can believe the reputation of the Church is the most significant risk so do not respond appropriately to knowledge of abuse; the welfare of the child is paramount

Abuse by a Person in a Position of Trust

The Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, as amended in 2022 by the Justice Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims (NI) Act, outlines the legal framework for offences against children under the age of 18, even if they are aged 16 (the age of consent for sexual activity), if the adult occupies a position of trust in the child's life. In our setting that would include, but is not limited to, minister/elder/pastoral worker/youth leader.

Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland (October 2024) states:

Abuse can be perpetrated by adults working in a position of trust, either in an employed or voluntary capacity, in a variety of settings or within an organisation that has responsibility for, or provides services or activities for, children.

We must recognise, unfortunately, that this may apply to roles in our church. *These should be dealt with in the same way as allegations against leaders or other volunteers in terms of referral to statutory agencies and in taking immediate protective steps in line with PCI guidance*

Reasonable Grounds for Concern

It is everyone's responsibility to protect children and young people and do their best to keep them safe.

If anyone has **reasonable grounds for concern** that a child may have been, is currently, or could become at risk of being abused or neglected, they should always inform Social Services via the Trust Gateway Team.

It is never necessary for any individual to prove that abuse has occurred, is occurring or could occur. It is the role of professional experts in Trust Gateways Teams to assess the concerns and make decisions based on this and any other information they have available to them.

The safety and well-being of the child must take priority over concerns about adults against whom allegations are made.

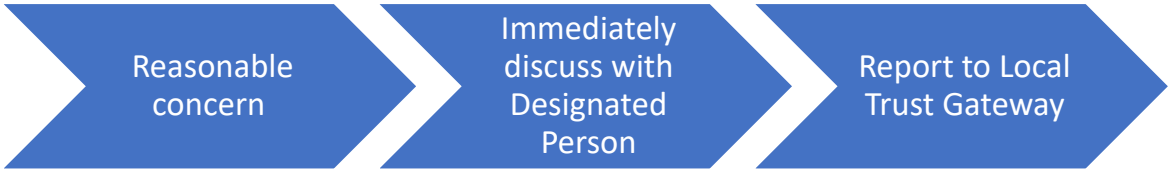
If what could be symptoms of abuse are ignored, it could result in ongoing harm to a child.

Reasonable grounds for concern include but are not limited to:

- Evidence that is consistent with abuse and is unlikely to have happened any other way (for example, injuries)
- Any concerns that are about possible sexual abuse
- Consistent signs that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect
- A child saying or indicating by other means (for example, by drawing a picture) that they have been abused
- Admission or indication by an adult or a child of an alleged abuse they committed
- An account from a person who observed the child being abused

Now read Chapter 3: Responding and Recording

Reasonable Grounds for Concern



Immediate Concern



In Summary

- Any child with whom you come into contact could be experiencing harm or abuse
- **Doing nothing is not an option; you must always act**

CHAPTER END

Chapter 3: Responding and Reporting

Aim of the Chapter

i. Managing a disclosure of abuse
ii. Other triggers for reporting abuse
iii. Reporting
iv. Mandated reporting and the appointment of a Designated Liaison Person
v. After reporting to Social Services
vi. Responding to allegations against Ministers and Elders
vii. A flowchart for responding and recording

Managing a Disclosure of Abuse

Barriers to Disclosures from Children and Young People

It can be very hard for children and young people to open up about what's happened to them.

They might be worried about the consequences or that nobody will believe them. They might have told someone before and nothing was done to help them. Sometimes they might not know that what's happening to them is abuse and struggle to share what they're feeling. Some children don't reveal they're being abused for a long time, some never tell anyone. *(NSPCC)*

Stay calm, express concern and sympathy, reassure and record in the child's own words.

There are particular barriers for children in faith-based organisations, like our church, and we need to be mindful of them.

- Often children see that the person harming them is very important. A leader, someone whom the church respects, someone who is in a position of trust and is often at the front of church, and they are afraid they will not be believed.
- It may be that children hear the person spoken about often with very positive language, and so they develop an understanding that the person is held in high esteem, and there is a protective fence around those individuals. There is already a power imbalance between children and adults, and this is added to when that adult is in a church-based position of trust and children assess that the individual is very much liked.
- It may be that children and young people are left afraid through the 'spiritually abusive' grooming activities of an individual. For example, the misuse of biblical language can be terrifying for a child brought up in a church environment. Threats can be made and children

can be left feeling shame because of their own sin or evil, or scared of the work of the devil – a grooming tactic that petrifies a child or young person.

- It is the case too that the children and young people of Christian families tend to be more exposed to strangers. Many families extending the beautiful gift of hospitality to strangers who come to our churches and communities tend to have their guard down when inviting individuals into their homes. This generosity of hospitality should not cease, but families need to be aware of managing the risks and keeping their children safe while they reach out to others.

Reasons for Disclosing

- realising the abuse is wrong
- not being able to cope any more
- the abuse getting worse
- wanting to protect other children
- wanting the abuser to be punished
- trusting someone enough to tell them
- someone asks them directly
- their environment has changed and they feel safe

Managing a Disclosure

Remember that if a child or young person has chosen you to disclose something to, they have assessed you as being safe and as someone who will help them. This is a privilege to take very seriously.

Follow these simple steps if a child or young person begins to tell you about possible abuse or harm:

Listen carefully	○ don't ask them to repeat or ask them leading questions ○ allow them to tell you anything in their own words ○ manage your emotions in that moment

Reassure	○ this is a big moment for them, tell them they've done the right thing ○ tell them you understand them

Be serious	○ let them know you believe them ○ let them know you are going to do something about it

	○ do not promise to keep a secret

Safety first	○ if a child is immediately in harm's way protect them first using emergency services ○ advise them in words they understand that this is not their fault, they've done nothing wrong

What is next	○ tell them what you are going to do ○ tell them who you need to tell

Report and record	○ write down everything you have been told ○ report immediately to the appropriate person ○ do not delay *(see below)*

It is never your responsibility to investigate the disclosure, nor to judge the truth of the claims or the credibility of the child.

Please note that even if you know that a child or their family is already known to Social Services you must report.

Other Triggers for Reporting Abuse

Harm to children and young people is not always brought to our attention by a disclosure.

We may also become aware because:

- someone else tells us
- we see injuries that are unusual or do not match the account of how they occurred
- we see signs consistent with neglect
- an adult admits abuse or harm (common in a 'confessional' pastoral space)
- a child or young person is alluding to abuse in non-verbal ways (e.g., drawings)

The same principles below apply for any concern of abuse or harm to a child, disclosed or not.

Reporting

Main Principles of Reporting

1. Designated Persons report to Trust Gateway Team any concern about the welfare of a child/young person
2. PSNI 999 in an emergency circumstance where **immediate protection** is required
3. You should always inform Social Services if you have reasonable grounds for concern that a child may have been, is being or is at risk of being abused or neglected (See Chapter 2)
4. If you are ever unsure if you should report a concern, you should contact Social Services to discuss and take advice
5. Always keep an accurate written record of what you are reporting in a secure space
6. Do not delay
7. We work in an open and transparent manner; it is therefore not appropriate for any leader in our church to make an anonymous report. All staff members, leaders and volunteers are recruited formally in their roles and should work in an open way. Anonymous reporting makes it difficult for Social Services to examine concerns fully.

Reports to Social Services are made through the Gateway Teams, in person, by telephone or in writing to the duty social work office in the area where the child lives.

Contact details for duty social work offices nationwide are available on the Trust websites.

Designated Person

Our congregation has appointed a Designated Person (DP) who takes the lead in the protection of children and liaises with outside agencies. We have appointed a Deputy Designated Person too, who also fulfils the role of Adult Safeguarding Champion. The DPs work with the leaders in the reporting of concerns. Internally, they are a source of advice and support to staff and volunteers.

Responding to Child Safeguarding Concerns

When a DP is alerted to concerns about a child/young person, their role is to act promptly and in accordance with the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's reporting procedure, which will include the following steps:

- Ensure that the child/young person is in no immediate danger and that any medical or police assistance required has been sought;
- Consider whether the concern is a safeguarding issue or not, in line with guidance provided within the policy. This may involve some 'checking out' of information but being careful not to stray into the realm of investigation;

- Consult with social services where there is any doubt – a hypothetical situation can be explored, and they should be advised on the best course of action to take;
- Make a formal referral if Social Services considers the concern to be a safeguarding issue. They should liaise with the Kirk Session representatives in the congregation with whom the statutory requirement to report lies;
- Be available, as required, to the investigation undertaken by the statutory authorities;
- If it is not considered a safeguarding issue, and it is decided that there should be no referral made to a statutory authority, a record should be made of the concern and the details kept on file, including any action taken, the reasons for not referring, and the situation monitored on an ongoing basis;
- The employee or volunteer who raised the concern should be given a clear written explanation of the reasons why the concern is not being reported to Social Services, and the employee or volunteer should be advised that if they remain concerned about the situation, they are free to make a report to Social Services or PSNI.

After Reporting to Social Services

Social Services will assess all reports they receive.

They will acknowledge that they have received the report.

To protect the privacy of the child and family it may not be possible to inform the DP of the progress or outcomes of a report.

They must continue to manage any alleged perpetrator in a precautionary manner until Social Services have completed their processes (see below).

Responding to Allegations Against Ministers, Elders, Leaders, Volunteers

External Reporting

The first priority always is to ensure that no child is exposed to unnecessary risk. The welfare of a child gets precedence in all situations, regardless of who the alleged perpetrator is.

To that end, there is **no difference** in managing a disclosure or reporting a concern externally if the alleged perpetrator is a minster or elder of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The process is the same as it would be with any other leader, volunteer, staff member or member of the public.

If a member of our church feels that their concerns have not been taken seriously by the DPs and Kirk Session, they should escalate the matter to PCI's Safeguarding Team

Follow all steps as outlined in this chapter for external reporting, **without delay**.

Internal Reporting

Internal reporting is required alongside any external reporting so the immediate risks can be managed across all potential areas of concern.

For example, the issue may have been raised in the context of the Sunday School, but the individual of concern might also be a Youth Club leader or engaged in another church.

Keeping Records

It is very important that good records are kept on safeguarding matters; all in our church should use the note of concern on the PCI website.

Records should be factual and include details of contacts, consultations and any actions taken.

All agencies dealing with children must cooperate in the sharing of records with Tusla where a child protection or welfare issue arises. An example of this could be information needed for a Child Protection Conference or Strategy Meeting or information important for the assessment of risk to a child. Ensure that records on child protection concerns, allegations and disclosures are kept securely and safely within the organisation.

Records should only be used for the purpose for which they are intended and should only be shared on a need-to-know basis in the best interests of the child/young person. Child protection and welfare records should be updated as required and reviewed regularly by the Designated Person.

Any individual in an organisation who has reported/needs to report a child protection concern should advise the Leader in Charge of their specific organisation, unless that person is the alleged perpetrator.

The Leader in Charge should advise the Minister (Convener if vacant) and the Designated Person.

If the alleged perpetrator is the Leader in Charge, the individual should go straight to the Minister and/or the DP.

If the allegation was about a DP, this should be made to the Minister of the congregation.

If it was about a Minister, the report should be made to the DP.



What to Report?

Please use the correct form when making a child protection report. This should include date and time, those involved and any immediate actions. You can find it on the PCI website.

Internal Actions

The Minister and/or the DP and an elder should, as a matter of urgency, take any necessary protective measures. These measures should be proportionate to the level of risk.

Protective measures taken are precautionary and not disciplinary. *Disciplinary action is not the remit of the Safeguarding Team or these procedures.*

The protective measures are an interim measure pending the statutory authorities' consideration of the matter firstly.

Protective measures may include but are not limited to:

- Stepping down a leader/volunteer/elder/minister from all roles and responsibilities
- Removing a leader/volunteer from a specific activity or space
- Asking someone to not attend church for a defined period of time
- For employed staff, looking at alternative duties that do not involve work with children

If a statutory authority decides that there is no issue for them to follow up on, there will be a further assessment of risk or concerns internally, to support decision-making as to next steps.

Just because there is no ongoing statutory involvement does not mean there are no concerns to manage.

If statutory authorities decide that there is a risk for children and/or young people the church has no authority to override this.

The church must take its lead from the statutory services assessment in this instance and act to fully protect children.

Internal Decision-Making Supports

The Minister and Designated Person can take confidential advice from:

1. **PCI Safeguarding Office**

   This is a wide part of its remit and it can advise on what immediate protective steps can be taken and guide through all the processes.

It is normal to advise the safeguarding officers that there has been a child protection issue.

2. **Clerk of Presbytery**

   This individual can advise on church-led processes and decision-making.

3. **Clerk of the General Assembly**

   In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to escalate to the office of the Clerk of the General Assembly.

4. **Kirk Session**

   It is critical that confidentiality is maintained, so it is not always appropriate to share sensitive information with the full Kirk Session. In April 2026, the Kirk Session appointed a small, delegated team to manage the local safeguarding, and that team can be consulted.

Engagement with the Alleged Perpetrator on the Report of Allegations of Harm

The Minister and one elder should privately inform the staff/volunteer/elder:

- the fact that an allegation has been made against him or her
- the nature of the allegation
- if applicable, the fact that the allegation will be brought to/has been brought to the attention of Social Services/PSNI

No details of the victim should be given.

The staff/volunteer/elder should be afforded an opportunity to respond and the response should be noted and passed on if making a formal report to Social Services/PSNI.

At this stage, the staff member/volunteer/elder against whom an allegation has been made, and his/her family, will require pastoral care, as will any alleged victims and their families.

The individual providing pastoral support to the alleged perpetrator must be different to the individual providing pastoral support to the victim and their family.

In the event that the Minister is the individual against whom the allegations are made, all of the above applies; however, these steps will be taken by the Clerk of Presbytery and either the Deputy Clerk or Clerk of the General Assembly.

If any individual has any concerns about a person in a position of trust in the church and feel unable to use the above internal procedure for dealing with an allegation against staff or volunteers, they should in the first instance contact the PCI Safeguarding Office.

Key Messages

1. The safety and well-being of the child must take priority over concerns about the adults against whom allegations may be made

2. Reports of concerns should be made without delay to Social Services
3. If you think a child is in immediate danger you should contact PSNI without delay

A Flowchart for Reporting

*If a child appears to be in danger or at immediate risk, Social Services and the PSNI should be contacted without delay



CHAPTER END

Chapter 4: Management of Non-Recent Disclosures of Abuse

Aim of the Chapter

i. To describe what non-recent abuse is
ii. To understand our context
iii. To know how to respond to a disclosure of non-recent abuse
iv. To outline the responsibilities of personnel
v. To assess current risk

What is Non-Recent Abuse?

Non-recent child abuse (sometimes known as historical abuse, or retrospective disclosure) is when an adult was abused as a child or young person under the age of 18.

Sometimes adults who were abused in childhood blame themselves or are made to feel it's their fault. But this is never the case – there's no excuse for abuse occurring at any time.

Someone might have known they were abused for a very long time or might only recently have learnt or understood what happened to them.

Whether the abuse happened once or hundreds of times, a year or 70 years ago, whatever the circumstances, there's support to help. It's never too late. *(NSPCC)*

Our Context

Disclosures can be about abuse that:

1. Has occurred within our church or denomination. That means abuse perpetrated by a leader of PCI at any time, or abuse that occurred on PCI premises or abuse that was instigated through a PCI contact or activity.
2. Has been disclosed pastorally and is not connected to PCI – for example, familial abuse disclosed to a Minister for pastoral support.

Adults have come forward – and will continue to do so – to report experiences of abuse as children within our denomination.

This should be of great sadness to us, and such disclosures must be met with compassion and concern.

Disclosures of non-recent abuse can occur within pastoral situations, when the adult has developed a trusted relationship with an individual who is part of their faith community.

This can also occur when an adult has left our church or denomination and feels they are in a safer place to disclose their experiences.

When they feel ready, adults choose to disclose these experiences for many reasons. These include but are not limited to:

- they feel safe – possibly with a person or in different situation
- something significant has changed: for example, the perpetrator has passed away
- they are concerned that the perpetrator is still active and they want to protect others
- they want justice and/or redress

Responding to a Disclosure that is Non-Recent

Critically, we must respond with the victim/survivor as our central focus.

We should not jump too quickly into the management of the allegations; instead, we should ensure the well-being of the person in front of us, both immediately and in the near future.

It is critical that we respond in an attentive manner, reassuring them for the steps they have now taken, praising their bravery and demonstrating compassion.

Most disclosures occur within the pastoral relationships between individuals and their Minister or elder.

Ministers/elders working with adults, particularly in the provision of counselling or spiritual support, must explain about the limits of confidentiality where child protection is concerned.

It is additionally important to remain aware that some individuals need more specialist and professional input as part of their survival journey; Ministers and elders should know when they need to refer outwards.

Follow these simple steps if someone begins to disclose non-recent abuse:

Always stop someone who is about to disclose to you and remind them you cannot keep secrets – that you have an obligation to pass on information of any crime or suspected crime and on every occasion where a child or adult may still be at risk of harm or abuse.

Listen carefully	○ stay calm ○ try not to ask lots of questions or make clarifying points

Reassure	○ acknowledge the courage of the individual and tell them they've done the right thing ○ tell them you have understood them

Be serious	○ let them know that you believe them ○ let them know that you are going to continue to support them

Safety first	○ if there is any immediate risk of harm established, protect them first ○ use emergency services if necessary

What is next	○ tell them what you are going to do ○ tell them who you need to tell

Record	○ write down everything you have been told ○ use the person's own words

Report	○ take advice from the PCI central Safeguarding Office ○ See below

Reporting Non-Recent Abuse: Responsibilities

If, because of information received from an adult, the person knows, believes or has a reasonable suspicion that a person who **is currently a child** has been harmed, is being harmed or is at risk of being harmed, they must report this information without delay to Social Services/PSNI. This information could come from a variety of sources and it is your legal duty to report.

Where possible, pastoral support should extend to supporting the individual to engage with any report to Social Services themselves. A direct report to Social Services/PSNI will help them to quickly examine the current or potential future risks to children.

All individuals are responsible for reporting any crime/potential crime of which they have knowledge to PSNI.

Advice should always be sought from PSNI/Social Services where there is any doubt.

CHAPTER END

Chapter 5: Confidentiality and Safeguarding

Aim of the Chapter

i. To explain our legal obligations
ii. To describe consent and the limitations to consent
iii. To describe support
iv. To describe internal communication processes

At times we may need to share sensitive or personal information to ensure the safety and protection of children.

We respect individuals' rights to privacy and are committed to keeping information secure.

However, there are limits to this confidentiality. In some situations, we are required to share information either internally or externally.

If we are concerned about a child's safety or well-being, we may need to share information with Social Services and PSNI.

This is required by law to protect children and young people.

Our Legal Obligations

The safety and welfare of children and young people is a priority for our church.

All our ministries are underpinned by regional statutory guidance and requirements, mainly *The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995* and *Co-Operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, October 2024*

It is also our own policy that all our leaders, staff members, volunteers, ministers and elders must inform social services when they have reasonable grounds for concern that a child may have been, is being or is at risk of being abused or neglected (harmed).

We must report concerns:

- Even if we do not know the child or the person who may have caused harm
- Even if someone tells us the concern has already been reported to Social Services or PSNI
- Even if someone wants to take back something said that raised concern
- No matter how well we know the child, their family or the alleged perpetrator
- No matter what the role or responsibility any individual has within our church

Consent

We will usually discuss our concerns with the individual about whom allegations are made and explain why we are making/have made a report.

We do not do this if it would put a child at further risk or place ourselves at any risk of harm.

It is important to note that consent is not required for us to make a report.

When it comes to child protection, data protection legislation and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) do not prevent us from sharing information when necessary to keep children safe, when we have reasonable grounds for concern.

Support

We understand that this process may be difficult for the individual subject of allegations, and they will need pastoral support.

Pastoral support can be given through our own church, or we can signpost to outside pastoral support.

The church leadership should identify appropriate persons to support. This should be two people.

Pastoral support should never be given to the subject of an allegation by the same person who is supporting a victim of abuse.

Internal Communication and Confidentiality

It is critical when managing incidents of child protection and safeguarding situations that confidentiality is maintained.

Any risks of potential breaches of confidentiality must be managed. Breaching confidentiality could have important impacts on sensitive situations including but not limited to:

- we may put a child at greater risk of harm
- we may place a family or individual at risk of community retribution
- we may disrupt a criminal investigation
- we may destroy the reputation of an innocent individual

Who Needs to Know?

1. Kirk Session

The Kirk Session is a court of the church and its members are corporately responsible for all areas of church life, including safeguarding.

However, when it comes to safeguarding and any potential child protection issue, the Kirk Session must not breach confidentiality at any stage.

Anyone being given information about a child protection concern or details of any alleged perpetrator must have a valid and legal reason for being involved.

It is good practice for Kirk Sessions to appoint a small team of elders to manage safeguarding, and to give assurances to the wider Kirk Session, without details, around any active child protection concerns.

This team usually involves the Minister, the Clerk of Session, the Designated Person and one or two other Elders, as nominated by the wider Kirk Session.

This model helps to both maintain confidentiality and assure Kirk Session of its wider responsibilities in the governance of the local congregation.

It is a good model. Considering this, our Kirk Session adopted it in April 2026.

The Kirk Session will be liable if confidentiality is breached and the potential for reputational damage is severe.

2. PCI Safeguarding Lead/Officers

It is normal for most child protection concerns to be reported to the central PCI Safeguarding Team.

All serious allegations and the management of offenders must be reported to the central PCI Safeguarding Team.

The team may hold other vital information that may help statutory bodies in their processes.

The team may hold other vital information that involves connections with other local congregations or ministries within our denomination.

The team is the professionally qualified department of the church that will support those on the ground to manage the complexities and processes involved in a child protection matter.

3. Clerk of Presbytery/Office of the Secretary to the General Assembly

As the most senior figures in our denomination's governance structures, it may be the case at times that they must be advised of a concern.

This is especially the case when the alleged perpetrator of abuse is a minister or elder of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland; church governance and law will require internal actions to commence once all statutory processes are complete.

CHAPTER END

Chapter 6: Recruitment and Appointment of Volunteers/Leaders/Helpers (Leaders) and Employed Staff

Aim of the Chapter

i. To outline some basic principles for safer recruitment
ii. To describe the recruitment and selection process
iii. To describe management of leaders from other jurisdictions
iv. To describe support and management arrangements
v. To describe processes for under 18s working with children
vi. To note the appointment of elders and safeguarding expectations

It is essential to have a recruitment and appointment procedure in place to select leaders in order to provide a safe environment and culture for children and young people in our congregation.

This also gives reassurances to parents and guardians that our mission and ministry is safe, and supports leaders to feel safe in the environment in which they are operating.

Proper appointment procedure is one of the most effective ways of assessing a person's suitability to work with children and young people, and may act as a deterrent to potential abusers.

We must do all that we can to ensure that anyone who may be unsuitable for working with children or young people is not given the opportunity to become a leader.

It is important that the Kirk Session ensures that every potential leader participates in a selection procedure, even if they are already known to the congregation.

This process is to be applied to all volunteers, leaders or helpers.

The procedure applies to anyone over the age of 16 working with children and/or young people.

All potential leaders and volunteers must complete the appointment process fully *before* commencing the role.

See also Chapter 7: Criminal Vetting Policy and Procedures.

Basic Principles for Safer Leadership Recruitment

- New people joining our congregation should not be considered for a leadership role until they have attended the church regularly for at least 12 months.

- In the case of someone transferring from another congregation, if evidence can be provided as to commitment, leadership can be considered sooner than this, but not before at least four months worshipping in our church.
- **It is recognised that not all leaders in our church are necessarily members here. Some leaders are from the community, or other denominations, and do not attend here. Therefore, the first two points cannot apply. In this scenario, the Kirk Session remains responsible for the safe recruitment, vetting and supervision of those leaders.**
- This recruitment process applies to all leaders aged 16 and over.
- No-one may begin in a role until the full process has been completed.
- It is crucial that to sustain leadership in all organisations we have the right people matched to the role. Youth and children's work is not for everyone and it is critical that the recruitment process is used well to establish skills and values.
- The decision to appoint someone into a leadership role should never rest on a clear AccessNI vetting and criminal records check alone; criminal records checks are an essential aspect of recruitment, but they only provide weak evidence of suitability. See Chapter 7**.**

Defining Roles and Responsibilities

A role description must be drawn up for each role and given to all leaders. This can be done generically for volunteer leader roles within the organisation.

For paid staff roles, a specific job description and person specification should be created.

One of the most critical safeguarding volunteer roles is the Designated Person. A role description for the Designated Person can be found on the PCI website.

The Process

1. Application Form and Verifying Identity

An application form must be completed by everyone applying to work with children and young people. This should cover past employment and volunteering history/experience.

The application form includes the AccessNI vetting process. Applicants are asked to declare any past criminal convictions or police investigations as part of this form. Identity checks for candidates should be carried out with official documentation, e.g., sight of driving licence, passport, proof of address.

All application forms must be signed by either the Minister or a member of Kirk Session to say that as far as they are aware, the applicant is suitable for the role for which they are applying.

Application forms and process are available on the PCI website.

2. Interview

The organisational leader, along with either the Minister, Designated Person or an Elder, should meet the person and ensure that they have the ability and ethos required for the role. This is best established through interview questions.

At the interview, the safeguarding policy should be provided and explained; this is to ensure agreement and understanding of the basic expectations of safeguarding responsibilities at the earliest stage.

3. Qualifications and Professional Regulation

The applicant's qualifications (where these are asked for) should be checked. It should also be checked whether the individual is professionally registered with a regulator (e.g., NISCC) and, if this is part of the requirement of the role, their professional standing on the relevant register should be checked.

4. References

The names of two referees should be given by the applicant.

The referees should NOT be family members, the Minister, Designated Person or either of the interviewers.

If the applicant is coming from a previous place of worship, then a reference should be sought from the previous Minister.

References should be from people who have had first-hand knowledge of the individual's work with children/young people and have known the applicant for at least two years.

It is usually the role of the Designated Person to send a reference request form to the referees given; references should be taken in writing and followed up orally.

A reference request form is available on the PCI website.

These do not need to be sent to the central PCI Safeguarding Office with the application form but should be kept for the congregation's own records.

5. AccessNI and Criminal Records Check

All leaders taking up a regulated position to work with children and young people must be vetted.

The process of vetting leaders involves an AccessNI check, which will show if an applicant has any criminal convictions and any other relevant policing information or is listed on any of the UK's Children and Adults' Barred Lists held by Disclosure Scotland or the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).

A person who does have a criminal conviction will not necessarily be barred from working with children and young people within a church setting. Only convictions considered relevant will be taken into consideration when an appointment is made.

Guidance should, however, be sought from the Safeguarding Office about the nature of any convictions.

Please be assured that all certificates, forms and conviction information are treated sensitively and confidentially by the central PCI Safeguarding Office.

Please refer to the AccessNI Criminal Records Check policy and procedure on the PCI website.

When the full process of application, interview, references and checks are completed, the Kirk Session will make a final decision of appointment and record its agreement of appointment.

6. Training

See Chapter 8: Training.

Recruitment of Leaders from Other Jurisdictions

The Kirk Session should make every effort to establish the suitability of candidates by careful use of references and interviews.

All must remain aware that what would be considered an offence in the Republic of Ireland may not be considered an offence in another country, and vice versa.

Any certificates of good conduct should be treated with caution, as there is little way to establish their validity.

Guidance

- The usual recruitment processes should be followed as closely as possible
- Additional weight may be put into interview questions
- Checks should be completed where possible, as per criminal records policy and procedure
- References should be sought and, when possible, followed up verbally
- Identity should be verified
- The volunteer should make a written statement, clearly signed, saying that there is nothing in their background that would disqualify them from volunteering with children and/or young people

See also Chapter 7: Criminal Vetting.

Management and Support of Leaders and Volunteers

Induction

It is best practice in safeguarding to ensure that the new leader is clear about how the organisation runs and the expectations of their role.

It is critical that all policy and procedure relevant to the safe running of the organisation is shared prior to commencing the role.

New leaders should have completed all basic training prior to commencing the role.

Trial Period

It is good practice to give all leaders an identified trial period in an organisation, at least 12 weeks.

For paid posts, staff should undertake a six-month probationary period before being confirmed in post.

Supervision

It is good practice for the leader of the organisation to meet at least twice a year with leaders, either individually or as a group. This gives time and space for leaders to discuss concerns, raise training needs and talk about positive experiences and learning with one another.

This practice helps leaders feel valued and allows an organisation's Leader in Charge to establish if they need any additional training.

Appraisal

All paid staff should have an annual appraisal by their line manager.

Grievances

It is the responsibility of the Kirk Session to ensure that all volunteers and leaders are listened to and to have a clear system in place to manage any concerns raised.

Volunteers should be encouraged to speak with leaders at any stage about concerns they face in their role.

Termination of Leadership

Most leaders will end their time with an organisation mutually and in a positive manner. When individuals 'retire' or move on from a leadership role it is good practice for the organisation to mark the occasion.

This is often a moment of encouragement for the organisation and other leaders to mark faithfulness.

The Leader in Charge of the organisation should advise the Designated Person, who will update their records. It is crucial that a final date of engagement in a role with children and/or young people is recorded. Should the individual return to a role at a later date a new process as above will commence.

If a role needs to be terminated due to concerns about behaviour unbecoming their role or values/ethos issues, this must be managed by the Leader in Charge of the organisation and the Kirk Session.

If the role needs to be terminated due to safeguarding issues or child protection, the Designated Person should also be involved as consideration needs to be made regarding potential onward reporting.

At all times, the safeguarding reporting procedures take precedence over all other procedures, and safeguarding concerns must be reported as per these procedures. This includes paid and unpaid staff/volunteers.

Records should be kept of any decisions and actions.

Under 18s Working with Children and Young People

16- and 17-year-olds can assist in providing children's activities.

However, it is never appropriate to require someone aged less than 18 years to take on the role of leader or be in sole charge of children. This would mean, unacceptably, leaving a child in charge of children.

At least two adult leaders should be in charge of any group of children at any time.

16- and 17-year-olds can be counted, in addition to the two adult leaders, in your ratios of children to adults if they have been through the full recruitment process, as above.

Anyone aged 15 and below who is helping with children does not count as part of leadership ratios.

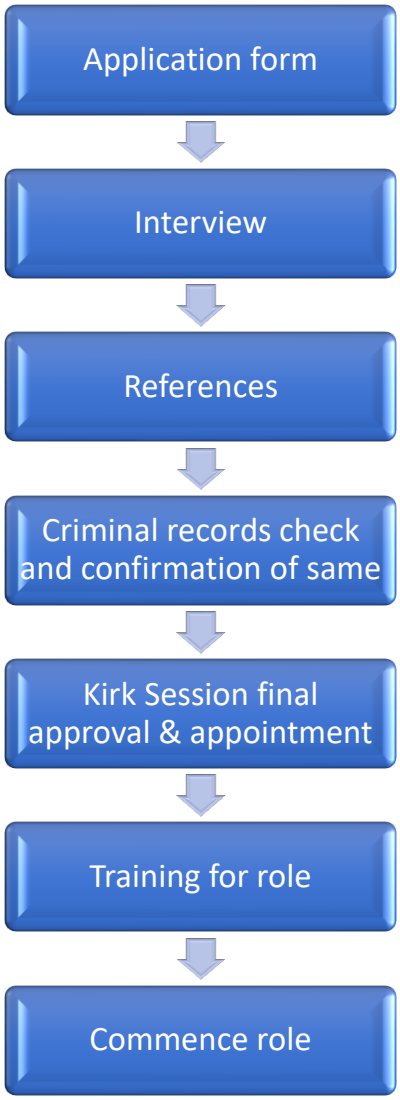
Please note that 16- and 17-year-olds who go through the AccessNI vetting process must have parental/guardian consent for a criminal records check.

16- and 17-year-old leaders should receive the same levels of training as all other leaders in that organisation.

Anyone under the age of 16 who is helping with children should receive an appropriate level of training provided by the leader of the organisation. This should include: appropriate physical contact and language, use of devices while working with children, emergency procedures and First Aid policy.

Such training must also include the need to safeguard themselves in situations where their actions may be misconstrued.

Flowchart for Recruitment



CHAPTER END

Chapter 7: AccessNI Vetting Procedures

CONTENTS

0.1 Context

0.2 Guiding Principles **Access NI checking**

0.3 Exceptions

0.4 Process

0.5 Payment

0.6 Management of Disclosure Information

0.7 Record Management

0.8 Management of Checks from Other Jurisdictions

1.0 Students for Ministry & Deaconess Training for the Diaconal Ministry (Union Theological College)

2.0 Transferring Ministers/ Licentiates (Ministers from Other Jurisdictions/Denominations)

3.0 References & Associated Policies

0.1 Context

Clare Presbyterian Church is a faith-based body that is required to ensure appropriate and adequate checks for all persons working or volunteering with children and/or adults at risk of harm.

As part of the ethos of safeguarding all who come in contact with our mission and ministries, it is crucial that all volunteers and employees are checked, prior to commencing roles and regularly thereafter.

This policy applies to all volunteers, leaders, officers and employees.

0.2 Guiding Principles

If you apply for a job or volunteer in a role having close and regular supervision of children or adults at risk of harm, as outlined in legislation, you need an **Enhanced** AccessNI check.

Given the nature of our ministry and associated roles, all individuals in a relevant role (Regulated Activity) are identified by:

- AccessNI Criminal Record Checks, under Part V of the Police Act 1997 and the provisions of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2005

As a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Clare Presbyterian Church identifies the following roles as Regulated Activity applicable under the legislation:

- Ministers (Student Ministers, Ministers with or without a charge, active Ministers, retired Ministers if continuing to engage in a pastoral role)
- Auxiliary Ministers
- Elders (**if they meet the test** for regulated activity for children or vulnerable adults)
- Deaconesses
- Leaders, helpers, volunteers
- Youth/family workers

Clare Presbyterian Church will complete a check at the beginning of the person's role.

This is to be renewed every three years while they remain in the post.

All checks must be applied for through a registered body; Presbyterian Church in Ireland is a registered body for AccessNI.

AccessNI checks in Northern Ireland are not currently portable between roles and organisations. However, it may be possible to use a recent PCI completed AccessNI check when an individual leader moves congregations or is involved in mission in another PCI church. Provided that the work is the same type of role which they were checked for (e.g. a Sunday school teacher moving to another Sunday school or into other youth work in children's regulated activity) and where:

- The Congregation has sight of the original AccessNI certificate (which is only held by the applicant in their NI Direct account);
- The check was done in last the 3 years;
- The Kirk Session seek an assurance from the previous church that there were no issues around the leader's role or work

Where the above cannot be complied with, a new AccessNI check must be carried out.

The Kirk Session must ensure that the recruitment processes for a transferring leader are followed, especially where this involves a change of role or different context.

Checks are not transferable between Presbyteries for any Minister role or Deaconess role.

For example, if a Minister is moving to a new charge within the same Presbytery a new criminal records check is not required. However, if a Minister moves to a new charge within a different Presbytery, the receiving Presbytery must conduct a fresh AccessNI records check.

Our Kirk Session is accountable for the leaders and volunteers operating within our church.

Anyone working with children or adults at risk, from the age of 16 on should get an AccessNI check.

No one may commence the role until the check process is completed, and a Presbytery cannot install a Minister until the check process is completed.

0.3 Exceptions

- Persons under the age of 16
- A short-term emergency situation

  Example: a parent who has stepped in to supervise a Sunday School class to allow a teacher to take a child to hospital. These should be the exception and risk managed by those in positions of responsibility.
- Volunteer from another jurisdiction, in some circumstances only (see 0.8 below)

0.4 Process

1. An individual who is seeking a relevant role will approach a Leader in Charge of an organisation to advise that they can fill a role; OR an individual is elected as a member of the Kirk Session; OR a Minister/Deaconess receives a call
2. An application for an AccessNI record check will be completed for a relevant role, giving references:

   AccessNI Forms – Presbyterian Church Ireland (presbyterianireland.org)
3. The Kirk Session (or Presbytery) should ensure that the form is fully completed and that all required documentation is attached before it is sent to the Council for Social Witness (CSW) admin team for processing. The process will expire after 90 days if not followed through completely
4. Once approved by the Kirk Session (or Presbytery), the application will be sent by the applicant to CSW central office for processing
5. CSW admin staff will process the application and the applicant will receive a disclosure certificate (see 0.6)
6. Incomplete forms will be returned to the applicant via email by the CSW admin team; incomplete forms cannot be processed and sent to AccessNI.

AccessNI applications for criminal record checks will expire in 90 days if the process if not completed and a new form will be required after this time.

0.5 Payment

There is no charge to process a volunteer's AccessNI check.

All paid offices and employed positions (Ministers, Deaconesses, employed youth workers etc.) cost £31. Individual congregations will be invoiced by Council for Social Witness for these checks.

0.6 Management of Disclosure Certificates

Leaders/Volunteers/Helpers

A disclosure certificate will be issued to the applicant.

PCI Safeguarding Office will be advised of either a clear disclosure or that a disclosure of a criminal record (known as a 'trace') has been identified.

The Safeguarding Office will not be advised of the nature or detail of the trace – that remains confidential to the individual.

If a trace is flagged it is important that the Kirk Session satisfies itself that it is of no nature that would suggest a risk to children, young people or adults at risk.

Therefore, PCI Safeguarding Office will both advise the representative of Kirk Session who has signed the form, and advise the individual to speak with the representative or Minister about the issue. This will be done in writing.

They should have sight of the digital certificate that has been issued to the person by AccessNI, which may contain criminal record information, relevant policing information or details of Barred List inclusion.

Kirk Session representatives should discuss the disclosure with the PCI Safeguarding Lead or Safeguarding Officer and ensure that is has recorded its decision-making when considering any trace.

The Kirk Session cannot overlook any trace that would contravene public protection.

It is a criminal offence for someone barred from working with children or vulnerable adults to apply for Regulated Activity and it is an offence for anyone to knowingly employ or use them in a Regulated Activity.

Elders

Elders do not complete applications for the role; rather, they are selected through a congregational voting process. This includes a period after nomination for concerns to be raised in writing by members of the congregation before they are confirmed in the role.

An AccessNI vetting check should take place during the period of nomination and the Presbytery cannot ordain an Elder until the check is completed.

If a trace is disclosed on a nominated Elder's vetting check, or on any check taken after they are confirmed in role, the Clerk of Presbytery will inform the PCI Safeguarding Lead and the Minister/Clerk of Session of the local congregation will make a decision. All decisions should be recorded.

Ministers

If a trace is disclosed on an AccessNI check for any Minister, the Clerk of Presbytery must inform the PCI Safeguarding Lead. The Clerk of Presbytery will also inform the Clerk/Deputy Clerk of General Assembly. All decisions should be recorded.

[If a trace is disclosed on a Student Minister's certificate as part of their application, the Convener and Secretary of the Council for Training in Ministry, and the Convenor of Ministerial Studies and Development Committee will make the final decision about the management of this. All decisions should be recorded.]

Deaconesses

If a trace is disclosed on an AccessNI records check for any Deaconess, the Clerk of Presbytery must inform the PCI Safeguarding Lead. The Clerk of Presbytery will also inform the Clerk/Deputy Clerk of General Assembly and the Secretary of the Council for Mission in Ireland. All decisions should be recorded.

[If a trace is disclosed on a Student Deaconess certificate as part of their application, the Convener and Secretary of the Council for Training in Ministry and the Convener of the Deaconess Selection and Training Panel will make the final decision about the management of this. All decisions should be recorded.]

No governing body, including our Kirk Session, can overlook any trace that would contravene public protection with any of these roles.

Please see separate guidance: Procedures for Managing Traces (AccessNI & Garda checks) V003 24.05.20

0.7 Record Management

Applications and trace information from AccessNI will be held for 90 days from the date of the certificate issued.

All information is kept confidentially in a locked cabinet centrally in CSW offices if received in paper form. All online applications are held in a secure, restricted section of the PCI system.

At 90 days after the issue of the AccessNI digital certificate to the applicant, the above information will be destroyed (shredded or deleted) by the office manager.

If a trace is disclosed and there is further action required, the 90-day process does not apply; 90 days will commence at the date on which the Kirk Session and PCI Safeguarding Lead/Safeguarding Officer have agreed that volunteering is appropriate OR that volunteering is not suitable.

0.8 Management of Checks from Other Jurisdictions

AccessNI cannot normally access criminal records held in other countries (with the exception of 12 EU countries, including Ireland), but it is possible to submit an application while the applicant is overseas. In a small number of cases overseas criminal records are held on the Police National Computer and these would be revealed as part of an AccessNI check.

The identity of an overseas volunteer should still be verified.

As AccessNI cannot access criminal records from other countries, an AccessNI check may not provide a complete picture of an individual's criminal record. Good character must therefore be established as clearly as possible via other avenues (see below: *Other Screening Methods*).

How to Check Overseas Applicants

If people from overseas are being recruited, the embassy or High Commission of the country in question should be contacted. It may be possible to avail of the that country's vetting procedures. Note that these may not be the same as those in the UK.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Response Centre Helpline on 020 7008 1500 be also be contacted.

Certificates of Good Conduct

A certificate of good conduct and any other references from potential overseas employees may be obtained. The standard of foreign police checks varies. To find out the standard, either the authorities in a particular country or its embassy should be contacted.

Either the employee or the Designated Person should obtain a certified translation of the certificate of good conduct.

When managing applications for volunteering from overseas, a common-sense approach will be adopted (see *Other Screening Methods*).

Other Screening Methods

References and Interview

The Kirk Sessions should make every effort to establish the suitability of candidates by careful use of references and interviews.

What would be considered an offence in Northern Ireland may not be considered an offence in another country, and vice versa.

Any certificates of good conduct should be treated with caution, as there is little way to establish their validity.

Good Practice Guidance

- The usual recruitment processes should be followed as closely as possible
- Additional weight may be put into interview questions
- Checks should be completed where possible, as outlined above
- References should be sought and, when possible, followed up verbally
- Identity should be verified
- The volunteer should be asked to make a written statement, clearly signed, saying that there is nothing in their background that would disqualify them from volunteering with children or adults at risk or in need of protection

An ‘adult at risk of harm’ is as defined in *Adult Safeguarding Operational Procedures, Adults at Risk of Harm and Adults in Need of Protection, September 2016*: A person aged 18 or over, whose exposure to harm through abuse, exploitation or neglect may be increased by their personal characteristics and/or life circumstances.

Personal characteristics may include, but are not limited to, age, disability, special educational needs, illness, mental or physical frailty or impairment of, or disturbance in, the functioning of the mind or

brain. Life circumstances may include, but are not limited to, isolation, socio-economic factors and environmental living conditions.

Sending Volunteers to Other Countries

As a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Clare Presbyterian Church will conduct all its own usual checks and measures (i.e., normal recruitment procedure and conducting the relevant AccessNI records check) prior to sending any volunteer to another country.

1.0 Students for Ministry and Deaconess Training Programme for the Diaconal Ministry (Union Theological College)

All students will engage with an AccessNI records check as part of their application.

Students are actively involved with children and adults at risk throughout their training.

Students will be guided through the process as part of their application process and the check will be conducted through the Council for Social Witness office.

This check will cover them for the duration of their student period and associated placements (three years).

[When Student Ministers are commencing their first Licentiate role, the hosting church must trigger a new criminal records check. The Presbytery cannot license a student until this check is completed.

When Student Deaconesses complete their three years' training and are called to a congregation, that Kirk Session will trigger a new AccessNI records check. The Presbytery cannot commission the student deaconess until this check is completed.]

2.0 Transferring Ministers/Licentiates (Ministers from Other Jurisdictions/Denominations)

It is often difficult to secure accurate criminal records checks from other jurisdictions.

The guidance in the above sections 0.8 should be followed.

[Ministers and Licentiates seeking to transfer into PCI from another denomination, within Ireland, should have an AccessNI record check as part of their application process before being accepted as a transferrer. The Council for Training in Ministry cannot place a Minister or Licentiate on a transfer pathway before this check is completed.

These processes and any trace management will be overseen by the PCI Safeguarding Lead and the Reception of Ministers and Licentiates Committee, who will make all final decisions.]

All transferring Ministers will then fall into usual three-yearly checks or a renewed check for a new charge.

3.0 References and Associated Policies

https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/articles/about-accessni

https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/articles/accessni-legislation-and-guidance

Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Council for Social Witness, Procedures for Managing Traces (AccessNI & Garda checks) V003 20.05.24

The Code: the Constitution and Government of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

CHAPTER END

Chapter 8: Safeguarding Training

Aim of the Chapter

i. To outline the roles and responsibilities for safeguarding training
ii. To outline the training requirements
iii. To outline the administration of training
iv. To outline how to access training in the denomination
v. To outline issues regarding non-compliance with training

Understanding the importance of safeguarding training is critical because it is a major feature in the prevention of abuse and the protection and care for children, adults and our local communities.

It promotes early intervention to prevent harm, manages risks, fosters a safe environment and ensures ethical and legal compliance.

It is not to be regarded as a simple matter of compliance, but rather as a shared responsibility, a demonstration of our deep love and care for those to whom we are ministering.

Context

The requirement for safeguarding training has changed significantly over the past few years.

The need for up-to-date training is critical for our congregation and denomination; but there is also a need for training that remains relevant and is attuned to the often-complex dynamics of safeguarding.

Training must be both accessible and trackable.

Safeguarding Training is Important Because:

- safeguarding is at the heart of our congregation and denomination – we genuinely aspire to do this well
- it simply helps keep children and adults safe
- it will support you in how to maintain a child focus
- it reassures families and members that our church is a safe place
- it supports communities to have confidence in our church
- it will teach you the different forms of abuse
- it will teach you the signs and indicators of abuse and neglect
- it will make you more confident when reporting concerns
- it will empower individual leaders and Kirk Session and give reassurance in decision-making

- it will make you aware of the laws relevant to our setting
- it is a best practice requirement to have it
- there is a possibility of inspection on our safeguarding training, via the Charity Commission or Statutory Services, if there has been any issue
- it is the most important training you will receive

Roles and Responsibilities

Kirk Session

- Each member of Kirk Session must maintain their own individual training and seek further input if there is an area they have not understood fully
- The Kirk Session overall must ensure that all those operating as leaders in our congregation have maintained their training
- The Kirk Session must ensure that no one is operating within our congregation whose training (or criminal vetting) has either lapsed or has not been engaged with
- The Kirk Session must ensure that it has kept up to date with the relevant changes in safeguarding, and ensure that this is disseminated across its leadership teams
- When asked, our Kirk Session must be able to demonstrate an accurate list of leaders and the date of their last safeguarding training, or the date they stepped down from leadership
- The Kirk Session must take all reasonable steps to ensure that our broad church leadership team has the opportunity of a training session at least once every three years
- The Kirk Session must ensure that any individual who has lapsed in their training (or vetting) are stepped aside from any further engagement in leadership until this has been resolved

Ministers

- Ministers must maintain their own individual training
- Ministers must agree to engaging fully in the training and taking responsibility for any area in which they identify that more training or further input is needed
- Ministers must ensure that they are keeping their Kirk Session appraised of any changes in safeguarding that is communicated to it, in a timely manner

Clerk of Session

- Clerks of Session must maintain their own individual training and seek further input if there is an area they have not understood fully
- Clerks of Session must support the Kirk Session, Minister and Designated Person by ensuring that there is a robust tracking system in place for maintaining all safeguarding training records

Designated Persons

- Must maintain their own individual training and seek further input if there is an area they have not understood fully
- Are usually delegated the task of overseeing the active leaders list; they are therefore accountable to the Kirk Session to ensure that the list is maintained with the names of all leaders and the dates of their last criminal vetting check and relevant safeguarding training
- Must be able to demonstrate the final date of any active leader who has stepped down
- Must advise the Kirk Session immediately when leaders' safeguarding training (or criminal vetting) has lapsed; the Kirk Session must ensure that those individuals are stepped aside from any further engagement in leadership until this has been resolved

Please note that any individual members of session, including the Minister or Clerk, and the Designated Persons, all have a personal responsibility in safeguarding.

If there is a situation in which our Kirk Session is not meeting the requirements for training and vetting adequately, any individual can raise this with their Clerk of Presbytery, who must investigate this and act. *(See below)*

Presbytery (via the Clerk of Presbytery)

- Each Clerk of Presbytery must have an active list of when each Kirk Session in their Presbytery last engaged in their safeguarding training
- Each Clerk of Presbytery must engage with any church whose Kirk Session safeguarding training has lapsed or who have not engaged in their training, setting expected timescales for compliance (no more than six weeks from date of concern raised)
- After six weeks this should be escalated to the Clerk of General Assembly for discussion with the Safeguarding Team in regard to immediate protective measures
- Each Clerk of Presbytery must ensure that they are addressing in a timely manner any concern raised in relation to local safeguarding training compliance. This includes giving direction to have individuals stepped aside if they are not compliant in their training and vetting, and escalating to the Clerk of General Assembly any congregational Kirk Session that has an endemic failure regarding training (and vetting)
- Each Clerk of Presbytery must ensure, if a congregation is vacant, that the Convener of the congregation is engaging in their training with Kirk Session
- Each Clerk of Presbytery must be knowledgeable in safeguarding, given their position in leadership and oversight of their Presbytery – if they are not an aligned elder in a local congregation, they should attend a Kirk Session training session in their Presbytery at least once every three years

Safeguarding Team

- Must ensure that training presentations are kept up to date, in line with regional legislation and good practice guidance
- Must ensure that all volunteer trainers are adequately trained and informed and are using the correct materials
- Must ensure that all volunteer trainers are supervised appropriately
- Must ensure that there is a robust and easy to access system for local congregations to access their training
- Must provide relevant guidance to the denomination regarding both the mandatory expectations and general good practices in safeguarding

Applicable training at least once every three years is a PCI requirement for all roles engaging with children in our church.

Training Requirements

Training	**For whom?**	**Timescales**
Basic Child Safeguarding & **Basic Adult Safeguarding**	All children's and youth leaders or anyone giving children/young people pastoral support	Prior to role commencement & Once every three years
	All involved in pastoral care, visitation of older, ill, disabled or frail people, all leaders of targeted organisations (e.g., groups for adults with disabilities/older people)	
Designated Persons	All who hold the role of Designated Person or Deputy Designated Person	Prior to role commencement & Once every three years
Kirk Session	All members of Kirk Session, including the Minister (or Convener if vacant)	Prior to role commencement & Once every three years

Other requirements:

- It is possible that one individual may sit in all of these roles. If that is the case, all training should be attended
- It is also appropriate if some members of Kirk Session attend all of the courses, even if they do not occupy all of the roles; this can provide useful understanding for Kirk Session, which remains responsible for the safe running of the church's activities
- Kirk Session training is ONLY for members of Kirk Session and the Minister/Convener
- Face to face training is preferable in all circumstances; however, online training resources will be available
- Anyone participating in online training will be expected to keep their camera on at all times
- Anyone who arrives late (after the first five minutes of start) or leaves early (at any stage) will not be assessed as having completed the training sufficiently
- Training must be delivered by a currently recognised PCI-appointed trainer

Training Administration Responsibilities

Core Principles

- It is the responsibility of the Kirk Session to ensure that it and its Minister/Convener have participated actively in the training and raised any queries they have with regard to safeguarding with the trainer at the end of the session
- The Kirk Session is responsible for the training of its leaders and should ensure that it has set up a training session for its leaders to access
- The Kirk Session should hold a list of all operational leaders, the date on which they were recruited, the date they last had a criminal vetting check and the date they last engaged in their relevant training
- The Kirk Session is responsible for ensuring that leaders who are around their three-year renewal date are signed up for their training and that the dates, on completion, are recorded
- A clear date should be recorded if any leader ceases in their post and no longer requires training or vetting
- It is the responsibility of the Kirk Session to be assured that the training was actually attended and was understood
- The Kirk Session delegates these administrative tasks to the Designated Person; however, it remains the responsibility of the Kirk Session to ensure that there is oversight of these tasks
- It is absolutely critical that Designated Personnel keep their training up to date

- Any Designated Person in any NI Presbytery can attend any training within the NI region – it is not specific to Presbytery

Please note that there is no central denominational record of individuals engaging in training; this remains the responsibility of our Kirk Session.

It is therefore not the responsibility of PCI centrally to trigger churches as to when they are in need of their training; this responsibility remains with our Kirk Session.

How to Access Your Training

Training	How to access	Need to know
Basic Child Safeguarding & **Basic Adult Safeguarding**	Please look online and book in to one of the pre-arranged sessions being held in your area	There will be 'mop-up' sessions both online and in Assembly Buildings scattered throughout the year; these will be advertised on PCI's website
Designated Persons	Please look online and book in to one of the pre-arranged sessions being held in your area	There will additionally be 'mop-up' sessions for new DPs, which will be conducted on MS Teams scattered throughout the year; check the PCI website for these dates
Kirk Session	Contact PCI's central Safeguarding Office to book your Kirk Session training	Training with other Sessions in our area may be conducted If there are specific safeguarding issues, a single session may be required, to maintain confidentiality

Non-compliance with Training Requirements

Please note that no one may commence in any leadership role without first engaging in their safeguarding training. After that, the training should be renewed at least once every three years.

If an individual leader or elder has failed to maintain their safeguarding training:

1. They should engage in their training within six weeks of their lapsed date. It is likely that they will need to join another congregation in order to do so, and they should contact the central Safeguarding Office to find out what training is available in that timescale

2. If the six weeks pass, the individual must step aside from leadership until such time that their training can be implemented
3. The Designated Person should keep an active record of this and ensure that this situation has been rectified before the individual returns to leadership. Kirk Session should be appraised

If a minister has failed to maintain their safeguarding training:

This will be brought to the attention of the Moderator and Clerk of the Armagh Presbytery. Safeguarding training must be part of local governance arrangements.

If a Designated Person (DP) has failed to maintain their safeguarding training:

1. They must engage in the specific PCI DP training within six weeks of their lapsed date, as above
2. If the six weeks pass, the individual must not continue to operate as a DP
3. Kirk Session needs to be aware that a named lead for safeguarding (the DP) is a mandatory role required by legislation and regional guidance; in the event of a DP having to step aside due to a lapse in training, the Kirk Session must have a contingency plan. In Ahorey, we have resolved to appoint a Deputy Designated Person

In the event that a Kirk Session has failed to maintain its safeguarding training:

1. The Clerk of Presbytery should review their records regularly and if this is the case, they should address the issue directly with the local church leadership
2. An immediate plan should be put in place to rectify this situation within six weeks
3. Any ongoing disruption to Kirk Session training should be escalated to Clerk of General Assembly for discussion with the Safeguarding Team for implementation of protective measures

CHAPTER END

Chapter 9: Working Safely with Children

Aim of the Chapter

i. Registers
ii. Ratios
iii. Supervision of Children
iv. Physical Contact
v. Health & Safety
vi. Accidents & Incidents
vii. Photos & Videos
viii. Activities & General Safety
ix. Residentials
x. Consent Forms
xi. Communication
xii. Holiday Bible Clubs
xiii. One-to-one Mentoring
xiv. Diversity
xv. Additional Needs
xvi. Intimate Care
xvii. Supporting our Junior Leaders
xviii. Use of Premises by Others and Other Organisations

This chapter deals with the practicalities involved in the safeguarding of children and young people.

The procedures cannot cover every eventuality.

The Kirk Session must risk assess its own activities and take reasonable steps to keep children and young people safe from harm generally.

Part of keeping children safe and reducing the likelihood of harm is having clear guidelines in place regarding how activities are organised and run.

The following are relevant considerations:

i. Keeping a Register of Children and Young People Who Attend Activities in the Church

- *Have criteria for membership of the organisation*
- *Have a registration scheme for children and young people*

- *Keep details of young people including address and family contact numbers*
- *Keep medical details, details of individual needs and emergency contact details*

ii. Ratios

Indoors	
Under 2 years	1 leader to 3 children
2 to 3 years	1 leader to 4 children
4 to 7 years	1 leader to 8 children
8 years and over	1 leader to 10 children
14 years and over	2 leaders to 20 children

Outdoors	
Under 2 years	1 leader to 3 children
2 to 3 years	1 leader to 4 children
4 to 7 years	1 leader to 6 children
8 years and over	2 leaders to 15 children
14 years and over	2 leaders to 20 children

- A minimum of at least two leaders/helpers present at all times no matter how small the group
- Young leaders (aged between 16 and 18) can be counted in the ratios but must not be left unsupervised or in charge

iii. Supervision of Children

Children/young people are less likely to experience accidents or incidents if they are supervised properly. Activities should be organised to maximise participation, fun and learning in a way that minimises risk. Ensure that:

- A work schedule is displayed so that everyone knows who is on duty or volunteering in an activity

- Children/young people are not left unattended
- Adequate numbers of workers/volunteers are available to supervise the activities (best practice would indicate that there are male and female workers/volunteers present to supervise coeducational activities)
- Workers/volunteers know at all times where children/young people are and what they are doing
- Online activities are age appropriate and monitored
- Any activity using potentially dangerous equipment has constant adult supervision
- Dangerous behaviour is never allowed

iv. Physical Contact

As a general principle, physical contact should be kept to a minimum between leaders/volunteers and children.

Any contact should always be for the benefit of the child and never for the benefit of the adult.

Adults must behave in a manner at all times in which their behaviour cannot be misconstrued.

Children always have the right to say no or reject any physical contact.

- Touch should be initiated by the child and appropriate to age
- Comforting a child who is upset is fine, for example, by putting your arm round them, as is celebrating with a child, for example, by engaging in a brief hug
- Allow children to carry out their personal care if they can
- Avoid being on your own with a child
- Do not make unnecessary physical contact
- Parents' views on the matter should be respected

v. Health and Safety

The general health and safety of the church environment is the responsibility of the Kirk Session and Congregational Committee.

All ministries should be taking place in facilities that are safe and well prepared, and there must be risk assessment and management of all the below health and safety functions.

This is general safeguarding of all who engage with our church, and it is mandatory that these issues are regularly attended to as part of the universal well-being of the community.

It is **not** therefore the remit of the PCI Safeguarding Office to oversee:

- Fire safety

- Water safety
- Building maintenance and security
- First Aid arrangements
- Food safety and hygiene
- Financial safety
- Maintenance of equipment
- Transport arrangements

vi. Accidents and Incidents

All accidents, incidents, near misses and safeguarding matters must be responded to immediately. They must be recorded and held confidentially for future reference. The form for recording any accident or incident can be accessed on the PCI website.

For each organisation/activity that is occurring at least one of the leaders should be trained in First Aid.

The church's First Aid box should remain well stocked and checked for out-of-date products. Additionally, any defibrillator on site should be regularly checked for battery life or tampering.

In the event of any accident or incident, leaders should deal with the immediate risk of further harm first, before attending to paperwork.

Parents/guardians should be contacted as soon as practicably possible.

Accident report forms are available on church premises. These should be fully completed and detail the accident/incident including outlining any injuries or treatment, any witnesses, and including all dates on forms and signatures of those involved and the Leader in Charge.

Consent forms should be up to date, ensuring that all relevant information is gathered at the start of the season of the organisation/activity, and be readily available to consult by leaders during the activity times. They must include information on allergies, medical/other conditions, medications in use, disability and consent for treatment.

It should be made clear that during the season if there are any changes in a child's medical status it is the responsibility of the parent to formally in writing advise the relevant Leader in Charge of the organisation/activity.

If in any doubt about a medical issue contact emergency services.

All potential or actual safeguarding issues must also be shared with our Designated Person, who will make an assessment of who else needs to know.

vii. Photos

Permission for any images (moving or still) should be sought on the seasonal consent forms (i.e., sought every year a child participates in an organisation/activity). A generic consent form can be accessed on the PCI website.

It is good practice that children, when able, also sign their form of consent for use of their images.

The form must make clear who will be taking images, for what purpose, where these will be shared and how the individual will dispose of them.

It is preferable to use group pictures. However, leaders must be cognisant of the following:

- Are there any looked after children for whom sharing their location would make them unsafe?
- Are there any adopted children (as above)?
- Are there any issues of domestic abuse that would put a family at risk if they were located?

Do not identify children by name or other personal details. Be especially mindful of this in relation to livestreaming. Please consult Chapter 11: Online Safety.

Carefully consider the location of the images and the pose of the children.

Do not insist that a child or young person participates in any images.

viii. Activities and General Safety

General health and safety is not the remit of the safeguarding office; however, it is noted that the premises management and the policies and procedures of our church must be up to date and fully understood by all in a position of leadership, to ensure the general safety of all children and young people.

Risk assessment is the key measure to ensure that all considerations have been given to any events, activities or organisations that are working with children and/or young people. See Chapter 13 on Risk.

There is a generic risk assessment available that is reviewed annually. This is the responsibility of the Kirk Session/Congregational Committee.

Each organisation/activity should then have its own individual risk assessment for their specific activities; these should be shared with the Congregational Committee.

These are living documents that are kept up to date and are fully reviewed at least annually.

All hazards should be identified, alongside an assessment of risk and the control measures in place to mitigate the risks.

We can never remove all risks but must make every reasonable effort to minimise them. Any unmanaged risk of harm to a child or young person will require an organisation/activity to cease until the matter can be addressed.

ix. Residentials

All residentials (including church-arranged sleep-overs) need to be well planned in advance.

Booking systems with consent forms outlining the specific activities and arrangements must be gathered in advance.

All those children or young people attending must have consent or they cannot attend.

The church must ensure that the location has adequate insurance cover and that it has advised its own insurers of the planned residential.

A risk assessment should be completed in advance of the trip.

Our Designated Person must be aware of the trip.

Leader to children/young person ratio should be robust.

Sleeping arrangements should be made clear in advance of the trip.

There must be a plan if the group is an older teenage group consisting of young adults both under and over 18 years old. Eighteen-year-olds are by law adults and should not be sharing sleeping arrangements with children. However, no one young person should be singled out so advance planning is required.

x. Consent Forms

Consent forms are required for all routine activities and any one-off activity the church is holding for children/young people.

It is vital to find out all relevant information such as contact details, use and administration of medicines etc. Parents are used to filling in these forms for schools and sports clubs – we in the church are no different and we need to know how to keep their individual children safe.

A system for the collection, safekeeping and access of this documentation should be in place. Documentation should be destroyed at the end of the season and consent should be gathered afresh at the start of a new season.

Consent forms are not transferable; each organisation/activity must have its own consent form. This is because:

- no two activities/organisations are engaged in the same events
- there should be restricted access to the forms for each set of leaders, who may need to consult them in the event of an emergency

Information in the consent forms is the responsibility of the parent(s) first and foremost – they must fill them in completely and they must sign and date them and provide their details accurately.

If there is no consent form the child cannot attend the activity. Leaders should therefore make every attempt to engage with the parents/guardians of the child to ensure that this is not a barrier to their engagement.

We should remain mindful that not all parents can read and write easily.

It would therefore be wise to have a system to support parents to fill the forms in; for example, a soft start evening in which tea and coffee is available for parents, treats for the children, and leaders and helpers present to complete the writing where needed.

Ensure that written consent for photographs forms part of this document, as above.

A generic consent form is available on the PCI website.

xi. Communication

Communication with Young People

Safe communication with young people is vital in order that they are kept safe from harm and that the actions of leaders can never be misconstrued.

Most young people use social media and messaging forums for large amounts of communication and the good practice guidance on this matter is issued as above.

Communication should always be purposeful and connected to the role and responsibility of the adult leader.

Communication should be open and transparent; parents should be generally aware that their child is engaged in communication with church leaders. Their views on this should be sought and consent given alongside that of their child.

Leaders must ensure that they never give the impression they can keep secrets; this is throughout our safeguarding practices and young people need to know that the leader will have to act if they become concerned about risk or harm at any point in any communication.

Communication should never be an option for only one young person; this should never be an exclusive arrangement. (*See below regarding one-to-one mentoring*)

It is never appropriate to communicate outside of structured activity times with any child under the age of 15.

Please see Chapter 10: Voice of Children and Young People.

Please see Chapter 11: Online Safety.

Communication with Parents/Carers

Parents/carers are primarily responsible for their children; leaders should never make significant decisions that would impact a child without consulting with parents.

Leaders should never assume a parent's views on something and should always respectfully enquire.

Leaders should remain mindful if a child is in foster or residential care – those foster parents/carers often need to consult a social worker before some decisions can be made. Such families need to be given enough advance notice to make some activities possible.

Parents are responsible for advising leaders of any conditions or changes that are significant to a child attending an organisation as the season progresses.

Parents should be clear who the leaders are, including the Leader in Charge of the organisation or activity.

Parents should be clear who our Designated Person is, and how to contact them.

Leaders should ensure that parents are advised of all accidents and incidents, no matter how short-lived they were.

Communication with parents about any issues is best done face to face with the Leader in Charge and another leader present. It is not appropriate to communicate significant issues via messaging forums.

xii. Holiday Bible Clubs (HBC)

Holiday Bible Clubs require additional consideration; they are usually a one-off event during the summer months and are widely open to the local community. They can also involve a large influx of children not known to the church.

HBC need to be planned in advance with regard to managing leadership, consent and managing risks.

Leaders

All HBC leaders need to be recruited and vetted as per usual processes in advance of the event.

This is the responsibility of the hosting church; therefore, if leaders are joining together from several churches or from several denominations, it remains the responsibility of the hosting church to take the lead in safeguarding processes. The hosting church must secure all vetting checks and be confident that training has been adequate.

Leadership must match safe ratios; it is at times difficult to predict attendance and the potential for several children with additional needs attending. It is always better to be over than under with leadership.

HBC leaders should be able to access some back-up people (usually elders) whom they can call if required. Note that anyone who is asked to help out last minute and, in an emergency, must also be properly vetted.

It is important to keep accurate registration details and consent forms.

Consent

As in the above section on same, and as per all activities, consent must be gained for all children in attendance.

This can be complex as during HBC times it is often the case that children will arrive without being accompanied by an adult.

There is no desire to turn them away and that runs contrary to the mission of the HBC.

- Try advance ‘booking’ systems including a brief ‘open morning’ to encourage consent forms filled in in advance
- Have forms available outside the venue in the car park – have a station outdoors for filling them in and ask leaders to be proactive in approaching those adults dropping children off

- In all publicity, ensure that the need for completing a consent form is highlighted along with all the ways in which this can be done
- Send forms and a brief explanation note home with children

Managing Risks

As a one-off event there should be an individual risk assessment for any HBC. They are unique in the life of the church.

One of the outcomes of this will include ensuring that our Designated Person is aware of the HBC and is available that week to manage any safeguarding concerns.

xiii. One-to-One Mentoring and Working

Overall, the preferred manner for any leader to engage with any young person is in group settings with at least two leaders present.

Such individual mentoring has the potential to make the child/young person more vulnerable to harm by those who seek to exploit their position of trust.

Adults working in these situations with young people may also be more vulnerable to unjust or unfounded allegations being made against them.

Both possibilities should be recognised so that reasonable and sensible precautions are taken.

It is acknowledged that one-to-one ministry has developed over the time of Covid between youth leaders and young people.

The fundamental principle, both in legislation and in recognised good practice, is that whenever the interests of young people are involved, their welfare must always be paramount.

To that end, one-to-one mentoring and working can occur but only in specific circumstances:

- One-to-one mentoring can only occur with children aged 15+
- It should involve transparency and anyone engaging in it should adhere to the PCI Code of Conduct
- Kirk Session must be aware of the arrangement and approve of it
- The adult mentor can only be an established youth volunteer/leader who has been through the full recruitment and vetting process
- A fresh vetting check should occur before mentoring commences
- Consent must be gained from the child's parent/guardian
- The consent must clearly document the expected frequency, location, length of session, general purpose of the session and expected outcome of the sessions, demonstrating when they will cease
- Any changes to the original agreement must be discussed and agreed with the parents/guardian of the young person

- The venue must always be a public space; it can never be the leader's own home or an empty church building, for example
- Boundaries should be explicitly discussed with the young person including clearly demonstrating the area of confidentiality and the parameters to this

xiv. Diversity

Children and young people may experience diversity in culture, disabilities, ethnicity, gender, religion and sexual orientation in early years.

We can only safeguard children and young people holistically if we remain mindful of the importance of diversity and inclusion.

Meaningful safeguarding will seek to understand and include all children who engage with our ministries. Child abuse can affect children and young people from any background.

The Kirk Session should ensure that when they are considering the child protection policies and procedures they take into consideration the diversity within our congregation and ministries and seek to overcome any perceived or actual barriers that exist for children and young people being able to talk openly about their experiences.

Please also see Chapter 10: The Voice of Children and Young People.

xv. Additional Needs (Special Educational Needs)

In NI, children and young people with special educational needs are assessed to ascertain if their ability to take part in, and benefit from, education is restricted, due to a continued physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability.

There are extra barriers for safeguarding some children and young people with additional needs, which we must overcome.

Children and young people with additional needs may be more vulnerable to abuse because they may:

- find it difficult to tell others what is happening
- have reduced capacity to resist or avoid abuse because of developmental age or incapacity
- lack knowledge about sex and sexuality
- be assumed to lack credibility as witnesses
- receive intimate personal care that may both increase the risk of abusive behaviour, and make it more difficult to set and maintain physical boundaries
- have fewer outside contacts
- be especially vulnerable to bullying and intimidation
- be more frequent users of the internet

It is critical that our ministries are inclusive for all children and young people as far as possible. This is recognised to be complex in our voluntary situation, when finding and keeping appropriate leaders for activities is under pressure. It may be at times that additional personnel are required to ensure that a ministry can run safely seeing to the needs of all the children present.

The strongest way to safeguard children and young people with additional needs is to get to know them and their families.

Understand as well as possible what it is like for them to engage in the local ministries and activities.

Remember that children with additional needs are not defined by a disability only; they also may be experiencing issues related to diversity, their stage (e.g., puberty), their gender, their mental and emotional health, and critically the same struggles with their faith.

Meaningful engagement and communication with children, young people and their families is critical.

Be aware and plan for a child with additional needs beyond their 18th birthday. This is a point of transition between children and adult safeguarding arrangements.

There may be a request to allow the individual child to remain in the children's ministries they have attended and enjoyed for so long. This can, however, put pressures on the leadership team and cause tensions with other parents and has led to a number of safeguarding issues.

Work alongside families and leaders in preparation for this time, and ensure that decisions and preparation is made in an open and transparent manner with all.

xvi. Intimate Care

Consider the child or young person's individual needs by ensuring that there is appropriate consultation with parents/guardians and children and young people. Consent should be sought for any agreed intimate or personal care practices. Consideration should be given to matters such as appropriate levels of physical contact, how to communicate with the child or young person and keeping parents/guardians appropriately informed. (*See broader intimate care guidance.*)

xvii. Supporting our Junior Leaders

It is critical that we remember that junior leaders are still, under legislation, children (to the age of 18) and should be protected as such.

It is critical that we do not put them into any situation in which they could come to harm or be at risk of allegations.

This applies no matter how well we believe we know a young person, nor how capable they appear to be.

All junior leaders aged 16 and 17 should be formally recruited as per the policy (see Chapter 6) and adequately trained (see Chapter 8).

Any child aged 15 who is coming along to help needs to be supported to understand safe behaviours with children before they engage in any helping activities.

It is the responsibility of the Leader in Charge of the organisation to make sure this has occurred, and the Kirk Session must be assured of the same.

The Designated Person should be made aware of all junior leaders aged 15 to 18 who are engaged in children's ministries.

Junior leaders should never be left alone during activities.

If there has been any accident or incident during an activity and junior leaders have been present or involved, the Leader in Charge of the organisation should ensure, as part of the processes afterwards, that the junior leaders get some time to debrief and talk about what has happened.

As with all leaders, not all young people are automatically skilled to work with children.

It is important that we don't assume that all young people want to, or can, work with children.

We must support all young people to find the best places in our ministries as they grow.

We must ensure that as soon as there are any issues they are addressed openly and transparently with the junior leader, and as they are children, with their parents or guardians.

xviii. Use of Premises by Others or Other Organisations

Our church allows the use of church premises for uniformed and non-uniformed activities, many of which are provided by third parties. The church may itself use other organisations' premises.

When using facilities or services provided by another organisation it is important to clarify and agree which organisation's reporting procedures for child protection or welfare concerns are being followed. There will be occasions where two or more organisations come together to collaborate or work in partnership and it is important to clarify child protection arrangements.

CHAPTER END

Chapter 10: The Voice of Children and Young People in our Church: Safeguarding Guidance

Aim of the Chapter

i. To describe good practices for engaging with children/young people

ii. To describe good practices for engaging with parents

iii. To describe how we should support our junior leaders

Engaging with Children/Young People

Principles

In our schools, children participate on school councils and committees. Often, they have a role in hiring new teachers and contributing to the resource distribution. They can implement new strategies, for example, around making the school more environmentally friendly, and they can develop peer supports to enhance anti-bullying policies and influence the school's ethos.

At church, we can too often just simply tell children what to do, often unconsciously.

We want our children to develop personally into adulthood; but also, we want them to mature in their personal relationship with Christ.

In seeking ways in which children can meaningfully participate – most commonly in worship, but also in other aspects of church life (the church's wider ministry, and even in some decision-making) – we actually create a stronger safeguarding environment.

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) establishes a child's right to be listened to and taken seriously when decisions are made affecting them.

This is reinforced by national legislation and guidance such as the ethos behind the Children (NI) Order 1995 or the Children First Act 2015.

Why?

Actively listening to children and young people engaged in our ministries is critical to safeguarding in our church.

Children and young people will only really talk when they know they are being listened to and taken seriously, regardless of the subject matter.

If we are listening in the 'small things' then children will feel more confident to tell us the 'big things'.

We need an environment in which if children are at harm in any way, they can speak up sooner rather than later.

We understand that this will be easier if children are thriving in an environment in which they are being taken seriously all of the time, not just if there is a problem.

Children need to know to whom they can speak.

We need to find the way to give children a meaningful voice in our church, so they can tell us how we might not only develop their connection to their Lord Jesus, but if we have a problem that we need to know about.

'Listening to and capturing the voice of the child is central to effective safeguarding practice. It's how we understand children's lived experiences, hear their views about their lives and circumstances, and take effective action to support or safeguard them.' *(NSPCC, 2024)*

What?

In our local congregation and ministries children need to be able to:

- Be able to speak up
- Be able to be heard loud and clear
- Be a real part of the local church family
- Be connected to the wider church family
- Be part of a safer church

Good Practice: Questions for Our Consideration

1. Have you considered all the ways in which children can communicate? It's not always verbal (mood, actions, drawings etc.)
2. Have you considered children who are non-verbal and how they can communicate and have their voice heard?
3. Have you got to know the child's family? Can you take cues from them as to how best to engage with their child?
4. Pastoral visitation is not just for mum and dad – have elders, ministers and pastoral care teams engaged also with the children/prayed with the children?
5. Have you given children the opportunity to make a difference in your local congregation? Do they feel like they are making an impact? Or do they feel invisible and disappointed?
6. Have you thought about the actual experience of children today, or are we pushing upon them what it was like for us to be children, or even how we raised our own children?
7. Have you considered a meaningful and age-appropriate way for children to influence and give feedback on their church experiences?
8. Are you fostering a culture of safe, trusted relationships? Are your general safeguarding practices strong around recruitment and vetting? Do we understand that children see all adults in a church as trusted, especially those who are the front for any reason?
9. Does Kirk Session ask itself, 'How would this affect our children and young people?'

If we consider both listening to and hearing from children and young people in our church in a meaningful way, we know that we will hear much more quickly if they are worried or concerned, or if something bad is happening to them.

If children already have a genuine belief that their voice is important and they are worshipping in a community in which they can trust many adults, it is more likely that they will be able to tell someone that something is not right or scaring them.

The sooner we know that, the better, in every circumstance.

Practical Tips for Us

- Ensure that safeguarding posters are accessible to children and:
    - put them at a height that children can see them
    - have a clear, up to date photo of the Designated Person so that children can identify them
    - ensure that information is clearly written with no jargon
- Ensure that the children have all been introduced to the Designated Person. Ensure that the DP has had an opportunity to explain their role to the children/young people
- Session should invite the family/children's/youth worker (if there is one in place) to feed back to them on the children's/youth experiences in the church, on a regular basis
- Design a meaningful way to allow children to speak up and be heard about the issues that impact them in their local church
- Connect with the wider Presbyterian Church in Ireland, at both Presbytery and island-wide level, to engage with resources and experiences for their children and young people

Engaging with Parents

Parents/carers are primarily responsible for their children and leaders should never make significant decisions that would impact a child without consulting with parents.

Leaders should never assume a parent's views on something and should always respectfully enquire.

Leaders should remain mindful if a child is in foster or residential care. Those foster parents/carers often need to consult a social worker before some decisions can be made; such families need to be given enough advance notice to make some activities possible.

Parents are responsible for advising leaders of any conditions or changes that are significant to a child attending an organisation as the season progresses.

Parents should be clear who the leaders are, including the Leader in Charge of the organisation or activity.

Parents should be clear who our Designated Person is, and how to contact them.

Leaders should ensure that parents are advised of all accidents and incidents, no matter how short-lived they were.

Communication with parents about any issues is best done face to face with the Leader in Charge and another leader present. It is not appropriate to communicate significant issues via messaging forums.

CHAPTER END

Chapter 11: Good Practices for Online Safety

Aim of the Chapter

This guidance provides the basis for **good practice** for our church when engaging with social media and other forms of electronic communication.

It outlines good practice guidance in keeping children, young people and adults who may be at risk safe online, and how to respond to some key concerns.

This guidance applies only to the use of social media and online resources approved by the Kirk Sessions.

Clare Presbyterian Church recognises that technology is a positive tool, when well used, especially in youth ministry.

Our aim is to promote the use of technology as a tool in ministry and these guidelines are to support the use of technology. We aim to promote best practices when using technology to keep everyone as safe as possible.

Legal Frameworks

This guidance has been drawn up with consideration of legislation, policy and guidance that seeks to protect children and adults at risk of harm across Northern Ireland. Key documents include:

- Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995
- *Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland*, October 2024, Department of Health
- SBNI https://onlinesafetyhub.safeguardingni.org/

'Young people use e-technologies extensively from an early age. While it is clear that technology offers children unprecedented opportunities to learn, communicate, create, discover and be entertained in a virtual environment, there are some inherent risks. While most children and young people's confidence and competence in using technologies is high, their knowledge and understanding of the risks associated with its use may be low.

'Organisations that engage with children and young people using e-technology should have a specific e-safety policy in place that has been made available to parents and young people. This should outline how the organisation mitigates against risk of harm and helps to ensure as far as possible that children and young people engaging with the organisation online are kept safe when doing so. All staff and volunteers who have contact with children should promote the safe and responsible use of technology in its many forms. All staff and volunteers should know how to respond if a child directly divulges an e-safety incident and how to escalate it appropriately.'

Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, October 2024, Department of Health

It is mandatory that a risk assessment be completed to identify whether a child or young person could be harmed while using online services via our ministries.

The child safeguarding policy of our church outlines the procedures in place to manage those risks identified.

Purpose of the Guidelines

This guidance has been developed by PCI to support our Kirk Session to know how to manage issues relating to the internet and social media.

- It will also guide the PCI Safeguarding Team to ensure consistent responses across the denomination
- It is to protect all children, young people and adults at risk who are involved in our ministries and who make use of technology while under our care
- It is to provide staff/volunteers with procedures to respond to any concerns, and to educate and inform staff/volunteers regarding online safety
- It is to ensure that our church is operating both in line with our denomination's ethos and within the relevant legislation as to behaviour online

It is the responsibility of everyone in society to keep children and young people safe from harm. This includes keeping children safe from harm online.

Standards

As a church we will:

- Ensure that we keep to relevant legislation and good practice guidance when using social media and online platforms
- Stay aware of how our children, young people and adults at risk are using social media and online platforms
- Signpost to training when necessary for any relevant staff/volunteers
- Regularly review our safeguarding policy and procedures to ensure that online safeguarding is central
- Make sure that all concerns, disclosures and abuse that occurs online are reported as per our usual procedures

Common Sense, Openness and Transparency

Clare has developed its own local online policy.

A common-sense approach is needed in our own context; for example, there are complex nuances in the below guidance when people are related, or when a young person turns 18.

Openness and transparency are always required in safeguarding children, young adults and adults at risk of harm. It is central to our use of technology and social media.

The online world is rapidly developing and deepening; there is a wide suite of resources available in the community held by those who understand this often better than we do. We as the church need to apply the principle 'if we don't know we must ask'.

Social Media and Website

The following is good safeguarding practice:

- All social media accounts/websites should be password protected and at least two leaders appointed by Kirk Session should have access to the accounts and the passwords, one of whom should ideally be an elder
- The accounts/websites should be regularly monitored by at least two leaders appointed by Kirk Session to ensure that content is appropriate
- All online activity should be consistent with the ethos of our church, in line with our Christian witness and responsibility. Kirk Session-appointed leaders should also approve all those who can post on social media in the name of the our church
- It is important to be aware that 'likes' and 'shares' are a method of communication widely used that also require discernment. For example, someone may use a church account to 'like' an external organisational page/post that may not be in keeping with the our ethos
- Those members designated leaders responsible for the account/website should ensure that their own safeguarding training is up to date
- Parental permission must be obtained before using any pictures of a child/group of children on any online platform
- It is safer to use group photographs rather than photos of individual children, but consent must still be gained
- All, including the children and young people, should be aware of who is appointed by the Kirk Session to manage the account/website and who they should contact if they are concerned about something that has happened online
- The leaders designated by the Kirk Session will remove any inappropriate posts by children or adults, explaining why this decision has been made, and informing anyone who may have been affected, including the child/young persons' parent/guardian, or a representative next of kin for an adult at risk
- No identifying details of any general member of our congregation should be posted on online platforms; this includes addresses, schools and contact numbers.

For Leaders in Charge of organisations and in church leadership roles, contact details posted should be done with the individual's consent and only when necessary

- Leaders should be aware that by advertising dates and times of events online, there is the possibility that other people, who would not have otherwise heard of an event, may target the event and turn up without warning. Preparation for this should be planned
- All concerns reported through social media platforms/websites should be managed in the same way as a face-to-face disclosure, according to our usual child/adult protection reporting procedures, and the Designated Person involved as appropriate (see section 0.11)

WhatsApp & Messaging Forums

- Messaging forums include a wide group of functions, apps and add-ons to other apps/gaming; it would be impossible to capture them all.

  The Kirk Session needs to ensure that all leaders are aware of what fora they have agreed to use, and which fora are off limits.
- The Kirk Session can only be responsible for the messaging forums used by its leaders to communicate.
- When setting up any messaging group on any platform, the purpose, parameters and rules of that messaging group should be explicit and clear when people sign up. Their signing up should be an indication that they accept those.
- Mixed adult/children's messaging forums are not good practice, with the sole exception of platforms designed for one-way communication where users' identity is protected and parental consent is given, e.g., 'bcc' email lists, mass text messages or WhatsApp community announcements.
- Messaging forums with children under the age of 16 is not good practice; children under this age, although usually very active online, do not fully understand the nuances of messaging. Congregations should communicate with those children as they always have done.
- Any personal mobile number (child or adult without consent) should never be shared by any staff/volunteer.
- It is essential to get parental consent for 16- and 17-year-olds (anyone under 18) to participate in group messaging forums with leaders.
- It is good practice to get 16- and 17-year-olds (anyone under 18) to sign their understanding of the purpose of the group messaging forum.
- Only the named and vetted leaders of a group should participate in group messaging forums with 16- and 17-year-old participants. If the group is for adults at risk of harm, again, only the leaders of the group should be involved.
- All messages should be used for communicating information (e.g., reminders of event times or kit to bring). Messaging forums are not for engaging in conversations.
- Pictures and images of anyone involved in or outside the group should never be shared.

- The Kirk Session should remain mindful that it cannot insist that leaders engage in group messaging forums; to do so usually releases an individual's personal mobile number to the group, and all have the right to protect this information.

  It is also not appropriate to then leave someone out of information if they have chosen not to participate (or do not have consent to do so). You must ensure that all members of the group including any member not in the messaging forum is getting the same information in the same timescales.

- For accountability reasons at least two leaders should be involved in the group; no group messaging forum should have only one leader involved.

- Steps for managing a misinterpretation of communication:

  - stop replying or end the conversation
  - suggest discussing the subject at the next meeting
  - inform the Designated Person in the interests of transparency
  - if concerned about the child/adult then consult the Designated Person or appropriate member of Kirk Session for safeguarding advice and follow all usual safeguarding procedures

Online Streaming and Video Recordings

- The Kirk Session should make it clear to everyone in advance of special events (for example, Children's Day) that personal videos must not be taken
- Sunday services are recorded/livestreamed; if children are visible at the front of the church at any point, it would be wise if the videographer zooms in on the speaker only
- If children/adults who lack capacity are engaging in the services, the Kirk Session should ensure that written consent is obtained from next of kin prior to sharing any recordings
- Please note the following scenario: a congregation livestreams and invites children to the front to celebrate a week of birthdays, allowing them to pick a gift out of a 'birthday bucket'
- In that moment we have shared an image of a child alongside their name, their place of worship and a birth date.

  This is enough information for any perpetrator to engage with a child and secure trust. Do not share too much information, for example, celebrate 'December birthdays' and share only the child's first name

- If an online meeting of a group is occurring that involves children, parents should also be present
- Parents need to ensure that if their child is participating in an online meeting, the child should be seated and online in a family room or shared space, not a bedroom
- Any activities being delivered via video conferencing platforms should be supported by at least two leaders (even if one is not doing any delivery of the activity), to ensure transparency

Staff and Adult Volunteers Must Not:

- 'Friend' or 'follow' any child or young person's personal accounts. Additionally, staff and volunteers should protect their own accounts
- Attempt to communicate with children via personal accounts
- Communicate formally with parents via social media/messaging; instead, use face to face, email or letters or other formally approved means such as church Instagram or WhatsApp communities specifically for parents
- Communicate via the congregational platforms/messaging outside of the hours identified in the congregation's social media policy
- Engage in 'sexting' or send pictures to anyone that would be considered inappropriate

Staff and Adult Volunteers Must:

- Ensure that, if your own social media accounts are public, you are keeping in line with the ethos of your congregation; children, young people and other adults may look you up
- Remain professional in tone when communicating online, avoiding emojis, kisses (xx), slang or abbreviations
- Undertake all online safeguarding training being offered, and keep their knowledge up to date on the online platforms available and on how they are being used
- Always work with openness and transparency and report any concerns to the Designated Person/a representative of Kirk Session immediately

Parents and Guardians Must:

- Be aware of the congregation's online ethos as communicated by the Kirk Session, and agree to this if their child/young person is engaging in the online forums.
- Expect the Kirk Session, usually through the leaders of organisations, to keep them informed of updates and changes with regard to the use of technology and expectations in the church ministry.
- Protect their child's privacy online at all times and be careful about the content they post on to the congregation's social media/website.
- Ensure that their behaviour on the our website/social media platforms is consistent with our congregational ethos as a place of Christian worship.

  Appropriate communication is positive, encouraging and faith building. Racist/sexist, hateful or exclusive language from members of the church, volunteers or staff is never appropriate.

  Using 'banter' should be avoided as it can be misconstrued.
- All pages/ groups and social media will be monitored and the church reserves the right to moderate and take action when it deems necessary.

Use of Mobile Phones During Congregational Activities

We have a statement on this within our congregational social media policy.

There is no 'one size fits all' for this guidance; for some activities it may not be appropriate to allow mobile phones at all and in others this may not be an issue about which to be concerned.

Some youth organisations have used 'contracts' to support young people to manage their mobile use when engaged in church activities.

It is appropriate to have a ban on mobile phones in bedrooms during youth residentials.

Online Gaming

Although an increasing means of engaging with young people, there are concerns in relation to the ability for this to be a fully inclusive activity. Leaders need to be mindful of this.

If online gaming between members and leaders is facilitated, several basic principles include:

- ensuring that written parental consent is specifically sought, and details of the gaming times and platforms are clearly shared with the parents
- setting a start and end time, not allowing anything after 11 p.m.
- age restrictions on gaming platforms are respected
- transparency about whether messaging or chat functions will be used during the game

Responding to Abuse Online

What is Online Abuse?

Online abuse is any type of abuse that happens on the internet, using technology like computers, tablets, mobile phones, games consoles and other internet-enabled devices.

Children, young people and adults at risk of harm may experience several types of abuse online, including:

- bullying or cyberbullying
- emotional abuse (including emotional blackmail)
- harassment, stalking or other threatening behaviour
- pressure or coercion to send sexual images
- sexual abuse
- sexual exploitation

Some people may also be exposed to online harms, such as inappropriate behaviours or content online.

How Online Abuse Happens

Online abuse can happen anywhere that allows digital communication, such as:

- social media
- text messages and messaging apps
- email and private messaging
- online chats
- comments on video or livestreaming sites
- chat in games, including voice chat
- immersive technologies such as virtual and augmented reality

Perpetrators exploit digital technology to initiate, maintain and escalate abuse. They may also groom people online, using online platforms to build a trusting relationship with the intention of abusing.

Perpetrators will often try to engage with people across a variety of online platforms. They may also encourage people to move conversations to platforms that use end-to-end encryption (NSPCC, 2021). This means that only the sender and recipient can see the content of messages, which makes it harder to identify threats to safety.

Online abuse may:

- be part of abuse that's also happening face-to-face such as bullying or an abusive relationship
- happen only online
- start online then develop into contact abuse

People can be at risk of online abuse from people they know offline, or from people they have only known online. Often there is a false sense of safety online, which means that they're more likely to talk to strangers. Perpetrators may also create anonymous profiles or pretend to be someone else, like another child.

This means that we may not realise to whom we are speaking.

People can also experience further abuse, or be re-victimised, if abusive content is recorded, uploaded or shared by others online – whether the original abuse happened online or offline.

Recognise/Respond/Report

As with any concern regarding abuse, we must know how to recognise it, how we should respond and when to report.

Recognise

It's not always easy to recognise the signs that someone is experiencing online abuse. You might see a change in behaviour, or you might notice that someone has become more isolated. Being alert to changes in behaviour is key to helping spot when something might be wrong.

Things to look out for:

- Behaviour or emotional changes; for example, a person may become angry or irritable, or they might seem low or anxious
- Changes in their eating or sleeping habits
- Inappropriate language being used for an individual's age
- Becoming secretive about their devices and to whom they are talking
- Becoming isolated and withdrawn, or suddenly mentioning new friends
- Spending more time online

Other factors to consider that increase vulnerability to online abuse:

- age
- gender
- being LGBTQ+
- loneliness or social isolation
- living in care
- special educational needs or disability
- mental health problems
- previous experiences of abuse

Respond

- If a child or adult is in immediate danger contact 999 without delay. You can also report to the Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre (CEOP)
- If you have concerns, speak immediately to your Leader in Charge and/or Designated Person
- They can advise you regarding next steps – either contacting statutory services or contacting PCI Safeguarding Lead for advice and support
- Never hesitate to access help and support – you should not wait for the next opportunity to contact someone if you have concerns, but act immediately
- If your concern is about online sexual abuse, you should alert PSNI immediately

Reporting Online Child Abuse Images

It is against the law to produce or share images of child abuse even if the image was self-created. This includes sharing images and videos over social media.

If you see a child abuse image or video online, including self-generated nude or semi-nude images, you should report to the PSNI/Garda immediately and make the PCI Safeguarding Lead aware of the situation by the next working day.

In the absence of PCI Safeguarding Lead, speak with a PCI Safeguarding Officer or the director of the Council for Social Witness.

Don't comment, like or share the video or image, as this will distribute it further. Some images and videos may appear old but it's still important to report them – you may be able to help prevent the video being shared further.

Informing Parents or Carers

Unless it would put the child at risk of further harm, you should inform their parents or carers about incidents of online abuse.

Pastoral Support

Recognising and reporting online abuse is difficult and can be distressing.

Reassure the individual that they have done the right thing in raising the issue.

It is important that the Kirk Session carefully follow up with any individual who has reported a concern about online abuse, advising them, when they can within confidentiality, that steps are being taken to address the issues.

Children Under the Care of Local Authorities/Adoptive Children/Adults at Risk

Always be careful of identifying any child who may be under the protective care of a local authority (fostered children, children residing in a children's home, kinship foster care arrangements, children leaving care services).

It may be critical to the ongoing safety of such children that they are not identified, and that their location is not given away. It is devastating to children in care to be moved around placements, and we should remain mindful of this and ensure that we are not putting any child at risk.

Additionally, some children who have been adopted need to continue to have their location protected; always discuss the issue with any adoptive parent.

Please also consider an adult or family at risk; often in cases of domestic violence a parent and children relocate.

It is therefore critical that it is clearly announced when live videoing/recording is taking place.

There are areas of our church in which to sit comfortably that would not appear on camera.

References and Resources

- https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/online-safety/social-media-online-communities-safeguarding
- Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) (2021) *Revised regional core child protection policies and procedures for Northern Ireland*
- Online Safety Hub - Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland

- **Thrive Academy** *(Local and up to date advice and support regarding digital resilience, training opportunities and church talks)*
- **CEOP** CEOP Safety Centre *The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre has numerous resources for parents, carers and children using the internet*
- **www.watchyourspace.ie**
- *Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, October 2024, Department of Health*

CHAPTER END

Chapter 12: Guidance for the Safeguarding of Children and Young People from Other Countries on Short-Term Visits

Aim of the Chapter

Children from other countries may visit our church and ministries for a variety of reasons, for example:

- As part of a charity holiday
- As part of a choir/performing mission
- As part of mission teams

The most common form of short-term visits is through mission choir/performance, usually a series of events. In these situations, children usually travel without family members and with a team of charity personnel.

This guidance addresses that scenario.

Key Terms:

1. **Tour Leader** – the person in charge of the whole trip representing the charity
2. **Charity leaders/mentors/chaperones** – adult individuals employed/volunteering through the charity (these should be mainly adult leaders, see below)
3. **Hosting church** – the church through which the partnership is set up and is accommodating the children and charity leaders while they are preforming in the local area. There could be several hosting churches during the whole trip
4. **Hosts/hosting families** – the individual homes in which children and charity leaders will reside between events
5. **Designated Person (hosting church)** – retains safeguarding oversight of all children associated with the church, even short term
6. **Venue church** – the church responsible for the one-off performance/event with the charity and the children involved

Person in Charge of the Tour & Charity Leaders/Mentors/Chaperones

Under 18 Years Old

- Some of the volunteers or leaders travelling with the children will be under 18 years old – children in terms of our legislation
- These leaders should be a minimum and hosting churches should seek assurances prior to the trip commencing that the majority of charity leaders are adults

- No 'leader' can be under the age of 16; anyone who is with the group under the age of 16 is counted as one of the child participants
- The 16- and 17-year-old leaders should be accompanied by an adult leader for the purposes of the accommodation
- 16- and 17-year-olds who are holding the responsibility of being a leader cannot share bedrooms with the children

A. Adult Leaders

- Prior to the trip commencing, the hosting church should get assurances that the charity has recruited and vetted, to the best of its ability, all adults involved in the trip
- Leaders from the home region may not be able to access vetting processes and criminal record checks in their country and the charity should give assurances that the individuals have been checked to the best of their ability through other measures (interview/references etc.)

B. Local Charity Leaders

- At times, the charity will employ individuals from Ireland or Northern Ireland who work for it and have not travelled with the group from their own country
- Any leader partnering with the charity from this country should have a valid vetting record check (AccessNI or NVB Vetting, ROI)
- The charity remains responsible for those local leaders for recruiting, vetting and training

It is important to note that the children in the local hosting families must also be protected from any person of risk, including those adults visiting briefly and staying in their home – therefore, vetting processes need to be open and honestly shared with the hosting church.

Please remember at all times that the standard of safeguarding that applies is that which is expected in Northern Ireland/Ireland, not that of the region from which the children have travelled, unless this is assessed as being over and above our own safeguarding standards.

Principles of Good Practice Relating to Events

A. Changing Facilities, Bathroom, Refreshments and Space

This relates to any venue that is being used. It is acknowledged that sometimes facilities on church premises can be limited.

It is a legal requirement that children over the age of five have separate boys' and girls' changing rooms and that adults also change separately. In the event that only one changing room is available, the children must change in turn (e.g., boys change, then girls).

Children should not be left in the changing rooms alone and should not leave the changing rooms unsupervised. This is the responsibility of the charity leaders.

Children should have access to bathroom facilities at all times. The church should ensure that their bathrooms are clean and stocked; female bathrooms should provide access to sanitary products.

The hosting church must ensure they have provided adequate refreshments for children throughout their evening.

Children should have access to a safe space in order to play and move around while they are waiting for a performance, or for somewhere to go if they feel unwell at any point.

All such areas need to be easily accessible and should be near to where the wider events are taking place – for example, children should not be isolated or alone with only one adult in a separate building if they have become unwell and need to return to the children's space.

B. Staging and Performance Risk Assessment

Before every performance, a visual risk assessment should be made of the stage area to ensure that it is suitable.

A clear entry/exit point to and from the stage should be discussed and agreed in advance.

Adequate lighting should be in place and care taken that there are no obstacles that could cause accidents.

C. Performances

The itinerary for the events is the responsibility of the charity. It should be shared in advance of the trip with the hosting church partners.

Children in Performance Regulations NI

In Northern Ireland, children participating in performances must adhere to specific regulations to ensure their safety and well-being. The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 and the Children (Public Performances) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996 govern these regulations. These regulations apply to performances in licensed premises, broadcasts and recordings intended for public exhibition and may include churches and other church premises or facilities.

Children are defined as individuals not over school-leaving age, and they must be accompanied by a parent or a registered chaperone at all times during rehearsal and performance. The Education

Authority (EA) is responsible for issuing performance licences for children and ensuring that safeguarding responsibilities are met.

The EA advises on the application process for licences and exemptions, and it is crucial for churches to seek advice and guidance and where necessary to submit applications for licences or exemptions at least 30 days before the first performance. Early discussion should be had with the charity responsible for the event as some countries will have similar regulations and may want to issue requirements in the home county.

See: https://www.eani.org.uk/services/other-services/children-in-employment-and-entertainment

For more detailed information on the application process and requirements, individuals can refer to the official guidelines provided by the EA and the Children in Entertainment & Employment Team (CEET).

If the hosting church has any concerns about the itinerary this should be addressed prior to the trip commencing.

The itinerary should demonstrate time and space on arrival in this country for children to adjust and recover from the journey.

Children should be substituted in performances and events when they are sick, tired or sore/injured.

When a child is uncomfortable or showing signs of distress on stage, they should be removed from the stage and effort made to find out what the issue is.

The child should only return if the issue has been resolved, and the child is comfortable and ready to.

Children should never be put under pressure/forced to perform, including if they want to pull out at the last moment.

It is essential that back-to-back performances do not occur, and that there is significant rest between events.

Late nights should always be followed by a period of rest the following day and churches should not arrange for activities the following morning.

D. Re-traumatisation

It is **never acceptable** that any child or young person is in a position in which they are asked to re-tell any traumatic events in a public arena.

Performances should not include the conveying of sensitive, distressing or traumatic information.

This is not an acceptable manner in which to demonstrate the work of a charity and it places children and young people at significant risk of harm.

Travel Related

Child Safety in Hosts' Cars or Bus Transport

Travel remains the responsibility of the sending charity.

However, at times, a local church will provide transport if a group is preforming over several nights.

In that case, travel to and from the church is usually managed by either hosting church members or by a church bus/church-hired bus.

- Adequate insurance must be in place, and the driver a fully qualified individual with a valid driving licence
- Adults must ensure that children have used their seat belts
- Adults must ensure that booster seats are used in line with legislation if necessary
- Adults must ensure that children are advised how to behave appropriately while journeying so as to avoid sudden distraction to the driver

Apparel

- Children from other countries can often find adjusting to the weather and climate stressful
- It is important that consideration has been given to appropriate clothing and children should be listened to if they are expressing that they are feeling too cold
- Appropriate outerwear must be provided if the weather requires it; this is the responsibility of the charity and the hosting church should help if required, ensuring that every child has appropriate clothing

Good Practices Hosting Children

At times, a church will provide accommodation to children during the time they are performing in an area; often this will be in individual church members' own homes.

At all times children must remain in pairs and be with at least one of the charity's adult leaders/ mentors. Hosts will therefore be hosting a minimum of three individuals.

Identifying Host Homes

- This should be planned well in advance
- Potential hosts should be recruited and vetted in the same manner as any other volunteer or leader of children's activities in the congregation
- This includes all adults who live in the house and any other child over the age of 16
- Hosts are responsible for those who may visit their home during the time the children are staying with them

Sleeping Arrangements

- Children should have their own room for sleeping and resting. It is appropriate for the children to share the room as long as the children are not expressing any issues with this
- The room should have a single access point
- Charity leaders should have a separate room
- Children need to be shown where the charity leader is, and how to get their attention if required
- Children need to sleep on appropriate mattresses; sofas or cushions on a floor are not acceptable
- Children should have access to a night light if they want this
- Hosts should not access the room while the children are resting – any issues should be managed by the charity leader
- Children's belongings are private and hosts should not interfere with them; they should be stored safely for the children while they are out and about

Bathing Arrangements

- Children should wash /bath themselves
- Hosting homes should ensure safe water temperatures
- Charity leaders should ensure the child has everything they need before commencing
- In the case where a leader needs to assist, the door must be left open and the host made aware

Soiled Bed Clothes

- This is mainly the responsibility of the leader from the charity to manage and support the child
- Children should be supported in a reassuring and sensitive manner and as few people as possible need to be advised of any accidents
- Hosts should ensure that the leader is able to access fresh linen and be able to dispose of or launder soiled linen

High-Risk Games and Play (e.g., trampolines, biking, swimming, going to other locations)

- All higher-risk social activities should be monitored by the charity leader present in the host's home
- Children should not be allowed to leave the hosts home unaccompanied
- They should not be allowed to visit other homes (e.g., the friends of children residing in the household) or go to other family members' houses without the charity leader also present with the children at all times

Food and Fluid

- Hosts should be given a written document regarding any food allergies or intolerances or any other dietary requirements of the child
- If a child requires any adjustments in their diet due to a medical condition (e.g., diabetes) the host should be made aware. The management of medical issues remains the responsibility of the charity leader
- Hosts should be given guidance in understanding the usual diet of the children in their care; it may be that high salt or sugar foods are not usually available to that child and could make them unwell
- Hosts should be given understanding of any cultural requirements around meal and snack times for the child
- Hosts should ensure that the child has access to water to drink at all times
- Hosts should be made aware of any food a child in their care does not like, to ensure that the child is not embarrassed or feeling under pressure to eat something they find distasteful

Medical and Health

Serious Medical Issues (Emergency)

- In an emergency, contact 999 or take the injured child to nearest Hospital Emergency Dept
- All incidents are to be reported to the Tour Leader immediately
- Children should not be separated from their charity leader; therefore, consideration needs to be given to any child who requires emergency treatment and any child who is being left in the host's home during this time.

  Hosts should therefore be able to contact the Tour Leader for emergency support; this arrangement should not cause delay to treatment

Minor Medical Issues, Administration of Medication, Reporting of any Medical Concerns or Incidents

- All accidents or incidents should have a written report associated, clearly outlining the issue and the actions taken, including the follow-up required and when next of kin (usually not in the country) have been advised
- Copies of accident reports should be held by the Tour Leader and the Designated Person of the local hosting church
- Charity leaders should be appraised of any medical conditions or allergies and they will therefore lead with the medical team enquiries when accessing any medical care
- Hosts are responsible for ensuring swift access to medical care as required
- Charity leaders are responsible for the safe storage and administration of any medication the child is on

- Hosts should not give the child any medication or home remedy
- Hosts should ensure that their own medications are out of sight and reach of all children

Communication

Social Media

- The church in which the children are performing need to make a clear statement, before the performance commences, regarding any images being captured by members of the public.

  This statement needs to be in line with the charity's own policy and procedures
- The charity should have clear guidelines on the use of social media and the charity is responsible for ensuring the parental consent for this
- Individual hosts should not put images of children in their care on social media; children are on their down time when with hosts and not practising or performing. This is their private space and time

Use of Phones, Tablets and Computers

- The Tour Leader is responsible for making clear to the hosting churches and families their rules and regulations in allowing the children to have access to the internet
- Hosting families should remember that contact with home could be upsetting for children and the Tour Leader will have planned for this contact and support thereafter
- If the church or hosting families have any concerns that a child is either not getting contact from family or community at home, or has been seeking this out and is being ignored, they should speak directly to the Tour Leader and get assurances that this will be accommodated appropriately
- At no point should children be allowed to engage in online or offline gaming, without the express permission of the Tour Leader. Some games are potentially traumatising
- At no point should children be encouraged to share their details or have suggested further contact with anyone they meet while on tour (see below)
- This should be managed age appropriately by the charity; small children need different parameters from teenagers and young people with regard to social media and phones. The charity must advise hosting churches of their expectations

Ongoing Communication with Children after the Event

- It is not appropriate for hosts to keep in contact with individual children they have met through this experience outside of the parameters set up by the charity's own regulations
- The hosting church should ensure that it has received a pack including all of the charity's policies, guidance and expectations prior to the children arriving

- The hosting church leadership should ensure that all hosts have had access to this and are clear about the guidance
- All ongoing contact should be open, transparent and set up through the charity's safe systems (for example, if there is ongoing sponsorship of a child there will be a safe process for this)

Gifts

- Host families and churches should only accept small gifts from children, for example, artwork or crafts they have made
- Host families and churches should only give small gifts to children. Consideration should be given to:
    - fairness across the whole group
    - restrictions on what can be allowed through customs and checks (e.g., food stuffs or liquids are not usually a good idea)
    - the meaning of the gift to the child/children
- All gifts given to children should be declared to the charity leader; this ensures openness and transparency and no later confusion or delays when travelling
- Money should never be given as a gift
- Host churches and families should consider meaningful gifts, like a disposable camera for the duration of their stay and printing out the pictures the child has taken for the child to keep

Managing Safeguarding

General Arrangements

- The Designated Person of the church should be aware in advance that the church is hosting the group
- The details of the Designated Person/s should be given to the Tour Leader and the charity leaders
- The children should meet the Designated Person and be advised who he/she is and what their role is, in a child-friendly manner
- The Designated Person should have a list of the hosts in advance, including their dates of recruitment, vetting and training
- The Designated Person should raise immediately with Kirk Session of any hosting church if they have any concerns about the arrangements
- The Designated Person must be advised of and involved in any child safeguarding matter
- The charity should provide the church with a copy of its safeguarding policy and procedures prior to the trip. If there are any concerns about the procedures these discussions and

clarifications should take place between the hosting church and the charity prior to the trip commencing. The church should be assured that the safeguarding arrangements of the charity with which they are partnering are robust

Dealing with Concerns

- Any safeguarding concern must be assessed and managed in the same manner in which we would respond for any child within our own congregations or attending our ministries
- Factual and clear record keeping must be in place, clearly outlining the concern and the actions taken
- The Tour Leader should be kept involved at all times and is responsible for the charity's actions and records
- Always, the immediate safety of children comes first, the welfare of the child is paramount in all decision-making
- If a disclosure is made with regard to a situation occurring in the child's home region the Tour Leader should be involved and should outline to the Designated Person how this will be managed.

  The Designated Person has a responsibility to alert our local social services who will also assess the situation and seek assurances as to the charity's protocols

Safeguarding Checklist

Before Arrival

☐ Received and reviewed the itinerary

☐ Received and reviewed the charity's Policy & Procedure Pack

☐ Received a list of leaders, identifying how many are 16- and 17-year-olds

☐ Received care plans for individual children (e.g., dietary and medical conditions etc.)

☐ Planning of ratios for hosting family accommodation, ensuring that any issues with available charity leaders/mentors/chaperones are addressed in advance of the trip

☐ Recruit, vet and train all potential hosting families

☐ Advise Designated Personnel in hosting churches of the trip and agenda

☐ Contacted the EA CEET team to ascertain if a performance licence needs to be applied for any performances and any requirements arising from that

During Hosting

☐ Ensure that children meet the Designated Person for the church that is hosting

☐ Ensure that details have been shared between charity leader, hosts and the Tour Leader so that communication out of hours can be maintained in an emergency

CHAPTER END

Chapter 13: Assessing and Managing Risk

Aim of the Chapter

i. To define risk and its connection to the protection of children and young people

ii. To outline the Kirk Session's responsibilities to assess and manage risk

Protecting Children and Young People from What?

While it is not possible to remove all risk, the Kirk Session should put in place policies and procedures to manage and reduce risk to the greatest possible extent.

Safeguarding risks are different from general health and safety risks. We have in place risk assessments for health and safety (including fire safety). These are important for the general overall safety of all attending our ministries, including children and young people. These are not covered in this procedure.

This procedure deals with the risks associated with abuse and protecting children from the harms of abuse.

This means all risks associated with the following as outlined in *Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland*:

> 'The Children Order defines 'harm' as ill-treatment or the impairment of health or development. The Order states that 'ill-treatment' includes sexual abuse, forms of ill-treatment which are not physical; 'health' means physical and/or mental health; and 'development' means physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development.
>
> 'Impairment of health or development may include impairment suffered as a result of the ill-treatment of another person or abusive behaviour (as defined in section 2 of the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021) directed at another person. The child may suffer such impairment regardless of whether they have witnessed, heard or been present during such ill-treatment or behaviour.
>
> 'There is no absolute definition of 'significant harm', as this will be assessed on a case by case basis. Article 50(3) of the Children Order states that 'where the question of whether harm suffered by a child is significant turns on the child's health or development, his health or development shall be compared with that which could reasonably be expected of a similar child'.
>
> 'Where a HSCT suspects that a child is suffering, or likely to suffer significant harm, the HSCT has a duty under Article 66 of the Children Order to make enquiries, or cause enquiries to be made, to enable it to decide whether it should take any action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare.'

Therefore, our church must conduct adequate risk assessment and management to protect children and young people from harm and promote their well-being.

A risk assessment is a legislative requirement in ROI under the Children First Act and statutory guidance. This is an area of good practice from ROI that we (as a PCI congregation in NI) have adopted.

What does a Risk Assessment Accomplish?

- It helps us to identify potential risks
- It helps us to consider how to/if we can manage those risks
- It helps us to put in place policy and procedure to minimise risks
- It helps us to review our risks and see if our procedures are working
- It helps form the Child Safeguarding Statement

Who is Responsible for Risk Assessment and Management?

The Kirk Session is responsible for the oversight of all aspects of our church's ministry. It must appoint adequately skilled individuals to conduct the risk assessments and draw these into a composite church document.

It must understand and review the Child Safeguarding Statement and any risks it is carrying, alongside the procedures to manage the risks.

It must ensure that everyone who needs access to the policy and procedures has it, and that the procedures are followed in its local activities and ministries.

It must take actions to protect from any immediate harm if individuals are not compliant with the procedures they have put in place.

The Leader in Charge of each activity is responsible for the rolling out of policies and procedures to keep children safe from harm. It must advise the Kirk Session of any concerns and give feedback as to the procedures' actual impact.

All leaders have a responsibility to ensure that they understand and work within the set policies and procedures. They should let the Leader in Charge know if they have any concerns.

Continued on next page

Risk Assessment Process



Top Tips for Risk Assessment

1. *Identify the Risks*

Who or what may cause harm to the children and young people in our congregation?

- Involve all persons engaged in particular ministries; it is important to talk to leaders delivering the activities, the children and young people themselves, and family members
- Consider our recent history; what have increasingly become any areas of concern?
- Consider the community in which we minister; are there wider community factors to consider?
- Consult the PCI denominational procedures for examples of common areas of risk that need attention; translate to our local area
- Are we delivering a new ministry? This is an area for special consideration as it is new ground

2. *Evaluate the Risks*

In other words, decide what are low, medium and high risks.

- How often does the activity occur?
- What is the likelihood of the risk?
- What would the consequences of the risk be if it occurred?

High risk: Significant likelihood of occurrence of harm and potentially severe consequences. Requires immediate attention.

Medium risk: A moderate likelihood of occurring and potential consequences. May cause significant disruption or harm.

Low risk: Unlikely to cause significant harm.

Keep the assessment simple.

3. *Control and Manage the Risks*

What will now be done to manage the identified risks?

- Who is responsible for managing the risks? (Kirk Session holds overall responsibility for the congregation. However, it cannot be present on-site during activities at all times. Therefore, the Leader in Charge of an organisation usually needs to manage the risks.)
- What current controls are in place already? (What policies and procedures does PCI already have that we can highlight?)
- What else do we need to do to manage the risks?
- Write our local procedures to guide everyone and set out the expectations for safe activities.

4. *Review the Risks*

How are the policies and procedures working out?

- All policies and procedures must be reviewed at least once every two years, signed off by the Kirk Session and re-issued to relevant people.

Examples of Safeguarding Risks

Several risks to consider are, but are not limited to:

Example of Risk	**Examples of Mitigations**
Inappropriate behaviour of adult leaders	PCI denominational procedures, especially: Chapter 6: Recruitment and Appointment of Leaders Chapter 8: Training Chapter 15: Codes of Behaviour
Inappropriate behaviour between children/young people	PCI denominational procedures, especially: Chapter 2: Recognising Abuse Chapter 10: Voice of Children and Young People Chapter 15: Codes of Behaviour

Lost/missing children	Prepare a clear and short statement for all leaders and parents as to actions that will be taken immediately in all circumstances of a child missing or leaving an activity; make publicly available. Security measures are part of general health and safety of our congregation.
Concerns about grooming	PCI denominational procedures, especially: Chapter 2: Recognising Abuse Chapter 3: Responding to and Reporting Abuse
Strangers on the premises during or after activities	PCI denominational procedures, especially: Chapter 9: Working Safely with Children, Ratios Security measures are part of general health and safety of the congregation.
Online abuse/concerns	PCI denominational procedures, especially: Chapter 11: Online Safety

Principles and Procedures to Keep Children and Young People Safe

These are outlined at length in our wider Safeguarding Children policies and procedures.

Our Safeguarding Children Policy states:

Clare Presbyterian Church believes that everyone has a responsibility to promote the welfare of all children and to keep them safe.

Clare Presbyterian Church believes that children should never experience abuse of any kind.

Clare Presbyterian Church is committed to safeguarding all children and protecting them from harm.

It is the policy of Clare Presbyterian Church to safeguard all children and young people interacting with its ministry in any form. This includes actively protecting children from all forms of harm or abuse.

- The welfare of any child is paramount, no matter how brief their engagement with our church or how small the organisation they attend

- All children, regardless of age, disability, gender, racial heritage, religious belief, sexual orientation or identity, have the right to equal protection from all forms of harm or abuse
- We recognise that some children are additionally vulnerable because of the impact of previous experiences, communication needs, disabilities, adverse environments and other issues
- The voices of children and young people are crucial to our learning and development as a safe church and we seek to always improve our engagement with them

Clare Presbyterian Church will therefore:

1. Ensure that there is an aligned accessible Designated Person, and a Deputy if needed
2. Maintain robust procedures for the recruitment, checking and monitoring of staff and volunteers working with children
3. Ensure that anyone engaging with children and young people through the church will be trained at least once every three years in how to recognise, respond to and report abuse as well as understand their role in the prevention of abuse
4. Ensure that we have in place clear processes for the reporting of abuse and the risk of harm, both externally to statutory services and internally through a clearly identified chain of responsibility
5. Ensure that identified risks to children and young people are assessed and managed
6. Ensure that any person of risk engaged in our ministries (for example, those with a history of serious offending behaviour) is safely managed, monitored and supported
7. Ensure that we have a timely, effective and sensitive approach to managing non-recent abuse disclosures
8. Ensure that children and young people from other countries are protected and cared for while engaging in our ministries and missions
9. Ensure that we have appropriate and actual methods for children and young people to voice their opinions and concerns, and be listened and responded to
10. Ensure that we have safe and confidential methods for managing information

Safeguarding Risk Assessment – Suggested Form & Example for Use

Child Safeguarding Risk Assessment	
Name of Congregation	Clare Presbyterian Church
Address	
Location (list all locations where the service is provided)	
Name of person responsible for the child safeguarding risk assessment	
Names of those consulted with in completing the risk assessment, if applicable	
Details of where the Child Safeguarding Statement will be displayed and how it will be furnished to all staff	
Completed by: Date: Date for review: (This risk assessment should be reviewed on an ongoing basis, and updated as required)	

Potential Risk Categories

Risk 1	Risk of harm to a child by a staff member, volunteer or student, including risks related to online activities
Risk 2	Risk of harm to a child from a service user (adult or child), visitor or member of the public, including risks related to online activities
Risk 3	Risk of harm to a child due to a child protection or welfare concern not being recognised or reported by a staff member
Risk 4	Risk of harm to a child due to a child protection or welfare concern not being recognised or reported by a child
Risk 5	Risk of harm to a child due to not implementing *Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in NI* and/or related SBNI guidance and policy
Risk 6	Risk of harm to a child due to a service failing to ensure safe access to ICT (including social media, web access and electronic contact)

Risk One

Risk 1 – Risk or harm to a child by a staff member, volunteer or student, including risks related to online activities	
Risk description	There is a risk of harm to a child due to a volunteer or leader physically, emotionally or sexually abusing or neglecting a child, resulting in the child experiencing harm that seriously affects their health, development or welfare.
What could happen?	A child could be abused or neglected by a volunteer or leader while engaging with our ministries. This could happen through face-to-face contact with a child, or through the use of online systems.
How could it happen?	A volunteer or leader could: ○ arrange to meet with a child alone, within usual activity hours, for the purpose of abusing them ○ arrange to meet with a child, outside of working hours, for the purpose of abusing them ○ contact a child, by phone or through online platforms, for the purpose of grooming with the intent to abuse ○ abuse a child while providing intimate care as part of the service provision ○ neglect a child in their care, either wilfully or accidentally, resulting in that child being harmed ○ lose control and cause physical harm to a child ○ inappropriately prescribe and/or administer medication in a manner that causes harm to a child (has a serious effect on their health development and welfare) A child could be harmed though the unauthorised taking and/or use of digital imagery by a staff member – for example, photographs and videos being shared without consent, modified or misused out of context, a vulnerable child being identified for the purpose of grooming and abuse.
Why might it happen?	This might happen because: ○ a staff member deliberately engages in this behaviour ○ of inappropriate levels of supervision – for example, child/adult ratios ○ of inappropriate levels of support or clinical supervision

	○ of staff members not adhering to policy and procedures ○ staff members were not properly screened and Garda vetted, as appropriate ○ of misuse of power and abuse of the position of trust that is inherent to work within a faith context
What might the impact be?	Harm to a child that seriously affects the child's health, development or welfare
Who, within the service and/or organisation, can and does influence this risk?	Kirk Session Leaders in Charge of organisations Leaders Volunteers and helpers Designated Liaison Person Mandated Person
Controls	Safeguarding Children (ROI) Policy and Procedures, Presbyterian Church in Ireland: Chapter 2: Recognising Abuse Chapter 3: Responding and Reporting Chapter 6: Recruitment and Appointment Chapter 7: AccessNI Vetting Chapter 8: Safeguarding Training Chapter 9: Working Safely with Children Chapter 10: Voice of Children and Young People Chapter 11: Online Safety Chapter 15: Codes of Behaviour

Repeat for all identified risks

Implementation

Clare Presbyterian Church is committed to the implementation of this Child Safeguarding Assessment and Risk Management and the practices and procedures that support our commitment to keeping children safe from harm while engaged in church activities.

This will be reviewed every two years or as soon as practicable after there has been a material change in any matter to which the statement refers.

Signed and dated on behalf of Kirk Session:

Designation	Date	Signature
Minister		
Clerk of Session		
Designated Person		

Key Personnel	Telephone	Email
Designated Person		
PCI Central Safeguarding Team		
Gateway Contacts		
PSNI Contacts		

CHAPTER END

Chapter 14: The Management of Safeguarding Agreements (Offenders & Serious Allegations)

Aim of the Chapter

i. To support the Kirk Session to know when a Safeguarding Agreement should be put in place

ii. To support the Kirk Session with the management of all serious offenders returning to worship

iii. To support the Kirk Session to know how to manage serious allegations

What is a Safeguarding Agreement?

A Safeguarding Agreement (Agreement) is a written Agreement between an individual and the appointed representatives of a church congregation, outlining conditions under which they can attend church services and activities and be part of church life.

When does an Agreement Need to be Put in Place?

- When an individual has an allegation of inappropriate or abusive behaviour towards children, young people or adults at risk, made against them
- When someone is convicted of offences relating to harm caused to children, young people or adults at risk
- When someone is cautioned for offences relating to harm caused to children, young people or adults at risk
- If information is received from the statutory authorities (PSNI/PBNI/Social Services) that they have concerns about the behaviour of an individual in relation to children, young people or adults at risk

Why are Agreements Important?

Agreements help to safeguard everyone involved in church life.

An Agreement also helps those who are subject to it by ensuring that they have supportive and accountable relationships within the church.

These accountable relationships help minimise the risk of them reoffending or behaving inappropriately.

This process of reformation and restoration will be supported and monitored through our risk management process – Agreements and mentoring.

The Agreement has a dual purpose – the first is to assure all victims of abuse and the families of children and adults at risk in our congregation that precautions and safeguards are in place to ensure safety from harm in our ministries.

The second is to provide structure and support for the offender who seeks to make his/her life characterised by forgiveness and pursues the opportunity to participate in the worshipping life of our congregation.

Who Needs to be Involved in Putting an Agreement in Place?

A small group of people will be identified to confidentially oversee the Agreement and support the offender/alleged offender in church life. Details will not be shared with other people within the church.

This will usually include:

- Minister
- Designated Person
- Clerk of Session
- Mentor
- Responsible Elder(s)
- Representative of PCI Safeguarding Team

The appointed team is responsible for putting the Agreement in place and ensuring that it is implemented and sustained.

At times an external statutory body will want to be part of the Agreement process (for example, a probation officer or a designated risk manager).

The Role of Kirk Session

This can often become an area of complexity, balancing the requirements of confidentiality with the role of the leadership of the church.

Confidentiality is a legal requirement. All Agreements need to be agreed and managed on a need-to-know basis.

It is therefore the advice of PCI Safeguarding Office that Agreement details are not discussed with the whole Session.

Our Kirk Session has nominated one or two responsible elders for safeguarding.

This is helpful because often (as in our case) the Designated Person is not a member of Session.

It is also normal for the Clerk of Session to have all of the information as he will be responsible in the absence of the Minister for overseeing the Agreement.

It is critical that safeguarding is a standing agenda item at Session meetings; this can usually be led by a nominated elder and should serve as reassurance to the Session that all safeguarding matters are in hand, and all relevant information is being appropriately shared.

It would be normal for the small group nominated to oversee safeguarding to give general feedback to the Session on safeguarding, giving assurances, but not to share the confidential detail.

Role of the Mentors

There should always be at least four mentors involved in supporting an offender to worship in a local congregation. This includes the Minister, the Clerk of Session and the Designated Person alongside one other, usually an elder.

This group of people will act as a support for the individual and will ensure some practicalities are overseen.

For example, the individual may be asked to sit within the observable area of a mentor during Sunday morning worship.

The mentor role should be carefully considered and should not be held by any person who themselves would be considered as an adult at risk.

The central Safeguarding Team must always be involved in putting in the management of any offender returning to worship or the management of any serious allegations.

The central team holds information on all subjects of an Agreement; this is critical for information sharing with statutory services for reasons of public protection.

It is often the case that one subject of an Agreement moves around the denomination and leaves and returns regularly. It is important that this is traced.

Review of an Agreement

The Agreement will usually be reviewed at least every six months to annually, to check that it is being adhered to and that the individual remains accountable to the appointed team.

A regular review will also ensure that any updates in the case are reflected within it (e.g., the individual being charged by the police or found guilty by the court).

There may be occasion when the Agreement requires reviewing on a more regular basis.

It is the responsibility of the representative from the PCI Safeguarding Team to identify the first date of review at the original Agreement meeting, and the rolling reviews thereafter.

What is the Process for Putting an Agreement in Place?

i. Contact the PCI Safeguarding Office to discuss the need for an Agreement and to ensure that all relevant information is exchanged

ii. A sample Agreement has already been drawn up in PCI. This can be adapted for each individual situation

iii. There may be a need to involve statutory agencies (Police and Probation). Often, they will want to review and check the Agreement and will give direction if amendments are required

iv. Meet with all relevant parties and talk through the Agreement.

v. Meet with the individual subject to the Agreement and talk them through it

vi. Ensure that the Agreement is signed and dated by all parties and that a review date is established

What Happens at the Meeting?

The process for approving an Agreement can invoke strong emotions and the individual may feel nervous or angry and may get upset or defensive about the process in hand.

Agree in advance who is leading the meeting.

If possible, start the meeting with a time of prayer.

It is helpful to outline at an early stage the ways in which you are able to support the individual; take this time to remind them that they are a valued part of your church community.

It can also be helpful to provide reassurance that this is normal procedure for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, that it is consistently followed in the same way across our denomination.

Talk through the specifics of the Agreement.

Take any questions.

Sign and date the Agreement, making sure that both the individual and the team present all sign and date.

A review date should also be agreed and recorded on the Agreement at that time.

What if an Individual Won't Sign an Agreement?

If an individual won't sign the Agreement, then our church is left in a position of potentially unmanaged risk.

It is crucial that our church is as safe a place as possible for everyone involved in church life.

It is the advice of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Safeguarding Office that the individual is not allowed to attend our church unless a signed Agreement is put in place.

It is important to advise any statutory body involved as they will have a view on this and may support monitoring of this situation.

What if an Individual Breaches the Terms of the Agreement?

It may be that as a result of a breach of this Agreement the individual is asked to stop attending our church, as we are no longer in a position where potential risks are being managed.

Our church should always alert any statutory body involved of a breach of the Agreement.

Contact the PCI Safeguarding Team for advice if you have any concerns about a breach of Agreement.

Ending an Agreement

Individuals convicted of an offence will be subject to an Agreement while attending their church, which will remain under review at least annually.

If an individual chooses to leave a specifically named church, the Agreement will end.

A new Agreement will be required if an individual moves to a different Presbyterian church.

The Agreement is specific to a congregation and is not interchangeable among congregations within the denomination.

The Agreement is specific to our denomination and anyone leaving the denomination should advise their new denomination of their situation.

On ending an Agreement, a written letter should be sent to the individual and the Minister of the church, and held on file, explaining the same and noting the reason and dating the cessation of the Agreement.

This letter should come from the PCI Safeguarding Office representative.

Should an individual return to the same church, a new Agreement will be required.

If an individual has not attended church for a period of three months, the Agreement will be ended.

If an individual moves to a different denomination, information should be sought from the central Safeguarding Team about the sharing of any relevant information with that denomination from a safeguarding perspective.

Managing the Records

A copy of the signed Agreement should be given to the PCI Safeguarding Team representative, the church representative and the individual subject to the Agreement.

Centrally, Agreements will be scanned and held on a secure online file. Paper copies will be shredded.

The church representative must ensure that they store the Agreement in a safe place where only the specified people have access to it.

This is a confidential document and must be treated as such.

What Support is there for the People who are Managing the Agreement?

The circumstances leading to an Agreement being put in place often create a strong emotional response.

It may be that the individual who is subject to the Agreement has been in the church for a long time or is a well-liked member.

Sometimes this makes it difficult to believe that they could be a risk to others within the church, particularly if they have not yet been to court or convicted.

The subject of the Agreement may also be given explanations for their past behaviour or deny that the behaviour took place.

People involved in offending are usually very plausible and can groom those around them.

The people managing the Agreement are just as vulnerable to grooming as other members of the congregation.

It is important that those people who are responsible for managing the Agreement also receive support.

While it is important that confidentiality is maintained (including not sharing information about the Agreement for prayer purposes) the people involved in this Agreement should feel able to talk and reflect on their thoughts and feelings in a safe and supportive environment.

It is important that this support is offered outside of the immediate church environment to maintain confidentiality, and to ensure some objectivity in the discussions.

The PCI Safeguarding Office should be that support and can also access other avenues of support.

Young People Who May Pose a Risk of Sexual Harm: Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Occasionally, young people will also pose a risk of sexual harm to others; this is referred to as 'harmful sexual behaviour'.

Where this is the case, the statutory agencies will be involved in providing a range of assessments and services to these young people.

It may be that our church is contacted as part of a wider risk management plan. Designated Persons (DPs) and Ministers should work with police and Social Services' input into any plan around these young people's attendance at church activities.

Any Other Business

- It is recommended that no congregation facilitates more Agreements than it is resourced to manage; Agreements are resource heavy and Session must make a reasonable consideration of its ability to manage more than one Agreement.

  It may be appropriate in this scenario to recommend that a second individual attends another local church, in our denomination, in the area. This congregation will be supported in the same manner to put all the safeguards in place.

- Statutory services may at times contact a local church or PCI Safeguarding Office and ask for an offender, usually leaving prison or regulated accommodation, to be able to attend a local church.

  On those occasions the Minister should alert the core group of Session (see section 0.5) and make a decision on their ability to accommodate such a request.

- There may be occasions on which an offender worships in a church with his/her family. We cannot assume that a spouse or other family members are aware of the offending behaviour or allegations. Confidentiality applies.

  Pastoral support for the family in these situations can be complex, and advice and support can be sought for each individual situation, via the Safeguarding Office.

- It is not appropriate for an offender to worship in the same congregation as the victims.

Finally

You are not alone.

These situations can be complex and not easily responded to.

The management of offenders/alleged offenders in churches never sits with one person.

If you ever want to ask a question, discuss a concern or work through a situation, the PCI Safeguarding Office is happy to take your call.

Appendices

i. Sample Agreement

ii. Contact List

Appendices

EXAMPLE

Safeguarding Agreement between (X) and Clare Presbyterian Church

A meeting was held on (date) to agree written Agreement date for (X) to attend Clare Presbyterian Church.

As a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Clare Presbyterian Church believes that within the context of grace and forgiveness, attendance at worship services is open to everyone. At the same time, the protection of our children must always remain paramount.

This Agreement is to ensure both the protection of children and adults at risk and (X)

The meeting was attended by (list Rev/PCI Safeguarding Office/Clerk/DP/PSNI/(X)etc.)

This Agreement will be shared with the Designated Person and the Clerk of Session.

This Agreement will be held in a safe location accessible only to the Minister, Designated Person and Clerk of Session.

The conditions of this written Agreement are as follows:

1. (X) can attend church services at Clare Presbyterian Church.
2. (X) will sit with _____during worship at Clare Presbyterian Church.
3. (X) will not be permitted to attend any organisation with children.
4. (X) will not be permitted to attend any church event that is primarily for children or a family event.
5. A mentor will be appointed within the congregation who will be the main point of contact for (X).
6. (X) will inform his mentor if he wishes to attend any church events other than Sunday services.
7. (X) will not form a relationship with or be in the sole company of any persons under the age of 18 years. This would include offering or providing any lift in a car as young people make their way to or from church.
8. (X) will not be permitted to hold a position of authority or responsibility within the church.
9. Should (x) need to make use of the toilet facilities on the church premises, he will use the communal toilet for males or use the single accessible toilet.
10. Managing ad hoc invitations to congregant's homes

11. Managing technology brought to church (mobiles etc.)
12. Managing technology in church – livestreaming help with media team etc.
13. This Agreement applies to attendance at Clare Presbyterian Church only. Should (X) wish to attend any other Presbyterian church, a new Agreement needs to be agreed beforehand.
14. If (X) chooses not to keep to the above conditions, he is choosing not to attend worship and will not be permitted to do so.

Should there be any concerns regarding (X) behaviour contact should be made with Rev _____ or Jayne Bellingham, Safeguarding Office, PCI.

Duration and Reviews of the Agreement

There is no time limit for how long this Agreement will last. It will apply for as long as (X) wishes to worship at Clare Presbyterian Church.

This Agreement can be reviewed at the request of any of the involved parties mentioned above.

The details of the next review are:

Time and Date: ……..

Venue: ……..

(X) :

…… Date:…….

Rev:

…… Date:……

XXXXXX, Safeguarding Office, Presbyterian Church:

…… Date:……

Designated Person / Mentor / Clerk of Session etc.

…… Date:……

Safeguarding Office, Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Tel: 048 9041 7290 (From RoI) Tel: 028 9041 7290 (From NI) safeguarding@presbyterianireland.org

CHAPTER END

Chapter 15: Codes of Behaviour

Aim of the Chapter

i. To outline Codes of Behaviour
ii. To describe actions on a breach of a code
iii. To describe the management of complaints regarding safeguarding
iv. To outline an anti-bullying approach and statement

Context

Codes of Behaviour provide protection for everyone, including children and young people.

It is important that everyone involved has guidelines on what is expected, and what is not acceptable, with respect to their behaviour.

The Codes of Behaviour will create supportive environments to provide a child-centred approach for the children involved in our ministries.

The Codes of Behaviour will help to provide rules for the leaders, parents and children to agree to and abide by.

Codes of Behaviour are based on a child-centred approach and promote openness and transparency at all times.

Strengths

Think about the strengths and the things already in place in our local congregation.

They might include:

- The value our denomination places on children and young people
- How we welcome and include children from many different backgrounds and who have different characteristics
- How each activity or organisation focuses on understanding of babies', children's and young people's specific needs
- How we already communicate with children and young people and ask them what they think
- The contact we already have with the local community
- The leadership that we already have in place; their faith, values and commitment
- The commitment to training for any staff and volunteers
- The strength of our recruitment processes for our staff and volunteers

Codes of Behaviour

Clare Presbyterian Church has resolved to adopt a Code of Behaviour for **the leaders** of all children's/youth organisations.

The guidance is that this should include but is not limited to:

- Overarching statement
    - leaders occupy a position of trust in our church community; we expect all leaders to act appropriately and in keeping with that trust
    - we expect all adults taking part in our activities to display appropriate behaviour at all times. That includes both behaviour that takes places within our ministries and behaviour online
    - the Kirk Session is responsible for establishing the Codes of Conduct in keeping with the ethos and aims of its Christian service and as part of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. As such, it is clear about the standards expected to keep all children and young people safe from harm and will take immediate action if it is concerned
- Outline of areas of responsibility
    - for example, working within the law and policies, modelling good behaviour at all times for children, working with the welfare of children as the paramount consideration, speaking up about any concerns of abusive or harmful behaviour
- Expected behaviours
    - for example, avoiding favouritism, working in an open and transparent manner, being mindful of the use of language, signing up to safe communication online, expectations in emergency situations
- Inappropriate behaviours
    - for example, ignoring concerns, being sarcastic or demeaning children, any type of punitive or humiliating behaviour, use of substances or alcohol, having secrets with children
- Actions in the event of inappropriate behaviours
    - for example, the Kirk Session will stand a leader down until further investigation has occurred, updating training, internal church disciplinary, removal from leadership
- Who the Code applies to
    - for example, noting which organisations it covers, noting that it includes senior leaders and elders helping at an organisation, that reputation and length of membership in a church do not exclude individuals

Clare Presbyterian Church has also resolved to adopt a Code of Behaviour **for the children and young people** attending organisations as participants.

The guidance is that this should include but is not limited to:

- Why we have a code in place for the children/young people
- Simple lists of dos and don'ts
- Role of parents and guardians, including communication with them
- What happens for children and young people if they breach the Codes of Behaviour, including who is responsible for helping children and young people understand this
- How we communicate this Code to our children and young people, and their families

Complaints about Safeguarding Practices

The body responsible for all safeguarding issues, including complaints, is the Kirk Session.

It is best to receive the complaints in writing, but not necessary. Once received by any member of Kirk Session the complaint should be recorded, dated and signed.

Individuals may make contact via the Minister or Clerk of Session. This may also occur through the Designated Person.

Individuals may use the word 'complaint' but be referring to a safeguarding issue that needs escalated.

Safeguarding complaints may involve elements of risk of harm and should be assessed carefully. Advice can be taken from the central PCI Safeguarding Team.

Anti-Bullying Policy

Clare Presbyterian Church has an anti-bullying policy statement, which sets out the PCI commitment to preventing and responding to bullying.

Related Policies and Procedures

PCI Safeguarding Children (NI) Chapter 2: Recognising Abuse

PCI Safeguarding Children (NI) Chapter 3: Responding and Reporting

PCI Safeguarding Children (NI) Chapter 10: The Voice of Children and Young People

PCI Safeguarding Children (NI) Chapter 11: Online Safety

CHAPTER END

Chapter 16: Glossary of Terms

The policies and procedures for safeguarding in Clare Presbyterian Church are written so that they are accessible to as many as possible.

They are written in 'layman's terms' as much as we are able to ensure that all can engage as closely as possible with the ethos and values of our approach.

The policy and procedures are written in line with, and under the spirit of, the regional legislation of NI, human rights approaches and other good practice guidance.

Safeguarding refers to all activity that relates to the development and well-being of children, including raising awareness activity, promotion of safe practices and preventative measures to ensure that children never come to any harm. It is wider than the term **child protection**, which refers specifically to the activity that is undertaken to protect individual children or young people who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm *(Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, October 2024)*

A Child: the Children (NI) Order 1995 defines a 'child' as a person under the age of 18.

Harm is defined in the Children (NI) Order 1995 as ill-treatment or the impairment of health or development. The Order states that 'ill-treatment' includes sexual abuse, forms of ill-treatment that are physical and forms of ill-treatment that are not physical; 'health' means physical and/or mental health; and 'development' means physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development.

Significant Harm is defined in Article 50(3) of the Children (NI) Order 1995, which states that 'where the question of whether harm suffered by a child is significant turns on the child's health or development, his health or development shall be compared with that which could reasonably be expected of a similar child'.

Harm from abuse is not always straightforward to identify and a child or young person may experience more than one type of harm or significant harm.

Harm can be caused by physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, exploitation, ill-treatment of another, or abusive behaviour directed at another *(Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, October 2024)*

Prevention is the importance of preventing problems occurring or worsening through the introduction of timely supportive measures.

Designated Person refers to the individual appointed by Kirk Session to oversee and administrate child safeguarding functions in each local church.

Statutory Authorities in Northern Ireland refers to Trust or Gateway Teams, which are responsible for all child protection matters, and/or the PSNI, which is empowered under legislation to investigate possible criminal offences.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland ('the denomination') is part of the universal Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. As such, He is the King and Head of the Church. It consists of congregations of persons who are associated for the administration and observance of ordinances according to the Bible, under a common government. It was established in 1840 with the coming together at that time of different strands of Presbyterianism, and has congregations across the island of Ireland.

The Minister, also known as teaching Elder, exercises oversight of the church in conjunction with the ruling Elders. The special calling of the Minister is the ministry of the Word, in public and in private, the conduct of public worship, the administration of the sacraments, the instruction of the young and the pastoral care of souls. The Minister's calling is exercised in the service of others. The Minister is not an employee, but a remunerated, called office-holder in the Church.

The Presbytery is primarily responsible for corporate oversight of the congregations and causes assigned to it by the General Assembly, and of the Ministers and Elders connected with it, and the advancement of Christ's kingdom generally within the geographical area for which it is responsible. The Presbytery shall observe the laws and directions of the Assembly and, so far as lies within its powers, ensure that those subject to its jurisdiction and within its fellowship do likewise. There are 19 Presbyteries in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Elders, also known as ruling Elders, acting together as the Kirk Session, work together with the Minister (teaching Elder) in the oversight and government of the congregation, for the upbuilding of God's people in spiritual fruitfulness and holy concord, and for the extension of Christ's kingdom among all people.

The Clerk of Presbytery is appointed by the Presbytery from among the Ministers or ruling Elders under its jurisdiction, and is responsible for the administration of the Presbytery, especially the recording of minutes of the meetings of Presbytery in a minute book kept by the Presbytery for that purpose and for the safe custody of the minute books of the Presbytery and its other records.

The Clerk of the General Assembly is appointed by the General Assembly as one of its officers. The Clerk of Assembly is responsible for the administration of the Assembly, especially the recording of minutes of the meetings of the Assembly. The Clerk of Assembly also acts as General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

The Moderator of Presbytery is a Minister who is a member of the Presbytery, and presides over the meetings of Presbytery as first among equals. The Moderator normally serves for one year.

The Kirk Session is the name given to the body of Elders [teaching and ruling] who together oversee and govern a congregation in its Christian calling. The Elders [teaching and ruling] are the charity trustees of the congregation. Each Kirk Session is under the immediate jurisdiction of the Presbytery.

GLOSSARY END