

The following guidelines are taken from the Church of England Safeguarding e-manual, available to read in full at <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-e-manual>

What is Safeguarding?

Safeguarding is at the heart of the Christian faith which believes each person is made in the image of God, but also acknowledges our fallibility and our deep capacity for sin.

Time and time again, scripture points us towards those for whom God has particular concern – the widow, the orphan, the stranger, those who are marginalised and often powerless. Proverbs 31:8 calls us to ‘speak out on behalf of the voiceless, and for the rights of all who are vulnerable’. The needs of the vulnerable were at the heart of Jesus’ ministry, and they need to be at the heart of ours.

Historically, the Church has all too often failed in this calling, protecting the institution rather than those whom we are called to serve. People have felt exploited where they should have felt protected, ignored when they should have been heard and respected. Great repentance is required of us where we have not done justice.

Scripture tells us that safeguarding is not some optional extra. It’s not just a business of filling out the right forms and following correct procedures. It goes to the heart of Jesus’ mission for His church, and to the core of our lives as Christians.

People come to the church looking for the healing, love and acceptance that we know God promises them. They come to us, whether they hope it will be a safe place, whether they’re just curious or whether they are looking to get to know the God who would die out of love for us.

It is our job to create a culture which honours that trust and hope: one where people are served, heard and loved. It is our job to challenge deference, clericalism and hierarchy where it can lead to cultures of secrecy and shame, where accountability can be avoided and power abused.

Safeguarding raises some of the biggest theological questions there are: about sin and forgiveness, grace and justice. Developing frameworks and Guidance in response to these issues to make sure safeguarding is embedded in everything we do is at the core of who we are as Christians and as a Church because it’s what Jesus requires of us. We are called to create a culture where we don’t cover up, or feel ashamed, or ignore difficult things because they seem too hard to handle but honour vulnerability and shine light on darkness.

As we are led into Jesus' call to stand with those who are vulnerable, those who feel broken and are suffering, we are reminded that God has a purpose for a new creation, one where His justice and mercy reigns supreme. At the core of that purpose is God's love for every single person and His faithfulness to His children. Our prayer is that God may comfort all who are hurting, that he may call us all to the holiness Christ shows us and that He may guide us in being a part of His purpose for the Kingdom of Heaven.

The concept of safeguarding, and the promotion of a safeguarding culture, is wider and more pro-active than just responding to the actual abuse of one person by another.

It is important that safeguarding is seen in broad terms that extend beyond abuse-related concerns. As such, safeguarding can be understood as 'acting in ways that mitigate any risk of harm'. There may be concerns about the safety and wellbeing of an individual which are not linked to abuse by another but are still on the safeguarding continuum. This might be to do with personal conditions or contextual circumstances; for example, poor mental health, homelessness and rough sleeping, suicidal thoughts, dementia and poverty. It is important to remember that safeguarding is as much about prevention as reaction, and so also covers risk assessment of environments and activities, anything that will help contribute to keeping people safe.

Who does Abuse Affect?

Safeguarding concerns can affect everyone, irrespective of social class, race, education or gender. It is inevitable that at some point everyone will encounter someone who has experienced abuse or is currently experiencing abuse, whether as victim, as someone who poses a risk or as a vulnerable person. This includes clergy and their families, where there might be the same kind of abuse issues as non-clerical families.

In the context of a Church setting, where people (including perpetrators, victims/survivors of abuse and those otherwise at risk) come in times of need and to seek help, it is even more important that everyone is aware of the different forms of abuse and safeguarding concerns, and is able to respond in an appropriate manner.

Safeguarding Children

Safeguarding children means:

- protecting children from maltreatment
- preventing impairment of children's mental and physical health or development
- ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care
- taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.

For the purposes of this Guidance, a child is anyone under the age of 18.

Safeguarding Adults

Under the Care Act 2014, “adult safeguarding” is working with adults with care and support needs to keep them safe from abuse or neglect. All statutory organisations have a duty to ensure that the welfare of all adults is ensured. As part of this, they need to understand when to implement their safeguarding adults reporting procedures.

Safeguarding duties apply to an “adult at risk.” The Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 uses the term “vulnerable adult”, defined as one who:

- “has needs for care and support (whether or not the local authority is meeting any of those needs) and;
- is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect; and;
- as a result of those needs is unable to protect himself or herself against the abuse or neglect or the risk of it”.

We recognise that the ability of people to keep themselves safe can depend on the context they find themselves in, as well as on their own personal characteristics or abilities. For example, in some settings or relationships, people may find themselves in less powerful positions than others, and this could, depending on all the circumstances, significantly impair their ability to protect themselves from physical abuse or exploitation by the person who is in the more powerful position. Other people may have physical or mental disabilities which may significantly impair their ability to protect themselves from abuse.

The definition of ‘vulnerable adult’ recognises that people may move in and out of being vulnerable at various points in their life or when the context changes.

Deciding whether a person should be considered a ‘vulnerable adult’ with regard to a particular safeguarding concern or allegation involves making an assessment of the facts of the particular case and forming a view on whether the ability of the individual concerned to protect himself or herself from the abuse in question was significantly impaired through physical or mental disability or illness, old age, emotional fragility or distress, or otherwise.