

Aston Tirrold United Reformed Church

Safeguarding Policy and Procedures

I Overview

I.1 Principles and statement of intent

Safeguarding is taken seriously by Aston Tirrold United Reformed Church. We recognise that safeguarding is a whole church responsibility. We consider that, in accordance with legislation, the welfare of children and adults at risk is paramount.

We acknowledge both adults and children's right to safety, security and protection from abuse regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or any other protected characteristic. We believe that domestic abuse in all its forms is unacceptable and inconsistent with a Christian way of living and can affect both adults and children.

We recognise the personal dignity and rights of children and adults at risk (for example as set out in the Human Rights Act 1989 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child).

I.2 About this policy

The aim of this policy is to provide procedures for promoting safeguarding, preventing abuse and protecting children, adults at risk, those who work with them, and anyone who may be vulnerable, at Aston Tirrold United Reformed Church.

The policy is approved and endorsed by the minister (when in post) and elders (trustees) and formally adopted at the Church Meeting. It applies to all who attend, work or volunteer at our church or the Centre for Reflection, and to organisations who hire our buildings and who, with prior agreement of the elders, agree to operate under this policy (instead of abiding by their own).

The policy includes clear procedures for taking appropriate action when safeguarding concerns are raised within our Church.

We will take all reasonable steps to ensure that all in our church will work within the terms of this policy, supporting the Safeguarding Co-ordinator and Deputy Safeguarding Co-ordinator (when in post) in their work and in any action they may need to take in order to protect children and adults at risk. In particular, children and parents/carers will be informed about this policy.

We will implement, maintain and review annually the procedures outlined in this policy.

This policy will be placed on the church website.

Children refers to those under the age of 18 years.

I.3 The framework for this policy

We will follow legislation, statutory guidance, denominational and specialist guidelines, and recognised good practice.

We will ensure that we keep up to date with national and local developments relating to safeguarding and will seek to build constructive links with relevant voluntary and statutory agencies.

We will have due regard to the United Reformed Church's comprehensive *Good Practice 6* guidelines and Handbook for Churches (see Section 7). This policy will operate within and is interpreted in the light of these guidelines.

1.4 Appointment of a Safeguarding Co-ordinator

We will appoint a Safeguarding Co-ordinator and, where resources allow, a Deputy Safeguarding Co-ordinator with specific responsibility for safeguarding.

The main purpose of the role of the Safeguarding Co-ordinator is to:

- coordinate safeguarding policy and procedure in the church
- be the first point of contact for safeguarding issues
- be an advocate for good safeguarding practice in the church
- report regularly to the elders on safeguarding matters
- keep this policy under review
- report to and liaise with the URC Wessex Synod on safeguarding matters as required

The Safeguarding Co-ordinator and Deputy Safeguarding Co-ordinator (when in post) will undertake training appropriate to their role, either provided by the URC or by another organisation, at least once every three years.

A full role description is available at

<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Good-Practice-5-Appendix-A2-the-role-of-a-safeguarding-coordinator.pdf>

Names and contact details are given in Section 7.

1.5 Protecting those at risk

We recognise that we all have a responsibility to help prevent the abuse and neglect of children and adults at risk.

We have a duty of care to all children or adults at risk who are part of our church community.

We will support all in our place of worship affected by abuse.

We believe that all children and adults at risk should know that they are valued within the Church and can safely enjoy and have access to every aspect of the life of our place of worship.

We will seek to establish a caring environment in which there is an informed vigilance about the dangers of abuse. We will organise activities in such a way as to promote a safe environment and minimise the risk of harm to children and adults at risk.

We will ensure that children and adults at risk with whom we are in contact know that they are valued, and are empowered to tell us if they are suffering harm.

2 Working with children and adults at risk

2.1 Recruitment and appointment

We will exercise proper care and follow a safer recruitment process in selecting and appointing people to work with children or adults in need of protection, whether voluntary or paid, lay or ordained. This includes:

- providing clear and up to date job descriptions and person specifications
- submission of an application form
- carrying out a formal face-to-face interview
- taking up references
- instigating a probationary period before the appointment is confirmed
- ensuring a DBS check has been carried out for all roles which are eligible

Further information on the URC's recruitment and employment policies and procedures are available here:

<https://urc.org.uk/safeguarding/safer-recruitment/>

We will abide by the guidelines contained in the URC's Paper H4: 'Safer election of elders':

<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2021-H4-Safer-Election-of-Elders.pdf>

2.2 Ongoing support and training

We are committed to providing ongoing support, supervision, resources and training to those who work with children and adults at risk.

2.3 Activities involving children and adults at risk

Leaders should arrange that, as far as possible:

- there are always at least two adults present with a group
- appropriate ratios of leadership to children / adults at risk are observed according to the nature of the activity, age, gender and specific needs of participants
- groups are never off the premises with fewer than three adults
- an adult is not left alone with a child or adult at risk where there is little or no opportunity of the activity being observed by others (this may mean groups working within the same large room or working in an adjoining room with the door left open)
- children / adults at risk are supervised when entering or leaving the premises, particularly when it is dark

A record will be kept of each activity/session, to include a register of participants, staff and visitors, roles undertaken and details of any significant incidents.

Where children or adults at risk have to be transported by car or minibus, appropriate leadership ratios will be observed, more than one passenger will be in the vehicle, and children will be seated in the back seats of the vehicle.

Children under 12 leaving the premises will be permitted to do so only in the presence of adults known to have permission to take them.

2.4 Adult to child ratios

The URC recommends the following adult to child ratios as the minimum numbers to help keep children safe:

- 0-2 years: 1 adult to 3 children
- 2-3 years: 1 adult to 4 children
- 4-8 years: 1 adult to 6 children
- 9-12 years: 1 adult to 8 children
- 13-18 years: 1 adult to 10 children

When young people are helping to supervise younger children, only people aged 18 or over will be included as adults when calculating adult to child ratios.

2.5 Lone working

Where it is unavoidable for a worker to work individually with a child or adult at risk, certain procedures and explicit safeguards must be in place, including agreement with a manager and/or parents/carers.

Workers should be offered training and guidance for the use of any areas of the workplace which may place themselves or others in vulnerable situations. This would include those situations where workers work directly with individuals in unsupervised settings within the community or in street-based projects for example (i.e. 'detached youth work'). Further advice and guidance about detached youth work can be obtained from organisations such as Frontier Youth Trust, www.fyt.org.uk

'One-to-one' situations have the potential to make individuals more vulnerable to harm by those who seek to exploit their position of trust. Adults working in 'one-to-one' settings may also be more vulnerable to unjust or unfounded allegations being made against them. Both possibilities should be recognised so that when one-to-one situations are unavoidable, reasonable and sensible precautions are taken. Every attempt should be made to ensure the safety and security of everyone involved.

There are occasions where a risk assessment will need to be undertaken in relation to the specific nature and implications of 'one-to-one' work. These assessments should take into account the individual needs of the child or adult at risk and the individual worker and any arrangements should be reviewed on a regular basis.

This means that workers should:

- ensure that when lone working is an integral part of their role, full and appropriate risk assessments have been conducted and agreed
- where possible, inform a co-worker, person in an appropriate supervisory capacity, and/or parents/carers about the contact(s) beforehand
- carefully consider the needs and circumstances of the individual when in 'one-to-one' situations
- avoid meeting one-to-one in remote or secluded areas
- always report any one-to-one situation where an individual becomes distressed or angry, to a senior colleague as soon as possible
- keep appropriate notes of all lone working.

Events in the neighbourhood of the building require the same care and attention. The adult/child ratio should be increased.

2.6 Good practice with colleagues

Workers should be prepared to speak to a colleague if they see them acting in ways that might be misconstrued. Alternatively concerns can be escalated to another person in a position of authority such as the minister (when in post), elder or Safeguarding Co-ordinator. Workers should encourage an atmosphere of mutual support and care that enables open discussion of inappropriate attitudes or behaviours.

2.7 Parental consent and responsibility

We recognise the responsibility of parents/carers as defined in the Children Act 1989.

We will obtain records of consent and attendance of young people and children involved in all regular activities (including online services) where parents are not themselves present, via a Consent Form, signed by the parent/carer, which should be completed the first time of attendance, and then annually.

Event Consent Forms will be required for special events, trips, or 'hazardous' activities. This form will include or accompany full details of the activity/trip.

Consent forms will ask for the information listed below and will be retained for five years:

- the child's name, address and date of birth
- details of each person with parental responsibility
- an alternative contact in an emergency
- any particular instructions concerning the child – eg. who will collect after the activity
- any instructions attaining to medical, dietary or specific needs/limitations, etc.
- permission for the inclusion of the child or young person in any photographs or films, which may be for use internally, or in the local press, or online (as appropriate)
- permission for workers to communicate directly with the child via text, email or social media, in accordance with good practice (as appropriate)

For a sample consent form see

https://urc.org.uk/images/safeguarding/GP5/Appendix_F_Model_information_and_consent_form.pdf

2.8 Disputes between workers and parents

In the event of a dispute between a worker and a parent, the minister (when in post) or an elder will attempt to resolve the dispute in discussion with both parties.

2.9 Risk assessments

Risk assessments are undertaken for all activities by the activity leader. For regular weekly activities, a risk assessment will be drawn up and reviewed annually.

Risk assessments will be filed for ten years.

2.10 Extra-curricular activities

It is not intended that being a worker should limit the worker's non-church-related social life. However, there are certain circumstances where meeting off-site with individuals only known through a church work capacity could be considered unwise. These situations should be avoided.

The minister (when in post), elders and workers follow the URC's *Code of Conduct for Working with Children or Young People*, available at:

https://urc.org.uk/images/safeguarding/GP5/Appendix_A3_Code_of_Conduct.pdf

and understand that action may be taken if this code is not followed. The church will abide by disciplinary procedures laid out in employees' contracts.

3 Recognising and responding to concerns and allegations

3.1 General principles

All concerns and allegations of abuse will be responded to appropriately.

We recognise that local authority safeguarding services have responsibility for investigating allegations or suspicions of abuse regarding a child or adult at risk. We will co-operate with external authorities in any investigation, will follow multi-agency decisions and will maintain confidentiality of any investigations to those directly involved. Where an allegation suggests that a criminal offence may have been committed then we will contact the police as a matter of urgency.

We will refer safeguarding concerns about workers and volunteers to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and the Synod Safeguarding Team. We recognise that LADOs have responsibility to deal with all allegations and concerns about people working with children and adults at risk, whether paid or volunteer, lay or ordained.

We will maintain confidentiality except in circumstances where to do so would place the individual or another individual at risk.

3.2 Definitions of abuse

Further information on the forms of abuse (including physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect) are contained in *Working together to safeguard children (2018)* and also at https://urc.org.uk/images/safeguarding/GP5/Appendix_A6_Signs_and_Symptoms_of_Abuse.pdf

3.3 Signs of abuse

It is important to be aware of possible signs and symptoms of abuse.

A list of possible signs and symptoms of abuse is contained in *Working together to safeguard children (2018)* and also at:

https://urc.org.uk/images/safeguarding/GP5/Appendix_A6_Signs_and_Symptoms_of_Abuse.pdf

It is essential to note that these are only **indicators** of **possible** abuse. There may be other, innocent, reasons for any of these signs and/or behaviour. They will, however, be a guide to assist in assessing whether abuse of one form or another is a possible explanation for a child or adult's behaviour.

3.4 What to do if there is a disclosure or allegation of abuse

If a child or adult trusts someone enough to disclose abuse it is vital s/he is taken seriously and that everyone knows how to respond.

It is important to explain that confidentiality cannot be promised.

When you are listening to someone making a disclosure, **do**:

- stay calm
- let them talk and listen attentively
- accept what is said without judgement
- reassure them that they are right to share these sort of things
- reassure them that you will ensure they are supported
- reassure them they are not to blame
- explain what you will do next
- explain that you will tell someone who can help
- seek medical attention if necessary
- get other people involved if they or someone else is being harmed or is at risk of being harmed

Do not:

- panic
- confront anyone alleged to be responsible for, or be involved in, the abuse
- press for information or put words into their mouth
- promise confidentiality
- investigate
- ask questions, especially leading questions such as 'so it sounds like you have been abused?'

- ask them to repeat the disclosure over and over
- take any action which would undermine any future investigation or disciplinary process
- say everything will be all right or give any reassurance about what is likely to happen
- keep it to yourself

If abuse is discovered, disclosed or suspected:

- consult the Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator or Deputy Safeguarding Co-ordinator (if either is implicated, only discuss the matter with someone who is not implicated). Do not discuss the situation with anyone else in the church unless they have a safeguarding remit or appropriate seniority, eg. the minister
- if the child / adult is at immediate risk, for example if they were to return home, contact local safeguarding services or the police
- record conversations as soon as possible and certainly within 24 hours
- make a written record of the allegation, disclosure or incident, sign and date this record using the template available at:
https://urc.org.uk/images/safeguarding/GP5/Appendix_A5_Safeguarding_Incident_Recording_Form.pdf
and pass it to the Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator. Records will be stored securely.
- keep copies of handwritten notes made at the time, even if these are subsequently typed up
- do not delay
- do not act alone

Concerns should be referred to the Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator or Deputy Safeguarding Co-ordinator as laid out below. There may be occasions where this is not possible, because of the need for immediate action / decision which will need to be taken by the person dealing with the incident. Actions taken / decisions made will need to be reported to the Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator or Deputy Safeguarding Co-ordinator as soon as practically possible.

Actions taken in response to a concern of abuse will be in accordance with URC Good Practice Guidelines, so as to work in line with legislation, government recommendations and statutory authority practices. If there is an immediate risk of harm the Police will be contacted.

Where it is judged that there is no immediate risk of harm, the concern should be discussed with the Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator or Deputy Safeguarding Co-ordinator and a decision made as to whether the concern warrants a referral to statutory agencies and/or escalation to the Synod Safeguarding Officer (see Section 7). A confidential record will be made of the conversation and circumstances surrounding it using the template at:
https://urc.org.uk/images/safeguarding/GP5/Appendix_A5_Safeguarding_Incident_Recording_Form.pdf

This record will be kept securely and a copy passed to statutory agencies if a referral is made.

3.5 Allegations about people within the church

If an allegation is regarding someone from within the Church, including someone who works with children or adults at risk, that person must not be informed, if it is judged that to do so would increase the risk of harm to the child or adult at risk. The Synod Safeguarding Officer and relevant statutory agency will be informed.

We endorse and follow the guidance issued in 'Working together to safeguard children 2018' which details criteria for the referral, by churches, of concerns about workers (paid and unpaid, lay or ordained) to the Local Authority Designated officer (LADO). Referrals can also be made to the police. (See Section 7 for contact details).

This guidance states that a referral must be made without delay where it is alleged a worker has:

- behaved in a way which has harmed a child or may have harmed a child
- committed a criminal offence against or related to a child
- behaved towards a child in a way which indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children

These procedures may also be used where concerns arise about:

- a person's behaviour in their personal life, which may impact on the safety of children to whom they owe a duty of care
- a person's behaviour with regard to their own children

If an allegation requiring immediate attention is received outside normal office hours, the out of hours emergency duty team or police should be contacted and the LADO informed the next working day.

Concerns which fall outside these criteria may nevertheless amount to inappropriate conduct. The church should seek advice from the Synod Safeguarding Officer to decide whether to handle this by way of advice, supervision, training, disciplinary processes or a combination of some or all of these.

A record should be kept of all allegations made.

The Synod Safeguarding Officer should be informed in respect of any referral made to a LADO. The Synod Moderator should be informed if the allegation relates to an ordained or commissioned minister. Moderators will inform the URC General Secretary as appropriate. Where there is potential reputational risk to the Church, the URC press office should also be informed.

The worker concerned should be informed as soon as possible after consultation with the LADO, with due regard for protecting evidence. A decision about who should inform the worker will be made in consultation with the LADO and the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

In accordance with the law, a referral will be made to the DBS if the church withdraws permission for an individual to engage in work with children or adults at risk or would have done so had that individual not resigned, retired, been made redundant.

4 Managing those who pose a risk

We are an inclusive church and we welcome everyone to our services and activities in a spirit of Christian love and compassion.

If we become aware of someone within our congregation known or alleged to be a risk to children or adults at risk, we will inform the Synod Safeguarding Officer and co-operate with them and the relevant statutory agencies to put in place a management plan to minimise the risk. We will support and supervise those who pose a risk to children or adults at risk, whilst bearing in mind the overarching principle that the welfare of the child or adult at risk is paramount.

We will take measures to protect people from the risks associated with known offenders within and associated with the Church, including implementing contracts with known offenders and those who have been assessed as posing a risk, which could include partners of offenders.

If an assessment is made that someone poses an unmanageable risk to children or those that are vulnerable and in need of protection and could no longer safely attend our place of worship, we will ensure that they continue to be offered pastoral care and will also be signposted to appropriate agencies that could support them.

5 Conditions for hirers

Organisations wishing to hire our building for activities with children or adults at risk must confirm in writing that they will adopt this safeguarding policy as a condition of the letting agreement. Alternatively, if they have their own safeguarding policy, they will be asked to provide a copy and the church reserves the right to refuse or cancel the hiring agreement if, in its opinion, the policy is not sufficiently robust.

6 Online platforms, communication and media

6.1 Internet

When using the internet as part of a talk or presentation the leaders will make sure that the material shown is age appropriate. If allowing access to the internet for individuals or in small groups as part of an activity, there will always be adequate adult supervision.

Church computers that are available for the use of children or adults at risk will have suitable baring and filtering systems in place to minimise the risk of users accessing inappropriate material.

Parents attending events will be advised that they may upload images of their own children, but not of others, without the authority of the relevant parent.

Since April 2020 the church has been hosting services via internet conferencing platform (Zoom). Zoom services are open to all. Guidelines about the use of Zoom including use of privacy settings (camera, microphone) are circulated along with the meeting details. Where services are recorded, participants are made aware of this, along with the purpose of recording.

If unaccompanied children attend Zoom services we will seek parental consent (see Section 2.7).

6.2 Social media

We recognise that social media is widely used by both young people and adults.

Workers are not barred from using social media or from having children or adults at risk as 'friends' on their personal accounts. However, clear demarcation is required between those individuals known personally and those known because of the roles undertaken within the church.

Careful consideration of all communications in the furtherance of church work must take place. Clear boundaries must be maintained to ensure transparency, safeguarding, and to aid managing of links when workers move on or step down from their role.

Workers should not accept young people as 'friends' on their personal accounts who they **only** know through the work they undertake for the church, and should never accept anyone as a friend if they know their account has been set up fraudulently (such as incorrect date of birth to start an account prior to turning 13 years of age). Workers should consider carefully whether to accept 'friend' requests from adults that are considered 'at risk'. Workers should never 'ask' to join any young person's individual account.

Workers should ensure that the security settings are set correctly on their personal accounts, and that their approach and conduct on these platforms does not bring the church into disrepute.

The church has a Facebook account, 'ATURC and Friends', used for open communication about the church and posting articles / content which may be of interest. All members of the group are expected to use the account in a considerate way and to bear in mind good safeguarding practice, for example, not posting images of people (especially minors) without their consent.

6.3 Text messaging

As with social networking sites, caution should be exercised when using text messaging with children and adults at risk. There need to be adequate safeguards in place.

In general, texting should be avoided, but if used, recorded to ensure transparency. It should be limited to the hours of 8:00am to 9:00pm. So far as possible, text messages should not be deleted. They may be archived to PCs or off-line storage, provided a record is maintained.

6.4 Filming and photography

We recognise that organisations must take great care in the creation and use of photographs or film footage involving children. This does not mean that pictures should not be taken or that filming should be prohibited. However, certain protocols should be followed in order to comply with legislation, as well as to safeguard children:

- permission must be obtained from parents/carers before a photograph is taken or film footage recorded
- it must be made clear why images or films are being made, what they will be used for, who might see them and where they will be stored
- children and young people should be asked if they want to be filmed or photographed
- group photographs of children should be used where possible and individuals should not be identified by any personal details such as their name, email address, postal address or telephone number
- all photographs should be appropriate and respectful of the subject; for example, appropriately dressed

- photos and other digital media should be stored in a secure location on a church computer. If this is not possible, it is important to record where the photographs and digital media are stored

7 Contacts and further resources

7.1 Contacts

Church Safeguarding Team:

Safeguarding Co-ordinator:

Andrew McBirnie: 07743 531948 | andrew.mcbirnie@hotmail.co.uk

Wessex Synod Safeguarding Team:

Safeguarding Officer:

Sharon Barr | safeguarding@urcwessex.org.uk

Children's and Youth Development Officers:

Philip Ray: 07787 171678 | cydo-n@urcwessex.org.uk

Ruth White: 07918 647955 | cydo-s@urcwessex.org.uk

For urgent advice when the above cannot be contacted, use the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service 24 hour helpline: 0845 120 4550

Local authority:

Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board:

01865 815843 | oscb@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO):

01865 810603 | LADO.safeguardingchildren@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Adult social care:

0345 050 7666 | <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/social-and-health-care>

Other:

NSPCC: 0800 800 5000 | <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/>

Childline: 0800 1111

Police: call **999** (emergency) or **101** (non-emergency)

WallingfordBerinsfieldCholseyNHPT@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk

7.2 Further resources

The United Reformed Church's Safeguarding documentation and resources, including the comprehensive edition of *Good Practice 6*, are available at:

<https://www.urc.org.uk/good-practice-policy-and-procedures.html>

Working together to safeguard children (2018):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>

8 Feedback and review

Comments and feedback about this policy should be directed to the Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator (details in Section 7)

The policy will be reviewed annually by the elders and referred to the Church Meeting for formal approval.

Approved by elders: 16 November 2023

Approved by church meeting: 25 February 2024

Signature:

Name: Julian Gallop

Secretary

Aston Tirrold United Reformed Church, Spring Lane, Aston Tirrold, Didcot OX11 9EJ <http://www.aturc.freeuk.com>