

Help... I'm the new safeguarding officer....

All of us in society have a responsibility to help protect children and vulnerable adults. Within our places of worship and faith organisations we need to work safely, too. In order to protect children (those under 18 years of age) and vulnerable adults, we appoint Safeguarding Officers – so congratulations on your appointment! You might be feeling a bit panicky at the responsibility placed upon you. Hopefully this booklet will help you understand your role better and feel more confident about what to do.

There are three main functions for a safeguarding officer:

- Act as an advocate for and on behalf of children and vulnerable adults;
- Oversee the preparation and implementation of the child protection or vulnerable adults policy (safeguarding policy), ensuring it is regularly reviewed;
- Act independently in reporting concerns of abuse to the statutory authorities (Children or Adult Social Care or the Police).

What's in a name?

The different titles for your role can be confusing for everyone. For some places of worship the role may only entail being responsible for children, with titles such as child protection co-ordinator or officer, children's advocate or representative etc. As the role generally is wider than just child protection and includes having responsibility for safeguarding in its widest sense, some names include children's safeguarding responsible person. Similar names are given for those working with vulnerable adults.

The title doesn't matter as much as the task the person is expected to carry out! For the sake of simplicity, the term 'safeguarding officer' is used in this document.

Have a deputy

There needs to be at least one deputy safeguarding officer. If ever there was an allegation against the safeguarding officer there is a need to have someone else a complainant could go to. And if a concern of possible abuse was raised and the safeguarding officer was on holiday or unavailable then having a deputy overcomes this.

Some places of worship have appointed married couples, so that a child or vulnerable adult could talk to either a male or female. This is fine but have them as the safeguarding officers and have someone else as the deputy. Couples tend to holiday together!

Safeguarding Officer's role

Your safeguarding officer's role might typically include:

- Overseeing the preparation and implementation of the safeguarding policy and ensuring that it is regularly reviewed, and that the policies and procedures are followed.
- Establishing contact with local Children's / Adults Social Care plus other key agencies and organisations (e.g. CCPAS), and reporting any concerns, in accordance with your policy.
- Being aware of local Safeguarding Children Board's (LSCB) procedures.
- Being part of the interview panel when appointing children's or youth workers.
- Maintaining accurate records relating to child / adult protection concerns
- Making sure that workers and leaders receive adequate child / adult protection training
- Attending children's and youth activities periodically.
- Promoting the needs of children / vulnerable adults in the place of worship and keeping the leadership informed on good practice
- Attending meetings following disclosures or investigations, including case conferences, giving either support to a child or family members (not both at the same time).

(A child protection conference brings together family members, the child where appropriate, supporters / advocates and those professionally involved with the child and family to share information, make safeguarding judgements and decide what future action is needed to safeguard the child and promote their welfare)

- Liaising with probation officers / police in relation to known offenders joining the church to tailor a contract with agreement with the individual.
- Attending MAPPA meetings where a sex or violent offender is part of the place of worship.

(Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements bring together relevant agencies in protecting the public from sexual or violent offenders who may require monitoring)

- Attending PACE interviews at police stations to support children and vulnerable adults.
- Appearing in court as a witness, should you have heard a disclosure of abuse.
- Supporting the child / family where there is a court case.

- Ensuring that appropriate pastoral care is available for any adult who may disclose that they have been abused as a child.
- Being available!!

Safe from Harm

The government issued Safe from Harm (1993) giving 13 recommendations for safe working practice for voluntary organisations. It has formed the basis for child protection for many church denominations and other groups. Whilst legislation has changed since then these recommendations give a firm basis in developing a policy. Two of the recommendations have a particular relevance for safeguarding officers:

- Introduce a system whereby children may talk with an independent person.
- Issue guidelines on how to deal with the disclosure or discovery of abuse.

Should the safeguarding officer be part of the leadership?

Within a school the designated person for child protection is often the head teacher or someone in a senior management position, this is similar to other organisations.

Some faith groups have insisted that the person be independent of the leadership of the church in line with Safe from Harm. Others stipulate in their national policies that they be from a different church or denomination. What matters is that the person always acts in the best interest of the child. A demonstration of the place of worship's commitment to independent scrutiny is to advertise Childline, and CCPAS Helpline telephone numbers alongside details of the safeguarding officers. (Ensure that you display name and telephone numbers, prominently on notice boards, diary sheets, and to any forms e.g. registration and consent forms for clubs.)

In some places of worship the safeguarding officer is the senior minister or youth pastor. The rationale for this is that as they have pastoral responsibility for everyone in the place of worship they would want to be informed of any safeguarding concern. In taking on this role it keeps the number of people who need to know to a minimum.

Some churches prefer to designate this role to someone independent of the leadership seeing this as demonstrating greater transparency. In this way no one could accuse the place of worship of placing the interests of the organisation above that of the child or vulnerable adult. It also means that if there is a safeguarding concern involving a family in the place of worship, the leadership can respond pastorally without it appearing that they are taking sides because they are having to deal with reporting the matter to the authorities etc. What is important is that the leaders understand the policy and never try to deal with safeguarding issues on their own. As the safeguarding officer you should expect to work with the leadership's full support.

The advocate's role

It is the experience of CCPAS in evaluating the calls to our telephone helpline that the majority of children disclose abuse to those people with whom they have a trusting relationship, such as Sunday school teachers or youth leaders. They in turn,

if not the safeguarding officer themselves, contact the person in their place of worship with such responsibility.

To act effectively as an advocate for children and vulnerable adults a person needs to be in relationship with them. Independence doesn't mean aloofness.

Some places of worship have split the task of the safeguarding officer by having one person as an advocate for children to talk to, and another person with responsibility for reporting child protection concerns to the statutory agencies.

Working as part of a team

As well as informing the statutory agencies you, you may also be required, as a condition of your insurance to inform them of any safeguarding concerns. In addition if your place of worship is part of a denomination or other umbrella organisation there may be an expectation that you inform them e.g. within an Anglican Diocese you may need to contact the Bishop's Adviser for child protection. Familiarise yourself with the process within your church/organisation and note relevant telephone numbers or contact names and addresses. Seek their advice and support, and where there isn't anyone, CCPAS are always available, and we generally confirm our advice in writing.

Safeguarding concerns within a place of worship can be emotionally and spiritually demanding. Whilst confidentiality is important for all concerned, ensure that you have support in place for yourself. This is something that the leadership should understand and agree to providing.

What should a safeguarding officer do if they receive a child protection concern?

It is likely that you could be contacted by a child who may disclose abuse directly to you in your role as an advocate, a worker may approach you with a concern, or a parent want help or advice.

You should refer to your child protection policy which will give a detailed description as to what to do, incorporating any guidance issued by your denomination / group.

Where there is a concern of physical, emotional abuse or neglect the following general guidelines should be followed:

- If deliberate injury is suspected, there is concern for a child's safety or they are afraid to return home, Children's Social Care should be contacted. Don't discuss with parents / carers.
- Seek medical help if needed urgently, advising doctor of suspicions.
- If a child isn't in immediate risk (e.g. poor parenting), encourage parent / carer to seek help themselves, but monitor the situation.

Where sexual abuse is suspected or disclosed:

- Always contact Children's Social Care or the police immediately
- Never tell the parents.

Some Social Care Departments have specific forms that they will ask you to complete in making a referral. We advise that you follow up any telephone conversation with a written referral and ask for confirmation.

Where working with vulnerable adults the principles above apply taking into account the wishes, feelings, and capacity of the individual concerned in relation to reporting the matter to Adult Social Care.

Finally

Having read through this booklet the task of safeguarding officer may seem very daunting. Remember you are not meant to be an expert in child or adult protection - leave that to the statutory agencies. You can, though, equip yourself by undertaking child protection training and reading your church/denomination/organisation's requirements, to better understand your role. Safeguarding officers are champions in places of worship. By having policies and procedures in places, ensuring that only suitable people are working with children and those who may be vulnerable, promoting an environment of vigilance, and the rights of children and vulnerable adults you will be instrumental in making your place of worship a safer environment for children and adults.

At CCPAS we applaud all safeguarding champions!!