



Good practice guide for church work with vulnerable adults

Message from the Bishop

We the bishops, clergy and people of the Diocese are committed to the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of all the children and vulnerable adults in our care. Many children and vulnerable adults are involved in the life of the Church, in worship and in various activities, under the guidance of a dedicated group of leaders and helpers. These people give their time freely and generously so that all, children and adults, can grow in the faith of Jesus Christ. Both children and adults need a safe and secure environment in which to work, worship, learn and grow.

This brief guide is intended to assist leaders and helpers in the implementation of the Diocese of Oxford Safeguarding Handbook which should be read for the complete policy, procedures and requirements for good practice. The safeguarding pages on the Diocesan website provide further information and guidance.

Who do we mean by a vulnerable adult?

A vulnerable adult is a person aged 18 or over whose ability to protect himself or herself from violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation is significantly impaired through physical or mental disability or illness, old age, emotional fragility or distress or otherwise; and for that purpose, the reference to being impaired is to being temporarily or indefinitely impaired.

Although everyone is vulnerable in some ways and at certain times, some people by reason of their physical or social circumstances have higher levels of vulnerability than others. Some of the factors which increase vulnerability are:

- A sensory or physical disability or impairment
- A learning disability
- A physical illness
- Mental ill health (including dementia), chronic or acute
- An addiction to alcohol or drugs
- The failing faculties in old age
- A permanent or temporary reduction in physical, mental or emotional capacity brought about by life events, for example bereavement or previous abuse or trauma.

Remember:

- Vulnerability is often not a permanent state
- Vulnerability is not always visible
- A person with apparently visible vulnerabilities may not perceive themselves as such
- We are all vulnerable at different stages of life
- Vulnerable people may also pose risk and cause harm

Recruitment

All leaders and helpers should follow Diocesan-approved recruitment procedures, which include:

- Submitting an application form with references

- Completing a Confidential Declaration Form
- Having a valid Enhanced Disclosure from the Disclosure and Barring Service, with barring information if eligible
- Accepting that the role is a position of trust

One of the aims of the policy is for church groups to provide a warm, nurturing environment for vulnerable adults whilst avoiding any inappropriate behaviour.

Positions of Trust

The Diocese makes the following expectations for those in a position of trust

- all church workers must conduct themselves at all times in accordance with the reasonable expectations of someone who represents the Church; this includes both while on duty and also when off duty;
- they must possess a personal copy of this Good Practice Guide for their work and comply with it;
- they will be seen as role models by the children or vulnerable adults with whom they are in contact at all times, including when they are off duty;
- they must not in their private life engage in activities which could bring the church or their role in it into disrepute;
- they must take care to observe appropriate boundaries between their work and their personal life. For example, they must ensure that all communications they may have with or about children or vulnerable adults are appropriate in their tone;
- they must seek advice immediately if they come across a child or vulnerable adult who may have been harmed (including self-harm) or a colleague whose conduct appears inappropriate;
- they must not expose themselves or others to material which is sexually explicit, profane, obscene, harassing, fraudulent, racially offensive, politically inflammatory, defamatory, or in violation of any British, European or international law.
- they must inform the relevant church authorities promptly should any convictions, court orders or allegations of misconduct arise.

It is contrary to the policy of the Church of England for those in a position of trust, including priests and pastoral care workers among others, to have sexual or inappropriate personal relationships with those for whom they are responsible. A breach of this is likely to be considered as a disciplinary offence. It will be referred as appropriate to the local authority and in some cases it may also constitute a criminal offence. Anyone found guilty of a criminal or disciplinary offence of this kind is likely to be dismissed and referred to the Disclosure and Barring Service for possible barring.

Activities with adults who may be vulnerable

- These recommendations apply to all churches' activities with adults who may be vulnerable – for instance, during worship on Sunday mornings, on outings, in groups and when visiting at home. They are designed to protect the adults who may be vulnerable in your care, as well as your leaders.
- They apply as much to church 'in house' activities for regular attendees as to activities which you run in and for the local community.
- Activities set up specifically for adults known to be vulnerable will need planning and preparation of a kind not needed for activities open to all.
- Ensure there are supervision arrangements and a reporting line back to the PCC.

Active membership and inclusion

- Create an environment where all people, including those who are vulnerable, are encouraged to participate in and contribute to all aspects of church life.
- Risk assess continuing and new activities including worship exploring what inclusion, choice and independence mean for communities and individuals.
- Set up policies and procedures for complaints and allegations.
- Share information appropriately.

Respect

- Always respect the vulnerable adult and all his or her abilities.
- Ask about personal preferences, forms of address, how much help might be needed.
- Ensure his or her individuality - e.g. always use their name.
- Give the same respect as to others.
- Respect differences – e.g. in appearance, ideas, personalities, ability.
- Don't assume or withhold physical contact – ask first.
- Have a proper conversation using appropriate language – e.g. ask about interests.
- Sometimes it may be necessary to set boundaries for some to ensure the safety of others.
- Obtain specialist advice when necessary, e.g. on harassment, disability, mental illness, domestic abuse.

Choices

- Respect the choices vulnerable adults make, even if they may appear risky.
- Consider whether the vulnerable adult has the capacity to make choices and whether safety might require intervention.
- Give vulnerable adults the highest level of privacy and confidentiality possible in their circumstances.
- Consult with the vulnerable adult about who he or she wishes to be included in affecting his or her life – in a way that does not further highlight to others their vulnerabilities.
- Offer assistance in such a way as to maximise a person's independence.
- Give vulnerable adults a choice about where they sit, and what activities they participate in, recognizing that some people find making choices stressful.
- Ensure that there is clear access to all areas which are available to members of the congregation, e.g. where coffee is served, the bookstall, where meetings are held.
- Do not assume that someone's level of comprehension matches their verbal communication.

Transport

- Lifts arranged by adults among themselves are a private matter and not the concern of the church unless there appears to be abuse or exploitation.
- Lifts arranged by the church, whether using existing pastoral care workers or a special team of drivers, are a church Lifts responsibility. Drivers need to be safely recruited. Carers should be consulted as appropriate.
- All those who drive vulnerable adults on church-organised activities should normally be over 25 and should have held a full driving licence for over two years.
- All cars that carry vulnerable adults must be comprehensively insured. The insured person must make sure that their insurance covers the giving of lifts during church activities. They must inform their insurance company that lifts may be given. There are separate requirements governing minibuses.
- All cars that carry vulnerable adults should be clean and in a roadworthy condition.
- All passengers as well as the driver must wear seat belts. If there are no seat belts vulnerable adults should not be carried.
- Take care in assisting vulnerable adults to board or leave vehicles, taking account of the guidance on touch.
- At no time should the number of passengers in a car exceed the usual passenger number. There must be a seat belt for every passenger.

- Recognize that people are vulnerable when receiving a lift as they cannot leave a moving car or effectively resist inappropriate approaches.
- If lifts are also provided to GP or hospital appointments or adult social care facilities this is regulated activity and attracts a DBS check with barring information.
- Any driver who has an endorsement of 6 points or more on their licence should inform the Parish Safeguarding Officer.
- Any driver who has an “unspent” conviction for a drink driving offence or for Dangerous Driving or Racing on the Highway should not transport vulnerable adults.

Visiting adults who may be vulnerable in their homes (including residential and nursing homes)

- Always do an assessment of risk to both the vulnerable adult and other interested parties, including yourself, before visiting someone in their own home.
- If there are concerns or risks known before the visit is undertaken, give careful consideration to whether the visit is absolutely necessary, or whether you should be accompanied by another adult. Don’t take unnecessary risks. There is separate guidance on *Lone working*.
- Always carry a mobile phone on a home visit, and ensure that someone knows where you are and when you are expected to return.
- Don’t call unannounced: call by arrangement, if appropriate telephoning the person just before you go.
- Always carry identification with you or a note of introduction from your church.
- Always knock on the door before entering a room or home; respect the person’s home and possessions.
- Don’t take or offer sweets, drink or other food items to people you are visiting.
- Never offer ‘over the counter’ medicines to the people you visit or administer prescribed medicines even if asked to do so.
- As a general principle, do not give those you visit your home phone number or address. Instead, where possible leave information about a central contact point.
- If you don’t know the answer to a question or feel out of your depth, seek advice and if appropriate refer the person to another agency. Know where you can access information about other relevant services.
- When referring someone on to another person or agency, talk this through with the vulnerable adult. Ask his or her permission before passing on personal information. Make the link with the new person or by yourself: if it is more appropriate for the vulnerable adult to do so themselves make sure they have all the information they need and that their contact will be expected.
- Be clear about your boundaries: keep to agreed limits on how much time you will spend with someone and how often you come. Don’t take on extra responsibilities on a bit by bit basis. Be realistic about the amount of time you have; don’t say yes to every request for help.
- Set a pattern and expectations about communications between visits. Beware of over-frequent texting or emailing and exchanges late at night.
- Avoid handling money for vulnerable adults; if it is unavoidable provide receipts and discuss with group leader or PCC treasurer
- Be clear about what behaviour is acceptable – and what is not – from the vulnerable adult.
- A record of pastoral visits and home communions must be kept by the church. Your local church should set a policy on this.

What to do if a vulnerable adult appears to be at risk

- The church does not itself investigate situations of possible risk to vulnerable adults from others but church members are entitled to clarify whether they consider there may be such a risk.

- If you have reasonable grounds for suspecting that a vulnerable adult is being abused or neglected it may be appropriate to refer them to the local authority adult protection service.
- The consent of the person concerned is normally needed. However, if they are not able to give informed consent or are being intimidated, they can be referred without consent.
- If in doubt whether a referral is appropriate, consult the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser or the local authority adult protection service.
- Make a record of the concerns and the action taken as soon as possible after the event and make sure a copy is on file. See guidance on *Recording safeguarding issues*.
- An abuse of power is a safeguarding issue.
- If there is a suspected criminal offence the victim should be encouraged to report the matter to the police and assisted in doing so if necessary.
- Refer on and work with existing statutory and voluntary services.

Conflicts and disagreements

- Recognize that the churches have duties of care to both perpetrators and victims or survivors if they are both parishioners.
- Bullying and harassment either by or of anyone in the church community is not acceptable.
- Recognize that vulnerable adults may be perpetrators as well as victims of abuse.
- Be fair, sensitive and confidential.
- Set a good example: challenge inappropriate behaviour but do so courteously.
- Be aware of your own power, even if you don't feel powerful.
- Ask for help if you feel out of your depth.
- Think before you act.
- Listen to your instincts.
- It will usually be necessary for a different team or individual to support a perpetrator from that supporting a victim.
- In some cases it may be appropriate to consult a trained mediator. The Diocese has access to these.
- In exceptional cases it may be necessary to ask the perpetrator to move to a different church. This should then be carefully facilitated. The Archdeacon may need to be involved.

Needs of carers

- Many carers are not aware that they are carers and may benefit from links with organizations for carers which can offer help and advice.
- Local carers' organizations are able to advise churches on caring issues.
- Remember the needs of carers – treat them as individuals, include them as appropriate, offer breaks and short times apart and practical assistance if feasible.
- Carers are entitled to an assessment of need from local authorities, but this does not carry a guarantee of services to meet the needs identified.

Important telephone numbers:

Statutory agencies (please write in your local numbers)

Thames Valley Police (all non-emergency enquiries)	101
Local Council Adult Protection	
Local General Hospital	

Diocesan contacts:

Stephen Barber, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser	01865 208290
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Parish contacts (please write in your local numbers):

Name	Role	Phone
	Incumbent	
	Group Leader	
	Safeguarding Officer	

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