Safeguarding Children (NI) POLICY / Ballysillan Presbyterian Church

i. Policy Statement

As a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland:

- we believe that everyone has a responsibility to promote the welfare of all children and to keep them safe.
- we believe that children should never experience abuse of any kind.
- tomato.

It is the policy of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland 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

This congregation demonstrates and achieves this by providing this policy and accompanying procedures, for all involved in youth and children's work and any form of children or youth ministry within our church, to ensure that children and young people enjoy their engagement with Ballysillan Presbyterian, free from the threat of abuse and in a safe environment.

ii. Biblical basis for Safeguarding

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland determine first and foremost that we have a biblical imperative for safeguarding.

Safeguarding is imperative for our denomination and a central component to our mission; when we do it well, we are proclaiming the excellencies of our Lord Jesus.

It is therefore our duty to use the Bible as our reference point, where we find guidance in how to safeguard others as part of, not only our legal and ethical duty, but as who we are as a denomination at heart.

For example;

- love our neighbour as ourselves, (Lev 19:18 / Luke 10:27 / Gal 5:13-15)
- treat others as we would want to be treated (Matt 7:12)
- meet the needs of others (Romans 15:1-2 / Philippians 2:3-4)
- seek justice and correct oppression (Psalm 89:14 / Isaiah 1:17 / Micah 6:8)
- protecting the weak and those in need (Psalm 82:3-4/ Matt 18:10)

iii. Legal Context

This policy and accompanying procedures have been developed with the following legislation and guidance documents considered, which all seek to protect and safeguard children;

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
- European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)
- The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995
- Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, October 2024
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007
- The Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015

iv. Core Principles

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland engages with children and young people throughout the island of Ireland and welcomes those from households where there is no Presbyterian or other denominational connection.

The welfare of any child is paramount, no matter how brief their engagement with ourdenomination or 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 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 denomination and we seek to always improve our engagement with them.

The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, highlights the following key principles:

- The child or young person welfare is paramount
- The voice of the child or young person should be heard
- Parents should be supported and families helped to stay together
- Children should be safe from harm at all times, including when a parent is not meeting their needs
- Partnership with statutory services is required to ensure effective safeguarding
- Prevention and our role therein should be a focus for all organisations working with children
- Responses to issues should be proportionate and decision making should be well informed

As a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland we will therefore;

1. Have an aligned Designated Person(s)

2. Have 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 denomination will be trained at least once every 3 years in how to recognise, respond to and report abuse as well as understand their role in the prevention of abuse

4. Ensure the denomination has 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 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 we have safe and confidential methods for managing information

This Policy will be executed in Ballysillan Presbyterian through a series of procedures as detailed in our Safeguarding Policy and Procedures Document

This Policy is to be displayed at each local congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

v. Review

At a denominational level, this Policy will be reviewed every three years by the Safeguarding Department. Changes will be reported to the General Assembly, with the Assembly being asked to approve any significant policy changes.

If there is a legislative change that requires the Policy to be updated or reviewed within that time period, this will be the responsibility of the Safeguarding Department. Where this

is urgent, the General Council can act on behalf of the General Assembly to approve a significant policy change. The Safeguarding Lead will advise them if this is the case.

Accompanying procedure will be reviewed at least every three years by the Safeguarding Department, as well as at any point there are legislative/good practice updates required.

It is the responsibility of the Safeguarding Department, to ensure changes are communicated in a timely and effective manner to the denomination.

vi. Kirk Session Adoption

This Safeguarding policy (Version 1.1/ July 2026) and the associated Safeguarding procedures and risk assessments (available in the full policy and procedures document on request) have been adopted by the Kirk Session of Ballysillan Presbyterian Church at its stated meeting on Wednesday 9th September 2026

Designation	Date	Signature
Minister	01/07/26	DAVE CURRIE
Clerk of Session	01/07/26	KEITH JOHNSTON
Designated Person	01/07/26	JEFF WHITCROFT

The review date is June 2028

CONTENTS

1. Safeguarding PROCEDURES / Ballysillan Presbyterian Church

1: Introduction

2: Recognising abuse

3: Responding and reporting

4: Non-recent disclosures of abuse

5: Confidentiality and safeguarding

6: Recruitment

7: AccessNI vetting procedures

8: Safeguarding training

9: Working safely with children

10: The voice of children and young people

11: Online safety

12: Children and young people from other countries

13: Assessing and managing risk

14: Management of safeguarding agreements

15: Codes of behaviour

16: Glossary of terms

2. Child Safeguarding Risk Assessment: Ballysillan Presbyterian

3. Code of Conduct / Leaders

4. Protocol for the Immediate Management of Safeguarding Concerns

5. Safeguarding Checklist for Northern Ireland: Ballysillan Presbyterian

1. Safeguarding PROCEDURES / Ballysillan Presbyterian Church

Chapter 1: Introduction to the procedures for safeguarding children

Aim of chapter

- To connect with the denominational policy statements
- To explain absolute actions and good practices
- To outline roles and responsibilities
- To outline what the denomination can expect with regard to timescales for responses from the central Safeguarding Team

1.1 Policy statements and procedural arrangements

General Assembly 2025 passed resolutions approving new policies in regard to children and adult safeguarding within the denomination.

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

Procedures are the thorough working out of those policy statements.

1.2 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 our denomination's Code.

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

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 central Safeguarding Team as it is evidence based.

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

1.3 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 with regard to the policy and procedure arrangements specifically.

The central 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 effect 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

Presbytery

1. Must ensure that each of the associated individual congregations has an up to date set of policies and procedures for child protection
2. Must ensure that each associated 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 central Safeguarding Team and work alongside it to take remedial actions

Local Kirk Sessions

1. Must have in place a written risk assessment, policy and procedure for the safeguarding of children engaged in their mission and ministries
2. Must review those documents at least once every two years
3. Must ensure that its actual practices adhere to its policy and procedures
4. Must have safeguarding as a standing agenda item for Kirk Session
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 personnel

1. Must keep their training up to date
2. Must review the congregational policy and procedures for safeguarding and update 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 Kirk Session appraised of any safeguarding issues
6. Must raise concerns if they believe 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 of 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 congregations, even if they have no role with children or young people, have responsibilities as members of this denomination 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 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 be aware of our open and transparent approach and know to whom and how they can raise any concerns they have about child safeguarding when they engage in our mission or ministries

Chapter 2: Guidance in recognising abuse

Aim of this chapter

- To describe forms of abuse and indicators of same
- To provide specific cultural and faith-based considerations
- To outline abuse of position of trust
- To outline reasonable grounds for concern

All those who contribute to the life of our local congregations have a part to play in keeping people safe. We do this in the arrangements we make in our congregations 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 written for congregations and services based in Northern Ireland and on legislation, policy and guidance in this jurisdiction. Parallel guidance exists for the Republic of Ireland.

2.1 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.

2.2 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 (see 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.

2.3 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 off line' 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 safety 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. All church settings in which children are provided with services or participate in activities 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.

2.4 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

2.5 Abuse by a person in a position of trust

The Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, as amended in 2022by 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, Elder/pastoral worker/youth leader.

Cooperating 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 the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. These should be dealt with in the same way as allegations against leaders or other volunteers in term of referral to statutory agencies and in taking immediate protective steps in line with PCI guidance

2.6 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

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 3: Responding and reporting

Aim of the chapter

- Managing a disclosure of abuse
- Other triggers for reporting abuse
- Reporting
- Mandated reporting and the appointment of a Designated Liaison Person
- After reporting to Social Services
- Responding to allegations against ministers and elders
- A flowchart for responding and recording

3.1 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 denomination, 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.

3.2 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.

3.3 Reporting

Main principles of reporting

1. Designated Persons report to the 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: Recognising Abuse)
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 PCI 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.

3.4 Designated Person

Each congregation must appoint a Designated Person (DP) who will take a lead in the protection of children and will liaise with outside agencies. Dependent on size, it may be appropriate to appoint one or more Deputy DPs. The DPs will work with the leaders in the reporting of concerns. Internally, they will be a source of advice and support to staff.

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 you 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. You 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.

3.5 After reporting to social services

Social services will assess all reports they receive.

They will acknowledge that they have received your report.

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

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

3.6 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 the Church feels that their concerns have not been taken seriously by the Church they should follow the Church's whistle-blowing policy.

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 Sunday School, but the individual of concern might also be a Youth Club leader or engaged in another church.

INTERNAL REPORTING

Individual with concern to raise
|
Leader in charge of the organisation
|
Minister and Designated Person
|
Protective measures in place until statutory assessment
|
Reviewed after statutory outcome

3.7 Keeping records

It is very important that good records are kept on safeguarding matters; congregations should use the Report 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 (Convenor 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.

3.8 What to report?

Please use the Report of Concern form when making a child protection report. This should include date and time, those involved and any immediate actions.

3.9 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.

The **Protocol for the Immediate management of safeguarding concerns** should be applied where necessary

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 of 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. Most Sessions now have 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 minster 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

3.10 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 4: Management of non-recent disclosures of abuse

Aim of the chapter

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

4.1 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 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 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

4.2 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

4.3 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 5: Confidentiality and safeguarding

Aim of the chapter

- To explain our legal obligations
- To describe consent and the limitations to consent
- To describe support
- 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.

5.1 Our legal obligations

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

All of 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

5.2 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.

5.3 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 the individual's 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.

5.4 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

PCI governance makes Kirk Session a Court of the Church and its members are, usually, corporately responsible for all areas of church life for the local congregation to which they are appointed.

This includes the overall safeguarding responsibilities for their congregational life.

However, when it comes to safeguarding and any potential child protection issue, 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 and one that this procedure recommends.

Kirk Sessions 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 6: Recruitment and appointment of volunteers/ leaders/helpers (leaders) and employed staff

Aim of the chapter

- To outline some basic principles for safer recruitment
- To describe the recruitment and selection process
- To describe management of leaders from other jurisdictions
- To describe support and management arrangements
- To describe processes for under 18s working with children
- 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 congregations.

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 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 regardless of what the local congregation calls the role.

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

6.1 Basic principles for safer leadership recruitment

- New people joining the 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 the new location.
- It is recognised that not all leaders in a church are necessarily members of that same church. Some leaders are from the community, or other denominations, and do not attend that local church. Therefore, the first two points cannot apply. In this scenario, Kirk Session remains responsible for the safe recruitment, vetting and supervision of those leaders.
- Some Kirk Sessions have decided that all leaders of organisations need to be communicant members first; this remains a decision for individual Kirk Sessions.
- This recruitment process applies to all leaders aged 16 and over.
- Do not commence anyone in a role until the full process has been completed.
- Many congregations are under pressure to cover leadership roles; it is crucial that to sustain leadership in all organisations you 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.

6.2 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

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

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 (see Chapter 7.)

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

6. Training

See Chapter 8: Safeguarding training

6.3 Recruitment of leaders from other jurisdictions

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

You 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

- Always follow the usual recruitment processes as closely as possible
- Think about putting additional weight into interview questions
- Get checks completed where you can, as per criminal records policy and procedure

- Seek references and, when possible, follow up verbally
- Verify identity
- Ask the volunteer to make a written statement, clearly signing, 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

6.4 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 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 with regard to 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.

6.5 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 7: AccessNI vetting procedures

Contents

7.1 Context
7.2 Guiding Principles Access NI checking
7.3 Exception
7.4 Process
7.5 Payment
7.6 Management of disclosure certificates
7.7 Record Management
7.8 Management of checks from other jurisdictions
7.9 Students for ministry and deaconess training for the diaconal ministry (Union Theological College)
7.10 Transferring ministers/licentiates (ministers from other jurisdictions/denominations)
7.11 References and associated policies

7.1 Context

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) 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 of the individual congregations and Presbyteries are checked, prior to commencing roles and regularly thereafter.

This policy applies to all volunteers, leaders, officers and employees in congregations and associated ministries in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

This policy does not apply to Council for Social Witness Care Services staff or Assembly Buildings employees. See PCI Human Resources Policy, Recruitment and Selection.

7.2 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:

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

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland 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

Currently, PCI 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 ie 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 nidirect 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.

Congregations will also want to ensure they follow their recruitment processes for a transferring leader 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.

Each Kirk Session is accountable for the leaders and volunteers operating within its congregational remit.

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.

7.3 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 7.8 below)

7.4 Process

1. An individual who is seeking a relevant role will approach a Leader in Charge of an organisation within an individual congregation to advise that they can fill a role; OR an individual is elected as a member of 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 and Garda Vetting Forms – Presbyterian Church Ireland (presbyterianireland.org)
3. Kirk Sessions or Presbytery should ensure that the form is fully completed and that all required documentation is attached before it is sent to the Safeguarding Department admin team for processing. The process will expire after 90 days if not followed through completely
4. Once approved by 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.

7.5 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 (as at March 2026). Individual congregations will be invoiced by Safeguarding Department for these checks.

7.6 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.

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. In NI this only applies to Elder roles that meet the test of regulated activity.

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, 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 Convenor 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, 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 Convenor and Secretary of the Council for Training in Ministry and the Convenor 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 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

7.7 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.

7.8 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.

You must still verify the identity of an overseas volunteer.

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 you are recruiting people from overseas and wish to check their overseas criminal record, you should contact the embassy or High Commission of the country in question. 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.

You can also contact the Foreign and Commonwealth Office(FCO) Response Centre Helpline on 020 7008 1500.

Certificates of good conduct

You can try to obtain a certificate of good conduct and any other references from potential overseas employees. The standard of foreign police checks varies. To find out the standard, you should contact either the authorities in a particular country or its embassy.

Either you or the employee 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

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

You must remain aware that 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

- Always follow the usual recruitment processes as closely as possible
- Think about putting additional weight into interview questions
- Get checks completed where you can, as outlined above
- Seek references and, when possible, follow up verbally
- Verify identity
- Ask the volunteer to make a written statement, clearly signing, 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

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland 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.

7.9 Students for ministry and Deaconess Training Program 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 Safeguarding Department.

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.

7.10 Transferring ministers/licentiates (ministers from other jurisdictions/denominations)

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

Please follow the guidance in the above sections 0.8 and 1.7.

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.

7.11 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 and Garda checks) V003 20.05.24

The Code: the constitution and government of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (2026)

Chapter 8: Safeguarding Training

Aim of the chapter

- To outline the roles and responsibilities for safeguarding training
- To outline the training requirements
- To outline the administration of training
- To outline how to access training in the denomination
- 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.

8.1 Context

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

The need for up-to-date training is critical for the 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 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 the church is a safe place
- it supports communities to have confidence in their local 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 Sessions and give reassurance in decision-making
- it will make you aware of the laws relevant to your setting
- it is a best practice requirement to have it
- there is a possibility of inspection on your safeguarding training, via Charity Commission or Statutory Services, if there has been any issue
- it is the most important training you will receive

8.2 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
- Kirk Session overall must ensure that all those operating as leaders in its congregation have maintained their training
- Kirk Session must ensure that no one is operating within its congregation whose training (or criminal vetting) has either lapsed or has not been engaged with
- Each 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, each 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
- Kirk Session must take all reasonable steps to ensure that its broad church leadership team has the opportunity of a training session at least once every three years
- 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

- Each Minister must maintain his/her own individual training

- Each Minister 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
- Each Minister 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

- Each Clerk of Session must maintain his/her own individual training and seek further input if there is an area they have not understood fully
- Each Clerk 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 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 Kirk Session immediately when leaders' safeguarding training (or criminal vetting) has lapsed; 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 the local 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 with regard to training (and vetting)
- Each Clerk of Presbytery must ensure, if a congregation is vacant, that the Convenor 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 with regard to both the mandatory expectations and general good practices in safeguarding

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

Training	For whom?	Timescales
Basic Child Safeguarding and Basic Adult Safeguarding	All children's leaders and youth leaders or anyone giving children/young people pastoral support 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 or older people)	Prior to commencement of role and once every three years
Designated Persons	All who hold the role of Designated Person or Deputy Designated Person	Prior to commencement of role and once every three years
Kirk Session	All members of Kirk Session, including the Minister (or Convener if vacant)	Prior to commencement of role and 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

8.3 Training administration responsibilities

Core principles

- It is the responsibility of each 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
- Each local 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
- Each 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
- Each 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 Kirk Session to be assured that the training was actually attended and was understood
- Most Kirk Sessions delegate these administrative tasks to the Designated Person; however, it remains the responsibility of 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 each local 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 each Kirk Session.

How to access your training

Training	How to access	Need to know
Basic Child Safeguarding and 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 the 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; please keep an eye on the website for these dates.
Kirk Session	Contact the central Safeguarding Office to book your Kirk Session training.	If you are a small Kirk Session, consider training with other Kirk Sessions in your area. However, some Kirk Sessions have particular safeguarding issues and may therefore require a single session to maintain confidentiality.

8.4 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.

In the event that 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

In the event that a minister has failed to maintain their safeguarding training:

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

In the event that a Kirk Session has failed to maintain its members' 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 need to be aware that a named lead for safeguarding (the DP) is a mandatory role required by legislation and regional guidance in both NI and ROI; 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 the event that a Kirk Session has failed to maintain its members' 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 9: Working safely with children

Aim of the chapter

- Registers
- Ratios
- Supervision of children
- Physical contact
- Health and safety
- Accidents and incidents
- Photos and videos
- Activities and general safety
- Residentials
- Consent forms
- Communication
- Holiday Bible clubs
- One-to-one mentoring
- Diversity
- Additional needs
- Intimate care
- Supporting our junior leaders
- 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 across a denomination of our size with its variety of ministries and activities.

Each 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:

9.1 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

9.2 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

There must be 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

9.3 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

9.4 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

9.5 Health and safety

The general health and safety of the church environment is the responsibility of the local Kirk Session and 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 of 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

9.6 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 are available 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 should be readily 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 the congregation's Designated Person, who will make an assessment of who else needs to know.

9.7 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 are available 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.

9.8 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 the local 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 should be a generic risk assessment available that is reviewed annually. This is the responsibility of the Kirk Session/Committee.

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

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

As a general guide, churches should ensure that all hazards are 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.

9,9 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.

The Designated Person of the local church 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.

9.10 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.

It is critical that each congregation has a system for the collection, safekeeping and access of this documentation. It 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. Local congregational 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.

Local congregations 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.

9.11 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 the church's 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.

9.12 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 the local Designated Person is aware of the HBC and is available that week to manage any safeguarding concerns.

9.13 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

9.14 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.

Kirk Session should ensure that when they are considering their local child protection policies and procedures they take into consideration the diversity within their 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.

9.15 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. Many churches provide important services and supports to these children and their families.

Congregations providing these ministries should understand that 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.

9.16 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.)

9.17 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 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.

9.18 Use of premises by others or other organisations

Congregations will allow 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 10: The voice of children and young people in our Church: Safeguarding guidance

Aim of the chapter

- To describe good practices for engaging with children/young people
- To describe good practices for engaging with parents
- To describe how we should support our junior leaders

10.1 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 local congregations.

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.

Ladder of participation

A simple guide to whether we are actively listening to our children was developed.

- At the lowest level, children are nominal, or manipulated, or used as a token; although they may be present, their presence actually serves to maintain the status quo.
- In the middle level, children have important parts to play, and are informed of them, or they are consulted and then informed of the results of the decision.
- At the top level, children and adults share power, and children's ideas and voices are considered as important as those of adults. For this to happen, there must be ways to include children in decision-making.

It is as we work up the ladder that we will see children become more engaged and empowered and it is in this space that we will have our strongest safeguarding cultures.

'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 congregations 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 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

- 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

10.2 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 the church's 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 11: Good practices for online safety

Aim of the chapter

This guidance provides the basis for **good practice** for our denomination 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 Kirk Sessions.

PCI 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.

11.1 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 must 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 the local congregation must outline the procedures in place to manage those risks identified.

11.2 Purpose of the guidelines

This guidance has been developed to support Kirk Sessions 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 congregations are 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 form harm. This includes keeping children safe from harm online.

11.3 Standards

As a denomination 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 procedure

11.4 Common sense, openness and transparency

Each congregation needs to develop its own local online policy. It should be informed by this document; however, this document cannot speak into every situation or ministry across the denomination.

A common-sense approach is needed in your 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’.

11.5 Congregational presence on social media and websites

Many congregations now operate their own social media account or 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 the local congregation, in line with their Christian witness and responsibility. Kirk Session-appointed leaders should also approve all those who can post on social media in the name of the congregation
- 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 congregation’s 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
- The congregation, 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 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 the 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 the congregation's usual child/adult protection reporting procedures, and the Designated Person involved as appropriate (see section 0.11)

11.6 WhatsApp and 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. Each local congregation should be clear what messaging forums they are using to communicate with their members.
- 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.
- 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

11.7 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 in many congregations; 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

11.8 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

11.9 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

11.10 Parents and guardians must:

- Be aware of the congregation's online ethos as communicated by Kirk Session, and agree to this if their child/young person is engaging in the online forums.
- Expect 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 congregation's websites/social media platforms is consistent with the 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.

11.11 Use of mobile phones during congregational activities

Congregations should have a clear statement on this within their congregational social ratio, depending on their position.

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.

11.12 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 a congregation facilitates online gaming between members and leaders some 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 11pm
- age restrictions on gaming platforms are respected
- transparency about whether or not messaging or chat functions will be used during the game

11.13 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 for the congregation
- 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.

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.

11.14 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 Kirk Sessions 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.

11.15 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 usually areas of a church in which to sit comfortably that would not generally appear on camera.

11.16 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 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 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 visit our churches 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.

12.1 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

12.2 Person in charge of the tour and 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.

12.3 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. Churches 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: 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 and 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.

12.4 Travel related

Child safety in hosts' cars / 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

12.5 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

12.6 Good practices hosting children

At times, a church will provide accommodation to children during the time they are preforming 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

12.7 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/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

12.8 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, art work 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

12.9 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 and 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 13: Assessing and managing risk

Aim of the chapter

- To define risk and its connection to the protection of children and young people
- To outline the Kirk Session's responsibilities to assess and manage risk

13.1 Protecting children and young people from what?

While it is not possible to remove all risk, each 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. Your local church should already have in place risk assessments for health and safety, for example, fire safety. These are important for the general overall safety of all attending your 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, every congregation and PCI organisation in Northern Ireland 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 the PCI wishes to adopt in NI and will ensure consistency across all congregations.

13.2 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

13.3 Who is responsible for risk assessment and management?

Kirk Session is responsible for the oversight of all aspects of a local congregation'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 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.

13.4 Risk assessment process

13.5 Top tips for risk assessment

1. Identify the risks

Who or what may cause harm to the children and young people in your local 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 your recent history; what have increasingly become any areas of concern?
- Consider the community in which you 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 your local area
- Are you 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 you can highlight?)
- What else do you need to do to manage the risks?
- Write your local policy/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 Kirk Session and re-issued to relevant people.**

13.6 Examples of safeguarding risks

Some risks to consider are but are not limited to:

Example of risk	Examples of mitigation
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: The 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 the 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 Security measures are part of general health and safety of the congregation.
Online abuse/concerns	PCI denominational procedures, especially: Chapter 11: Online safety

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

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland believes that children should never experience abuse of any kind.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland is committed to safeguarding all children and protecting them from harm.

It is the policy of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland 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.

Principles and procedures to keep children and young people safe

These are outlined at length in our wider Safeguarding Children policies and procedures. The denominational procedures are available on the PCI website.

Our Safeguarding Children (NI) 2025 policy states:

- The welfare of any child is paramount, no matter how brief their engagement with our denomination 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 denomination and we seek to always improve our engagement with them

BALLYSILLAN 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 denomination 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 they 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

13.7 Safeguarding risk assessment

13.7.1Suggested form

CHILD SAFEGUARDING RISK ASSESSMENT

Name of Congregation:

.....

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)

13.7.2Example for use

	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 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 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

- Kirk Session
- Leaders in Charge of organisations
- Leaders
- Volunteers and helpers
- Designated Liaison PersonMandated 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: The voice of children and young people
- Chapter 11: Online safety
- Chapter 15: Codes of behaviour

Repeat for all identified risks

13.8 Implementation

BALLYSILLAN 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 14: The management of Safeguarding Agreements (offenders and serious allegations)

Aim of the chapter

- To support Kirk Sessions to know when a Safeguarding Agreement should be put in place
- To support Kirk Sessions with the management of all serious offenders returning to worship
- To support Kirk Sessions to know how to manage serious allegations

14.1 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.

14.2 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

14.3 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 a 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 a congregation.

14.4 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).

14.5 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.

In most cases, churches will have nominated one or two responsible Elders for safeguarding, often those who hold the 'mentor' role.

This is helpful because often 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/she 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.

14.6 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.

14.7 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.

14.8 What is the process for putting an agreement in place?

1. Contact the PCI Safeguarding Office to discuss the need for an Agreement and to ensure that all relevant information is exchanged
2. A sample Agreement has already been drawn up in PCI. This can be adapted for each individual situation
3. 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
4. Meet with all relevant parties and talk through the Agreement.
5. Meet with the individual subject to the Agreement and talk them through it
6. Ensure that the Agreement is signed and dated by all parties and that a review date is established

14.9 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.

14.10 What if an individual won't sign an agreement?

If an individual won't sign the Agreement, then your church is left in a position of potentially unmanaged risk.

It is crucial that your 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 your 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.

14.11 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 your church, as you are no longer in a position where potential risks are being managed.

You 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.

14.12 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 domination information should be sought from the central Safeguarding Team about the sharing of any relevant information with that domination from a safeguarding perspective.

14.13 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.

14.14 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 give 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.

14.15 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 congregations are 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.

14.16 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- It is not appropriate for an offender to worship in the same congregation as the victims.

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.

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.

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.

14.17 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.

14.18 Appendices

1. Sample Agreement
2. Contact List

Appendix 1: Sample Agreement

EXAMPLE

Safeguarding Agreement between (X) and _____Presbyterian Church

A meeting was held on (date) to agree written Agreement date for (X) to attend _____ Presbyterian Church.

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 _____ Presbyterian Church.
2. (X) will sit with _____during worship at _____ 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 _____ 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 _____PC.

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: ……..

Signed:

(X) :

…… Date:…….

Rev:

……
Date:……

XXXXXX, Safeguarding Office, Presbyterian Church:

……
Date:……

Designated Person / Mentor / Clerk of Session etc

……
Date:……

Appendix 2: Contacts

Safeguarding Office, Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Tel: 048 9041 7290 (from RoI)

Tel: 028 9041 7290 (from NI)

safeguarding@presbyterianireland.org

Chapter 15: Codes of behaviour

Aim of the chapter

- To outline Codes of Behaviour
- To describe actions on a breach of a code
- To describe the management of complaints with regard to safeguarding
- To outline an anti-bullying approach and statement

15.1 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 PCI 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.

15.2 Strengths

Think about the strengths and the things already in place in your 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 the local congregation already has 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

15.3 Codes of Behaviour

Each congregation should have a Code of Behaviour in place for the leaders of all children's/youth organisations.

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 local 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, 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

Each congregation should have a Code of Behaviour in place for the children and young people attending organisations as participants.

This should include but is not limited to:

- Why we have a code in place for the children/young people
- Simple lists of do's 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

15.4 Complaints about safeguarding practices

All local congregations must make clear the processes for all individuals attending if there is a concern or complaint anyone needs to raise with regard to 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 often make contact via the Minister or Clerk of Session. This can also often occur through the Designated Person. The Designated Person needs to be identifiable within the church community.

The Kirk Session should make clear its arrangements for the management of such complaints.

Individuals may use the work '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.

15.5 Anti-bullying policy

Every congregation that works with children within our denomination needs to have an anti-bullying policy statement, which sets out the PCI commitment to preventing and responding to bullying.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland Anti-Bullying Statement

(To be adapted at local congregational level)

The purpose and scope of this policy statement

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland works with children and families as part of its day-to-day ministry and mission.

This work appears in many forms, including through Sunday worship and a wide range of additional focused children and youth activities, involving all ages and stages of children and young people.

This statement aims to provide people with the guidance to:

- prevent bullying from happening between children and young people who are a part of our church or take part in our activities
- make sure bullying is stopped as soon as possible if it does happen and that those involved receive the support they need
- provide information to all staff, volunteers, leaders, children and their families about what we should all do to prevent and deal with bullying

This statement applies to all connected with our ministries, and should be shared with all leaders at all levels of the church, with families, and with children and young people in age-appropriate ways.

Each congregation has also adapted a Code of Behaviour for children, young people and leaders, and this should also be consulted.

What is bullying?

At its most basic, bullying is any behaviour that seeks to harm, intimidate or coerce someone perceived as vulnerable. (Oxford English Dictionary)

Bullying includes a range of abusive behaviour that is usually but not limited to:

- repeated
- intended to hurt someone either physically or emotionally
- can be carried online (see also Chapter 11)

Legal frameworks

This statement has been drawn up on the basis of legislation, policy and guidance that seeks to protect children in the NI. That is, mainly Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, DOH and SBNI Policies and Procedures. It is also based on human rights legislation and good practice guidance that underpins all our work.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland believes that:

- children and young people should never experience abuse of any kind
- bullying is a form of abuse
- children and young people are precious in God's eyes and adults in their faith community have a responsibility to protect them from all harm
- bullying causes real distress and affects a child's health and development
- all children, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation, have the right to equal protection from all types of harm or abuse.
- all adults associated with the Presbyterian Church in Ireland have responsibilities to protect children from harm and prevent harm as far as possible; this includes the harm that comes from bullying

This includes children who not part of our denomination, but interact with our mission and ministries in any way

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland will seek to prevent bullying by:

- providing guidelines for all local congregations to ensure that they have a written policy and procedure in place for the management of instances of bullying
- providing guidelines for local congregations to ensure that they have developed a Code of Behaviour that sets out how everyone involved in their local congregation is expected to behave, in face-to-face contact and online, and within and outside of activities
- encourage local Kirk Sessions to keep safeguarding on their agenda for all meetings, and ensure they address the issues and complexity of bullying in their discussions
- include bullying in the safeguarding training for the denomination

Responding to bullying

Our response to incidents of bullying:

- will be focused on the needs of the person being bullied, and ensuring immediate protection from harm when required
- if no immediate protection is required the next consideration will be the need to prevent any future occurrences of bullying
- a plan needs to be drawn up to address any incident of bullying and how all parties will engage to resolve and restore the situation
- a review of this plan should be scheduled in for as long as is necessary

- considers the needs of the person displaying bullying behaviour, often also a child
- considers the local congregation as a whole, and the impact upon families and ministries
- all incidents will be recorded and handled as confidentially as possible

Inclusion

We recognise that bullying is closely related to how we respect and recognise the value of diversity and include all children and young people in our ministries.

See also Chapter 10: Voice of vhildren and young people.

We will therefore be proactive about:

- seeking opportunities to learn about and celebrate difference
- welcoming new members to our children's and youth activities
- working closely with families of children and young people to understand life experiences for our children and young people
- seeking out and listening to the views of children and young people

15.6 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 16: Glossary of terms

The policies and procedures for safeguarding in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland 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) See Chapter ** for full explanation of these terms.

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.

2. Child Safeguarding Risk Assessment: Ballysillan Presbyterian

773 Crumlin Road, Belfast, BT14 8AA

Activities Covered:
Boys' Brigade, Girlzone, Sunday Club, Crèche, Sunday Youth AM & PM, Summer Youth Activities

Location (list all locations where the service is provided):
Church Sanctuary, Church Lounge, Stevenson Room, McCullough Hall, Gailey Hall

Name of person responsible for the child safeguarding risk assessment:
Keith Johnston (DP), Jeff Whitcroft (DP), Dave Currie (Minister)

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:
Displayed in Church vestibule and back porch of church halls
Furnished to all volunteers by email and available on website

Completed by:
Keith Johnston (DP), Jeff Whitcroft (DP), Dave Currie (Minister)

Date:
17th June 2026

Date for review:
June 2028

Designation	Date	Signature
Minister	17/06/26	DAVE CURRIE
Clerk of Session	17/06/26	KEITH JOHNSTON

Designated Person		

A. Safeguarding & Abuse Risks

Hazard/Risk	Potential Harm	Controls (Actions)	Relevant Chapter of Procedures	Named Person	Timescale
Abuse by leader/ volunteer	Serious harm to child	Safer recruitment, vetting, training every 3 years, supervision, code of conduct	2: Recognising abuse 3: Responding and reporting 6: Recruitment 7: AccessNI vetting procedures 15: Codes of behaviour 8: Safeguarding training	Kirk Session / DP / Leaders	Ongoing
Peer-on-peer abuse / bullying	Emotional or physical harm	Anti-bullying approach, supervision, behaviour management	2: Recognising abuse 3: Responding and reporting 15: Codes of behaviour 8: Safeguarding training	Leaders / DP	Ongoing
Abuse of position of trust	Exploitation / grooming	Immediate reporting, removal from role, statutory referral	2: Recognising abuse 3: Responding and reporting	DP / Minister	Immediate

B. Supervision & Ratios

Hazard/Risk	Potential Harm	Controls (Actions)	Relevant Chapter of Procedures	Named Person	Timescale
Inadequate supervision	Injury / abuse risk	Minimum two leaders, follow ratios, register attendance	8: Safeguarding training 9: Working safely with children	Leaders in Charge	Each session
Lone working	Increased safeguarding risk	Avoid one-to-one, open environment, accountability	8: Safeguarding training 9: Working safely with children	Leaders	Ongoing

C. Premises & Environment

Hazard/Risk	Potential Harm	Controls (Actions)	Relevant Chapter of Procedures	Named Person	Timescale
Unsafe building	Injury	Regular maintenance checks, fire safety, secure areas	See Health and Safety Policy	Church Committee	Annual
Unauthorised access	Stranger danger	Controlled entry, sign in/ out, supervision	8: Safeguarding training 9: Working safely with children	Leaders	Each session
Accidents	Physical injury	First aid, incident reporting, trained staff	See Health and Safety Policy	Leaders	Immediate

D. Communication & Online Safety

Hazard/Risk	Potential Harm	Controls (Actions)	Relevant Chapter of Procedures	Named Person	Timescale

Private messaging	Grooming risk	Transparent communication, parental consent, no private contact under 15	8: Safeguarding training 9: Working safely with children 11: Online safety 15: Codes of behaviour	Leaders	Ongoing
Online abuse/ content	Emotional/ sexual harm	Monitoring, safe platforms, report concerns	8: Safeguarding training 9: Working safely with children 11: Online safety 15: Codes of behaviour	Leaders / DP	Ongoing

E. Behaviour & Conduct

Hazard/Risk	Potential Harm	Controls (Actions)	Relevant Chapter of Procedures	Named Person	Timescale
Inappropriate physical contact	Misinterpretation or abuse	Minimal contact, appropriate touch, child consent	8: Safeguarding training 9: Working safely with children 15: Codes of behaviour	Leaders	Ongoing
Challenging behaviour	Harm to others	Clear rules, consistent discipline, escalation	8: Safeguarding training 9: Working safely with children 15: Codes of behaviour	Leaders	Ongoing

F. Governance & Reporting

Hazard/Risk	Potential Harm	Controls (Actions)	Relevant Chapter of Procedures	Named Person	Timescale

Failure to report	Ongoing harm	Clear reporting procedures, immediate escalation	2: Recognising abuse 3: Responding and reporting 8: Safeguarding training	All Leaders / DP	Immediate
Lack of training	Increased risk	Mandatory training every 3 years, monitoring	8: Safeguarding training	Kirk Session	Ongoing
Poor record keeping	Loss of evidence	Secure confidential records, incident logs	3: Responding and reporting 5: Confidentiality and safeguarding	DP	Ongoing

G. Child Vulnerability

Hazard/Risk	Potential Harm	Controls (Actions)	Relevant Chapter of Procedures	Named Person	Timescale
Additional needs	Higher risk of harm	Individual planning, additional supervision	9: Working safely with children 10: The voice of children and young people	Leaders	Each session
Lack of information	Medical/ safety issues	Consent forms, emergency contacts, annual updates	9: Working safely with children 10: The voice of children and young people	Leaders	Annual

Emergency Procedures

Immediate danger: Contact PSNI (999)
Or Out of Hours Social Work Service 0800 197 9995

All safeguarding concerns must be reported to the Designated Person and Social Services without delay.

3. Code of Conduct for Leaders/Adults

(based on guidance in Chapter 15 of the PCI procedures [NI and ROI])

Overarching statement

We in Ballysillan Presbyterian want to have the highest standards in in our behaviour, values and attitudes towards children and young people, who are members of our congregation.

We adopt the following in line with PCI principles and within the guidance of the denomination's safeguarding procedures.

This Code of Conduct is endorsed and agreed by our church's Kirk Session.

The Code of Conduct applies to all those in leadership positions and adults who come into contact with children and young people. Our 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. That includes both behaviour that takes places within our ministries and behaviour online. The Code also applies to organisations who use our premises.

A CHILD-CENTRED APPROACH ALL TIMES

- In our contact and work with children and young people as a congregation we:
- Treat all children equally, listen to and respect them.
- See children as individuals and respect diversity.
- Ensure leaders should lead by example and at all times model good behaviour.
- Respect a child's personal space. Involve children and their parents, as appropriate, in decision-making.
- Provide encouragement, support and praise (regardless of ability).
- Use appropriate language (verbal and non-verbal).
- Have fun and encourage a positive atmosphere.
- Discuss boundaries on behaviour and related sanctions, as appropriate, with children and their parents/carers.
- Offer feedback and challenge inappropriate behaviour and language, when required.
- Encourage feedback from children.
- Consider a group contract at the beginning of each year/session.
- Use age-appropriate teaching aids and materials.

- Be aware of a child's other commitments when scheduling activities, e.g. school or exams.
- Are cognisant of a child's limitations, for example, due to a medical condition.
- Encourage a trusting environment.
- Observe appropriate dress.

PREVENTNG INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

When working with our young people leaders should

- Avoid being alone with children.
- Do not use or allow language or behaviour that is offensive, abusive or sexually suggestive.
- Do not single out a particular child for unfair favouritism, criticism, ridicule, or unwelcome focus or attention.
- Do not allow/engage in inappropriate touching of any form.
- Do not hit or physically chastise children.
- Do not socialise inappropriately with children, e.g. outside of structured organisational activities.
- Do not allow an inappropriate relationship to develop with any child and avoid favouritism.
- Ensure that any contact with children through social/digital media is in line with best practice and our policies.
- Do not allow concerns to go unreported.
- Maintain awareness around your communication, either verbal, written or digital (including social media). If you have said or done something that has caused offence or upset, then try to address it in an apologetic, sensitive and timely manner, with a view to reconciliation.
- Do not let children and young people have your personal contact details (mobile number, email or postal address) or have contact with them via a personal social media account.

PHYSICAL CONTACT WITH CHILDREN

In working with children any physical contact

- Should be in response to the need of the child and not the need of the adult.
- Should be open and not secretive.

- Should be child initiated.
- Should be appropriate to the age and developmental stage of the child.
- Check with children about their level of comfort when doing activities that might involve physical contact.
- Avoid rough play or inappropriate touch.
- Church personnel who have to administer first-aid should ensure wherever possible that other children or another adult is present and that the administration of any first aid of medication has consent in place.
- Following any incident where an adult thinks that his/her actions have been, or may be, misconstrued, every effort should be made to communicate with the offended party to resolve any misunderstandings. All incidents should be recorded, and where there is concern, the person in charge should be informed.

RELATIONSHIPS

In our relational work with children and young people

- Church leaders should ensure that their relationships with children are appropriate and above reproach.
- Our leaders must not allow a romantic/intimate relationship to develop with a child or young person. This could be potentially a criminal offence under abuse of trust provision.

If you become aware of any breaches of this code, you must report them to a member of the congregations safeguarding team: the minister or Designated Persons/Designated Liaison Persons

4. Protocol for the Immediate Management of Safeguarding Concerns

1. Policy Statement – Protecting children and adults at risk of harm
It is the role of the PCI Safeguarding Department (SD) to provide expert professional advice to decision makers regarding appropriate measures for the immediate management of safeguarding concerns. If a concern is identified, advice should be sought from the SD and consideration should be given to establishing an Emergency Safeguarding Panel (ESP) as per Appendix 1.

Having taken advice, if the appropriate convenor of the ESP (per Appendix 1) considers that there are reasonable grounds for concern regarding any safeguarding matter involving volunteers, staff or leaders of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI), the first priority must always be to ensure that no child or adult at risk of harm is exposed to unnecessary risk.

Regardless of who the concern is about or the type of risk involved, the welfare of the vulnerable person will always take precedence, alongside complementary regard for the welfare of the person about whom the concern has been raised.

2. Scope
This protocol applies to all volunteers, staff and leaders across PCI in both Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland and the principles also apply to the Church's mission overseas.

The Protocol neither impacts nor supersedes legal obligations to report concerns to appropriate statutory authorities, as per Children First and Cooperating to Safeguard Children and Young People. These legal obligations should be completed first.

3. Immediate protective measures and precautionary actions
In all safeguarding matters, actions must be taken as a matter of urgency, to address immediate harm and minimise any immediate risk of additional harm.
If the risk of harm is such that a person's safety is being jeopardised, it is vital that any necessary immediate protective measures are not delayed by church governance processes.

Accordingly, this protocol will be applied immediately a concern is identified. Any action taken under the protocol will subsequently be reviewed by the appropriate Court of the Church or (in the case of contracted employees) relevant HR processes, as soon as practicable.

Measures taken under this Protocol are not disciplinary actions – they are solely for the purpose of addressing perceived immediate harm or risk of harm. They should not be interpreted as implying a finding of wrongdoing.

Further, any immediate measures taken under this protocol must be proportionate to the level of risk assessed. In some circumstances, the necessary protective measures may include requiring a minister or elder temporarily to step back from delivery of their role, however such a 'stepping back' should be considered a last resort and must only be

applied after alternative options (such as those outlined in section 4 below) have been considered.

The categories for concern are defined as:

- if an individual is convicted of offences relating to harm caused to a child or adult at risk;
- if an individual has an allegation made against them of inappropriate or abusive behaviour towards a child or adult at risk;
- if information is received from statutory authorities that they have concerns about the behaviour of an individual in relation to a child or adult at risk;
- if a PCI SD assessment indicates that an individual's involvement in safeguarding related decisions, judgements or implementation could expose a child or adult at risk to harm.

As noted above, it is the role of the SD to provide expert professional advice to decision makers in relation to appropriate immediate protective measures. If a concern is identified, their advice should be sought as soon as possible.

4. Emergency Safeguarding Panel
If a safeguarding concern is identified, an ESP should be convened (as per Appendix 1) as soon as practicable to consider any necessary immediate actions to address the concern.

Material considered by an ESP and any decisions reached are strictly confidential and are likely to meet the definition of Special Category Data under relevant data protection legislation.

In undertaking its work, the ESP has two necessary and urgent functions. Firstly, based largely on the information provided when the concern was reported, the ESP should seek to understand:

- the general nature of the concern;
- if it relates to child or adult safeguarding;
- when the incident is alleged to have occurred;
- what is known at this point;
- any additional readily available information.

The ESP should not carry out any additional investigation nor should it seek to identify or interview witnesses, the alleged victim or the person about whom the concern has been raised.

Having collated and considered the available information, the ESP must consider what action (if any) is necessary. The outcomes of an ESP review can include:

- deciding that no immediate precautionary action is necessary
- requiring the individual to:
  - cease particular actions / roles
  - refrain from contacting specific individuals

- refrain from attending specific locations
- step back from their role in its entirety

The ESP should not delay its deliberations in an effort to obtain additional information. As the key issue for the ESP to address is immediate protection of children or adults at risk, the expectation is that an ESP should normally make its decisions within 48 hours of being advised of a concern.

The role of the SD is to provide advice relating to:
- safeguarding matters;
- the level and type of risk involved;
- possible actions to take to mitigate risk.

The SD advises, but is not part of, the decision making of the ESP.

If, for any reason, the SD cannot be contacted, the ESP Convenor should seek initial advice from appropriate statutory authorities and should put in place such immediate temporary steps as they consider necessary to protect the individuals at risk until the ESP is able to meet formally with the SD.

The ESP will summarise the information it has considered and any decisions (with reasons) on the ESP Review and Decision Record form (Appendix 3).

When any precautionary action (including requiring an individual to step back from a role or function) is taken by the ESP to address an identified concern or risk, this is deemed to be a formal decision with the authority of the church and may only be changed following adjudication by the relevant court of the church or (in the case of a contracted employee) HR process.

Any investigation which is necessary will be undertaken utilising the appropriate processes of the relevant court of the Church or HR policy. Once the immediate risk has been addressed by the ESP, the relevant church court or HR process will commence its work. The actions and decisions of the ESP will be reviewed and either affirmed, amended or revoked by the subsequent investigation process. This initial work should also be completed as a matter of some urgency, with a review of any ESP actions normally expected within seven days.

Once the matter has been passed from the ESP to a Church Court or HR process, the rules for procedure, appeals, etc. governing those processes will apply.
The ESP must be mindful that any new information which comes to its attention during deliberation may retrigger the mandatory or statutory reporting requirements of the relevant jurisdiction.

Any additional reports required should be managed in line with PCI procedures as a matter of urgency.

5. Consideration of ‘stepping back’

While always ensuring that the safety of individuals at risk is critical in the decision-making process, the ESP must be cognisant of the implications of any decision to require an individual to step back from any or all of their roles in the church.

Such a decision can have far reaching consequences and should only be considered as a last resort, and ideally with advice from the SD. The ESP must balance the protection of vulnerable individuals with the welfare of the person about whom the concern has been raised. As previously noted, the decision should be based on fairness and proportionality.

Immediate precautionary stepping back from a role may be appropriate if:

- a child or adult is at significant risk;
- the concern is so serious that if proven it may lead to dismissal / removal from office;
- the concern has the potential to meet the criteria for a statutory referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).

6. Informing the individual

If any immediate precautionary action is required, the individual concerned should, subject to any restrictions applied by statutory authorities, be advised without delay of the following:

- the nature of the concern and in particular that it is a safeguarding matter;
- the rationale for the action being taken;
- that the action is precautionary and is to protect all parties;
- the identity of a church contact point to provide pastoral support.
    - Any person identified to provide such pastoral support must not be part of the ESP or any future investigative processes.

It is vitally important that the individual is assured that any precautionary actions are neutral and intended solely to protect all parties.

The ESP Convenor should further ensure that pastoral support is available for the individual raising the concern and their family.

7. Handover to normal procedures

When the ESP is reasonably assured that any immediate risk has been addressed, it should ensure that the steps outlined above leading to an investigation by the appropriate court of the church have been instigated.

Appendix 1 - Protocol for the Immediate Management of Safeguarding Concerns

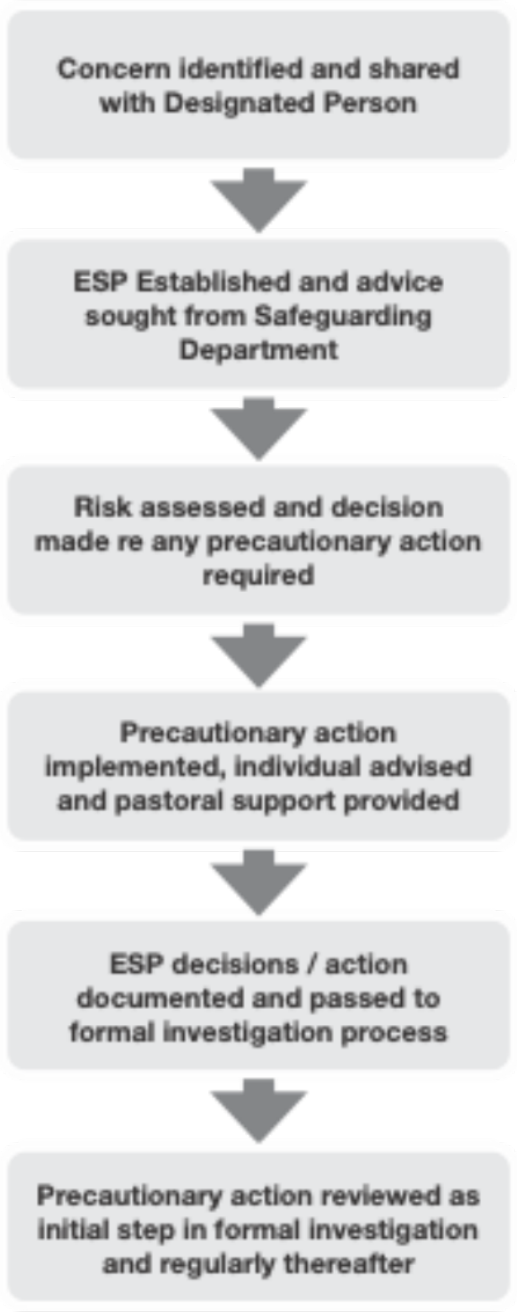
Emergency Safeguarding Panel – Composition

In all cases, the ESP should seek advice from the PCI Safeguarding Department.
The ESP as appointed must be independent of the individual about whom concerns have been raised.
Where ESP review relates to a called office-holder, the ESP members must be members of the relevant court.

Individual about whom concerns have been raised	**Responsible for establishing ESP**	**Composition of Panel** *ESP should consist of at least three of the people listed below*
Congregational volunteer / leader	Minister	Minister, Clerk of Session, Other elder, Designated Person
Congregational staff member	Minister	Minister, Clerk of Session, Other elder, Designated Person
Minister or elder	Moderator of Presbytery	An independent panel from Presbytery with at least 1 ruling elder and at least 1 teaching elder
Presbytery Moderator	Clerk of Presbytery	An independent panel from Presbytery with at least 1 ruling elder and at least 1 teaching elder
Chaplain / Deaconess under the auspices of CMI	CMI Secretary	CMI Convener, CMI Secretary, Presbytery Moderator, Presbytery Clerk
Staff in CSW Services	Relevant Regional Manager	Regional Manager(s), Service Manager(s), Care Service Director / Deputy Director.
Other PCI Employee	Council Secretary or Head of Dept.	Council Secretary, Head of Department, Council Convenor, Member of Senior Leadership Team
Council Secretary	Clerk of Assembly	Member of Senior Leadership Team, Council Convenors
Senior Leadership Team member	General Council Convener	Moderator of the GA, General Council Convenor, Convenor of another Council, Convenor of an Assembly Commission

Appendix 2 - Protocol for the Immediate Management of Safeguarding Concerns

Emergency Safeguarding Panel – Decision Process



Appendix 3 - Protocol for the Immediate Management of Safeguarding Concerns

Emergency Safeguarding Panel – Review AND Decision Record Form

Date of meeting:
Those present and their designation:
Note of declared conflicts of interest:
Note of discussion on background to the meeting:
Consideration of information as it relates to: • If an individual is convicted of offences relating to harm caused to a child or adult at risk. • If an individual has an allegation made against them of inappropriate or abusive behaviour towards a child or adult at risk. • If information is received from statutory authorities that they have concerns about the behaviour of an individual in relation to a child or adult at risk. • If a PCI Safeguarding Department assessment indicates that an individual's involvement in safeguarding related decisions, judgements or implementation could expose a child or adult at risk to harm.
Panel decisions/deliberations including considerations of options:
Outline of action plan and agreed next steps: Note of named individuals responsible for tasks and related timelines:
What further process to be followed: • HR processes • Kirk Session • Presbytery • Pastoral provision
Any other regulatory actions considered necessary: • Notification to Charity Commission / Charity Regulator? • PSNI / Gardai • Social Services / Tusla
Signed: **Designation:** **Date:**

5. Safeguarding Checklist for Northern Ireland

V001 March 2026

This checklist has been prepared to assist Designated Persons, Adult Safeguarding Champions and Kirk Sessions to assess the congregation's compliance with safeguarding procedures.

It is recommended that safeguarding teams complete this checklist annually.

The checklist should be tabled at a Kirk Session meeting for discussion.

Area	Yes/No	Actions needed, who is responsible and timescale
Safeguarding leadership in church		
Has the church appointed a Designated Person (DP)/Deputy DP and Adult Safeguarding Champion (ASC)?		
Do those responsible for safeguarding in the congregation meet as a team?		
Record management		
Do you have arrangements to hold confidential records and safeguarding notes securely? This includes information held electronically.		
Is access to records restricted to the safeguarding team?		
Local policy development		
What parts of the PCI Church's policy and procedures are you planning on customising over the next 12 months?		
Have you looked at the nature and extent of the church's mission and any risks or vulnerabilities that need local guidance? E.g., you host a lot of overseas mission teams or have older people's drop-in centres.		

Area	Yes/No	Actions needed, who is responsible and timescale
Awareness of safeguarding		
Do you display the details of DPs and ASC leads in the church?		
How do you raise awareness of safeguarding in the church? E.g. social media, church website, display of local procedures, newsletters or Safeguarding Sunday?		
Do you have a code of behaviour for leaders? Is it prominently on display? Are young people aware of it?		
Is the Kirk Session provided with a regular safeguarding update report?		
Involving children and young people in safeguarding		
How do you involve the church's young people in the development of safeguarding arrangements?		
Managing adults who may pose a risk		
Are you aware of PCI's policy on managing adults who pose a risk and who require safeguarding agreements?		
If any such agreements are in use, are they reviewed within appropriate timescales i.e., yearly?		
Recruitment		
Have you developed role descriptions for paid and volunteer posts?		
Is there an application form and suitable assessment process?		
Have you interviewed in line with best practice? eg. use of a mixed gender panel		

Area	Yes/No	Actions needed, who is responsible and timescale
Are references checked in all cases?		
Is identity verified in all cases?		
Are all forms sent to PCI centrally for processing to AccessNI?		
Have volunteers & leaders set up their AccessNI online account?		
Are AccessNI checks completed for all new volunteers and staff before commencing service?		
Do you have a list showing when leaders will need to be rechecked by AccessNI?		
Have you sought any advice from the PCI central team where there are concerns about an adult [leader, volunteer or member of the congregation]?		
Training		
Has there been general child protection for leaders in the congregation? When will this next be required?		
Have the Safeguarding Team, Minister, lead elder, ASC and DPs undertaken training? When will this next be required?		
Has Kirk session undertaken appropriate safeguarding training? When will this next be required?		

Date completed: _____

Signature: _____

Role (Minister, DP/ ASC): _____