



The
United
Reformed
Church



Quick Guide: Covid-19 and Safeguarding

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During the pandemic, the pressures placed upon local churches have risen significantly and this has led to an increase in the need to protect people from different forms of harm and abuse. Below is a quick guide to what you can do to offer support whilst continuing to serve the needs of your communities.

Protecting People

If you become aware or you are concerned that an individual may be at risk of abuse or neglect; you should:

- Contact your church safeguarding coordinator or Synod Safeguarding Officer for advice within 24 hours,
- Refer to a local social care service in the area that the individual lives. (Check the website to see any changes to reporting procedures currently).
- Always call the Police using 999 if you suspect someone is in immediate danger.

Exploitation and Grooming

In times of crisis, those who seek to exploit children and adults can be quick to act and prey on vulnerabilities – particularly in online forums, where they may face fewer barriers to do so with a reduction in online moderators. You can help by:

- Know the signs of exploitation, be vigilant to them and take any disclosures or concerns seriously.
- Refer concerns to safeguarding coordinators, Synod Safeguarding Officers, social services or the Police.

- Use the resources like the [NSPCC](#), [CEOP](#) or [UK Safer Internet Centre](#) to support parents, families and individuals to learn how to stay safe online.

Poverty

It is estimated that over 3 million people have faced food poverty since the pandemic began, including those who have lost their employment and their homes. You can offer support by:

- Map out food banks and points of contact in your area to be shared with those who need them.
- Use the Covid-19 Mutual Aid website to locate individual who can support those who are vulnerable and self-isolating to access essential supplies.
- Encourage parents of school age children to continue to claim their free school meals.
- Share information on basic hygiene and infection control with those who may have limited access to technology.
- Share information about the Government's pledge to support those facing home insecurity and signpost to local Housing Offices.



Financial Abuse

Many elderly and vulnerable people are having to try to manage their finances in different ways and there has been a rise in cases of scams as others look to exploit this – including over the phone and online. Financial abuse can be perpetrated by those closer to home, including family, friends and others who appear to be seeking to help the individual and it can be closely linked to domestic abuse.

You can offer support by:

- Be familiar with the signs of financial abuse (reports of missing personal items, unexplained shortages of money for essential items, another person controlling someone's money or taking an unusual interest.
- Share advice on the signs of a **SCAM**
 - **S**eems too good to be true
 - **C**ontacted out of the blue
 - **A**sks for personal details
 - **M**oney is requested
- If you support those in your community involving payments follow government advice on keeping records and receipts.



Further resources

[Social Care Institute for Excellence](#) – safeguarding advice and guidance during Covid-19

[NSPCC](#) – safeguarding and child protection information

[AGE UK](#) – provides information and advice

Safe Online Activities

There have been recent reports of a rise in hacking activity which seeks to disrupt online activities and spread harmful material. This is very important as Churches are finding new online ways to connect with their congregations. You can:

- Follow and remind staff and volunteers of your safe working practices advice and safeguarding policy (including GP5's Appendix C).
- Avoid engaging with your community over social media and always use an organisational email address or social media that belong to the Church.
- Risk assess any online platforms for meetings especially those discussing confidential information.
- Ask for advice and training on online safety from your synod safeguarding officer
- Review your lone working policy to ensure that online communication guidance is provided to mitigate against the risks of unavoidable 1:1 contact.

Domestic Abuse

We know that abuse can escalate when families face greater pressure and stress, and the order to stay at home can cause anxiety for those who already feel at-risk. During this time, Refuge, a domestic violence charity, saw a 700% increase in calls for help in one day. Faith is important to people in times of need. You can offer your support by:

- Contacting your church safeguarding coordinator or Synod Safeguarding Officer if you become concerned that someone may be experiencing abuse.
- Call the Police if someone is in immediate danger.
- Make training and advice accessible for those in your church, this will help them identify and support those at risk. Your synod safeguarding officer can also assist you.

- Signpost to support agencies and community resources including [SafeLives](#), [Live Fear Free](#) (Wales) and [helplines](#) in Scotland. Be aware of the need for discreteness when signposting not to place survivors in any further danger.
- Consider how your safeguarding coordinator could be contacted directly and confidentially by those in need.
- Promote that those fleeing violence are exempt from the order to “stay at home” and they can leave to keep themselves safe.
- Familiarise yourself with [Appendix R](#) – *Good Practice 5 – A Guide to Domestic Abuse*

Community Volunteers

Difficult times often bring out the best in people and there has been a surge in community volunteering initiatives during the pandemic. However, keeping people safe must always be a priority and churches should apply the same standard of safeguarding in this work.



Many roles carried out by volunteers do not need a DBS/PVG check but this should be reviewed regularly. You can:

- Take advice from DDC (our DBS checking provider) and review the information on their website relating to checks during the pandemic.
- Revisit your volunteer role descriptions and risk assess these for the potential for harm.
- Continue to apply for DBS checks on roles that require this and ensure that volunteers do not start until a satisfactory clearance is received.

- Review your lone working policy and ensure protections are in place for volunteers.
- Consider using online safeguarding training for anyone undertaking a new role. Synod safeguarding officers can help with this.

For advice on DBS checks and volunteering during Covid-19, visit [Disclosure and Barring Service](#).

Safeguarding Agreements, Contracts and Risk Management Plans

Being able to worship is an important support for many people especially those who have offended and those who may pose a risk to others. However, current safeguarding agreements may not make effective provisions for safeguarding others during the current ways of working. You can support by:

- Risk assessing any new activities including online and virtual forums to mitigate against new risks.
- Revisit any safeguarding contracts with the individual involved to discuss amendments.
- Where restrictions may be required, remain vigilant when using online group meetings to ensure that individuals who should not be participating are not present.
- Consider how to continue to offer spiritual support safely.

Further resources

[Faith Action](#) – advice and resources

[Inter Faith Network](#) – advice and guidance from faith groups

[Streetlink](#) – for helping rough sleepers

This is one in a series of booklets designed to give information to those working and volunteering within the United Reformed Church.

The booklets can be read and downloaded at www.urc.org.uk/information-guides



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