

Help!



I'm a safeguarding
co-ordinator

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Everyone has a responsibility to help safeguard children and adults at risk. None more so than in places of worship who, after schools, work with more children than any other institution. Places of worship are also more vulnerable because they are open to all. It follows therefore that care taken within places of worship, faith groups and organisations to appoint at least one person to undertake the safeguarding role.

If this is you, congratulations! What you are doing is of great (and lasting) significance. You may at this point in time feel a bit unsure of what is expected of you, but hopefully this booklet will give you confidence, and help with the tasks that lie ahead.

What's in a name?

The different titles for the safeguarding role can be confusing. For some places of worship it may only mean being responsible for safeguarding children, with titles such as child protection coordinator or officer, children's advocate or representative etc. Increasingly, the role is becoming more than safeguarding children and can include safeguarding other groups such as adults at risk.

The title doesn't matter as much as the role and, for the sake of simplicity,

the term 'safeguarding co-ordinator' is used in this booklet. By the way,

it's advisable to have a deputy for when you are not around and perhaps share some of the responsibilities.

Training

Your denomination or group may provide safeguarding training but if this is not provided or is inadequate, training and resources are available from CCPAS (see back page). These could be particularly useful if you are just beginning to come to terms with the need for a safeguarding policy. Whatever the situation, it is important the leadership understand the policy, are willing to follow it and never try to deal with safeguarding issues independently.

It is the expectation that the leadership will give you, as co-ordinator, their full support, though the detail of any situations that arise should be shared on a 'need to know' basis only, in line with your safeguarding policy.

What am I expected to do?

There are three main functions:

- Act as an advocate (i.e. someone who speaks for and on behalf of children and adults at risk).
- Act independently in reporting concerns of abuse to the statutory authorities, that is Children's or Adult Social Care (formerly Social Services) or the Police. NB Children's Social Care is otherwise known as Children's Services in England. Other names will apply elsewhere in the UK.
- Oversee the preparation and implementation of the Safeguarding Policy (children and/or adults at risk), ensuring it is regularly reviewed.

Advocate for children and adults at risk

All those working with children, young people and adults at risk (including you as advocate) need to know how to respond appropriately if approached by someone wanting to share a safeguarding concern. Concerns may be expressed to a worker or directly to you (as the advocate) by the young person or vulnerable adult. The task is to get alongside the person concerned and try to establish what is troubling them. This should be done through sensitive listening, reassurance and acceptance of what they are saying. Don't ask questions and keep an open mind. Workers should pass any information on to you as safeguarding co-ordinator. The individual should not be further questioned. As coordinator your job is to initiate the action required by your policy by referring to the statutory authorities or taking advice, for example from your denomination or CCPAS.

These will now be explained in more detail...

Call our Helpline:

0845 120 4550

Reporting concerns

You will obviously need to follow your safeguarding policy but remember that where there are concerns of child abuse, the following actions are essential:

- If deliberate injury is suspected, if there is concern for a child's immediate safety or they are afraid to return home, Children's Social Care should be contacted.
- Don't discuss with parents /carers – it could jeopardise an official investigation.
- Seek medical help if needed urgently, advising doctor of suspicions.
- If a child isn't at immediate risk (e.g. poor child care), encourage parent / carer to seek help themselves, but monitor the situation.
- Make careful notes of conversations and/or concerns as they may be required in an investigation.

- Where sexual abuse is suspected or disclosed always contact Children's Social Care or the Police immediately. Don't discuss with parents or carers for the reasons stated above.

Making a referral

If you are not sure whether the information you have is sufficiently serious to be passed on as a referral you can always ask for advice from our Helpline. Concerns for a child's welfare that fall short of safeguarding concerns, for example poor child care, can also be referred to Children's Social Care so that early help and support to the family can be organised. This is often referred to as a 'child in need' referral or a referral for 'early help'. The most important thing, however, is that if a child appears to be at risk of harm then these safeguarding concerns should be passed on without delay.

Some Children's Social Care departments have specific forms to complete and it is good practice to follow up a telephone conversation with a written referral requesting confirmation of the action that will be taken.

Government guidance, 'What to do when you're worried a child's being abused' (2015) states that a social worker should give you a response to your referral within one day.

When safeguarding concerns relate to an adult at risk the same principles apply although the referral should be made to Adult Social Care. When dealing with adults, their wishes, feelings and mental capacity must be taken into account and people should be supported to make their own decisions and encouraged to give informed consent when possible. As the Safeguarding Coordinator you are not expected to be an expert in assessing mental capacity and, when in doubt, always seek advice. Our Helpline is also available to help you with issues around safeguarding adults.

What happens next?

Sometimes, following a referral to Children's Social Care/ Police Child Protection, you or a member of the leadership may be asked to attend meetings to give support to a child or family member. This may include a child protection conference. The conference

brings together family members, the child where appropriate, supporters/advocates and those professionally involved with the child and family, to share information and decide what action is needed to safeguard the child and promote their welfare.

There may be instances when it is appropriate and/or helpful for a child or adult at risk to be accompanied to interviews at a police station. This doesn't have to be the safeguarding coordinator, it could be someone who has pastoral responsibilities. Either way, the leadership needs to support all those involved, particularly on the rare occasion a case goes to court.

If any adult discloses past abuse it is important to ensure pastoral care is available to them, even if it isn't you who gives it! There may also be considerations to do with reporting non recent abuse that you would need to take into account (see our leaflet 'Help... I was abused as a child').

Teamwork

If your place of worship is part of a denomination or other organisation, there may be an expectation that you inform the regional or national oversight (for example, the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer for anglicans) of any allegation/concern. You may also be required, as a condition of your insurance policy, to inform your insurers of any serious safeguarding concerns, particularly if an allegation has been made that could result in litigation involving the church. Safeguarding concerns within a place of worship can be emotionally and spiritually demanding. Whilst confidentiality

is important, it is equally important that you also receive support. This is something that the leadership should understand and agree to provide.

The safeguarding policy

As Safeguarding Co-ordinator, consider:

- Familiarising yourself with any existing safeguarding policy and denominational guidance, ensuring it is followed and regularly reviewed.
- Establishing contact with your local children's and adult social care services and finding out about the procedures of the relevant safeguarding boards. This will give you confidence in reporting any concerns.
- Maintaining accurate records relating to child / adult protection concerns. That means ensuring that workers write a full account of any safeguarding issues that arise and the report is stored in a secure place for future reference.
- Being part of the interview panel when appointing workers to explain the responsibilities they would carry for passing on safeguarding concerns to you, giving assurances that appropriate training will be provided.
- Occasionally attending the activities and meeting with workers so that you become a familiar face to the children, vulnerable adults and workers alike. It may then be easier for them to come to you with any concerns.

Facing The Unthinkable

Safeguarding children and adults at risk of harm

- Promoting the needs of children and adults at risk and keeping the leadership informed on good practice. This may include making leaders aware of any person attending who could pose a risk. Someone in the leadership should be liaising with probation and/or police when a sexual or violent offender is part of the congregation. This may involve helping to establish clear boundaries for the offender through a written covenant of care.
- It is important to remember that as Safeguarding Co-ordinator you are not expected to be an expert in child or adult protection – leave that to the statutory agencies and use CCPAS to help you! By being vigilant however, having policies and procedures in place, and ensuring that only suitable people are allowed to work with these groups, you will be instrumental in making your place of worship or organisation a safer environment for all.

Remember CCPAS is here to help
and support you.

Helpline: 0845 120 45 50

01322 517817

For more information about the role
of a Safeguarding
Co-ordinator, try our Facing The
Unthinkable training courses!

This is one of an expanding series of **Help!** Guides published by CCPAS, many of which are particularly relevant to workers.

See CCPAS website for more details www.ccpas.co.uk



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