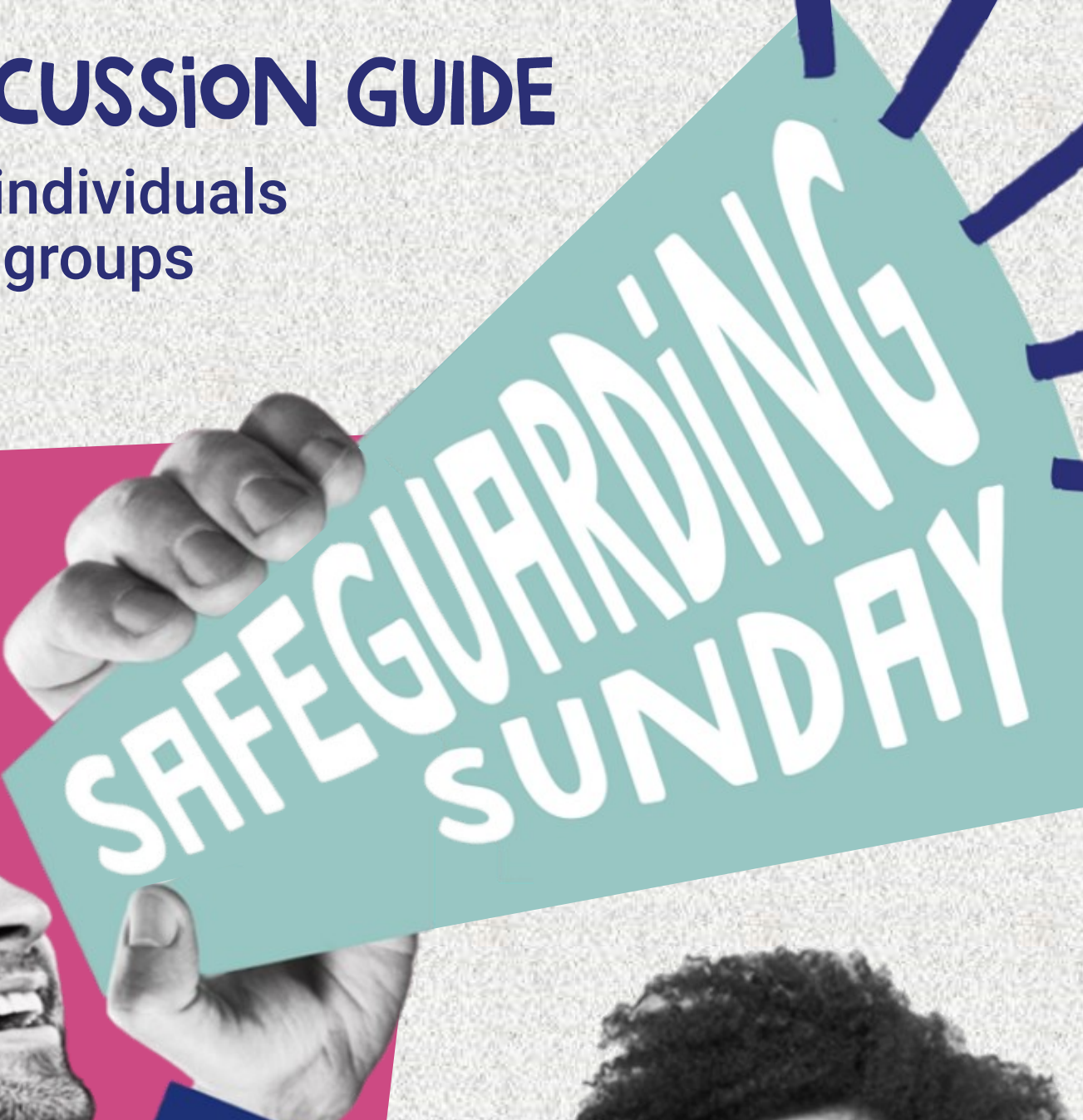


# DISCUSSION GUIDE

For individuals  
and groups

A hand is shown holding a teal-colored sign with the words "SAFEGUARDING SUNDAY" written in large, white, sans-serif capital letters. The sign is tilted upwards and to the right. The background behind the sign is a light grey wall with dark blue diagonal lines. The overall image is a collage with a pink background on the left and a light grey background on the right.

SAFEGUARDING  
SUNDAY



## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

**Safeguarding is an important part of the Christian message of justice and hope. But it's not always an easy thing to talk about.**

This discussion guide has been created to help you think about safeguarding, the impact it has on you and your church, and the role we each have in creating safer places for all.

With one in five people having experienced abuse before the age of 16\*, it is likely that there will be someone in your group who has been impacted by abuse and trauma or knows someone close to them who has. They may never have told anyone else about it.



**Talking about these topics may stir up some difficult memories. Before you begin, please take a moment to consider the following:**

- If you think this discussion may be triggering for you or you feel uncomfortable in any way, please **TELL SOMEONE**.
- **BE SENSITIVE.** Speaking or thinking about harm and abuse can be difficult. Be mindful of your thoughts and emotions, and those of others. No one should feel compelled to speak or take part if they don't want to.
- **RESPECT CONFIDENTIALITY.** Be considerate of what others may share. It takes huge courage to talk about difficult experiences so be respectful. What is shared in the group should stay in the group unless action needs to be taken (see Group Leader notes.)
- **GET HELP.** Talk to the person responsible for Safeguarding (often called the Safeguarding Lead) or someone else that you trust. There are also many charities or agencies who will be able to help and support.

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\* Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/childabuseextentandnatureenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2019>

## SETTING THE SCENE

**Read:** Criminal record checks, safeguarding policies, training – as one church volunteer said, *“We didn’t have all this in my day – we just trusted each other.”*

‘Safeguarding’ is now a familiar word to most people who work and volunteer in churches and Christian ministry, but it hasn’t always been the case. So what’s changed? Why do we need it now? Why are churches making such a big deal about it?

**Group discussion:** What does the word ‘safeguarding’ mean to you?

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**Personal reflection:** How relevant is safeguarding to my life?

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### WHAT IS SAFEGUARDING?

Safeguarding is all about protecting a person's right to live in safety, free from the fear of harm, abuse, and neglect. It's all the things we do, the actions we take together, which promote the welfare and wellbeing of everyone, and reduce the risk of harm and abuse from happening. It's everyone's responsibility.

It's easy to think that abuse and neglect doesn't happen in our churches. But the sad truth is that it can and does happen. In recent years, thanks to the many brave people who have spoken out about the abuse they have experienced, we are now much more aware of the extent to which abuse has taken place, and the risks we need to be vigilant of.

## PART OF ONE BODY

### Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12–27

1 Corinthians is a letter from Paul to the church he established in Corinth. Paul wrote it around 53–55 AD after receiving reports that the Christian community there was struggling with the challenge of living as a community of faith and facing the reality of what it meant to be church together. Paul uses the image of a body to help them understand how everyone, though different, has an important part to play in being church.

### Discussion questions:

**1. In what ways does the image of the body help us understand what it means to be part of a church together?**

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**2. In verses 22–23 Paul talks about how we treat the parts of the body that are 'weaker' and 'less honorable'. What might this mean in the context of my church community?**

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**3. In verse 25 we read about the need to have equal 'concern' or 'care' for one another. How might we relate this to safeguarding and the church?**

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Within your church you will have people with specific responsibilities for safeguarding who will follow up any concerns. However, when it comes to reducing the risk of harm or abuse happening, none of us should say, *"Because I'm not a... Safeguarding Lead, Church Leader, or Children's/Youth/Adult worker... I don't have a role to play."*

Each of us can play a vital part whatever our role. Each of us can be the eyes and ears for vulnerable people and support those who may be at risk.

## WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

**Thinking about the image of the church as a body, read one or more of the following scenarios and use the discussion questions on the next page to consider how you might respond.**

### Scenario 1

There is a family in the church with two boys (aged 8 and 6 years old). The last couple of weeks, you have noticed that during services, the boys are often running around unsupervised, and you haven't seen their grown-ups around keeping an eye on them. After the service one day, you see them play fighting forcefully with each other resulting in the younger boy crying.

### Scenario 2

There is a woman in her 70s in your congregation. Her partner passed away a couple of years ago and since then her attendance at church is less regular. She has been coming more recently with her son, but she has mentioned that he works weekends and so finds it difficult to always bring her. She has a daughter, but she lives far away and only visits every couple of months. There has been occasion where when speaking to you she has become muddled, and this has made you a little worried.

### Scenario 3

There is a girl who attends your church's children's Sunday club who has autism and lacks awareness of physical space. She regularly goes to sit on laps and cuddle adults in the church who are not part of her family. You've noticed that one of the Sunday Club volunteer helpers seems to give more attention to this child than to other children, often giving her gifts, and appears to have a closer relationship with the girl's family than others in the church. You've heard that the helper regularly babysits and helps out when the family needs it.



**Scenario discussion questions:**

**1. What are your initial thoughts on the scenario?**

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**2. Does this raise any concerns for you at all?**

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**3. Do you think this could potentially be a safeguarding issue?**

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**4. What do you think would be the most appropriate action for you take, if any?**

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**Further discussion:**

Sometimes, knowing what to do in a situation isn't always straightforward. We can worry about doing the wrong thing. The Bible encourages us to talk about any concerns and to speak up when things aren't right (Proverbs 31:8), but it also warns against the dangers of gossip (Proverbs 16:28).

**5. What is the difference between 'gossip' and legitimately sharing concerns? How might these look different in the context of church?**

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## IF ONE PART SUFFERS

**Read** this testimony written by someone who has experienced abuse in the context of church. Use the discussion questions to help you respond.



**Content warning:** This article mentions childhood sexual abuse, which some people may find upsetting. Please take care when reading.

“ A six-year-old girl waves goodbye to her parents and skips into Sunday School for the first time. A few weeks later she staggers in, head hanging low, reluctant to join in. People look and notice, but they don't react.

“He” – the Sunday School teacher, the figure of authority who is so well thought of and respected, but who sexually, physically, and emotionally abuses her on the church premises week in, week out.

“They” – the people of the church, who don't question why he is regularly taking her to a room to be alone. “I wouldn't trust him with my child,” they say. Yet they allow him to run the Junior Church.

The six-year-old grows up being subjected to this abuse on a regular basis. Her childhood is full of fear, confusion, pain, and loneliness. At 18, she escapes the years of torment, and moves away to university, but later in life, is so crippled with shame and guilt, she tries to end her own life.

That six-year-old girl is me, a now 42-year-old teacher and mother. On the surface, I look like I've got it all – a nice house, a loving husband, beautiful children, and a career I'm passionate about, but my demons still haunt me every day.

The lasting effects of the abuse I suffered will never leave me. The flashbacks, the nightmares, the high anxiety, the lack of self-worth, the emotional hurt, the guilt, the shame, the physical pain – they're all there every day. I have weekly therapy, which allows me to function and enjoy the wonderful things in life I've been blessed with.

Have I lost my faith? No. Do I take my children to church? Sadly, I don't. I feel the Church let me down. I'm not angry with the Church, but I do want to know that the Church has moved forward and that everyone within a church community helps to protect children and prevent abuse.

Don't turn a blind eye or assume someone else will act – do something. What would Jesus do? He would have talked, listened, challenged, and stood up for what is right. Reach out and be that voice for that scared six-year-old. ”

**Written by Karen, a survivor from the Methodist Church**

**Testimony discussion questions:**

**1. What are your initial thoughts on hearing this testimony?**

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**2. Would it change how you felt if you knew this had happened in your church?**

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**3. What do you think the people of the church could have done differently in this situation?**

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**4. What actions does my church take, or need to be taking, to ensure a similar situation couldn't happen today?**

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**Read:** 1 Corinthians 12:26.

**5. What do you think this tells us about how we should respond to those who have experienced abuse within the context of church?**

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## GROUP ACTIVITY

In your group, come up with a list of the activities your church does and is involved with.

Think about the people who attend these activities, their ages, abilities, vulnerabilities, needs, and whether they are from within the church or the wider community.

**How many of these activities might your church need to consider having safeguarding arrangements in place for?**

Look at the list of the different types of abuse on page 15.

**Discuss where you think the risks are in your church.**

## CLOSING REFLECTIONS

**“...each one of you is a part of it.” 1 Corinthians 12:27**

Just like the human body, which is made up of many parts all working together, we each have a part to play in helping to create places that are safer for all.

**Personal reflection:** How has your understanding of safeguarding changed from the start of the session?

**Is there anything your church should be doing differently?**

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### Prayer

Dear Lord, Thank you that each one of us is part of the body of Christ. Help us as we seek to show equal care and concern to one another and play our part in making your Church a safer place for everyone.

**Amen.**

# GROUP LEADER NOTES

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**Purpose of the session:** To help people have a greater understanding of safeguarding and to understand that it is everyone's responsibility.

### TIPS FOR GROUP LEADERS:

- Familiarise yourself with the content beforehand.
- Pray before you begin.
- Remember – you don't need to be an expert in safeguarding.
- Keep to time.
- Keep the discussion focused. People might go off on tangents so bring back the focus.
- Feel free to rephrase the questions to your own context.
- Be prepared that this may raise issues – know where to sign-post people for help or advice.
- Don't be afraid of silence.
- Ask for volunteers to read the sections – it's good to hear different voices.
- Encourage participation – ensure no one dominates. Invite people that are quiet to participate eg 'Let's hear from someone who hasn't spoken yet.'
- If running the session online, familiarise yourself with the technology and agree a protocol up front about muting, having cameras on/off etc.
- Set some ground rules – use the consideration points in the guide.
- Ensure everyone has a copy or access to the questions either printed or online.

**A group works best when the group leader keeps the discussion on track, but this leader shouldn't try to be the 'teacher' nor the 'answer giver'. These notes are for reference as the group examines, discusses, and thinks together.**

### Before you begin

Check that everyone has access to the questions and scenarios. You can download these as a Word document at [thirtyoneeight.org/downloads](https://thirtyoneeight.org/downloads). Read through the points to consider together. Ensure everyone in the group knows where and who they can go to for help should they need to.

**Confidentiality:** It's important that people feel the group is a safe space to share and so the importance of respecting confidentiality should be emphasised. However, if you think the safety of a person may be at risk because of any information that is shared, this takes priority over confidentiality. You should explain that if information is shared that gives cause for concern that you may have to pass this on to the appropriate person.

### Setting the scene

Invite the group to share their own individual understandings of what safeguarding means to them. Encourage them to make notes of their thoughts so that they can refer back to these at the end of session and see in what ways their understanding has changed.

### Part of one body

**Q1.** This is important in the context of understanding that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Although your church will have people with specific responsibilities for safeguarding, we each have an important part to play.

**Q2.** Consider what factors might increase a person's vulnerability to risk of harm or abuse. What factors might mean that they can't protect themselves or their own interests, or which could give opportunity for others to neglect, exploit or abuse them? See definitions section.

**Q3.** 'Safeguarding' is often associated with processes and procedures, background checks, training, policies etc. However, at its heart are the Christian values of loving your neighbour as yourself.

## What would you do?

**You could read one or more of the scenarios together as a whole group, or break into smaller groups or pairs to discuss a different scenario each.**

**Action to take:** In all three scenarios the action you should take would be to share any concerns with your Safeguarding Lead. Make sure you know who the Safeguarding Lead person is in your church. Contact details should be clearly displayed on your church premises and website.

### Scenario 1

This could be perceived as physical abuse but could also just be rough play. The main issue here is a lack of appropriate supervision. What is your church's policy on parents supervising children in communal spaces? Although this scenario does not reach a safeguarding threshold, it's important that information is passed along so support can be offered and if any additional concerns arise, then the Safeguarding Lead has a full picture.

### Scenario 2

You should consider your own concerns for the person alongside her right to be involved in any decision that would mean speaking to others, and any support that might be offered. Although this does not reach a safeguarding threshold, it's important that information is passed along so support can be offered and so that if any additional concerns arise then the Safeguarding Lead has a full picture.

### Scenario 3

The girl is potentially vulnerable due to her autism and lack of awareness. The helper could be well-meaning with what they're doing but this needs to be balanced with potential favouritism and boundaries – especially in their role as a volunteer. If you are ever concerned about a volunteer or staff member's conduct, then the Safeguarding Lead needs to be made aware.

### Q5.

Some people may worry that in sharing information they might be going against the Bible's teaching on gossip. They may also think that what they've seen or heard isn't significant enough to be shared with anyone. However, sharing information with the appropriate person is part of our responsibility to care for one another. It is important that information is passed along so support can be offered and that if any additional concerns arise then the Safeguarding Lead has a full picture when considering what action should be taken.



## If one part suffers

Remember to read the **content warning** before you read the testimony and give time for people to consider it before you proceed. Be aware that the content may be shocking or upsetting for some people. Be prepared to pause reading.

This testimony is used with the kind permission of the author who is a member of the Methodist Survivors' Advisory Group. The Methodist Church is striving to improve its response to people who have experienced harm by listening to the voices of victims and survivors of abuse and trauma. You can find out more at [methodist.org.uk/safeguarding/support-for-survivors](http://methodist.org.uk/safeguarding/support-for-survivors).

**Q1.** Often when people think about abuse they tend to think of the physical or emotional impact on the person or persons involved. In this testimony we see some examples of the long-term effects that abuse can have, from anxiety to feelings of suicide, but the spiritual impact is also important to consider. How do people respond to how this person feels about taking her own children to church?

**Q2.** It can sometimes be tempting to think that 'this could never happen here'. We can think that abuse is something that only happens in other churches and not our own. The reality is that harm and abuse can and does happen, we just may never hear about it. If this situation had happened in your own church, how might this change how you feel about it? Would you believe it?

**Q3.** Any church member who had concerns about the Sunday School Teacher's conduct, could have shared them with the Safeguarding Lead or another appropriate person. Having appropriate guidance and a code of conduct for church workers makes it clear what is expected and easier to spot and address any behaviour that might fall outside of this. Teaching and empowering children that it's okay to speak to someone if they have any worries or concerns is also important part of abuse prevention.

**Q4.** This question is to prompt people to think about the preventative safeguarding actions churches could and should be taking to reduce the risk of abuse and harm. This could include things such as criminal record checks, requiring staff to not be on their own with children, training to spot the indicators of abuse etc. It might be helpful for you to familiarise yourself with the arrangements your church has in place so you can share these with the group.

**Q5.** When a person tells someone directly about their experience of abuse, or comes to them for help, this is called making a disclosure. It can take great courage for someone to disclose abuse. When they do, a poor response can often leave people feeling 're-abused', so the need for them to be taken seriously is vital. What could it mean to 'suffer' with those who have 'suffered' abuse in the context of church? Do you know what your own church or denomination's response to survivors and those who have experienced abuse is like?

### Types of abuse

Abuse is a single or repeated act, or lack of action, that happens within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to another person or violates their human or civil rights. It is the misuse of power and control, and can be perpetrated by a wide range of people, including those who are close to the person or those who have no previous connection to them.

**Physical abuse:** Physical abuse is the deliberate use of physical force by one person against another to cause harm.

**Emotional abuse:** Any persistent emotional ill-treatment that causes severe and long-lasting adverse effects on a person's emotional development.

**Neglect:** The failure to meet a person's basic physical or emotional needs which is likely to have a serious negative impact on their health or development.

**Sexual abuse:** Any behaviour perceived to be of a sexual nature which is unwanted or takes place without consent or understanding.

**Domestic abuse:** Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence, or abuse by one person against another where they are or have been intimate partners or family members.

**Financial abuse:** The attempted or actual misappropriation or misuse of a person's money, property, benefits, or other assets, by means of intimidation, coercion, deception, or other ways which the person doesn't or cannot consent to.

**Self-neglect:** When an adult lives in a way that puts their own health, safety or well-being at risk.

**Modern slavery (Human Trafficking):** The recruitment, movement, and holding of a person by improper means, such as force, threat or deception, for the purposes of exploitation or abuse.

**Discriminatory abuse:** When a person is treated unfairly, bullied, or abused because of a particular characteristic.

**Organisational abuse:** When a person is abused or mistreated within an institution such as a care home or hospital, or by an organisation providing care in the person's own home.

**Spiritual abuse:** A form of emotional and psychological abuse which is characterised by a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour in a religious context.



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Thirtyone:eight is the UK's only award-winning independent Christian safeguarding charity which helps individuals, organisations, charities, faith and community groups to protect vulnerable people from abuse. Join us.

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Creating safer places. Together.