

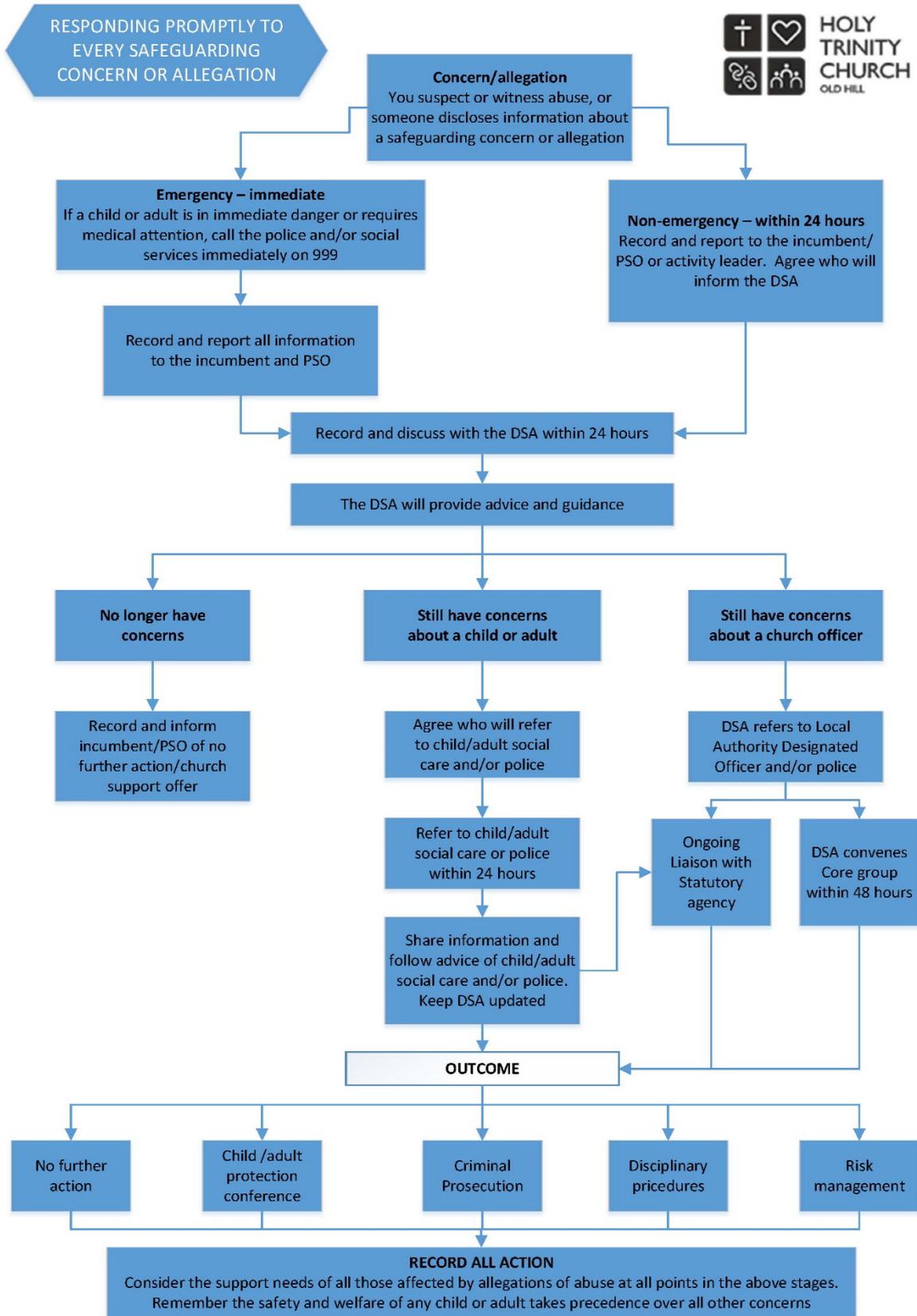
Procedure for dealing with safeguarding allegations or concerns

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This Procedure exactly follows the guidance in Section 7 of the [Parish Safeguarding Handbook](#)

1. Quick Guide



2. What to do if you are concerned about a child or adult and/or you are concerned that a church officer¹ may be abusing a child or adult²

If you have a concern that a child or adult is or may be being abused, or that a church officer is or may be abusing a child or adult³(see sections 3 and 4 for information on types of abuse):

1. Respond well to the victim/survivor, if it is a direct disclosure, to ensure they feel listened to and taken seriously. Explain what will happen next and check out support requirements. They should be informed that their identity and the identity of the respondent⁴ will be shared with key church officers⁵, and may be shared with the statutory agencies⁶, if there is any current risk to children or adults. The concern or allegation should not be shared with anyone other than those who need to know (e.g. the statutory agencies and appropriate church officers – see footnote 5 and section 3).
2. **Emergency:** If you believe a child or adult is in immediate danger of significant or serious harm, contact the emergency services on 999.
3. **Non-emergency:** Contact the Parish Safeguarding Officer or incumbent, in the first instance. They must then contact the DSA. If neither are available, contact the DSA directly⁷. If the concern arises in an activity, discuss with the group/activity leader, who will contact the Parish Safeguarding Officer or incumbent.
4. Any safeguarding concerns must be reported to the DSA within 24 hours.
5. If the PSO/incumbent or the DSA are not available within 24 hours, contact Children’s Social Care or Adult Social Care⁸ and/or the police directly, if the concern is that a child or adult is being abused. Contact the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)⁹ and/or police if the concern is that a church officer may be abusing a child or adult.

Advise the Parish Safeguarding Officer or incumbent as soon as possible that you have made a referral; they will advise the DSA.

If in doubt don’t delay – seek advice from statutory agencies.

¹ A ‘church officer’ is anyone appointed/elected by or on behalf of the Church to a post or role, whether they are ordained or lay, paid or unpaid, for example a priest, church warden, bell-ringer, organist or youth activity leader.

² Please see the [House of Bishops’ Responding to, Assessing and Managing Safeguarding Concerns or Allegations Against Church Officers Practice Guidance 2017](#) for further information.

³ Please note that this includes a concern about a church officer’s behaviour that is not in line with safer working practices as outlined in [section 11](#).

⁴ The person about whom a safeguarding concern or allegation has been made. Sometimes called the ‘subject of concerns or allegations’ or ‘alleged perpetrator’.

⁵ This would normally be a Parish Safeguarding Officer, incumbent, archdeacon and DSA. It may also be an activity leader if the concern arose within an activity.

⁶ This means the Local Authority and/or the police.

⁷ If concerns arise outside of normal office hours, contact the diocesan out-of-hours service.

⁸ Please note that in some areas this is called the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). In some areas this will be for children only; in other areas it will be for both children and adults.

⁹ Please note that the LADO should be the first point of contact. They will then inform the police, as required.

6. Do not contact the respondent¹⁰ or anyone who may be implicated in the allegation or disclosure, even if they would normally be contacted as part of the procedure, until advice has been sought from the DSA or statutory agencies¹¹.
7. Record the details of the concern or allegation. Where it is not appropriate to take notes at the time (usually it will not be), make a written record as soon as possible afterwards or before the end of the day. Record the time, date, location, persons present and how the concern or allegation was received, e.g. by telephone, face-to-face conversation, letter, etc. The record should include details of information provided to that person as well as the information received. Always sign and date the record. Keep it factual. Pass on a copy to the DSA (and/or the PSO/incumbent). The records should be kept secure and confidential (please see Model Parish Recording Template).

If the concern is about a child or adult:

8. The DSA will act in line with the House of Bishops' guidance. They will offer advice, support and guidance and help to make the required referrals. If there is a risk of harm, the concerns must be reported to the statutory agencies within 24 hours of the DSA receiving the concerns. This would be Children's or Adult Social Care and/or the police.

There should be close communication between the DSA and PSO/incumbent until the situation is resolved. The archdeacon should also be informed.

If the concern also involves a church officer:

9. The DSA will act in line with the House of Bishops' guidance. They will offer advice, support and guidance and refer the concerns to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and/or police within 24 hours. The DSA will now take over the management of the safeguarding concern in conjunction with the core group (which will be convened within 48 hours) and statutory agencies. There may also be a requirement for parish representatives to attend a subsequent core group/s. If there are doubts about whether or not to make a referral and under what route, the DSA will seek advice from the LADO.

Please note that the procedure is the same for non-recent abuse¹²

A proper balance must be struck between protecting children and adults, and respecting the rights of the person against whom an allegation is made. In such circumstances the welfare of the child, young person or adult must come first. The rights of the person against whom the allegation is made are important and must be given due weight, once the immediate safety and protection of the child, young person or vulnerable adult have been assured.

3. Guidelines for responding to a person disclosing abuse

Respond

Do:

- Listen.
- Take what is said seriously.
- Only use open questions (open questions begin with words like: who, what, when, where and how. Open questions cannot be answered with a 'yes' or 'no').

¹⁰ The person about whom a safeguarding concern or allegation has been made. Sometimes called the 'subject of concerns or allegations' or 'alleged perpetrator'.

¹¹ This means the Local Authority and/or the police.

¹² This means abuse disclosed by an adult which happened to them in the past, either as a child or as a younger adult; and abuse disclosed by a child which happened to them in the past as a younger child.

- Remain calm.
- Take into account the person's age and level of understanding.
- Check, if face to face, whether they mind you taking notes while they talk so you can make sure you capture the information accurately.
- At the end you can check with them that you have understood everything correctly.
- Offer reassurance that disclosing is the right thing to do.
- Establish only as much information as is needed to be able to tell your activity leader/ Parish Safeguarding Officer/ DSA and statutory authorities what is believed to have happened, when and where.
- Check what the person hopes to happen as a result of the disclosure.
- Tell the child or adult what you are going to do next.

Do not:

- Make promises that cannot be kept (e.g. that you won't share the information).
- Make assumptions or offer alternative explanations.
- Investigate.
- Contact the person about whom allegations have been made.
- Do a physical or medical examination.

Record

- Make some very brief notes at the time, if appropriate, and write them up in detail as soon as possible.
- Do not destroy your original notes in case they are required by the DSA or the statutory authorities.
- Record the date, time, place and actual words used, including any swear words or slang.
- Record facts and observable things, not your interpretations or assumptions.
- Don't speculate or jump to conclusions.

Report

- If there is immediate danger to a child or adult contact the police.
- Otherwise report to your activity leader/Parish Safeguarding Officer/incumbent immediately.
- Within 24 hours the PSO/incumbent reports the concerns to the DSA.
- The DSA will advise regarding reporting to statutory agencies within 24 hours.
- If there is any doubt seek advice from Children's/Adult's Social Care or the police.

4. Non-recent abuse

Safeguarding concerns or allegations may be about something that is going on now and/or something that may happen in the future (recent) or something that happened in the past (non-recent). Non-recent allegations of abuse must be treated as seriously as recent allegations. Research evidences that it may take up to 25 years or longer for an adult to disclose sexual abuse that happened to him/her either as a child or younger adult. A victim/survivor needs to be aware that if a respondent is known to be currently working with children/vulnerable adults in either a paid or voluntary capacity a referral to the statutory services will be made. The DSA will make this referral¹³.

¹³ Please note that any safeguarding concern or allegation made against a church officer who has died must also be reported to the DSA.

5. Domestic abuse¹⁴

The House of Bishops' policy states that *'The Church is committed to those who have been victims and survivors of domestic abuse. Domestic abuse in all its forms is contrary to the will of God and an affront to human dignity. All need to play their part in preventing or halting it'*. The welfare of the adult victim of domestic abuse is important, but where there are children in the family it must be understood that they too are victims of domestic abuse. Consideration of the child's welfare always comes first. In all circumstances, contact the DSA who will help clarify the issues and steps needed, which may involve contacting Children's Social Care. There may be a need for a risk assessment and for a Safeguarding Agreement to be put in place. The DSA will undertake this work in conjunction with the parish church and any statutory agencies.

What do you need to do in a parish?

- PCC to agree a parish domestic abuse statement including who to contact if there are concerns.
- Appoint a named individual who is a point of contact for any advice and support. This may be the Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO).
- Follow the process on how to respond to safeguarding concerns or allegations.
- Support those in leadership positions, pastoral and safeguarding roles to engage in diocesan domestic abuse training.
- Consider the best place to display the domestic abuse statement including information about helplines and local services.
- Discuss domestic abuse in appropriate contexts such as marriage preparation.
- Challenge inappropriate comments and behaviour by church members.

Recommended good practice:

- Encourage leaders and those who preach to speak against domestic abuse in teaching, sermons, prayers and parish magazines – remember that many of the congregation may have personal experience of domestic abuse.
- Offer some awareness-raising activities e.g. invite speakers from local domestic abuse agencies.
- Consider including activities around healthy relationships within activities for children and young people.
- Develop links with local domestic abuse organisations.
- Organise courses in parenting and confidence-building.

6. Ministry of deliverance

Concerns may be expressed that a child, young person or adult is troubled by or possessed by evil spirits or demons and that this may account for behavioural issues in the individual or be considered to justify harsh treatment by the family, guardians, friends or carers. If a church officer, including a member of clergy, becomes aware of the above situation and/or a request is made for deliverance ministry, the parish must contact the DSA who will contact the appropriate person.

¹⁴ For further information please see [House of Bishops' Responding Well to Domestic Abuse Practice Guidance 2017](#).

7. Recording, data protection and information sharing

Opening a church safeguarding case file

Good record keeping is an important part of the safeguarding task. A record, called a case file, should be opened whenever a safeguarding concern or allegation occurs in a church. The record should include key contact details, dates of when the information became known and the nature of the concerns. The record should include ongoing actions with dates, other key documents on the case file (e.g. observation notes, reports, consent forms etc.) and the case closure date. Records should use straightforward language and be concise and accurate so that they can be understood by anyone not familiar with the case. Please see Model Parish Recording Template .

Record retention and security

The safeguarding case files, whether electronic or paper, must be stored securely by the incumbent and the PSO. This should include identifying who should have access to them. Records in relation to safeguarding issues, even if they have not been proven, should be maintained in accordance with the Church's retention guidance. If the incumbent moves from the church, the records should be passed to the new incumbent.

Data protection and information sharing

In May 2018, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 replaced the Data Protection Act 1998. The GDPR contains the principles governing the use of personal data. It should be noted that the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 place greater significance on organisations being accountable and transparent in relation to their use of personal data. Parishes handling personal data need to have the proper arrangements for collecting, storing and sharing information¹⁵.

Personal information in relation to safeguarding will often be sensitive and is likely to be classed as what is called 'special categories of personal data' under the GDPR, which means extra care will need to be taken when handling such data. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware that the Data Protection Act 2018 includes specific reference to processing data in relation to the 'safeguarding of children and individuals at risk' and allows individuals to share, in certain situations, personal data without consent (see below)¹⁶.

'The GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018 do not prevent, or limit, the sharing of information for the purposes of keeping children and young people safe' and this can equally be said to apply to vulnerable adults¹⁷.

Reporting concerns about adults

Referrals of suspected abuse are made to Adult Social Services and the police. Where possible, for a person over 18, this should be done with their written consent.

¹⁵ More information for parishes about the new data protection regime can be found at www.parishresources.org.uk/gdpr

¹⁶ There are also provisions that allow the sharing of personal data without consent for the prevention or detection of unlawful acts or to protect members of the public from dishonesty, malpractice or seriously improper conduct. However, you should always seek legal advice before relying on these provisions.

¹⁷ Information Sharing – Advice is for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers (July 2018).

The starting point is the presumption that an adult can give consent and has the mental capacity to do so. The provisions of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 are complex and questions and concerns about consent and mental capacity should always be discussed with the DSA.

Sharing without consent

Information can be shared legally without consent, if a person is unable to or cannot reasonably be expected to gain consent from the individual concerned, or if to gain consent could place somebody at risk. Relevant personal data can be shared lawfully without consent if it is to keep a child

or vulnerable adult safe from neglect or physical, emotional or mental harm, or if it is protecting their physical, mental or emotional well-being. Never make these decisions on your own. If you are going to share personal data, this should always be discussed with the DSA. Of course, you may be able to share data, at least initially, without identifying the individual concerned both within the church and with the statutory services.

Ultimately, the most important consideration is whether the sharing of information is likely to support the safeguarding of a child, young person or vulnerable adult.

8. Useful links and contacts

Vicar – Nick Gowers - nick.gowers@holytrinity.org.uk

Parish Safeguarding Officer – Rachel Ford– safeguarding@holytrinity.org.uk

Diocesan Safeguarding Team

- [Hilary Higton](#), Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, 07495 060869
- [Delia Stokes](#), Assistant Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, 07376 374380
- [Sarah Booth](#), Assistant Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, 07375078677

If you have concerns about the immediate safety of someone please don't delay in ringing the Police on 999 or Children or Adult Services:

- Dudley Adult and Children's Social Care -0300 555 0055 (out of hours 0300 555 8574)
- Sandwell Adult Social Care - Adult 0121 569 2266 (out of hours 0121 569 2355)
- Sandwell Children's Social Care – 0121 569 3100
- West Midlands Police - 101

Diocesan Support for Parish Safeguarding - <https://www.cofe-worcester.org.uk/safeguarding>

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Subject to review on an annual basis