



The
United
Reformed
Church



They've asked me to be a
**Safeguarding
Coordinator**

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Introduction

This booklet has been written for those who are considering taking up, or have recently taken up, the role of safeguarding coordinator, or deputy, in their local United Reformed Church (URC). It seeks to define safeguarding in the context of Church, as well as setting out the core responsibilities and necessary skills and abilities of safeguarding coordinators.

Please note that the information also applies to churches of the URC that are part of a Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) which use the URC Safeguarding Policy rather than one of the other denominations in the LEP.

What is safeguarding?

Safeguarding refers to both the actions taken to promote the welfare of children/young people and adults, specifically putting preventative measures in place to protect those who are at risk of, or experiencing abuse, harm or neglect; and having effective procedures in place should something go wrong.

The URC's safeguarding policy **Good Practice 5** defines a child as anyone under 18 years of age, and an adult as anyone aged 18 years or over. It recognises that, for certain purposes, Scottish law treats 16- and 17-year olds as adults.

Adults at risk replaces the term 'vulnerable adults' and refers to adults who 'by reason of mental or other disability, age, illness or other situation are permanently, or for the time being, unable to take care of themselves, or to protect themselves against significant harm, abuse or exploitation.'

Safeguarding and the URC

Safeguarding in the United Reformed Church (URC) is underpinned by Jesus' command to 'love one another as I have loved you' (John 13:34-35).

Best practice, and the URC's aim, is that everyone involved in church life – as an expression of the love of God – shares the responsibility of protecting the most vulnerable and upholding the rights of the least powerful.

Although the safeguarding coordinator may be seen as overseeing the church's safeguarding work, all church members and workers should be encouraged always to be vigilant and to play their part by:

- creating and maintaining a safe and inclusive environment for all, especially children and adults at risk, in which the dignity and rights of each person are respected
- acknowledging that the welfare of the child and adult at risk is paramount, and that the priority is always to act in their best interests
- responding without delay to every concern, incident or complaint which suggests that a child or adult has been harmed, or is at risk of harm
- cooperating with ecumenical partners, and the relevant statutory authorities
- challenging any abuse of power, especially where it involves someone in a position of trust
- managing risks and those who might pose a risk to the people and the welfare of the Church.

*'love one another as
I have loved you'*

Taken together these steps will prevent the abuse and neglect of children and adults, and ensure the well-being and pastoral care of those who are or may be at risk.

The need

All United Reformed Churches are required to appoint a safeguarding coordinator for children and adults at risk. (A deputy should also be appointed if possible.) It may not be possible to find one person who is able or willing to take on safeguarding tasks for both the children and adult safeguarding roles.

In this case, separate coordinators could be sought, with deputies if possible. Smaller churches may like to consider appointing one or two coordinators for a group of churches.

These appointments are open to anyone except ministers and their spouses/close relatives. They are also open-ended, although potential candidates may like to discuss a 'fixed-term' appointment of three or five years.

What's involved in the role?

Those appointed to the role of the church safeguarding coordinator (or deputy) are expected to have knowledge of the specific requirements of safeguarding children and adults at risk and be willing to attend appropriate safeguarding training/refresher training every three years organised by the Synod.

The core purposes of the role are:

- to coordinate safeguarding policy and procedures in the local church
- to ensure that the local church's safeguarding policy is fit for purpose and updated annually
- to be the first point of contact for all safeguarding issues in the church
- to offer support to those known to pose a risk to children and adults, including supervision and referral to the appropriate agencies
- to ensure that any allegations, concerns and complaints about abuse or neglect discovered or suspected is recorded, reported and shared safely within and beyond the denomination as appropriate
- to be an advocate for good safeguarding practice in the church
- to ensure safeguarding training and safer recruitment arrangements for relevant volunteers and paid staff are in place – and that those concerned understand why they need to attend training courses
- to refer safeguarding matters to statutory authorities and the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

A sample role description, giving much more detail, is provided [here](#) as an Appendix to *Good Practice 5*.

Key abilities, characteristics and tasks of safeguarding coordinators

- Ability to keep sensitive information confidential – information relating to any alleged abuse/safeguarding incidents in the local church will normally be only shared with a small group – the Synod Safeguarding Officer, the minister or interim moderator, the statutory

agencies to whom a safeguarding referral is being made (such as Children's or Adult Services and/or the police). The Synod Safeguarding Officer should always be informed whenever referrals are made to any statutory agency.

- Calm, consistent, fair, hard to shock – you may be involved with challenging situations concerning people you/the church have long trusted ... you must act appropriately and in line with church policies at all times.
- You must be willing to be easily contactable – and prepared to make your details public to enable anyone to contact you directly at any time. Best practice would be to have a dedicated safeguarding email address (a free one from Gmail or Hotmail would be adequate) accessible only by you, alongside a mobile number. (You might want to think about a safeguarding mobile; a cheap phone and sim, for receiving safeguarding calls. A key advantage of this is that the phone can be passed on to those covering for you when you are away etc.)
- To be wise and have sound judgement – including knowing when to seek advice and from whom.
- Accurate record keeping – when confidential safeguarding information is shared, a record should be made of when it was shared, with whom, in what form, for what purpose and whether it was disclosed with or without informed consent. Similarly, any decision not to share any such information should also be recorded.
- An efficient and organised administrator – among other things safeguarding coordinators are responsible for completing the safeguarding section of the Annual Church Return. For more information on the Annual Church Return, specifically how to complete the safeguarding section, please see Appendix H1 to *Good Practice 5*.
- To advocate effectively – making others in the church aware of all relevant safeguarding policies and procedures.
- To report annually to the Elders and/or Church Meeting and the Synod Safeguarding Officer – anonymising information as appropriate.



Confidentiality and information sharing

While safeguarding coordinators must keep confidences as appropriate, legislation makes it clear that information about a person will sometimes need to be shared without consent for the purpose of safeguarding the welfare of a child or an adult at risk.

In such cases the key consideration is that the information sharing is carried out appropriately and with due regard to proportionality, which means ensuring that whenever information is disclosed a fair balance has been struck between the individual rights of the person and the relevant justification.

The decision-making process must weigh up what might happen if the information is shared, against what might happen if it is not shared. Information sharing should always be limited only to those who have a need to know (see above) and if in doubt, advice should be sought from the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

The appointment

If, having thought and prayed about the role, you decide to say yes, the appointment will be made by the Elders who serve as trustees and have primary responsibility for all aspects of safeguarding in each local church. The process of making the appointment varies from church to church but, however it is done, a key outcome is ensuring that the safeguarding coordinator is known by and has the support and trust of the congregation as a whole.

The time commitment

When there are no incidents and concerns to deal with the time commitment is minimal – obviously when dealing with a safeguarding incident the time spent on the role will increase. Most safeguarding coordinators spend an average of 5-10 hours a month on safeguarding-related work – this includes administration work, attending meetings and/or reporting incidents etc to the synod safeguarding officer or statutory authorities.

January might be busier as data needs to be compiled and submitted to the Synod for the Annual Church Return.

Sources of information and support

There's plenty of information and support available for local church safeguarding coordinators. In addition to regular training, *Good Practice 5* is an invaluable source of information. The URC website has an extensive safeguarding section containing resources, guidance documents and excellent information on all areas of safeguarding children and adults at risk. We strongly recommend that you familiarise yourself with *Good Practice 5*.

Seek to develop a good working relationship with your Synod's Safeguarding Officer ([a full list can be found here](#)) and consider asking for a mentor – perhaps a safeguarding coordinator at a nearby United Reformed church, or the outgoing safeguarding coordinator at your church if appropriate.

And of course, the national safeguarding office at United Reformed Church House in London is there to help and can be contacted at safeguarding@urc.org.uk or on 0207 520 2729.

And finally ...

Please don't be overwhelmed by the scope of the role, or the amount of information to read. Don't forget you've been approached about this role because someone has seen in you the necessary combination of drive, characteristics, experience and abilities needed for 'your' local church.

Speak to the outgoing safeguarding coordinator and/or ask the person/people who approached you for more information on the realities of the role in your local church. And remember, advice and guidance is readily available from those mentioned above; although this is a crucial role it's not meant to be a burden!

Safeguarding people is an important part of the URC's mission. We are called to journey together alongside both those who have been abused and those who have abused; and together we work to ensure the Church is a sustained community of care where everyone – particularly the most vulnerable – find a place of love, pastoral care and support.

This is one in a series of booklets designed to give information to those who have been asked to consider taking on a role in the United Reformed Church.

The booklets can be read and downloaded at www.urc.org.uk/ask



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Written by Gill Nichol, a freelance writer and former Head of Communications of the URC. Designed and produced by the URC Communications Team.

The United Reformed Church, Church House,
86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT
020 7916 2020

www.urc.org.uk

