



The Bridge Church

WELCOMING ALL IN FAITH AND LOVE

SAFEGUARDING POLICY FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS AT RISK

AIM AND PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY

The aim of this policy is to ensure that protecting people from abuse, harm or neglect is central to the culture of the Bridge Church. It provides procedures for promoting safeguarding, preventing abuse and protecting children, adults at risk, volunteers and paid staff. This includes clear procedures for taking appropriate action when safeguarding concerns are raised involving children and adults within the Bridge Church, or those who attend activities and events.

WHO THIS POLICY APPLIES TO

This policy is approved and endorsed by the Elders of the Bridge Church and applies to:

- All members of the Bridge church
- All those who attend the Bridge Church as a place of worship and/or attend events at the Bridge Church
- Minister and Elders of the Bridge Church
- Paid staff (both internal and external e.g. contractors or consultants)
- People who volunteer to run and/or participate in events or groups organised by the Bridge Church
- Organisations and groups which hire the building or part of the building with written agreement to operate under the Bridge Church safeguarding policy.

Uniformed Organisations for children, who use church premises, are subject to their own safeguarding policy and procedures and volunteers attend training as prescribed by those organisations.

DEFINITIONS

The term “children” refers to those under the age of 18 years.

The term “adult at risk” refers to any person aged 18 or over who, by reason of mental or other disability, age, illness or other situation are permanently, or temporarily, unable to take care of themselves, or to protect themselves against significant harm, abuse or exploitation.

DUTY OF CARE AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The Bridge Church has a duty of care to all beneficiaries of the church, whether adults or children. Confidentiality will be maintained, except in circumstances where to do so would place the individual or another individual at risk of harm or abuse.

CREATING A SAFER CULTURE

We are committed to creating a safer culture in our church which will help us to prevent harm from occurring and provide an environment in which all can flourish.

In line with Chapter two of Good Practice 6, we will:

- Appoint a Church Safeguarding Coordinator and ensure contact details are available for anyone to report a concern
- Have a safeguarding policy which is reviewed annually and updated when necessary
- Practice safer recruitment procedures for paid and volunteer roles
- Ensure all those working with children and/or adults at risk are given copies of relevant Codes of Conduct
- Follow the requirements of the training framework
- Comply with legal requirements in respect of data protection
- Complete the Annual Church Safeguarding Return
- Ensure safeguarding is a regular agenda item for church and Elders' meetings.

ENSURING SAFER ACTIVITIES

Whilst it is not possible to guard against every eventuality, we are committed to providing as safe an environment as possible for activities both on and off church premises.

In line with Chapter three of Good Practice 6, we will:

- Ensure appropriate insurance is in place for buildings and activities
- Consider the implications of data protection and health and safety requirements for specific activities
- Carry out risk assessments for relevant activities or events
- Ensure adequate staffing for activities and that leaders have suitable training, are aware of relevant guidance and agree to follow relevant Codes of Conduct
- Ensure the hirer's agreement is in place for other organisations using church premises
- Seek advice from the Synod Safeguarding Officer for complex or sensitive risks.

RECOGNISING AND RESPONDING TO CONCERNS

We acknowledge that, although promoting Safer Culture and Safer Activities will help to protect all those in contact with the church, some concerns will inevitably arise and we are committed to responding well in such circumstances.

In line with Chapter four of Good Practice 6, we will:

- Promote awareness of different kinds of abuse, other vulnerabilities and types of safeguarding concern
- Seek to create a 'listening culture' and help people develop listening skills to respond appropriately in situations where sensitive information is disclosed
- Inform the Synod Safeguarding Officer as a minimum of any situations where involvement from statutory services is/may be required
- Share information with statutory services as appropriate and co-operate with them during any investigations
- Report any serious safeguarding incident to the Charity Commission and notify the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

MANAGING ALLEGATIONS AND PEOPLE WHO MAY POSE A RISK TO OTHERS

Where allegations are made against individuals within the Church, we are committed to following all required investigative and regulatory procedures. We will work in collaboration with the Synod, wider Church staff, statutory agencies and other relevant organisations.

In line with Chapter five of Good Practice 6, we will:

- Co-operate fully with any investigative or disciplinary procedures
- Inform the Synod Safeguarding Officer immediately on becoming aware of anyone in the church who may present a risk to others
- Work with the Synod Safeguarding Officer and contribute relevant information for risk assessments
- Alert the Synod Safeguarding Officer or statutory agencies to known breaches of a safeguarding agreement.

SUPPORTING VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS

The key principle underpinning our policy and practice in this area is that all those who have experienced abuse, whether recently or in the past 'will be listened to and offered the pastoral care and support they deem appropriate and relevant, irrespective of type of abuse, context, or when this occurred' (General Assembly policy statement 2021).

In line with Chapter six of Good Practice 6, we will:

- Recognise that the Elders' meeting has responsibility for provision of pastoral care
- Be aware of local support services that people can be referred or directed to
- Ensure those in relevant roles attend appropriate training
- Seek advice from the Synod Safeguarding Officer about provision of appropriate support
- when necessary.

KEY CONTACTS

The church Safeguarding Coordinator is the person to whom all concerns or allegations relating to children or adults at risk should be addressed:

Name: Alison Anslow

Telephone number: 0113 281 7035/07932 686550

E mail: alison.anslow@aol.com

In the absence of the Safeguarding Coordinator the Deputy Safeguarding Coordinator can be contacted:

Name: Colin Whitaker

Telephone number: 01943 468786/07941 234849

E mail: colin@otleybridgechurch.org.uk

Synod Safeguarding Officer

Name: Carrie Kaunda

Telephone number: 07917 958579

E mail: carriekaunda.yorkshire@urc.org.uk

REVIEW

The Elders will review this policy annually, amending and updating as required and informing Church Meeting that this has been done.

Policy approved	Next review date
Elders' Meeting 9 th February 2025	February 2026

Signed.....on behalf of Church Elders

GUIDANCE

The following is guidance on what to do and how to respond in safeguarding situations at The Bridge Church.

PREVENTING ABUSE

The Bridge Church has appointed a Safeguarding Coordinator (Alison Anslow) and Deputy Safeguarding Coordinator (Colin Whittaker) for safeguarding children and adults.

Activities within the life of the church will be organised in line with the URC's safeguarding policy and guidance to promote a safe environment and healthy relationships, whilst minimising opportunities for harm, misunderstanding or false accusation.

Appropriate records of activities will be kept.

Adequate insurance will be in place.

For each group and one- off event, a risk assessment will be carried out and appropriate and accessible consent forms will be used (for children's activities and activities for people with special needs).

SAFER RECRUITMENT

Our safer recruitment procedures for volunteers leading and participating in regulated church activities, and any paid staff, will include the following:

- Completing an application form
- Completing a self-declaration form
- Being subject to a check through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)
- Supplying names of 2 references (not family members)
- Being subject to an interview
- Adhering to any written contract/agreement and any role description
- Working to a code of conduct

All elders, staff and volunteers will work to any codes of conduct attached to this policy.

We will treat applicants who have a criminal record fairly and not discriminate because of a conviction or other information revealed during an application to volunteer or work in a paid capacity.

If there is an allegation or suspicion that someone within the Bridge Church has harmed children and/or adults, the church Safeguarding Coordinator or Deputy Safeguarding Coordinator, or in their absence, the Synod Safeguarding Officer will be informed within 24 hours. Those involved will cooperate with the Safeguarding Coordinator and the relevant statutory authorities, if applicable, to minimise the risk of harm to children and adults at risk.

When the premises of the Bridge Church are let to external groups or individuals, those hiring the premises should hold and abide by their own safeguarding policy. Or, if the hirer does not have their own safeguarding policy, they must abide by the Bridge Church safeguarding policy, a copy of which should be made available. Each hiring body is required to ensure that children and adults at risk are always protected by taking all reasonable risks to prevent injury, illness, loss or damage occurring.

TYPES OF ABUSE

It is important that all elders, volunteers and staff recognise the possible signs of abuse. Abuse can take many forms, including:

- Physical
- Sexual
- Emotional
- Neglect (including self-neglect)
- Financial (or material)
- Spiritual
- Discriminatory
- Institutional
- Domestic
- On-line
- Modern slavery
- Exploitation
- Radicalisation
- Bullying and harassment

Observing any of the signs or symptoms does not necessarily mean that a person is being abused; there could be a perfectly ordinary explanation. However, the observation of multiple signs and symptoms together with explanations which are inconsistent or do not “ring true” should give more cause for concern.

For comprehensive descriptions of these types of abuse please refer to

<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/S5.pdf>

WHAT TO DO IF THERE IS A DISCLOSURE OR ALLEGATION OF ABUSE

If a child or adult makes a disclosure that they are being abused, or have been abused, it is important that the person being told:

- Stays calm and listens carefully
- Reassures them that they have done the right thing in telling
- Does not investigate or ask leading questions
- Explains that they will need to tell someone else if anyone is at risk of harm, in order to help them

- Does not promise to keep secret what they have been told
- Informs the Bridge Church Safeguarding Coordinator within 24 hours (or in their absence the Deputy Safeguarding Coordinator or Synod Safeguarding Officer)
- Makes a written record of the allegation, disclosure or incident and signs and dates this record. This should be given to the Safeguarding Coordinator and stored securely in a locked filing cabinet

PROCEDURE IN THE EVENT OF A CONCERN OF ABUSE

If there is an immediate threat of harm the Police should be contacted without delay.

Where it is judged there is no immediate threat of harm the following procedure should be followed:

- The concern should be discussed with the church Safeguarding Coordinator or the synod Safeguarding Officer within 24 hours and a decision needs to be made as to whether the concern warrants a referral to statutory authorities. Any referral should be made by the church Safeguarding Coordinator.
- A confidential record should be made of the conversation and the circumstances surrounding it. This record will be kept securely, and a copy passed to statutory authorities if a referral is made.
- The person about whom the allegation is made must not be informed by anyone in the church if it is judged that to do so could place a child or adult at further risk. If the statutory authorities are involved they should be consulted beforehand.
- The Synod Safeguarding Officer should be kept informed of any serious concerns and any referrals to police and statutory authorities. If someone in the church is alleged or known to harm/have harmed children or adults, the Synod Safeguarding Officer must always be informed so that they can offer advice and support.
- If the concern is not referred to statutory authorities the church Safeguarding Coordinator should discuss with the Synod Safeguarding Officer the most appropriate way to proceed and act accordingly.
- At no time should church members attempt to investigate a concern of abuse or in any way act without the express knowledge and agreement of the church Safeguarding Coordinator, other than in the case of an immediate threat of harm to an individual or individuals.
- Depending on the seriousness of incidents or allegations, a report to the Charity Commission will also need to be considered as they deem “serious incidents” to require notification. A decision to report to the Charity Commission should be taken by the church officers and church Safeguarding Coordinator in consultation with the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

TRAINING

Safeguarding training will be provided, and all volunteers and paid staff will be expected to take up training opportunities offered by the Synod. The Safeguarding Coordinator should ensure that all people involved in regulated activities with children or adults have undergone training as recommended by the URC.