

Session Summary:

The session was led by Julie Edwards - Safeguarding and Training Officer for the Interdenominational Safeguarding Panel and the designated safeguarding officer for [three denominations](#). The importance of creating a healthy culture within the church was emphasised including transparency, learning lessons from the past and never ignoring or hiding concerns. The session covered the churches safeguarding policy and procedures, including safer recruitment of volunteers, principles of good practice, signs and indicators of abuse and neglect and, how to [respond to concerns](#) including [responding well to survivors/victims](#). Safeguarding can be a difficult subject for some people, and it was noted that further [support is available](#). We looked at the importance of being able to recognise signs of abuse and neglect among children and vulnerable adults as there are many barriers for an individual to disclose abuse themselves. Church volunteers have a crucial role in safeguarding and are well-placed to notice changes in individuals due to their close relationships within the community. It is important to never promise to keep abuse a secret never to investigate or discuss matters with the accused.

IT WAS EMPHASISED THAT WE SHOULD NEVER HESITATE TO ASK FOR HELP.

Next steps...

How many of the boxes below can you tick?

- ☐ Have you looked at the [safeguarding handbook](#) and the [training information booklet](#)?
- ☐ Have you completed the [e-learning course](#) recommended by Social Care Wales?
- ☐ Have you familiarised yourself with the relevant good practice sections in the manual or booklet creating a safer church? Have you reviewed the signs and symptoms of abuse? For children this is [section 3](#) of the handbook and [section 4](#) for adults or the yellow pages in the middle of the course booklet.
- ☐ Is the [safeguarding policy statement](#) displayed in your church?
- ☐ Has your Church conducted a safeguarding self-assessment using the checklist [Appendix 10](#)
- ☐ Do you know how to [report any safeguarding concerns](#) to the Panel office
- ☐ How about encouraging your Church to participate in [Safeguarding Sunday](#) in November or any other Sunday to raise awareness of safeguarding ?

Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups: We looked at the definitions of safeguarding, recognising signs and symptoms of abuse, and providing safe activities and appropriate care. The last decade has seen a shift from child protection policies to a broader approach to safeguarding that involves vulnerable adults and includes preventive action and good practice. We discussed the definition of vulnerability, with factors such as past trauma, disability, age, dementia, lack of capacity, poor organisational practices, and issues when carers are unable to protect children or adults in their care. We looked at the formal definitions of a child and a vulnerable adult (Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.)

Safeguarding in Churches: Safeguarding in Churches: We looked at some factors that create a safer church, including a named [safeguarding coordinator](#) and [trustee](#), transparency, openness, and prevention. We stressed the importance of good practice, including risk assessments, appropriate consent forms, and ensuring that volunteers have undergone DBS checks. Local church volunteers need to work as a team to ensure activities are as safe as possible including developing clear guidelines for the activity and when communicating with children and young people online. The Panel can assist with [risk assessments](#) and other safeguarding support and advice.

Safeguarding Policy: [The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Handbook](#) is the church's safeguarding policy and procedures. It includes sections on safer recruitment, children and young people, vulnerable adults, and pastoral care as well as additional resources and information in the appendices and forms. We focussed briefly on the importance of safer recruitment, stressing that it's not just about DBS checks but also about asking the right questions and conducting thorough background checks to make sure that we have done all we can to ensure that the most vulnerable people in our churches are in safe hands. The Panel has produced resources to help with this process including forms and a code of conduct for volunteers ([appendix 2a](#)) and guidelines for safe working practices ([appendix 2](#)).

Recognising Signs of Abuse and Neglect and How to Respond: The second half of the session focussed on recognising signs of abuse. It is crucial sometimes **think the unthinkable** and move beyond the assumption that abuse is by strangers, not someone known to us. An abuser could be anyone and most commonly a perpetrator is someone known to the victim, including family members, friends, or authority figures. Abuse can take various forms, including physical, sexual, emotional, financial, and institutional abuse there are also [subcategories of abuse](#). Neglect is the most common form of abuse and involves an ongoing failure to meet a person's basic needs. We need to be vigilant and proactive in identifying and addressing potential abusive situations, and to seek support from the Panel or the [out of hours service by thirtyone eight](#) when needed. [This flow chart](#) gives step by step guidance on how to respond to concerns.