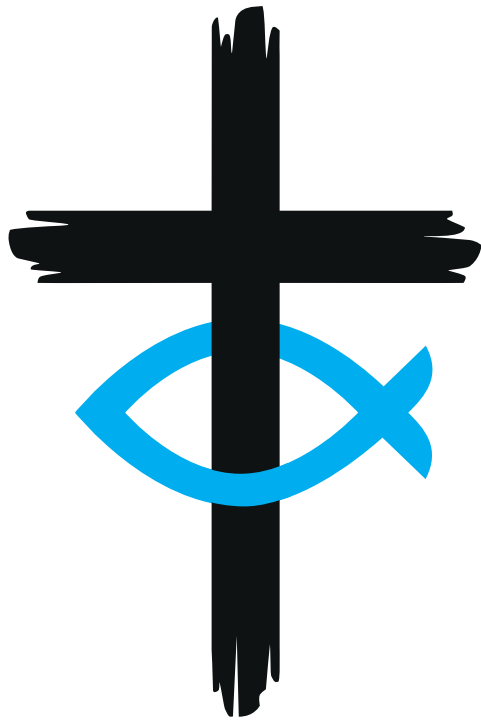




The
**United
Reformed
Church**

Synod and Synod Trust Safeguarding policy

This is a template which can be adapted to suit specific local requirements.

1. Aims and purpose of this policy

The aim of this policy is to promote and highlight safeguarding, prevent abuse, provide support to the survivors of abuse and protect all vulnerable people (both children and adults) at Synod level, and in the work the Synod carries out for local churches. This ensures that we have clear procedures for taking appropriate action following the raising of safeguarding concerns involving children or adults within our Synod, or those who attend our activities and events. It also ensures that there is an understanding within the Synod and its local churches of safeguarding issues and to seek assurance that appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place within its local churches.

Safeguarding is integral to the mission of the United Reformed Church and a part of its response and witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ. Safeguarding is underpinned by Jesus' command to his followers to 'love one another as I have loved you' (John 13:34-35). Because Jesus' ministry is continued in and through the Church, it is our call to 'to live out, in joyful and sacrificial service to all ... that ministry of caring, forgiving and healing love which Jesus Christ brought to all whom he met' (The Manual A11). As such, we, the

Synod of the URC, aspire to be a loving community, offering a welcoming environment in which people can flourish, safe from harm.

The policy should be read in line with the URC's Good Practice Guidance and resources which can be found [here](#).

2. Who this policy applies to

This policy applies to both the Synod and to the URC Trust Ltd. Where the term 'Synod' is used within this policy, it refers also to the Synod Trust. It is therefore relevant to Synod trustees, paid Synod staff, volunteers and those who supervise them. It is also helpful as guidance to local churches within the Synod, as it clarifies the relationship between churches and the Synod relating to safeguarding, as well as the responsibility that the Synod has to both support and monitor the safeguarding practice within local churches.

3. Definitions

Synod is the regional administrative grouping of United Reformed Churches across the region. There are 12 churches in this grouping. A small team of staff support the functioning and ministry of these churches.

URC Trust Ltd is a Charitable Trust and accountable Synod body. It oversees financial governance and probity of the Synod, employs Synod staff and ensures that the Synod is complying with Charity Law and carrying out its responsibilities appropriately and in the public interest. Safeguarding is an important aspect of these responsibilities.

Children includes anyone aged under 18 years. The Children Act 2004 (section 11) places a duty on a range of organisations to have in place arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Details of the arrangements required are set out in Chapter 2 of 'Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children' (HM Government 2023) and this includes specific reference to the need for faith-based organisations to have procedures in place.

Adults at risk includes any adult of any age, who may be vulnerable due to a permanent or temporary illness or disability, or who have been made vulnerable by their circumstances which include domestic abuse and discrimination. Statutory guidance describes adults at risk who need safeguarding as those who:

- have needs for care and support (whether or not the local authority is meeting any of those needs) and
- are experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect: and
- as a result of those care and support needs are unable to protect themselves from either the risk of, or the experience of abuse or neglect.

4. Statement of safeguarding principles

Safeguarding is taken seriously by Synod and Trust.
We believe that children and adults have a right to live in a way that does not cause them harm or impede their human rights and we support the URC's denominational Safeguarding Statement which can be found [here](#).

We therefore acknowledge their right to protection from abuse regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or beliefs. We will follow legislation, statutory guidance and recognised good practice. We believe that domestic abuse in all its forms is unacceptable and inconsistent with a Christian way of living.

Within the Synod we will:

- encourage good practice in safeguarding in local churches within the Synod.
- seek to establish a caring environment in which there is an informed vigilance about the dangers of abuse.
- appoint a Synod Safeguarding Officer (SSO) to advise churches and Synod, whilst recognising that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.
- organise Synod activities in such a way as to promote a safe environment and minimise the risk of harm to children and adults.
- follow a safer recruitment process for the selection and appointment of people to work with children or adults at risk, whether voluntary or paid, lay or ordained.
- provide appropriate support and supervision, resources and training, to those who work with children and adults.
- use rigorous and careful supervision to protect people from the risks associated with known offenders within the Synod.

All concerns and allegations of abuse will be responded to appropriately, including referring to the Police and Social Care if necessary, either Adult or Children's. We will co-operate with the Police, Children's and Adult's Services in any investigation, will follow multi agency decisions and will maintain confidentiality of any investigations to those directly involved.

All concerns or allegations concerning

Synod activities, staff or volunteers should be addressed to one of the Synod

Safeguarding personnel:

Synod Safeguarding Officer:

Name:

Contact phone number:

Email address:

Deputy – if applicable:

Name:

Contact phone number:

Email address:

5. Duty of care and confidentiality

We have a duty of care to beneficiaries of the Synod, either adults or children. We will maintain confidentiality except in circumstances where to do so would place the individual or another individual at risk of harm.

6. Promoting and monitoring safeguarding in local churches

General Assembly 2021 passed resolutions to make additions to the structure which included:

Functions of Synod:

- a) to appoint a Synod Safeguarding Officer or equivalent.
- b) to have oversight of, and to support, monitor and report safeguarding related activities and issues within local churches, and amongst ministers, officers and staff of the Synod.
- c) to take all necessary powers and actions positively to promote implementation of good practice in accordance with the safeguarding policy statement adopted by the General Assembly.
- d) to adopt best safeguarding practice for all its own activities and events.

Addition to rules of procedure for Synod:

- a) to appoint a Synod Safeguarding Officer with the necessary experience, qualifications and current knowledge.
- b) to arrange for safeguarding training as appropriate.
- c) to collate church safeguarding returns and forward them to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

The Synod Safeguarding Officer (SSO) and

will be available to offer advice and support to local churches on safeguarding matters.

The Synod will also have a Safeguarding Reference Group made up of

or

Where those who may present a risk to others are identified within local churches, the Synod Safeguarding Officer will work with the church to draw up an appropriate agreement with all relevant parties, following Good Practice Guidance.

Synod will encourage all local churches to adopt and implement good practice policies for safeguarding children and adults, in line with the latest edition of the United Reformed Church's good practice guidelines. The rationale for

encouraging all churches to do this is as follows:

- Churches actively working with children or adults should do this in order to safeguard the vulnerable, reassure parents / carers and partner organisations, and protect leaders from false allegations.
- Churches not currently working with children should still be prepared with a policy so that they are ready as and when children get involved in the church.
- In order to keep up the reputation of
Synod and United Reformed Church as a whole, and therefore its member churches,
Synod is a body which takes
safeguarding seriously and is seen to do so.
- To implement relevant General Assembly Resolutions.

Synod will offer and publicise safeguarding

training opportunities to those in local churches who work with children or adults around the Synod, encouraging them to undertake safeguarding training every three years. Ministers will complete safeguarding training every three years to at least Intermediate level. All training will be in line with URC training matrix which can be found here: urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/S2.pdf

Safeguarding good practice in local churches and the Synod will be monitored. This will be overseen by the Synod Safeguarding Officer and reported to the Synod Executive and Synod Trust meetings. Churches will be asked to complete an Annual Church Safeguarding Return. Once the returns have been collated, an annual safeguarding review meeting will take place with
and/or a report provided to the Trust and/or
to consider the findings and
agree what action needs to be taken.

7. Preventing abuse and harm in Synod events and activities

Activities will be organised in accordance with URC good practice guidelines so as promote a safe environment and healthy relationships whilst minimising opportunities for harm and misunderstanding or false accusation. For each event, risk assessments will be carried out, appropriate consent forms will be used for activities with children and young people, appropriate records will be kept (see URC Record Keeping policy for further details, available from Synod office), and adequate insurance will be in place for each event.

We are committed to safer recruitment and appointment of all paid staff and volunteers and will ensure that these procedures are followed, which include:

- asking applicants to complete an application form
- providing workers with role/job descriptions and person specifications
- obtaining Disclosure and Barring checks where legally entitled to do so
- taking up two references (not family) and
- interviewing candidates.

Training in safeguarding will be provided and volunteers and paid staff will be given support related to safeguarding in their role by the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

All trustees, paid staff and volunteers will agree to work within a Code of Conduct (see *Good Practice 6*) and understand that there may be action taken if this code is not followed, possibly involving suspension or termination of working/volunteering with us.

Synod staff and volunteers communicating with children and young people online (eg through social media or use of video calls) as part of Synod initiatives (such as Synod Youth Exec) should comply with the guidelines set out in *Good Practice 6*.

8. Recognising and responding to concerns of abuse

What are we protecting from?

The definitions of abuse differ between children and adults. A copy of the definitions relating to children and adults can be found in *Good Practice 6*.

How to recognise abuse

It is important to be aware of possible signs and symptoms of abuse. A list of such possible signs and symptoms in relation to children and in adults can be found in *Good Practice 6*. Some signs could be indicators of a number of different categories.

It is essential to note that these are only indicators of possible abuse. There may be other, innocent, reasons for any of these signs and/or behaviour. They will, however, be a guide to assist in assessing whether abuse of one form or another is a possible explanation for a child or adult's behaviour or appearance.

What to do if a worker notices indicators of possible abuse?

If indicators of possible abuse give cause for concern, then the worker should inform the person responsible for safeguarding at the event as soon as possible. This is often the leader in charge of an event. Alternatively inform the Synod Safeguarding Officer directly. **Do not discuss with anybody else.**

Make a **written** record of the allegation, disclosure or incident and **sign and date** this record and pass this onto the person responsible for safeguarding at the event, who will liaise with the Synod Safeguarding personnel to decide what action needs to be taken. There is a proforma in the resources of *Good Practice 6*. Any such records will be stored securely on the URC's case management system.

If any of the Synod safeguarding personnel are implicated in the allegation, refer to the Synod Moderator. In the case of the Synod Moderator being implicated, refer to the General Secretary of the URC at Church House.

What to do if there is a disclosure or allegation of abuse

If a child or an adult makes a disclosure that they are being abused and/or an allegation of abuse against someone, it is important that the person being told:

- stays calm and listens carefully
- reassures them that they have done the right thing in telling you
- does not investigate or ask leading questions
- does not promise to keep secret what they have been told
- explains that they will need to tell someone else.

Inform the person responsible for safeguarding at the event as soon as possible. This is often the leader in charge of an event. Alternatively inform the Synod Safeguarding Officer directly. **Do not discuss with anybody else.**

Make a **written** record of the allegation, disclosure or incident and **sign and date** this record and pass this onto the person responsible for safeguarding at the event, who will liaise with the

Synod safeguarding personnel to decide what action needs to be taken. Resource F1 from *Good Practice 6* provides a template for recording concerns. Any such records will be stored securely on the URC's case management system.

If any of the Synod safeguarding personnel are implicated in the allegation, refer to the Synod Moderator. In the case of the Synod Moderator being implicated, refer to the General Secretary of the URC at Church House.

Procedure in the event of a concern

If there is an immediate threat of harm, the police should be contacted.

Where it is judged that there is no immediate threat of harm the following will occur:

- The concern will be discussed with the Synod Safeguarding Officer and a decision made as to whether the concern warrants a referral to statutory agencies.
- A confidential record will be made of the observations and/or conversation and the surrounding circumstances. This record will be kept securely in a locked filing cabinet at the Synod Office. A copy will be passed to statutory agencies if a referral is made.
- The person about whom the allegation has been made must not be informed by anyone in the Synod if it is judged that to do so would place a child or adult at increased risk of further harm.

Who to contact in the case of a concern

Synod Safeguarding Officer

Name:

Contact phone number:

Email:

The Synod Safeguarding Officer will refer concerns to the Adult and/or Children's Social Care Department of the relevant local authority depending on the particulars of each case.

If someone working on behalf of the Synod (paid or volunteer) is alleged or known to have harmed children or adults

The Synod Safeguarding Officer will contact the Local Authority Designated Officer/Designated Person [delete or amend as appropriate depending on local terminology]. A decision will be taken about when to inform the member of staff or volunteer. The timing and method will be discussed and agreed with the LADO/DP and the Synod should follow this decision.

The Synod Safeguarding Officer will inform the Moderator, relevant Synod staff and the safeguarding coordinator of the local church to which that person belongs and advise on the implications for that person's involvement with children or adults at risk in the local church and in Synod activities, both during any investigation and following the outcome of any investigation. Information will be shared on a strictly 'need to know' basis.

In accordance with the law, a referral will be made to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) if the church withdraws permission for an individual to engage in Regulated Activity OR would have done so had that individual not resigned, retired, been made redundant or been transferred to a position which did not involve Regulated Activity because the employer believes that the individual has engaged in relevant conduct or satisfied the harm test or has committed an offence that would lead to automatic inclusion on a barred list.

As a registered charity, the Synod is required to notify the Charity Commission of any safeguarding serious incidents.

Sources of advice, guidance, and support to Synod

United Reformed Church Safeguarding Team:

Tel. 0207 520 2729

Email: **safeguarding@urc.org.uk**

9. Complaints

Should anyone have any concerns or complaints about safeguarding in Synod, please contact the Synod Moderator:

Name:

Synod Office:

Telephone:

Email:

It would be preferable to have complaints in writing, as this avoids any possible misunderstanding about what the issue is. However, whether verbal or in writing, complaints will be acted upon.

10. Review

This policy should be reviewed annually by the Synod* amending and updating it as required in the light of such changes as: Synod safeguarding personnel and contact details; changes to URC Good Practice guidance; changes to statutory safeguarding requirements; changes to procedure arising from review of safeguarding cases.

Date of most recent review:

Date of next review:

Signed: _____ (on behalf of Synod)

Role:

** Add details, depending on specific Synod arrangements eg reference group, Executive or Trust*

Safeguarding Office, The United Reformed Church, 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT