



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 Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) that use the URC Safeguarding Policy rather than that of another denomination in the LEP.

What is safeguarding?

Safeguarding refers to both:

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

The URC's safeguarding guidance **Good Practice 6** 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' 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. In Scotland, the term 'protected adult' refers to a person aged 16 or over who is at risk of harm and unable to safeguard their own wellbeing.

Safeguarding and the United Reformed Church

Safeguarding in the 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 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 should be encouraged to play their part by:

- creating and maintaining a safe and inclusive environment for all, in which the dignity and rights of each person are respected
- acknowledging that the welfare of children and adults 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
- challenging any abuse of power, especially where it involves someone in a position of trust

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

These steps will help prevent the abuse and neglect of children and adults, and ensure the wellbeing 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.) If it is not possible to find one person who is able to take on both the children and adult roles, 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/be willing to learn about requirements for safeguarding children and adults at risk, and to attend appropriate safeguarding training/refresher training every three years.

The core purposes of the role are to:

- coordinate safeguarding policy and procedures in the local church
- be the first point of contact for all safeguarding issues in the church
- ensure that any safeguarding concerns are responded to promptly and recorded properly
- refer safeguarding matters to the Synod Safeguarding Officer (SSO) and statutory authorities when necessary
- ensure staff and volunteers are safely recruited
- be a verifier for DBS/Disclosure Scotland checks
- promote safeguarding training and keep records of training attendance
- work with the SSO to ensure appropriate arrangements are in place for those who may pose a risk to others in the church
- ensure safeguarding is a regular agenda item for church and Elders' meetings
- complete the annual church safeguarding return

A sample role description is provided in Resource S1 of [Good Practice 6](#).

Key requirements

To take up the role you would need to:

- be safely recruited and complete an enhanced DBS check
- be willing for your contact details to be stored on the URC database
- undertake foundation and intermediate safeguarding training (specific training for safeguarding coordinators is also available)
- be easily contactable: you will need a dedicated safeguarding email address which only you can access. It is also advisable to have a specific phone number for receiving safeguarding calls. These details will need to be publicly available (e.g. in the church building and on the church website) so that people know how to contact you

Key abilities, characteristics and tasks

The role requires a range of qualities and skills including:

- the 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)
- being 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
- wisdom and 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
- efficient and organised administration – among other things, safeguarding coordinators are responsible for completing the safeguarding section of the Annual Church Return and keeping records of training
- being an advocate for good safeguarding practice in the church and making others aware of all relevant policies and procedures.
- willing and able to work with ecumenical partners, statutory services and other agencies

More details on these key tasks and what is expected can be found in [**Good Practice 6.**](#)

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.

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, 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 6* 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 6*.

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 URC, 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.

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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