

Section 3

Promoting safer practice – adults at risk

The following guidance relates specifically to adult at risk (formerly referred to as vulnerable adults) and is in addition to the “*Promoting safer practice in parishes and ministry areas*” referred to in Section 1.

The Church in Wales seeks to provide a safe, inclusive community for all who wish to take part in the life of the church and create an environment which helps them to grow spiritually and cares responsibly for them. An adult can become an “adult at risk” at any time in their life and is not necessarily permanent.

An adult at risk is a person over 18 years of age who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness and who is or may be unable to take care of himself or herself, or unable to protect himself or herself against significant harm or serious exploitation. A person may also become at risk due to a permanent or temporary reduction in their physical, mental or emotional capacity brought about by life events, for example bereavement or previous abuse or trauma. A full definition of the term adult at risk is given in the glossary. (Annex 5)

Through ministry and contact with adults at risk in many settings the Church in Wales has a particular responsibility to ensure that all people are treated with dignity and respect and to be alert to signs of abuse and poor care.

This policy statement and the good practice guidelines are designed for all members of the church who have some responsibility for the pastoral care of others. It is intended to help the church community understand the needs of adults at risk to help improve pastoral care.

Principles of good practice

All those working with adults at risk should:

- ensure they are familiar with the Church in Wales’ safeguarding policy;
- set an example they would wish others to follow;
- always respect the person and all their abilities and treat each person with dignity and respect;
- not make assumptions, for example, ask someone if they are happy for their first name to be used or if they would prefer to be addressed using a title and surname;
- be respectful when visiting people, taking care to knock before entering a building or a room and being conscious of length of visits. Lone visits are discouraged however when lone visits are made, the visitor should always inform someone else of their whereabouts and visits should not be undertaken at night unless it is an emergency;
- work to respect and uphold the rights of all regardless of their ethnicity, gender, sexuality, impairment or disability, age, religion or cultural background;
- remember that an adult at risk is still an adult and must never be treated like a child. The choices that an individual makes should be recognised even if they appear risky and they must never be forced or coerced to participate in an activity. It is important to ensure that the choices offered to individuals are fully understood by them;
- empower adults at risk to safeguard themselves. They should be listened to, believed, given relevant advice and information and always involved in decisions that affect them as far as it possible;

- provide help in such a way as to maximize a person's independence. People with additional needs can and do lead active and fulfilled lives but some may need support and resources to do so. Respect their independence and do not encourage the person to become dependent on you;
- not partake in pastoral care which is beyond an individual's responsibility and/or competence;
- decline to deal with an individual's financial affairs unless legally required to do so;
- not accept material or financial gifts. If it would upset or offend someone for the gift to be refused then the cleric or a Provincial Safeguarding Officer should be informed as soon as possible. This will avoid any accusation or confusion later;
- be mindful of the language used, tone of voice, and body language. Positive and appropriate language should be used at all times and if necessary, advice should be sought when the person has specific communication needs;
- use touch appropriately and respect an individual's boundaries. Touch can be a way of communicating affection, warmth and comfort. It should be appropriate and generally initiated by the adult and related to their needs;
- be mindful of the safety of adults at risk but also of your own safety and protect yourself from allegations of inappropriate behaviour. Behaviour should be open, transparent and accountable. Be aware that however well-intentioned someone's actions are, they may be misinterpreted by others;
- accord adults at risk the highest level of privacy and confidentiality possible in the circumstances however promises to keep secrets should not be made. Offering appropriate care and support is important so, in listening to a person's problem or offering advice, care should be taken in selecting an appropriate location and setting for such a discussion. Where possible, other leaders should be made aware of the meeting and other people should be around. Avoid situations within a relationship of trust which could compromise that relationship;
- ensure social media is used with care;
- never trivialise abuse or dismiss worries. Allegations and concerns about abuse must be taken seriously. Careful notes should be written of what has been seen or heard and it should be reported straight away. Recognise, record, report;
- never be afraid to ask for help and advice from your leaders or more experienced staff. The Provincial Safeguarding Officers are available to give consultation and advice.

Participating in Activities

The consent of the individual should be sought before undertaking activities with them. This will usually be verbal consent.

Organisations have a responsibility to assess the risk involved in the activities that are provided. A risk assessment template works as a checklist to make sure the possible problems and risks in an activity have been considered, and help to plan appropriate steps or actions. An informal check before the start of an activity may be sufficient but for organised group activities it is usually good practice to complete a written risk assessment.

If possible, each church led group activity should include someone who has a First Aid qualification.

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