

Section 5

Safety and safeguarding specific to ministry

The best interests and welfare of the child, young person or adult at risk should always be at the heart of ministry and it should be exercised in a way that protects and safeguards their wellbeing. This section sits alongside guidance in the rest of this document and should be applied in conjunction with it. This section deals only with safeguarding issues within ministry. For matters relating to clerical guidance, disciplinary procedures or other human resources issues the relevant policies should be consulted.

Ministry is not a matter of procedures and rules, rather it is about clergy and lay pastoral visitors working together with all those who come into contact with the church to create and promote a safe environment that promotes wellbeing and helps all to grow in their Christian faith. The relationship between a person undertaking any form of ministry and those they are ministering to is therefore one of trust. It exists within religious and spiritual boundaries and this confers a particular duty of care to ensure that it remains safe. When that trust is abused the damage that is done to individuals, congregations and to the church community as a whole is devastating. This specific guidance sits alongside and should be applied in conjunction with the safeguarding procedures set out in this policy.

When working with children and adults at risk, particular care must be taken to ensure that relationships are safely managed and trust is never abused. The responsibility for this lies with the minister who is in a position of authority.

Ministry of prayer with children, young people and adults at risk

Praying for people is at the heart of a Christian's life. However, it can also be identified as a particular ministry within the church, for example during a corporate act of worship (even if this is done on a one to one basis) or within the pastoral care offered by a church or parish. At all times due regard for the protection and care of all those involved in this ministry should be paramount. When prayer with children, young people or adults at risk, is offered as part of this ministry only those who are authorised by the church should be involved, and the necessary DBS checks should be in place.

Individual counselling

Counselling should be offered only by those who are trained and authorised to work as counsellors. Counselling should be part of a wider pastoral care being offered, where appropriate, in consultation with medical advisors.

Personal relationships

Particular care must be exercised when ministering to people with whom the church worker has a close personal relationship. Ministers/clerics should be aware of the dependency in pastoral and professional relationships and seek advice or supervision when these concerns arise. Ministers/clerics should avoid behaviour that could give the impression of inappropriate special relationships. If there are any concerns about the nature of the feelings for a child, young person or adult at risk shown by or to a church worker then these should be discussed with a Provincial Safeguarding Officer.

Ministry of deliverance

All reasonable steps should be taken to ensure the safety of the person receiving deliverance ministry. It should be done with regard to the Church in Wales' safeguarding policies and best practice for children, young people and adults at risk. People have a right to know what is being provided and how they will be ministered to. Enquiries and cases should be referred to the diocesan deliverance ministry advisors. The advisors' special expertise should be used in order to help as effectively as possible but can only be administered with the knowledge and authority of the Diocesan Bishop.

Seal of the confessional

This ministry can only be exercised by bishops and priests. Any concerns or allegations of a safeguarding nature raised in the seal of confessional should be raised with the safeguarding team. The Church in Wales Professional Ministerial Guidelines paragraphs 7.3 and 7.4 state:

“Where abuse of children or vulnerable adults is admitted in the context of confession, the priest should urge the person to report his or her behaviour to the police or social services, and should also make this a condition of absolution, or withhold absolution until this evidence of repentance has been demonstrated.

If a penitent's behaviour gravely threatens his or her own well-being or that of others, particularly children or vulnerable adults, the priest should insist upon action on the penitent's part. It should be noted that at law there is no absolute duty of confidentiality.

A Court or the police may require disclosure. In exceptional circumstances there may also be an over-riding duty to break confidence, especially where the safety of children, or of vulnerable adults, is involved, or, more rarely, where the well-being of the person who is sharing confidence is at risk.

Should a priest believe that there is a possibility that such information will be disclosed, it should be made clear to the penitent in advance, that such disclosure may be necessary.”

Survivors of past abuse

Priests and those offering pastoral support in the church may find themselves hearing disclosures of abuse that happened to that person when they were a child.

There is no definitive correct procedure for dealing with a disclosure of previous abuse by an adult. The wishes of the person disclosing abuse will be very important. For some adults, just being able to talk to a trusted person about the experiences can be a powerful healing event.

However people who have committed sexual abuse against someone years ago could well be abusing children today. The individual survivor should be encouraged and supported to report the matter to the police if this has not already been done and the matter should be discussed with a Provincial Safeguarding Officer.

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