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**Children and Youth Ministry
Policies Handbook**

May 2025

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Safeguarding Team at Village Church South Belfast

The Purpose of the Safeguarding Team

To help us protect and care well for the children, young people and vulnerable in our care. To support the elders and leaders in their care of the people within Village Church South Belfast and its visitors. We will do so by establishing good practices which consider how best to keep everyone safe.

The most basic purpose of the Safeguarding Team is to provide a platform for concerns to be raised and to discern whether any safeguarding disclosure it receives should be passed on to other safeguarding bodies. It is its role to discern whether or not to pass on information to authorities. It is also its role to discern whether or not to pass on information to supportive services, but this requires consent.

Roles and Responsibilities within the Safeguarding Team

Lead Safeguarding Officer: Tim Anderson - safeguarding@villagesouthbelfast.com

Deputy Safeguarding Officer: Lauren Young - lauren@villagesouthbelfast.com

Lead Safeguarding Trustee: Andrew Elder - andrew@villagesouthbelfast.com

Thirtyone:Eight safeguarding helpline: 0303 003 1111

All of the team members commit to undergoing Child Protection training to Designated Officer level and to refreshing that training every three years.

The Safeguarding Team takes seriously our responsibility to implement good practice in the processing and sharing of sensitive information. We are committed to the following:

- Providing an accessible system for dealing with disclosures.
- Keeping the information received regarding concerns within the safeguarding team. Sharing of any information outside of the team will not be considered unless we have first obtained consent.

In general, information that is shared with any member of the Safeguarding Team will first be considered by the Designated Safeguarding Lead. If it is thought necessary to share that information with the Broader team then they will do so, employing the principle of paramountcy (that the child's best interest and welfare is the first and paramount consideration) at every stage. In the sharing of information with the Safeguarding Team we will employ the following principles:

- It is important that Safeguarding Team members do not unnecessarily

share sensitive information pertaining to disclosures. The principle of paramouncy applies.

- In some instances it may be best to present a version of the information to the wider Safeguarding Team (e.g., what was the issue, what was the decision made, how does it affect the organisation?).

Please note that consent is **not** required for us to share information with the authorities when the concern is deemed to be a Child Protection issue. It is the role of the Designated Safeguarding Officer to pass this information on.

Members of the Safeguarding Team are not beyond scrutiny or accountability and Safeguarding Team members are committed to good practice of the sharing of information within the team itself. We are committed to sharing any information we receive sensitively, making the wellbeing and safety of those concerned our criteria for our decision making.

The Scope of the Safeguarding Team within Village Church South Belfast

The Safeguarding Team has been established to help protect the welfare of children in our care. There is legal responsibility for organisations like ours to abide by best practice and to provide evidence of our endeavours to keep children safe.

It is our aim to go beyond our legal duties to protect all those in our care and as such we have established an Adult Safeguarding policy and Pastoral Care Policy.

Safeguarding Policy for Children and Young People

This policy applies to all staff and volunteers working with children and young people on behalf of Village Church South Belfast.

The purpose of this policy:

- To protect children and young people who attend Village Church South Belfast. This includes the children of adults who attend;
- To provide staff and volunteers with the overarching principles that guide our approach to safeguarding and child protection

Village Church South Belfast believes that a child/young person should never experience abuse of any kind. Types of abuse are outlined in appendix 1. We have a responsibility to promote the welfare of all children and young people and to keep them safe. We are committed to practise in a way that protects them.

This policy booklet should be available to all team members so that they have access to the Church's policies on the following:

- Volunteer codes of conduct
- Dealing with disclosures and concerns about a child or young person
- Managing allegations against staff and volunteers
- AccessNI checks
- Child protection

We recognise that:

- The welfare of the child is paramount;
- All children have a right to equal protection from all types of harm or abuse;
- Some children are additionally vulnerable because of the impact of previous experiences, their level of dependency, communication needs or other issues;
- Working in partnership with children, young people, their parents, carers, and other agencies is essential in promoting young people's welfare.

We will seek to keep children and young people safe by:

- Valuing them, listening to and respecting them;
- Appointing a Safeguarding Team for children and young people
- Adopting child protection and safeguarding practices through procedures and a code of conduct for staff and volunteers;
- Providing effective coordination for volunteers through support and training;
- Recruiting staff and volunteers safely, ensuring necessary background checks are made;
- Recording and storing information professionally and securely, and sharing information about safeguarding and good practice with children, their families, and volunteers via leaflets, posters and one-to-one discussions;
- Using our safeguarding procedures to share concerns and relevant information with agencies who need to know, and involving children, young people, parents, families and carers appropriately;

- Using our safeguarding pathway to manage any allegations against staff or volunteers appropriately;
- Creating and maintaining an anti-bullying environment and ensuring that we have a policy and procedure to help us deal effectively with any bullying that arises;
- Ensuring that we provide a safe physical environment for our children, young people, staff and volunteers, by applying health and safety measures in accordance with the law and regulatory guidance.

We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice annually. This policy was last reviewed: May 2025

Reviewed by: Lauren Young (Director of Operations)

Volunteer Induction and Foundational Child Protection Training Policy

Induction

New volunteers will be provided with the following:

- Induction and training relevant to the ministry they are involved in;
- Access to the child protection policy, procedures and safeguarding pathway, including reference to relevant legislation and organisational policies and procedures for safeguarding;
- Information and training about basic child protection awareness;
- Contact information about the Safeguarding Team within Village Church South Belfast and guidance on how/when to contact them;
- The behaviour code for staff/volunteers;
- Information about any further training he/she is expected to take.

A record should be kept that these areas have been covered. They should sign to confirm that they have read and understood the child protection/safeguarding policy and their responsibilities towards keeping children safe from harm.

Foundational Child Protection Training

Support and learning opportunities on the basics of child protection awareness, in addition to information about Village Church South Belfast's policies and procedures, is essential for new Children's Ministry team members. Our aim is to provide annual child protection awareness training. This will include information on:

- Understanding what children and young people want and need to feel safe;
- Understand different ways children can be harmed (by adults, other children and young people, through the internet);
- Different types of abuse;
- Recognizing signs, indicators and symptoms;
- How child abuse happens;
- Why some children are more vulnerable;
- Key child protection agencies and their roles;
- A brief summary of the laws around child abuse and child protection;
- The process to follow if you suspect child abuse (when and how to refer a concern, who to consult, what to do if you are unsatisfied with the response to your concerns – from either Village Church South Belfast or other

organisations/agencies);

- Emergency action procedures to protect a child;
- Understanding multi-agency working, other agencies' roles and responsibilities in safeguarding children.

We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice annually. This policy
was last reviewed: May 2025

Reviewed by: Lauren Young (Director of Operations)

Behaviour Policy for Adults in Children's and Youth Ministry

This behaviour policy outlines the conduct we expect of all our volunteers. This includes anyone who is subcontracted to undertake specific duties. The behaviour code aims to help us protect children and young people from abuse and also reduce the possibility of unfounded allegations being made.

Roles and Responsibilities of Children's and Youth Ministry Team Members

When working with or for children and young people, you are acting in a position of trust. You are likely to be seen as a role model and must act appropriately.

The Responsibility of our Team Members:

You are responsible for:

- Prioritising the welfare of children and young people;
- Providing a safe environment for children and young people, including, but not limited to;
 - Ensuring equipment is used safely and for its intended purpose,
 - Having good awareness of issues to do with safeguarding and child protection and taking action when appropriate;
- Keeping up to date with, understanding and upholding all of the policies and procedures within this booklet
- Staying within the law at all times;
- Modelling good behaviour for children and young people to follow;
- Challenging unacceptable behaviour by reporting any breaches of the behaviour code to a member of the Safeguarding Team;
- Reporting all allegations/suspicions of abuse following our safeguarding pathway;
 - This includes abusive behaviour being displayed by an adult or child and directed at anybody of any age.
- Teaching, or supporting the teaching of, careful, biblically accurate bible stories/lessons. These must always follow the content given by church staff and children must always be given the opportunity to ask questions
- Show and foster an environment of respect for differences in opinions, allowing for discussion while clearly stating what the bible says

The Rights of Children Under our Care:

In order to uphold the rights of children under the care of Village Church South Belfast, you should:

- Treat children and young people fairly and without prejudice or discrimination;
- Understand that children and young people are individuals with individual

needs;

- Be respectful of differences in gender, sexual orientation, culture, race, ethnicity, disability and religious belief systems between yourself and others, and appreciate that all participants bring something valuable and different to the group;
- Challenge discrimination and prejudice;
- Listen to and respect children at all times, valuing and taking their contributions seriously;
- Encourage young people and adults to speak out about attitudes or behaviour that makes them uncomfortable.

Maintaining Healthy Relationships with Children and Young People:

Team Members should:

- Promote relationships that are based on openness, honesty, trust and respect;
- Avoid favouritism;
- Be patient with others;
- Use special caution when you are discussing sensitive issues with children or young people;
- Ensure your contact with children and young people is appropriate and relevant to the work of the project you are involved in;
- Ensure that whenever possible, there is more than one adult present during activities with children and young people
 - If this isn't possible, ensure that you are within sight or hearing of other adults
 - If a child specifically asks for or needs some private time with you, ensure other staff or volunteers know where you and the child are (we expect that this would be rare, and would be limited to older children eg in mentoring scenarios)
- Only provide personal care where it is clearly in the interest of the child's physical health and wellbeing, having made every attempt to contact the parent/guardian, and make sure there is more than one adult present.
- Respect a young person's right to personal privacy as far as possible
 - In some cases, it may be necessary to break confidentiality in order to follow child protection procedures
 - If this is the case it is important to explain this to the child or young person at the earliest opportunity.

Unacceptable behaviour

When working with children and young people, you must not:

- Allow concerns or allegations to go unreported;
- Take unnecessary risks;
- Smoke, consume alcohol or use illegal substances;
- Develop inappropriate relationships with children and young people;
- Make promises to children and young people;
- Engage in behaviour that is in any way abusive
 - This includes having any form of sexual contact with a child or young person;
 - Abiding by the restrictions set out in the E-safety policy in further detail below;
- Act in a way that can be perceived as threatening or intrusive;
- Patronise or belittle children and young people;
- Make sarcastic, insensitive, derogatory or sexually suggestive comments or gestures to or in front of children and young people.

You should always follow this code of behaviour. If you have behaved inappropriately you will be subject to our disciplinary procedures. Depending on the seriousness of the situation, you may be asked to leave Village Church South Belfast. We may also make a referral to statutory agencies such as the police and/or the local authority children's social care department.

We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice annually. This policy was last reviewed: May 2025

Reviewed by: Lauren Young (Director of Operations)

Adult to Child Ratios Policy

Age range of children	Maximum number of children per adult
0-2 years	One adult to three children
2-3 years	One adult to four children
4-8 years	One adult to six children
9-12 years	One adult to eight children
13-18 years	One adult to ten children

In any group there should be at least two supervising adults present. If the group of children is mixed gender, the supervising staff should also, where possible, include both male and female workers.

These guidelines are minimum requirements only. We may need more workers than the minimum to ensure safety and must regularly consider the specific needs of the children in Village Church South Belfast. We should also take into account the activities they are going to be doing and the environment where these activities take place.¹

In situations where parents and carers are in attendance, you need to be clear, both in your own mind and with them as to whether:

- They are there to be responsible for their own children but not for any of the other children in the group
- They are there as adult helpers/volunteers working with all the children in the group.

Parents or carers that are to be responsible for children other than their own are, in effect, volunteers and they can be included in the number of supervising adults. They will need appropriate support, briefing and training for this and if they take on the role on a regular basis, they will need to be AccessNI checked.

Any parents/carers that are responsible for their own children only cannot be counted as volunteers. You can, however, take their children out of the equation for the purpose of calculating the number of supervising adults needed.

¹i.e. If some children have specific support needs, if there are behavioural issues in the group, or if there are additional risks associated with planned activities.

We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice annually. This policy

was last reviewed: May 2025

Reviewed by: Lauren Young (Director of Operations)

E-Safety Policy when working with Children and Young People

Purpose of policy

- To protect children and young people who use Village Church South Belfast's services and who make use of mobile phones/devices and the internet as part of their involvement with us;
- To provide staff and volunteers with the overarching principles that guide our approach to e-safety;
- To ensure that, as an organisation, we operate in line with our values and within the law in terms of how we use information technology (IT) and behave online.

We recognise that:

- The welfare of the children we come into contact with is paramount and should govern our approach to use and management of electronic communications and online behaviour;
- All children have the right to equal protection from all types of harm or abuse;
- Working in partnership with children, young people, their parents/carers and other agencies is essential in promoting their welfare and in helping them to be responsible in their approach to e-safety;
- The use of IT is an essential part of our lives; it is involved in how we gather and store information, as well as how we communicate with each other. While beneficial to all, including children and young people, it can present challenges in terms of how we use it responsibly and, if misused either by an adult or young person, may lead to harm to them.

We will seek to keep children and young people safe by:

- Providing clear and specific directions to volunteers on how to behave online and the appropriate use of IT;
- Using our procedures to deal firmly, fairly and decisively with any examples of inappropriate IT use and online behaviour, whether by an adult or child/young person (e.g. downloading or creating indecent images of children, cyberbullying, use of IT to groom a child or perpetrate abuse);
- Inform parents of incidents of concern as appropriate;
- Encourage young people in the safe use of social media
- Reviewing and updating the security of our information systems regularly;
- Ensuring that the personal information of staff, volunteers and children/young people (including names) are not published on our website/social media platforms;
- Ensuring that images of children, young people and families are used only

after their written permission has been obtained, and only for the purpose for which consent has been given;

- Risk assessing in advance any social media tools used in the course of our work with children, young people, and families; this assessment to be carried out by the member of staff wishing to use them;
- Examining and risk assessing any emerging technologies before they are used within the organisation.
- Ensuring all staff and volunteers involved with youth ministry have read and agree to the Social Media Policy

We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice annually. This policy was last reviewed: May 2025

Reviewed by: Lauren Young (Director of Operations)

Child Protection Policy

Child Protection in Northern Ireland - use of services:

In each of the procedures/ scenarios covered in pages 19-32, outside services may be brought in. The following paragraphs outline the possible use and outcomes of outside services.

Referrals and Investigations

A referral is a request from a member of the public or a professional to the Gateway Services team or the police to intervene to support or protect a child. When reports about a child are referred, the police or the Gateway Services team will first assess if the child is at immediate risk of danger.

Helping children in immediate danger

When a child's in immediate danger, the following action can be taken through the courts:

Excluding a named individual

Articles 57A and 63A of The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 give a court the power to exclude a named individual suspected of abuse from a child's home.

Emergency protection order, child assessment order or supervision order

Social services can get an emergency protection order, child assessment order, interim care order or supervision order to remove and / or protect the child. The NSPCC also has powers as an authorised person² to apply for these orders.

Removal by police

The police are also able to remove the child in an emergency, but this is only done in exceptional circumstances.

²In England, Wales and Northern Ireland the NSPCC has statutory powers to intervene on behalf of children. Only local authorities and the NSPCC can apply to a court for a care, supervision, or child assessment order. They refer to this as having 'authorized person status' because in law they are described as an 'authorized person' to bring such proceedings. They have had statutory powers to intervene on behalf of children for more than a century. These were most recently re-affirmed by the Children Act 1989 in England and Wales and the Children (NI) Order 1995 in Northern Ireland. Legal definitions: Section 49 of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

Assessing the risk of harm

When the Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) Gateway Service receives a referral about a child, they will carry out an initial assessment within 10 working days using all the available information to decide if further action is required. As part of the process, practitioners must consider whether the [Joint Protocol \(PDF\)](#) should be implemented. The Joint Protocol is a framework for joint investigative working between the police and social workers. Where there are allegations of abuse and neglect, or a crime is suspected, the referral must be reported to the police (PSNI) and a strategy discussion must take place within 24 hours to decide how to proceed. The strategy discussion may involve a range of professionals working with the family. The purpose of the discussion is to ensure an early exchange of information and to clarify what action needs to be taken jointly by the PSNI and the HSCT and what they will take forward separately.

What is significant harm and how is it determined

"Harm" is the "ill treatment or the impairment of the health or development of the child". It is determined "significant" by "comparing a child's health and development with what might be reasonably expected of a similar child".

Although there are no absolute criteria for determining whether or not harm is "significant", local authorities such as social services, police, education and health agencies work with family members to assess the child, and a decision is made based on their professional judgement using the gathered evidence.³

After a referral is investigated and assessed

After these initial enquires, a number of things can happen:

- **No further child protection action**

- o If the child hasn't been harmed and isn't considered to be at risk of significant harm, it may be decided that there doesn't need to be any further child protection action. The child and their family may be offered additional support, such as a parenting programme, instead.
- o The NSPCC provide [a number of services](#) which local authorities can refer children and families to.

- **Designated as a child in need**

- o If it's decided that the child is in need of further support from social services, they will officially become a child in need.⁴

³ Legal definitions for NI: Articles 2 and 50 of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995

⁴ Local authorities have a duty to "safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are in need". A

child is defined as being 'in need' if: 1) s/he is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him/her of services by a local authority under this Part; 2) his/her health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for him/her of such services;

3) or s/he is disabled" See: **Section 17 of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995**

- **Given a pathway assessment**
 - If a child is identified as needing additional social work support, a pathway assessment will give an in-depth assessment of their needs.
- **Only limited intervention is needed**
 - It may be decided that best support is short time-limited intervention.
This will be provided by the gateway service.

Procedure for Children at Possible Risk of Abuse

Purpose and aims of this procedure

We aim to ensure that children attending Village Church South Belfast, and any other children who come to our attention, receive the protection and support they need if they are at risk of abuse. Types of abuse are outlined in appendix 1. This procedure provides clear directions to staff and volunteers if they have concerns that a child is in need of protection.

Respond, Record, Report

Staff and volunteers will follow the '3 Rs' when abuse is suspected.

Respond - respond appropriately to the child making the disclosure, as outlined below

Record - record the disclosure on the written record form or the online form outlined below

Report - inform a member of the safeguarding team immediately.

Ways that abuse might be brought to your attention

- A child might make a direct disclosure about him/herself
- A child might make a direct disclosure about another child
- A child might offer information that is worrying but not a direct disclosure
- A volunteer might be concerned about a child's appearance or behaviour or about the behaviour of a parent or carer towards a child
- A parent or carer might make a disclosure about abuse that a child is suffering or at risk of suffering
- A parent might offer information that is worrying but not a direct disclosure
- A church member or attender might make a disclosure or bring up a concern about a child or their guardian

For more information on recognising the signs of child abuse, see the NSPCC document "[Definitions and signs of child abuse](#)"

Talking to a child who has told you that he/she or another child is being abused

The NSPCC Outlines the three main ways to respond during disclosures

Show you care, help them open up:

Give your full attention to the child or young person and keep your body language open and encouraging. Be compassionate, be understanding and reassure them their feelings are important. Phrases such as 'you've shown such courage today' help.

Take your time, slow down:

Respect pauses and don't interrupt the child – let them go at their own pace. Recognise and respond to their body language. And remember that it may take several conversations for them to share what's happened to them.

Show you understand, reflect back:

Make it clear you're interested in what the child is telling you. Reflect back what they've said to check your understanding – and use their language to show it's their experience.

Other principles:

- Never quiz the child or ask leading questions:
 - Examples of leading questions are 'did someone hit you?' when observing a bruise, or 'did mummy/daddy shout at you?' when presented with a child who is upset
 - Keep questions open (and lighthearted, where appropriate) eg 'Wow, big bruise! You must be very brave! What happened?', or 'would you like to tell me why you're sad?'
- Reassure the child that they have done the right thing by telling someone about it
- Tell him/her that you now have to do what you can to keep him/her (or the child who is the subject of the allegation) safe.
- Let the child know what you are going to do next and who else needs to know about it.
- Ask the child what he/she would like to happen as a result of what he/she has said, but don't make or infer promises you cannot keep
- Give the child the ChildLine number (08001111)
- Immediately record the interaction on the online safeguarding concerns form, or on the physical form (available in the hallway towards the kids classrooms) and tell or hand to the Designated Officer
- In discussion with the Designated Officer, fill in the remainder of the physical form, or if using the online form, fill in 'Written Record Form: Child Protection Concerns Follow Up' form

Helping a child in immediate danger or in need of emergency medical attention

- If a child is in immediate danger and is with you, remain with them and call the police
 - If the child is elsewhere, contact the police and explain the situation to them
 - If the child needs emergency medical attention, call an ambulance and, while you are waiting for it to arrive, get help from your first aider.
 - If the first aider is not available, use any first aid knowledge you have to help the child.
 - You also need to contact your team leader or the DSO to let them know what is happening.
 - Once the danger is eliminated, or immediate responsibility has been given over to emergency services, record the incident on the online safeguarding concerns form or on the physical form (available in all kids ministry rooms) and hand to the Designated Officer
 - In discussion with the Designated Officer, fill in the remainder of the physical form, or if using the online form, fill in 'Written Record Form: Child Protection Concerns Follow Up' form

A decision will need to be made about who should inform the child's family and

Gateway Services, and when they should be informed. If the police and/or the health services have been involved, they should be part of this decision. At all times in the decision-making process the welfare of the child should be paramount.

Issues that will need to be taken into account are:

- The child's wishes and feelings
- The parents' right to know (unless this would place the child or someone else in danger, or would interfere with the criminal investigation)
- The impact of telling/not telling the parent
- The current assessment of the risk to the child and the source of that risk
- Any risk management plans that currently exist.

Once any immediate danger or emergency medical need has been dealt with, follow the steps set out in the flowchart below.

Keeping a record of your concerns

Use the written record form available in all kids' ministry rooms or the online form <https://villagesouth.churchcenter.com/people/forms/612598> to document the concern and how it is dealt with. The relevant sections of the form should be completed and signed at each stage of the procedure. It can be used to forward information to Gateway Services if a referral to them is needed. The form should be signed and dated by all those involved in its completion and kept confidentially on the child's file. The name of the person making the notes should be written alongside each entry. Any additional pages used should be clearly labelled, signed and dated.

Pathway for Reporting Concerns

Individual has concerns about the safety or welfare of a child, or a disclosure is made



Individual records concern using **Written Record Form: Child Protection Concerns** either online via the website or on a physical copy found in all kids' ministry rooms, and alerts a Designated Officer



Designated Officer discusses with individual (and rest of safeguarding team if necessary)



Concern is discussed with child's family (as long as it doesn't pose a risk to the child or the family).



If the Safeguarding Team is still concerned about the child, concern is discussed with the Social Care Department or NSPCC. Child's identity and family remains anonymous. These agencies advise on whether they are concerned or not concerned.

Concerned



Named person referred to Social Care departments and confirmed in writing within 48 hours.

Not Concerned



No further child protection action required. Safeguarding Team decide whether pastoral care is required, this requires the consent of the person who raised the concern and of the family involved.



Designated Officer and reporting individual fill in **Written Record Form: Child Protection Concerns Follow Up** form.

ANYONE CAN CALL ThirtyOne:Eight AT ANY TIME FOR CONFIDENTIAL ADVICE, OR IF YOU ARE UNSATISFIED WITH THE RESPONSE OF THE SAFEGUARDING TEAM

Dealing with Allegations Against Employees/Volunteers

The aims of this procedure are:

- To ensure that children attending Village Church South Belfast, and any other children who may come to our attention, are protected and supported following an allegation that they may have been abused by an adult from within Village Church South Belfast.
- To ensure that there is a fair, consistent and robust response to any allegations made, so that the risk posed to the other children by an abusive individual is managed effectively
- To facilitate an appropriate level of investigation into allegations, whether they are said to have taken place recently, at any time the person in question has been employed by/volunteered with Village Church South Belfast, or prior to the person's involvement with Village Church South Belfast.
- To ensure that Village Church South Belfast continues to fulfil its responsibilities towards members of staff and volunteers who may be subject to such investigations
- To ensure that individuals are able to continue in their role if they have been at the centre of allegations that are unfounded or deemed to be malicious in origin.

This procedure applies to:

- Any member of staff or volunteer to whom an allegation of abuse has been made, that involves another member of staff or volunteer.
- Anyone in a managerial position, including the designated safeguarding officer (DSO), who may be required to deal with such allegations and manage investigations that result from them.

Note: For information on different types of abuse, see the NSPCC document [Definitions and Signs of Abuse](#).

Allegations of abuse against employees/ volunteers - immediate response

1) *Is the child in immediate danger or does she/he need emergency medical attention?*

- a. If a child is in immediate danger and is with you, remain with them and call the police
- b. If the child is elsewhere, contact the police and explain the situation to them
- c. If the child needs emergency medical attention, call an ambulance and, while you are waiting for it to arrive, get help from your first aider.
- d. If the first aider is not available, use any first aid knowledge you have to help the child. You also need to contact your team leader or the named child protection/safeguarding officer to let them know what is happening.
- e. The team leader should also inform the child's family if the child is in need of emergency medical attention and arrange to meet them at the hospital.

2) *Is the person at the centre of the allegation working with children now?*

- a. Discuss immediately with a Designated Officer. If the allegation is against a Designated Officer, discuss with an alternative DO
- b. The Designated Officer should then, in a sensitive manner, remove the staff member involved in the allegation from direct contact with children.
- c. It should be explained to the person, in private, that a complaint has been made against them, although details of the complaint should not be given at this stage. Inform them that further information will be provided as soon as possible, but until consultation has taken place with the relevant agencies and within the organisation, they will not be working with children.
- d. The information provided at this stage needs to be very limited because discussions with other agencies, such as Gateway Services or the police, must happen first.

3. Reporting

- Once the danger is eliminated, or immediate responsibility has been given over to emergency services, record the incident on the online safeguarding concerns form or on the physical form (available in all kids ministry rooms) and hand to a Designated Officer
- IF THE ALLEGATION IS AGAINST A DESIGNATED OFFICER OR VILLAGE STAFF MEMBER, USE A PHYSICAL COPY OF THE FORM AND HAND TO AN ALTERNATIVE OFFICER. THIS WILL PREVENT THE ACCUSED PERSON ACCESSING THE FORM.
- In discussion with a Designated Officer, fill in the remainder of the physical form, or if using the online form, fill in 'Written Record Form: Child Protection Concerns Follow Up' form

Conducting an investigation

Once any urgent necessary steps have been taken, attention can be given to the full implications of the investigation. There are several lines of enquiry when an allegation is made:

- A police investigation of a possible criminal offence
- Enquiries and an assessment by Gateway Services about whether a child is in need of protection
- Village Church South Belfast will consider whether the volunteer can continue in their role and, if so what steps should be taken to manage possible risks

ANYONE CAN CALL THE NSPCC AT ANY TIME FOR CONFIDENTIAL ADVICE, OR IF YOU ARE UNSATISFIED WITH THE RESPONSE OF THE SAFEGUARDING TEAM

Reporting an allegation or concern

Allegations by children or family members, or concerning behaviour observed by other volunteers should be reported immediately to a member of the Core Safeguarding Team. As long as it doesn't put the child at risk to do so, this will then be shared confidentially within the Core Safeguarding Team.

If a volunteer has received an allegation or observed something of concern about their team leader, the volunteer should report the allegation/concern to a member of the Core Safeguarding Team. If the person who is the subject of concern is one of the Safeguarding Team Members, the matter should be reported to an alternative Safeguarding Team member. All members of the team are committed to sharing information sensitively and to employing the principle of paramountcy in making decisions about information sharing. Concerns can also be raised directly with the police or Gateway team using the information provided in this document.

Issues that will need to be considered are:

- The child's wishes and feelings
- The parents' right to know (unless this would place the child or someone else in danger, or would interfere with the criminal investigation)
- The impact of telling/not telling the parent
- The current assessment of the risk to the child and the source of that risk
- Any risk management plans that currently exist.

Once any immediate danger/emergency medical needs are dealt with, follow the steps set out in the safeguarding pathway.

Keeping a record of the investigation

All those involved in dealing with the allegation should keep clear notes of the allegations made, how they were followed up, and any actions and decisions taken, together with the reasons for these.

These notes should be compiled gradually as the situation unfolds, with each entry being made as soon as possible after the event it describes. The notes should be signed and dated by the recorder, and their name printed.

The notes should be kept confidentially on the file of the person who is the subject of the allegation. Discussion should take place with Gateway Services to determine whether any aspects of the notes may not be shared with the person concerned. If there are no reasons not to do so, a copy of the records should be given to the individual.

The notes should be held on file for a 10-year period, whether or not the person remains with Village Church South Belfast for this period. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse actually advised that such notes be kept indefinitely.

Dealing with Allegations Against Another Child/Young Person

The aims of this procedure are:

- To ensure that children attending Village Church South Belfast, and any other children who may come to our attention, are protected and supported following an allegation that they may have been abused by another child or young person involved with Village Church South Belfast.
- To ensure that there is a fair, consistent and robust response to any allegations made, so that the risk posed to the other children by the child/young person in question is managed effectively.
- To facilitate an appropriate level of investigation into allegations, whether they relate to recent alleged activity, said to have taken place during the time that the child/young person in question has involved with Village Church South Belfast, or whether they relate to abuse which allegedly took place prior to the child's/young person's involvement with Village Church South Belfast.
- To ensure that Village Church South Belfast continues to fulfil its responsibilities towards children and young people who may be subject to such investigations and are in need of support.
- To ensure that there is an appropriate response in situations where allegations are unfounded or deemed to be malicious in origin.

This procedure applies to:

- Any member of staff or volunteer to whom an allegation of abuse has been made, that suggests that another child or young person is responsible.
- Anyone in a managerial position, including the designated safeguarding officer, who may be required to deal with such allegations and manage investigations and care plans that result from them.

AT ALL TIMES IN SITUATIONS WHERE THERE IS AN ALLEGATION AGAINST A CHILD/YOUNG PERSON, IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT BOTH THE VICTIM AND THE ALLEGED ABUSER ARE CARED FOR AND SUPPORTED.

Ways that allegations might be made against another child/young person involved with Village Church South Belfast

- A child or parent/carer might make a direct allegation against another child/young person
- A child or parent/carer might express discomfort with the behaviour of another child or young person that falls short of a specific allegation
- Another child or volunteer may directly observe behaviour from one child/young person towards another that gives cause for concern.
- The group may be informed by parents/the police/another statutory authority that a child or young person is the subject of an investigation.
- A child or young person may volunteer information to the organisation that they have harmed another child or are at risk of doing so or have committed an offence against or related to a child.

Child protection or bullying?

Deciding whether behaviour constitutes bullying, or a child protection concern is the responsibility of the Safeguarding Team, in consultation with the team leaders responsible for the child and, if necessary, Gateway Services.

If it is deemed bullying, and both children attend Village Church South Belfast, it should be dealt with under the anti-bullying policy and procedure.

If it is behaviour that could be described as child abuse and has led to the victim suffering significant harm, then it must be dealt with under child protection procedures. This includes all incidents of sexual assault and all but the most minor incidents of physical assault.

Checklist to inform decision-making:

Bullying

- The difference of power between the bully and person being bullied is relatively small.
- The bullying behaviour may be from a number of children/young people acting in a group rather than from one child acting alone.
- It may also, but not necessarily, be directed towards a group of other children rather than an individual child.
- The behaviour involves teasing, excluding a child from games and conversations, pressurising other children not to be friends with someone, spreading hurtful rumours or circulating hurtful photographs/ drawings (NB this does NOT include sexual images- these must be dealt with as a child protection concern), cyberbullying, shouting at or verbally abusing someone, stealing, making threats, or harassment on the basis of race, gender, sexuality or disability.
- The behaviour has not previously been a concern and the bully or bullies may have been responding to group pressure.
- The behaviour is perceived as bullying by the victim.

Child protection concerns

- The difference of power between the child who is abusing, and the person being abused is significant, e.g. there is an age difference of more than 2 years, there is a significant difference in terms of size or level of ability, the abuser holds a position of power (such as being a helper, volunteer, or informal leader) or the victim is significantly more vulnerable than the other child or young person
- The behaviour involves sexual assault or physical assaults (other than the most minor forms of physical assault).
- The victim of the behaviour suffers significant harm
- The behaviour may not necessarily be perceived by the victim as abusive, particularly if it is sexual in nature
- If the action itself is not immediately obvious as a child protection issue, it may become one if the behaviour is not a one-off incident, but is part of a pattern of concerning behaviour on the part of the child or young person who is abusing.
- The behaviour, if sexual, is not part of normal experimentation that takes place between children and young people.⁵

⁵ Assessing whether this is abusive depends on whether there is a significant difference in age, dominance, or understanding; if the behaviour was accompanied by threats or bribes; and if the behaviour was carried out in secret. If there is any uncertainty, discuss it with Gateway Services or the NSPCC

Allegations of abuse against another child/ young person - immediate response

1. <i>Is the child who has been allegedly abused, or the child who has allegedly perpetrated the abuse, in immediate danger or does either of them need emergency medical attention?</i> a. If a child is in immediate danger and is with you, remain with them and call the police b. If the child is elsewhere, contact the police and explain the situation to them c. If the child needs emergency medical attention, call an ambulance and, while you are waiting for it to arrive, get help from your first aider. d. If the first aider is not available, use any first aid knowledge you have to help the child. You also need to contact your team leader or the named child protection/safeguarding officer to let them know what is happening. e. The team leader should also inform the child's family if the child is in need of emergency medical attention and arrange to meet them at the hospital.	2) <i>Is the child/ young person at the centre of the allegation present with other children now?</i> a. Discuss immediately with a Designated Officer b. The Designated Officer may then choose to sensitively remove the child from the situation (NB the child should not be taken anywhere that is not risk assessed or go anywhere with any adult privately 1:1. Removing the child will most likely look like redirecting them away from the rest of the group to an activity elsewhere in the room) or, more likely, the Designated Officer may remain in the room throughout the session, being extra vigilant of the child/young person in question. c. The DO may discuss with the core Safeguarding Team d. Procedure in Children and Youth Ministry Policies Handbook to be followed
3. <i>Reporting</i> • Once the danger is eliminated, or immediate responsibility has been given over to emergency services, record the incident on the online safeguarding concerns form or on the physical form (available in all kids ministry rooms) and hand to a Designated Officer • In discussion with a Designated Officer, fill in the remainder of the physical form, or if using the online form, fill in 'Written Record Form: Child Protection Concerns Follow Up' form • If physical harm/injury occurred, fill in an injury reporting form	

ANYONE CAN CALL THE NSPCC AT ANY TIME FOR CONFIDENTIAL ADVICE, OR IF YOU ARE UNSATISFIED WITH THE RESPONSE OF THE SAFEGUARDING TEAM

If the child who is the alleged victim is not known to Village Church South Belfast, it is not our role to inform the child's family. Even if the child who is the alleged victim is known, the police and/or social care services, should be part of the decision-making process if they have been contacted.

1) The paramount consideration should always be the welfare of the children and young people involved. Issues that will need to be considered are:

- The child's wishes and feelings
- The parents' right to know (unless this would place the child who has allegedly perpetrated the abuse in danger, or would interfere with the criminal investigation)
- The impact of telling/not telling the parents
- The current assessment of the risk to the child who has been abused and the source of that risk
- The current assessment of any risk to the child who has allegedly perpetrated the abuse and the source of that risk
- Any risk management plans that currently exist for either child.

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2) Once any immediate danger/emergency medical needs are dealt with, the procedure set out below should be followed:

Documenting

- The volunteer who has been informed of the allegations or who has the concern, should make notes of what he/she has been told or of his/her direct concerns using the reporting form, and should discuss these with a Designated Officer as soon as possible and within 24 hours.

Informing guardians

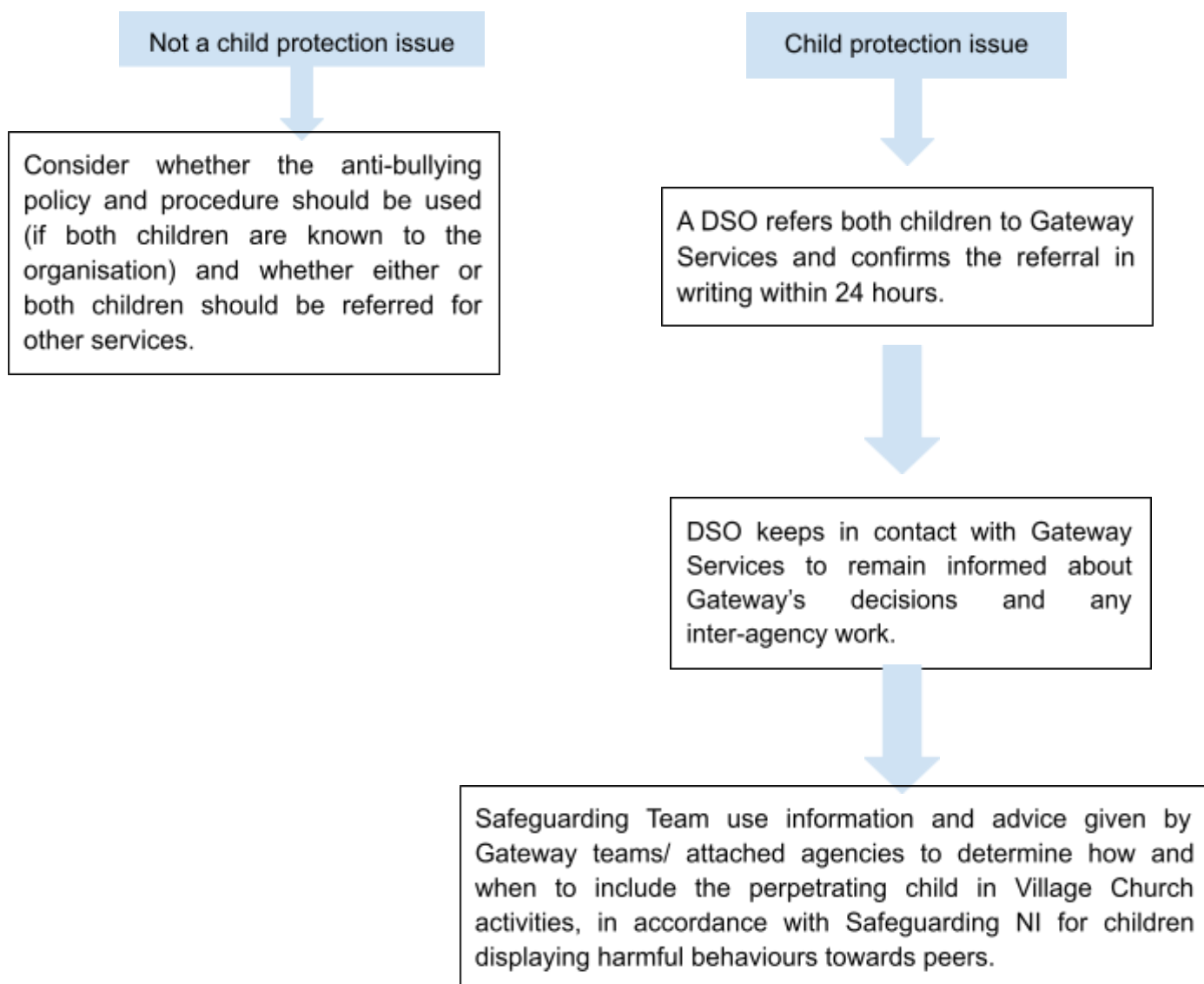
- If both children/young people are known to Village Church South Belfast and if their families do not already know about the allegation or concern, a Member of the Safeguarding Team should discuss it with them unless:
 - The view is that someone (the alleged perpetrator) may be put in danger by the family being informed
 - Informing the family might interfere with the criminal investigation
 - If any of these circumstances apply, discussions with the families should only take place after this has been agreed with Gateway Services.
- If only the child who has alleged to have harmed another child is known to Village Church South Belfast, then subject to considerations set out in above, discussions with only this child's family should take place.
- If only the child who has allegedly been harmed is known to Village Church South Belfast, then subject to considerations set out in above, discussions with only this child's family should take place.
- The child who is the subject of the allegation should also be informed of what

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has been said about him/her. However, if the view is that children's social care or the police should be involved, the child should only be informed after discussion and agreement with these agencies. These agencies may have views about what information should be disclosed to the child/young person at this stage.

Reporting

- If there is still uncertainty about whether the allegation or concern constitutes a child protection issue, a DSO should discuss with Gateway Services or with the NSPCC Helpline without disclosing the identity of either child/family.



If the procedures are not being used by Gateway Services but Village Church South Belfast remains concerned that the child/young person could pose a risk to other children, then the Safeguarding Team should consider whether the child/young

person can continue to be involved with Village Church South Belfast and, if so, on what basis. This is a situation that needs to be kept under regular review as the investigation and assessment conducted by the statutory agencies is carried out and reaches a conclusion. It may also need to be reviewed regularly following the conclusion of the assessment process, as the child/young person may be receiving support that should, with time, reduce the level of risk that they present.

Wrongful allegations

- If the allegation is found to be without substance or fabricated, Village Church South Belfast will consider referring the child who was said to have been harmed/ the child who reported the allegation to Gateway Services for them to assess whether he/she is in need of services (for example, the child may have been abused by someone else).
- If it is felt that there has been malicious intent behind the allegation, Village Church South Belfast will discuss with the police whether there are grounds to pursue any action against the person responsible.

What should I say to a child who discloses abuse by another child/young person?

Follow the advice on page 15 of the Children and Youth Ministry Policies Handbook, with key differences outlined below:

- Tell him/her that you now have to do what you can to keep him/her (*or the child who is the subject of the allegation*) safe.
- In agreement with the safeguarding team, explain to the child's parent/carer what has happened. Do this first without the child there, and then summarise it again in front of the child so that it is an open subject between parent/carer and child. This may enable them to talk about it together more easily. Agree with the Safeguarding Team what details should be shared with the guardian of the alleged victim.
- Make sure the parent/carer has support too.

What should I say to a child/young person who says that he/she has abused other children?

Follow the advice on page 15 of the Children and Youth Ministry Policies Handbook, with key differences outlined below:

- Tell him/her that you now have to do what you can to keep him/her *and the child who has been abused* safe.
- If the Safeguarding Team agree that it is safe to tell the child's family, explain to them what has happened. Do this first without the child there, and then summarise it again in front of the child so that it is an open subject between parent/carer and child. This may enable them to talk about it together more easily. Agree with the Safeguarding Team what details should be shared with the guardian of the alleged perpetrator.
- Reassure the child that, with help, the problem can be sorted out and that what has happened does not make him/her 'bad' or 'naughty' for life.
- Remember that the child who has behaved in this way is a child in need of

support.

- Make sure the parent/carer has support too.

We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice annually. This policy

was last reviewed: May 2025

Reviewed by: Lauren Young (Director of Operations)

Written Record Form (Child Protection Concerns)

Details of child and parent(s)/carer(s)

Name of child		
Gender:	Age:	Date of birth:
Language:		Additional needs:
Name(s) of parent(s)/carer(s)		
Child's home address and address(es) of parents (if different from child's):		

Your details

Your name:	Your position:	Date and time of incident (if applicable):
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Nature of concern

Are you reporting your own concerns or responding to concerns raised by someone else? (delete as appropriate) Reporting own concerns Responding to concerns raised by someone else
If you are responding to concerns raised by someone else, please provide their name and position within Village Church South Belfast:
Please provide details of the incident or concerns you have, including times, dates, description of any injuries, whether information is first-hand or the accounts of others, including any other relevant details. If you need to continue on a separate sheet, please label, sign and date it and attach securely:

After discussion with the Children's Ministry Lead and DSO, do you still have child protection concerns?

Yes/No (delete as appropriate)

Have the statutory child protection authorities been informed?

Police: Yes/No

Date and time:

Name and phone number of person spoken to:

Contacted by: Signature:

Gateway Services: Yes/No

Date and time:

Name and phone number of person spoken to:

Contacted by: Signature:

Action agreed with child protection authorities:

What has happened since referring to the statutory agency(ies)? (Include the date and nature of feedback from referral, outcome and relevant dates)

If the concerns are not about child protection, details of any further steps taken to provide support to child and family, and any other agencies involved:

Signed	Date and time	Name and position

Village Church South Belfast

Small Group and One-to-One Ministry Policy

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to direct staff and volunteers in their practice regarding small group meetings and one-to-one ministry with young people. This policy is designed to provide a framework to protect children, young people, staff and volunteers.

We recognise that:

‘Young people’ in this policy are defined as those aged 11-18, or equivalent school years. Where a young person reaches the age of 18 before leaving our youth ministry it is still good practice to adhere to this policy. Any meetings with young people outside the parameters set out below should not take place. Small group and one-to-one ministry meetings with children below age 11, and one-to-one ministry should not happen outside of the regular, ongoing programmes offered by the church (ie., Sunday gatherings and Village Connect).

We will keep children and young people safe by ensuring:

1. Staff members/volunteers present should reflect the gender(s) of the young people attending the small group or one-to-one meeting.
2. A staff member/volunteer may meet with a young person at the young person's home only in the presence of their parent or guardian.
3. A staff member/volunteer can hold a meeting in their home or elsewhere with a **group** of under 18s provided there is another adult present at all times and if approved in advance by the Children and Families Worker or a member of the Safeguarding Team. All adults in the house should have a current Access NI certificate. No adult should be left alone with a young person or group at any time.
4. One-to-one meetings of staff and volunteers with an under 18 can take place, provided the below apply:

- As part of the regular Sunday morning mentorship programme

OR WHERE

- They are in a public place
- The ministry leader or the Children and Families worker has been informed beforehand, or if not possible beforehand, as soon as possible afterwards. This is managed using the shared ‘one-to-one and small group’ youth ministry calendar.
- A brief record is kept of who were present, date, time and location. This can be recorded using the one-to-one meeting record form:
<https://villagechurchbelfast.churchcenter.com/people/forms/192833> d. This record is available to the Children and Families Worker and is kept on file on the church server.

- The parents have given written permission.

We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice annually. This policy was last reviewed: May 2025

Reviewed by: Lauren Young (Director of Operations)

Youth Communication and Social Media Policy

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to direct staff and volunteers in their practice with regards to communicating with young people through social media, email and mobile phone. Young people communicate in these ways and it is essential for our ministry that we engage with them effectively and safely.

We recognise that:

‘Young people’ are defined as those aged 11-18. Where a young person reaches the age of 18 before leaving our youth work provision it is still good practice to adhere to this policy. Children under the age of 11 should not be communicated with using social media or mobile phones.

Social media are continually changing and this policy will be reviewed and updated annually, but the principles embodied in this document will continue to be applied. This policy is designed to provide a framework to protect children, young people, staff and volunteers. It also serves to help children and young people understand appropriate use of social media and modern technology.

Guidelines for e-communication:

Emails

1. Once permission is given via the annual consent form, staff and volunteers can hold email addresses for young people in their care.
2. Emails should be short and should usually be a one-off communication to arrange a meeting or remind young people to attend an event.
3. Conversations should not be had over email. Staff and volunteers should arrange to meet one-to-one with a young person if the young person would like to talk, following the One-to-One Meetings Policy.
4. If an email raises any child protection concerns, staff or volunteers should consult with the Children and Families Worker or a member of the Safeguarding Team.
5. When a volunteer leaves the youth ministry team, the email addresses of young people should be removed from their personal address book.
6. Staff should only email using their work account and not personal email accounts.

Phone calls and texting

1. Once permission is given via the annual consent form, staff and volunteers can hold mobile phone numbers of the young people in their care.
2. Text communication should be short and should usually be a one-off communication to arrange a meeting or remind young people to attend an event.
3. Staff and volunteers should use an appropriate tone; friendly, but not over-familiar or personal. While communications should be warm and friendly,

- they should not suggest or offer a special relationship.
4. Staff and volunteers should only give personal contact details that are within the public domain of Village Church South Belfast, including their mobile phone number.
 5. Conversations should not be had over texts. Staff and volunteers should arrange to meet one-to-one with a young person if the young person would like to talk, following the One-to-One Meetings Policy.
 6. Staff and volunteers can have phone calls with young people, but these should be short.
 7. If a disclosure is made that raises a safeguarding concern, verbatim notes should be made as soon as possible using the Safeguarding form. This information should be reported to the Children and Families Worker or a member of the Safeguarding Team.
 8. When a member of staff or volunteer leaves the youth ministry team, phone numbers of young people should be removed from private phones and any other digital or written record should be removed.

Social Media

This policy does not list every social media site, but the principle for all of them is that staff and volunteers should not befriend, follow or be followed by young people. All those using social media sites should set their privacy settings accordingly and check them periodically.

Private messaging is not permitted. If a young person messages a staff member or volunteer's personal account, they should not respond.

1. Staff and volunteers should not follow a young person whereby their contact has been made with the young person through their role in Village Church. Once a young person has left our youth ministry programme and if they are over 18 it is then the volunteer or staff member's choice whether to follow them.
2. Under no circumstances can staff or volunteers follow young people on Snapchat, or any other disappearing message platform.
3. Where the young person gains the ability to message staff or volunteers privately on social media, it is to be opened only in the presence of another staff member or volunteer. This is to be reported to the Children and Families Worker or DSO, who should have a polite follow up conversation with the young person to advise them that it is not our policy to engage in direct messaging with people under the age of 18.
4. Group messaging is permitted for the purpose of arranging meetings, or issuing reminders of reading material, etc. However the following principles should apply:
 - a. Only those who meet the permitted age range of the app be added to the group
 - b. Conversation should be friendly and inclusive of all participants
 - c. No photos or videos of young people can be stored on personal phones
 - d. When a young person or staff/volunteer moves on from the ministry, they are to be removed from the group chat.

We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice annually. This policy was last reviewed: May 2025
Reviewed by: Lauren Young (Director of Operations)

Children and Youth Transport Policy

Purpose:

The purpose of this transportation policy is to direct staff and volunteers in their practice regarding transporting children and young people they are working with in cars and minibuses, buses and coaches. It is designed to provide a framework to protect children, young people, staff and volunteers.

We recognise that:

‘Young people’ for this policy are defined as those aged 11-18. Where a young person reaches the age of 18 before leaving our youth work provision it is still good practice to adhere to this policy. Children under 11 should only be transported in cars by staff or volunteers in the event of an emergency, and in this case every effort should be made to obtain verbal parental consent.

We will keep children and young people safe by ensuring:

1. Transport and travel arrangements are the responsibility of parents if they make informal arrangements among themselves. They are the responsibility of Village Church South Belfast if staff or volunteers organise or provide them.
2. Volunteers and staff may use cars to transport young people to and from Village meetings, activities and other trips, provided they have obtained prior consent from their parents or carers. However, giving lifts should be the exception, rather than usual practice.
3. All those who transport young people to or from Village-organised activities should be over 25 and should have held a full driving licence for over two years.
4. Any driver who has an endorsement of 6 points or more on their licence should inform the Children and Families Worker or a member of the Safeguarding Team.
5. Any driver who has an “unspent” conviction for a drink driving offence or for Dangerous Driving or Racing on the Highway should not transport young people.
6. All cars that carry children and young people should be comprehensively insured. The insured person should make sure that their insurance covers the giving of lifts during church activities. Note that overcrowding invalidates any insurance policy.
7. All cars that carry children and young people should be in a roadworthy condition.
8. All children and young people must wear suitable seat belts and use appropriate booster seats. Children and young people should only be transported when there are seat belts.
9. Drivers should drop children and young people off on the correct side of the

- road so that they do not need to cross the road. Drivers should try to ensure children and young people exit the car on the pavement side of the car.
10. Drivers should not drive away until all passengers are safely away from the vehicle at their destination.
 11. It is the driver's responsibility to ensure there is enough fuel in the vehicle to complete the journey.
 12. If a child or young person is known to have a disability or special need, it may be necessary to have a non-driving adult in the car. This adult should sit in the back, behind the driver, with the child or young person in the seat beside him or her.
 13. For all journeys there should be a non-driving Village Children's or Youth Team member present as well as the driver. Where this is not possible a record should be kept and the Children and Families Worker or a member of the Safeguarding Team should be informed.
 14. Where explicit parental permission is given (in writing) a young person may sit in the front if they are the only passenger. Children under the age of 12 should sit in the rear of the car on an appropriate car seat.
 15. Drivers should carry a mobile phone and have the young people's emergency contact details with them.
 16. Drivers must obey the Highway Code.
 17. For non-local journeys drivers should carry a first aid kit in the vehicle and have young people's medical information with them.
 - a. Note: this does not apply for transport within the Belfast area, but is aimed at journeys to and from events that are a significant distance away.

We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice annually. This policy

was last reviewed: May 2025

Reviewed by: Lauren Young (Director of Operations)

Record-Keeping Policy

The Data Protection Act 1998 contains principles governing the use of personal data. These are reproduced below for convenience. Personal data should be:

- Processed fairly and lawfully;
- Obtained and used for specific purposes;
- Adequate, relevant and not excessive;
- Accurate;
- Not kept for longer than is necessary;
- Processed in line with a person's rights;
- Secure;
- Not transferred to non-UK countries without adequate protection.

Recruitment

Village Church South Belfast should maintain records relating to staff and volunteer appointments, including a note of when an AccessNI check was obtained. Records should be kept secure and retained after the people concerned have left Village Church South Belfast.

Safeguarding Children and Adults

Notes should be made of all safeguarding incidents involving children or adults as accurately and as soon as possible after the incident. Notes should record what happened, who was involved, when it happened, what action was taken, why and when. They should be treated confidentially and securely stored by a DSO in the agreed upon location.

These should be retained even if the information received was judged to be malicious, unsubstantiated or unfounded. During an interval, the designated person should be responsible for all safeguarding records which must be passed on to their successor. Safeguarding records should be retained for 75 years.

Known Offenders

Records of known offenders against children should be retained indefinitely, together with a copy of any agreement and reviews.

Sharing Information

Nothing in data protection legislation seeks to limit appropriate disclosure in order to protect an individual who either is, or may be, at risk. What matters is that the process of information sharing is reasonable and proportionate.

How long should records be kept?

Information	Destroyed securely after
Accident reporting sheets or book – if relating to adults	20 years after date of incident
A clear AccessNI certificate or disclosure letter of confirmation.	6 months
Risk assessment recommendations and management plan in the event of an unclear or blemished AccessNI disclosure.	50 years after appointment/employment ceases
Records of safeguarding adult or child protection incidents either within the church or within a family/ by an individual where Village Church South Belfast was the reporting body or involved in care or monitoring. To include any sex offender risk assessments and monitoring agreements.	50 years after the conclusion of the matter
Records of any children's activities and related general safety risk assessments. Any communication from parents or other parties.	50 years after the activity ceases
Personnel records with contact with children and vulnerable adults including all documentation concerning any allegations and investigation regardless of the findings	50 years after the conclusion of the matter

How to record

Records should be written and kept in accordance with p21 & 22 of this handbook.

How to store

- Keep paper records in chronological order, and in a secure folder or file.
- Records about the same child, adult or family, irrespective of the author should be stored in one file.
- Keep all electronic recorded information password protected or encrypted.

What access do people have to personal data stored?

Legally, we must respond to individuals' written requests for access to personal information as soon as possible and in any event within 40 days. It is illegal to destroy data that is the subject of an access request.

As much information as possible should be shared with the individual, but there are some restrictions and conditions attached to the legal right of access, e.g. protecting the rights of other individuals to privacy and for the prevention of crime. You must remove anything which would identify a third party. You may also be entitled to hold

back information containing serious allegations, such as child abuse, if revealing that information would compromise a proper investigation of those allegations.

The individual has the right to comment on inaccurate data; such information must be corrected if it is proved to be wrong. They also have the right to object to distressing or harmful data, which should only be held if there are compelling reasons to do so.

We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice annually. This policy
was last reviewed: May 2025

Reviewed by: Lauren Young (Director of Operations)

AccessNI Data Management Policy

As an organisation using AccessNI to help assess the suitability of applicants for positions of trust, Village Church South Belfast complies fully with AccessNI's Service Level Agreement regarding the correct handling, use, storage retention and disposal of Disclosure Applications and Disclosure information. We also comply fully with obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998 and other relevant legislative requirements with regards to the safe handling, storage, retention and disposal of Disclosure Information.

Storage and Access

Disclosure information is kept securely in an online cloud-based folder with access strictly controlled and limited to those who are entitled to see it as part of their duties.

Handling

In accordance with section 124 of the Police Act 1997, Disclosure information is only passed to those who are authorised to receive it in the course of their duties. We maintain a record of all those to whom Disclosures or Disclosure information has been revealed. We recognise it is a criminal offence to pass this information to anyone who is not entitled to receive it.

Usage

Disclosure information is only used for the specific purpose for which it was requested and for which the applicant's full consent has been given.

Retention

Once a recruitment decision has been taken, we do not keep Disclosure information for any longer than is necessary. We comply with AccessNI's Service Level Agreement to return the original Disclosure certificate to the applicant once a decision has been made and will be retained no longer than the agreed period (6 months).

Disposal

Once the retention period has elapsed, we will ensure that any Disclosure information is immediately destroyed by secure means, i.e. by shredding, pulping or burning. While awaiting destruction, Disclosure information will not be kept in any unsecured receptacle (e.g. waste-bin or confidential sack). We will not keep any photocopy or other image of the Disclosure or any copy or representation of the contents of a Disclosure or any other relevant non-conviction information supplied by police. However, despite the above, we may keep a record of the date of issue of a Disclosure, the name of the subject, the type of Disclosure requested, the position for which the Disclosure was requested, the AccessNI unique reference number of the Disclosure Certificate and the details of the recruitment decision.

We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice annually. This policy

was last reviewed: May 2025

Reviewed by: Lauren Young (Director of Operations)

Appendix 1 - Types of abuse and how to recognise them.

Outlined below are the types of abuse recognised in the UK. They are all taken from the [NSPCC website 2023](#).

Physical abuse

'Physical abuse is when someone hurts or harms a child or young person on purpose. It includes:

- hitting with hands or objects
- slapping and punching
- kicking
- shaking
- throwing
- poisoning
- burning and scalding
- biting and scratching
- breaking bones
- drowning.

It's important to remember that physical abuse is any way of intentionally causing physical harm to a child or young person. It also includes making up the symptoms of an illness or causing a child to become unwell.'

Recognising physical abuse

'Physical abuse symptoms include:

- bruises
- broken or fractured bones
- burns or scalds
- bite marks.
- scarring
- the effects of poisoning, such as vomiting, drowsiness or seizures
- breathing problems from drowning, suffocation or poisoning.

Head injuries in babies and toddlers can be signs of abuse so it's important to be aware of these. Visible signs include:

- swelling
- bruising
- fractures
- being extremely sleepy or unconscious
- breathing problems
- seizures
- vomiting

- unusual behaviour, such as being irritable or not feeding properly.'

It is important to note that not every bump, bruise or scratch is a sign of abuse - children fall and get hurt regularly and it is a normal part of growing up. However, marks that are:

- Not easily explained
- In areas that would not usually be harmed
- In patterns or lines eg finger marks

Or that are persistent in nature, eg a child is regularly attending with injuries, should be reported.

Emotional abuse

'Emotional abuse is any type of abuse that involves the continual emotional mistreatment of a child. It's sometimes called psychological abuse. Emotional abuse can involve deliberately trying to scare, humiliate, isolate or ignore a child.

Emotional abuse is often a part of other kinds of abuse'

'Emotional abuse includes:

- humiliating or constantly criticising a child
- threatening, shouting at a child or calling them names
- making the child the subject of jokes, or using sarcasm to hurt a child
- blaming and scapegoating
- making a child perform degrading acts
- not recognising a child's own individuality or trying to control their lives
- pushing a child too hard or not recognising their limitations
- exposing a child to upsetting events or situations, like domestic abuse or drug taking
- failing to promote a child's social development
- not allowing them to have friends
- persistently ignoring them
- being absent
- manipulating a child
- never saying anything kind, expressing positive feelings or congratulating a child on successes
- never showing any emotions in interactions with a child, also known as emotional neglect.

Signs of emotional abuse

'Children who are being emotionally abused might:

- seem unconfident or lack self-assurance
- struggle to control their emotions
- have difficulty making or maintaining relationships

- act in a way that's inappropriate for their age.

The signs of emotional abuse can also be different for children at different ages.

Babies and preschool-age children may: • 'Be overly-affectionate to strangers or people they don't know well • Seem unconfident, wary or anxious • Not have a close relationship or bond with their parent • Be aggressive or cruel towards other children or animals.'	Older children may: • 'Use language you wouldn't expect them to know for their age • Act in a way or know about things you wouldn't expect them to know for their age • Struggle to control their emotions • Have extreme outbursts • Seem isolated from their parents • Lack social skills • Have few or no friends.'
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Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse occurs when a child is tricked or forced into sexual activities.

Children are legally unable to give consent, and any sexual activity involving a child is illegal. This includes contact (eg, but not limited to, sexual touching, penetration of any form, forcing a child to take part in sexual acts or to perform them on others) and non-contact (eg, but not limited to, flashing/ exposure, showing a child pornography, making them masturbate, forcing them to make/ view/share child abuse images or videos, forcing a child to take part in conversations online of sexual nature).

Signs of sexual abuse:

Emotional signs: • Avoiding being alone with or frightened of people or a person they know. • Language or sexual behaviour you wouldn't expect them to know. • Having nightmares or bed-wetting. • Alcohol or drug misuse. • Self-harm. • Changes in eating habits or developing an eating problem. • Changes in their mood, feeling irritable and angry, or anything out of the ordinary.	Physical signs: • Bruises. • Bleeding, discharge, pains or soreness in their genital or anal area. • Sexually transmitted infections. • Pregnancy.
	Children might: • Spend a lot more or a lot less time than usual online, texting, gaming or using social media • Seem distant, upset or angry after using the internet or texting • Be secretive about who they're talking to and what they're doing online or on their mobile phone

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have lots of new phone numbers, texts or email addresses on their mobile phone, laptop or tablet. • Children and young people might also drop hints and clues about the abuse. |
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Neglect

‘Neglect is the ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs and the most common form of child abuse. A child might be left hungry or dirty, or without proper clothing, shelter, supervision or health care.’

There are 4 types of neglect.

Physical neglect

A child's basic needs, such as food, clothing or shelter, are not met or they aren't properly supervised or kept safe.

Educational neglect

A parent doesn't ensure their child is given an education.

Emotional neglect

A child doesn't get the nurture and stimulation they need. This could be through ignoring, humiliating, intimidating or isolating them.

Medical neglect

A child isn't given proper health care. This includes dental care and refusing or ignoring medical recommendations.’

Signs of neglect:

‘Poor appearance and hygiene:

- Being smelly or dirty
- Being hungry or not given money for food
- Having unwashed clothes
- Having the wrong clothing, eg no warm clothes in winter
- Having frequent and untreated nappy rash

Health and development problems:

- Anaemia
- Body issues, such as poor muscle tone or prominent joints
- Medical or dental issues
- Missed medical appointments, such as for vaccinations
- Not given the correct medicines
- Poor language or social skills

- Regular illness or infections
- Repeated accidental injuries, often caused by lack of supervision
- Skin issues, such as sores, rashes, flea bites, scabies or ringworm
- Thin or swollen tummy
- Tiredness
- Untreated injuries
- Weight or growth issues

Housing and family issues:

- Living in an unsuitable home environment, such as having no heating
- Being left alone for a long time
- Taking on the role of carer for other family members

Changes in behaviour:

- Becoming clingy
- Becoming aggressive
- Being withdrawn, depressed or anxious
- Changes in eating habits
- Displaying obsessive behaviour
- Finding it hard to concentrate or take part in activities
- Missing school
- Showing signs of self-harm
- Using drugs or alcohol.'

Child Sexual Exploitation

'Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a type of sexual abuse.

When a child or young person is exploited they're given things, like gifts, drugs, money, status and affection, in exchange for performing sexual activities.

Children and young people are often tricked into believing they're in a loving and consensual relationship. This is called grooming. They may trust their abuser and not understand that they're being abused.'

Children can also be trafficked into or within the UK and exploited.

CSE may take place:

Online - children are forced to send or upload explicit images, film or livestream sexual activities, have sexual conversations. These are then used as leverage to force further activity.

In person - CSE is used to exert power and control, for initiation into gangs, children given drugs or alcohol before being assaulted.

Signs of CSE

- 'Unhealthy or inappropriate sexual behaviour.
- Being frightened of some people, places or situations.
- Being secretive.
- Sharp changes in mood or character.
- Having money or things they can't or won't explain.

- Physical signs of abuse, like bruises or bleeding in their genital or anal area.
- Alcohol or drug misuse.
- Sexually transmitted infections.
- Pregnancy
- Having an older boyfriend or girlfriend.
- Staying out late or overnight.
- Having a new group of friends.
- Missing from home or care, or stopping going to school or college.
- Hanging out with older people, other vulnerable people or in antisocial groups.
- Involved in a gang.
- Involved in criminal activities like selling drugs or shoplifting.'

Child Criminal Exploitation

'Criminal exploitation is child abuse where children and young people are manipulated and coerced into committing crimes.' This may be by a peer group, street gang or organised criminal gang.

Signs of CCE

- 'Frequently absent from and doing badly in school.
- Going missing from home, staying out late and travelling for unexplained reasons.
- In a relationship or hanging out with someone older than them.
- Being angry, aggressive or violent.
- Being isolated or withdrawn.
- Having unexplained money and buying new things.
- Wearing clothes or accessories in gang colours or getting tattoos.
- Using new slang words.
- Spending more time on social media and being secretive about time online.
- Making more calls or sending more texts, possibly on a new phone or phones.
- Self-harming and feeling emotionally unwell.
- Taking drugs and abusing alcohol.
- Committing petty crimes like shop lifting or vandalism.
- Unexplained injuries and refusing to seek medical help.
- Carrying weapons or having a dangerous breed of dog.'

Radicalisation

Radicalisation is the process through which a person comes to support or be involved in extremist ideologies.

Indicators include:

- Spending increasing amounts of time talking to people with extreme views (this includes online and offline communication)
- Changing their style of dress or personal appearance
- Losing interest in friends and activities that are not associated with the extremist ideology, group or cause
- Having material or symbols associated with an extreme cause
- Trying to recruit others to join the cause
- Using extreme vocabulary or becoming angry with others' opinions

Honour-Based Violence

Honour-based abuse encompasses all crimes committed to defend the so-called honour of a family. Examples include:

- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
- Forced Marriage
- Other cultural practices such as breast ironing

Signs of FGM

- A relative or someone known as a 'cutter' visiting from abroad.
- A special occasion or ceremony takes place where a girl 'becomes a woman' or is 'prepared for marriage'.
- A female relative, like a mother, sister or aunt has undergone FGM.
- A family arranges a long holiday overseas or visits a family abroad during the summer holidays.
- A girl has an unexpected or long absence from school.
- A girl struggles to keep up in school.
- A girl runs away – or plans to run away - from home.
- Having difficulty walking, standing or sitting.
- Spending longer in the bathroom or toilet.
- Appearing quiet, anxious or depressed.
- Acting differently after an absence from school or college.
- Reluctance to go to the doctors or have routine medical examinations.
- Asking for help – though they might not be explicit about the problem because they're scared or embarrassed

Spiritual abuse

The inappropriate use of religious practice or belief. This can include the misuse of the authority of leadership or penitential discipline, oppressive teaching, or intrusive healing and deliverance ministries.

Signs that a child has been spiritually abused can be hard to spot. Some indicators are:

- Excessive use of punishment
- Low self-esteem
- Being reluctant to ask questions
- Hostility towards other religions
- Displaying an 'us vs them' mentality
- Talking about being ridiculed, or ridiculing others

To protect against spiritual abuse, all staff and volunteers will adhere to the behaviour code outlined on page 9 of this handbook. Staff and volunteers are expected to inform a safeguarding officer if they have concerns about any child or adult with regards to spiritual abuse, and to follow the reporting pathway on p24 of this handbook.

1. NB these behaviours are also signs associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder and other neurodivergent conditions. If a child is known to be neurodiverse, discretion must be applied when considering whether these signs indicate emotional abuse. If you are unsure, speak to a member of the Safeguarding Team