

**Alison Hill:  
District Safeguarding officer**

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Serving the Methodist Church  
in South Yorkshire,  
North Nottinghamshire  
and North East Derbyshire

Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> November 2021

Dear Church Safeguarding Officers

Let me start by saying a huge thank you for all you are doing for your church, and in turn for your circuit and district. I've been greatly encouraged by all your emails in response to my first letter. I love affirming quotes and your responses reminded me of the quote by Walter Payton.



This month I am focusing on two aspects of the Church Safeguarding Officers role. The first regards how we Record Safeguarding issues and the second how we promote Appropriate Routes of Concerns. It looks complicated but its not, and once everything is in place you can rest easy knowing you are ready for anything.

**Record all safeguarding issues that are reported to the church safeguarding officer, according to Methodist policy and procedure.**

The Methodist Safeguarding Policy, Procedures and Guidance (PP&G) provides all the information we need regarding how to record safeguarding issues – unhelpfully the information is dotted throughout the whole document. Therefore, it's important that we take time to bring this information together into a practical and user-friendly policy and procedure for our individual churches.

I suggest that every church create their own Safeguarding Recording Policy, Procedures & Guidance. I have created a model policy that you could use, bringing together all the relevant information – please find a copy attached.

The way I have introduced this idea to my Church Council was at one meeting to bring the need for a bespoke Recording Policy to their attention and ask their permission to create such a policy.

The council happily agreed for me to proceed.

Before the next council meeting I asked if the newly created policy could be distributed so that, at the meeting, people will have already had time to digest its contents.

At the next Council Meeting the policy was unanimously adopted. I suggested that, due to the policy needing to be updated once a year it should become an appendices to the Church Safeguarding Policy – this was also agreed.

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Now, you might be questioning why such a policy is needed, so I would like to quickly take you through each section and hopefully you will understand why.

**Safeguarding Recording Policy, Procedures & Guidance**

The Policy has 5 sections and there are 2 associated procedures.

**Section 1: Respond promptly and appropriately to every safeguarding concern or allegation.**

I've cut and pasted the information found in the PP&G on page 17. This is basically an introduction and sets the context.

**Section 2: Recording – with the text taken from page 37 of the PP&G.**

In this section I mention using a Church Safeguarding Concern Form, which Connexion produced a little while back. I am recommending the Church Safeguarding Officers are the only ones to use this form.

I get very nervous about asking people to report their concerns on such a form (as opposed to have a verbal conversation). In one church (not in the Sheffield District) I was told that a children's worker did not report an incident because they didn't have the right form to hand. They didn't understand that they could report a concern verbally they assumed they had to use the form.

I do recommend Church Safeguarding Officers to use the form though. If a case had to be reported to a statutory agency then they would need to give a certain level of detail and the form would prompt that.

If you already have a reporting form that is similar then please choose the form that you feel most comfortable with. You will need to amend the model policy accordingly so that its clear which form you are using.

The last bullet point in section 2 refers to a Case Note form. Using this form to record all other actions you take with a case will make you compliant with the record keeping requirement in the next section, section 3.

If someone has to keep safeguarding records on a particular person its common practise to use the Case Note format – please find the master copy attached. Keeping your notes in one document is the most secure way of retaining information. Rather than having to collate numerous bits of paper the Case Notes document allows all information to be presented in a clear chronological order.

In the next section we are told that 'A record should be retained of the nature of the allegation or concern, actions taken and the outcome'. Using the Church Safeguarding Concern Form and the Case Notes form together you will be able to provide an excellent account of all actions taken.

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**Section 3: Retention of Safeguarding Information (pg82)**

Retaining document for 75 years is a requirement in law and cannot be altered or changed.

**Section 4: Storing Safeguarding Information (pg 83)**

The first bullet point will require the church to name who will have access to safeguarding records. This policy will be reviewed every 12 months so the names of people can be updated as new people take on new roles.

Your Church Council will need to decide who should have access to documents. For reasons of confidentiality I recommend only a couple of people are named – perhaps the person in Pastoral Charge (Minister, Lay Pastor) and the Church Safeguarding Officer.

It is good to have a backup plan and therefore I encourage you to list someone who could access the paperwork in an emergency situation. An emergency situation would be where records are needed by statutory agencies to protect someone when there is an immediate danger to life. If the Minister and the Church Safeguarding Officer are both away on holiday someone else will need to locate the information asap.

In this section you will also need to make some decisions regarding how your church intends to store safeguarding paperwork. It's important that the route you chose will need to conform with the need to keep paperwork for 75 years. You may wish to keep records electronically or you may prefer to keep paper records.

Whichever you choose if fine, you will just need to delete the bullet points that don't apply at this time. If you choose to keep paper copies this year you could always switch to electronic files at a later date.

**Section 5: Sharing Information. (Pg 134 in the PP&G)**

Serious Case Reviews, which are completed after every child dies in suspicious circumstances, constantly highlight a lack of information sharing as a contributing factor. Data Protection and now GDPR have made people very cautious about sharing information but when it comes to Safeguarding we need to reassess our approach. The opening statements of section 5 demonstrate how important information sharing can be but we do need to be mindful that we are following basic information sharing rules.

The Policies, Procedure and Guidance documents goes into much greater details about information sharing and I would direct you to read through all the information if needed. The information I have included in section 5 is really to highlight its importance in relation to recording safeguarding concerns and to reassure church members that information sharing, done correctly, will save lives and is allowed.

The last thing I need to do is to draw your attention to the back page of the Church Safeguarding Concern Form on page 7. You will see I have highlighted in yellow 3 sections that will need personalising to reflect

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your church. The whole paragraph regards providing people with a Privacy Notice – this is a requirement under GDPR. Connexion have produced one for you to use. Please be sensitive regarding the right time to give someone a Privacy Notice. You don't have to give someone the notices immediately if that would be pastorally insensitive, but they will need a copy over the coming days or weeks.

Every year when the PP&G document is updated I will update the model copy of the Safeguarding Recording Policy, Procedures & Guidance. I will share with Church Safeguarding Officer and therefore hopefully take the stress out of an element of your role.

### Promote appropriate routes for reporting of concerns

The second element I would like you to consider this month concerns Promoting Appropriate Routes for Reporting Concerns. This sits nicely alongside Recording of Safeguarding Concerns and so it makes sense to tackle both aspects together.

The first thing I would like to point out is that you are only required to 'promote' appropriate routes.

Promoting can be done as a reaction to a safeguarding concern but it can also be done proactively, to stop a problem escalating. So, let's consider each aspect in turn.

#### **Promoting appropriate routes as a reaction to a safeguarding concern.**

If someone comes to you with a safeguarding concern the very first thing you need to do is assess what level of intervention is needed. My predecessor, Howard Smedley, created a very good A4 guide called the Responding Well Flow Chart, which I have updated and attached. I also recommend using the flowcharts found in the PP&G on pages 30 & 31. (I have attached both documents to this email)

Both flow charts give clear guidance on how to deal with a situation but you can always contact me for any help and advice if needed. If you're not sure if your concern needs immediate action or not please consult with someone else. If in doubt refer to statutory services. If you haven't met their thresholds they will tell you and give you advice on what appropriate steps you need to take. Don't forget to record any decisions and conversations you have.

The Responding Well flow chart will always state the date of publication so please ensure that the copy you use and display is the same date as the latest version of the PP&G. On the back of the page I have listed all the telephone numbers for the statutory services which operate in the District.

People attending your church, especially Church Council members, need to know the procedure if they have a Safeguarding Concern. I recommend that you include information about the Responding Well Flow chart, and the flowcharts in the PP&G, in your next report to church council. If you have room on your Safeguarding Noticeboard then it would be good to print off the Responding Well Flow Chart and post it there. The more people that know how to report concerns the better!

#### **Proactively promoting appropriate routes to a safeguarding concern.**

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When I first started working for Derbyshire County Council I worked in the Early Help team. My job was to work with a family, when a potential safeguarding concern was identified, in order to stop the concerns escalating. This approach was incredibly successful. For example, if someone needed a food parcel to feed their family we would support them to access help but we would also support with debt management or help people gain qualifications which in turn made them more employable. If the family needing a food parcel had children there was a chance that maybe the child was at an increased risk of neglect, therefore it was important that the underlying case was identified and tackled.

Each month I write an issues newsletter tackling a current area of concern. The newsletters covering the last 12 months can be found by clicking on this [link](#). I start by outlining the issue but then I always promote organisations that provide help and support.

If you were able to promote my newsletter in your church you would be Promoting Appropriate Routes for Early Help Support. My last newsletter concerned Squid Games – a very popular Netflix programme which is very unsuitable for children. It would be very appropriate to make sure that anyone in your church working with Children and Young People got a copy of the newsletter.

If you have a notice sheet each Sunday it would be appropriate to promote the Newsletter there and have copies of the newsletter available if people wanted to take a copy. You may not have children in your church but people will have grandchildren or nieces / nephews etc and the information may still be useful.

It's important to never assume information would not be relevant but rather remain open minded that someone might come across the newsletter and find it helpful.

I promote new issues of the newsletter in the Weekly District Newsletter that Katrin Hackett emails out every Tuesday. Hopefully you are already receiving the District newsletter but if not please click on this link to register: <https://www.sheffieldmethodist.org/news/newsletters.html>

A big thank you if you have managed to get to the end of this letter without losing the will to live! I have updated the annual Safeguarding report template to reflect the suggestions I've made in this newsletter – please find attached. I thought you might find it helpful to understand why and how to implement the measures I've suggested above so I've made a short video recording – you can view it by clicking on the following link: <https://youtu.be/807LjCld9ZU>.

As ever if you have any questions or concerns please call or email me.

Lastly, thank you for all you are doing for your church and your congregation.

Best Wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Alison Hill'.

Alison Hill