



OAKWOOD

CHAPEL

Safeguarding Policy

Fully re-written: October 2023

Reviewed: January 2026

Church Statement:

The Church has a children's and young people's ministry. The Elders, on behalf of the Church, take seriously their responsibility to protect and safeguard the welfare of children and young people entrusted to the Church's care.

Church Mission

As part of the church's mission, the Leadership Team are committed to:

- Listening to, relating effectively and valuing children and young people whilst ensuring their protection within church activities.
- Encouraging and supporting parents / carers.
- Ensuring that children's youth workers are given support and training.
- Having a system for dealing with concerns about possible abuse.
- Maintaining good links with the statutory childcare authorities.

Areas of Policy

The Church recognises that many children and young people today may be the victims of neglect, or physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Accordingly, the Church has adopted the policy contained in this safeguarding policy (hereafter, "the policy"). The policy sets out agreed guidelines relating to the following areas:

- Responding to allegations of abuse, including those made against leaders or members of the church.
- Appointing children's youth workers.
- Supervision of activities and practice issues.
- Helping victims of abuse.
- Working with offenders.

The Church recognises the need to build constructive links with the childcare agencies. Accordingly, these guidelines were originally prepared in consultation with Harlow Social Services and PCCA's Churches Child Protection Advisory Service, who hold a copy of this policy.

The local Social Services office telephone number at Willowfield House is: (01279) 434641. The out-of-hours number is: 0345 606 1212.

The content of the policy has formed the basis of a seminar for all Elders and Deacons and children's / youth workers in the Church run by Thirtyone:eight. (hereafter, 31:8). The Elders are committed to an ongoing programme of education regarding best-practice for safeguarding for themselves and all Church youth workers, making use of in-person or online training as appropriate.

Types of Abuse

Abuse or neglect may take several forms:

- Physical Injury: Actual or likely physical injury to a child, or failure to prevent it.
- Sexual Abuse: Actual or likely sexual exploitation of a child or adolescent.
- Neglect: Persistent or severe neglect of a child, or the failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger.

- Emotional: Actual or likely severe adverse effect on the emotional and behavioural development of a child caused by persistent or severe emotional ill-treatment or action.
- Organised: Organised (or multiple) abuse, involving one or more abuser and a number of related or non-related children or young people. The abusers concerned may be in concert to abuse children, sometimes acting in isolation, or may be using an institutional framework or position of authority to recruit children for abuse. Organised and multiple abuse occur both as part of a network of abuse across a family or community, and within institutions such as residential homes or schools.

Recognition of abuse

All regular children's workers will be trained to recognise and respond to signs of possible abuse. Any other member of the church may also request such information and/or training.

What to do if you suspect abuse has occurred

1. You must report concerns as soon as possible to the Coordinator, Daniela Biddiscombe (phone number 01279 725786 / 07786 095027), who is nominated by the Elders to act on their behalf in referring allegations or suspicions of neglect or abuse to the statutory authorities. The Coordinator may also be required by the conditions of the church Insurance Policy to immediately inform the Insurance Company. In the absence or unavailability of the Coordinator, the matter should be brought to the attention of one of the Elders. Either:
 - a. Sam Pakala (phone number: 07850 083724) or
 - b. Martin Biddiscombe (phone number: 01279 725786 / 07768 478606)
2. If the suspicions in any way involve the Coordinator, then the report should be made to one of the other named church Elders detailed above. If the suspicions in any way implicate all of the above, then the report should be made in the first instance to:
 - a. PCCA Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service, PO Box 133, Swanley, Kent, BR8 7UQ, also known as "31:8"; telephone number 0303 003 11 11
 - b. Alternatively, contact Harlow Social Services on 01279 434641
3. Suspicions will not be discussed with anyone other than those nominated above.
4. It is, of course, the right of the individual as a citizen to make direct referrals, or to seek advice from external safeguarding agencies, such as 31:8. We hope that members of the church will use the procedure laid down in this policy document. If, however, you feel that the Coordinator or other nominee has not responded appropriately to your concerns, then it is open to you to contact the relevant organisation directly. We hope that, by making this statement, we demonstrate the church's commitment to effective safeguarding.

Allegations of physical injury or neglect

If a child has a physical injury or symptom of neglect, the Coordinator will:

1. Contact 31:8 (or Social Services) for advice in cases of deliberate injury, or where concerned about the child's safety. The parents should not be informed by the Church/organisation in these circumstances.
2. Where emergency medical attention is necessary, it will be sought immediately. The Coordinator will inform the doctor of any suspicions of abuse.
3. In other circumstances speak with the parent / carer and suggest that medical help / attention is sought for the child. The doctor (or health visitor) will then indicate further action, if necessary.

4. If appropriate the parent / carer will be encouraged to seek help from Social Services Department.
5. Where the parent / carer is unwilling to seek help, if appropriate, the Coordinator will offer to go with them. If they still fail to act, the Coordinator should, in cases of real concern, contact Social Services for advice.
6. Where the Coordinator is unsure whether to refer a case to the Social Services, then advice from 31:8 will be sought and followed. 31:8 will confirm its advice in writing in case this is needed for reference purposes in the future.

Allegations of sexual abuse

In the event of allegations or suspicions of sexual abuse, the Coordinator will:

1. Contact directly the Social Services duty social worker for children and families, or the Police Child Protection Team. The Coordinator will NOT speak to the parent (or anyone else).
2. If, for any reason, the Coordinator is unsure whether to follow the above, then advice from 31:8 will be sought and followed. 31:8 will confirm its advice in writing in case this is needed for reference purposes in the future.
3. Under no circumstances will the Coordinator attempt to carry out any investigation into the allegations or suspicions of sexual abuse. The role of the Coordinator is to collect and clarify precise details of the allegation or suspicion, and to provide this information to the Social Services Department. Their task is to investigate the matter under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.
4. Whilst allegations or suspicions of sexual abuse will normally be reported to the Coordinator, the absence or unavailability of the Coordinator or Church Elders should not delay referral to the Social Services Department.
5. Exceptionally, should there be any disagreement between the person in receipt of the allegation or suspicion and the Coordinator or Church Elder as to the appropriateness of a referral to the Social Services Department, that person retains the responsibility as a member of the public to report serious matters to the Social Services Department, and should do so without hesitation.
6. The Leadership Team will support the Coordinator or Church Elder in their role and accept that any information they have in their possession will be shared in a strictly limited way on a need-to-know basis.

How to respond to a child wanting to talk to you about abuse

All regular children's workers will be trained to respond to children wishing to talk about possible abuse. Any other member of the church may also request such information and / or training.

What to do once a child has spoken to you about abuse

1. Make notes as soon as possible (preferably within an hour of being told). Write down exactly what the child said, what you said in reply to the child, when the child said it, and what was happening immediately beforehand (for example, description of activity). Record dates and times of these events, and when you made the record. Keep all handwritten notes securely, even if these have subsequently been typed. The "Responding to abuse – worker's action sheet" form should be used, if appropriate.
2. Report your discussion as soon as possible to the Coordinator. If the latter is implicated report to another Church Elder. If both / all are implicated, report to 31:8 or to Social Services if preferred.

3. You should not discuss your suspicions or allegations with anyone other than those nominated above.
4. Once the child has talked about the abuse, the worker / Coordinator should consider whether it is safe for the child to return home to a potentially abusive situation. On rare occasions it might be necessary to take immediate action to contact Social Services and / or police, to discuss putting into effect safety measures for the child so that they do not return home.

Working with offenders

Where someone attending the church is known to have abused children, then whilst extending friendship to the individual, the Elders, in their commitment to the protection of all children, will meet with the individual and discuss boundaries that the person will be expected to keep.

Helping victims of abuse

As a church we are committed to supporting victims of abuse and encouraging them in their faith.

Appointment of workers

In appointing workers, the church will be responsible for the following:

1. The procedure for appointment will be:
 - a. Discuss with / interview of the person, with specific detail being given of the need to follow the church's policy on safeguarding children's welfare, and expectations in relation to practical issues such as supervision of children's activities.
 - b. Obtain satisfactory references, written or oral, as required.
 - c. DBS check required to be carried out for all key workers involved in supervision of children.
 - d. Agree a suitable probationary period (possibly 3 months). During this time the new appointee would be attached to a more experienced worker, who will give appropriate feedback to the trainee during this period.
 - e. Confirm the appointment, agreeing reviews as appropriate.
2. The criteria for NOT appointing children's workers are:
 - a. Any convictions for offences against children.
 - b. Failure to pass the DBS checks.
 - c. Any credible concerns raised during the above appointment procedure about the suitability of the applicant for working with children.
 - d. In addition, any key leader of children's work in the church will be expected to have a credible and current Christian experience in line with Oakwood Chapel's Statement of Faith.
3. Children's workers will be expected to attend appropriate training on child protection. This training will be held either externally, online or 'in-house'. There would be opportunity for regular updating of this training.
4. Children's workers will be given opportunities to meet together with the leader to discuss work programmes and areas of concern, including issues relating to discipline.
5. The appointment of workers will be reviewed on a regular basis.

Arrangements for supervision of group / children's activities

1. The following youth groups currently operate as a part of the work of Oakwood Chapel:

Group	Age range
Crèche	0-3
Acorn Club	4-6
Twigs	7-10
Tetris	11-15
Acts 29	16-18

2. The leadership of these groups is open to those with:
- A credible Christian commitment in line with Oakwood Chapel's "Statement of Faith".
 - Evident aptitude for working with children of the appropriate ages.
 - Trained in the principles of Safeguarding concerns. For example, by attending an appropriate 31:8 course, or viewing the 31:8 training DVD.
 - Typically, such leaders will be official members of the church.
3. Junior or assistant group leaders remain formally under the supervision of the official leaders at all times, unless similarly qualified. If under 16, they should not be left in sole charge of the children at any time.
4. At least one leader or assistant should be present during group activities.
5. All normal activities of the youth groups take place at Oakwood Chapel on Sundays. Typically during the morning service for all groups. Leaders will usually be present before and after these times but cannot undertake official supervision of the children before the start of any of the sessions. Children are free to leave at the end of the session and may be either collected by a parent or their designate, or (with parental approval) walk home by themselves. During the group sessions, at least one fully trained leader will be present at all times.
6. Other activities will be separately notified in appropriate detail. Specific permission for attendance will be required. An example permission slip is included in Appendix A.
7. In addition to meeting at Oakwood Chapel, groups may meet at times in the homes of members of the Chapel, or at other external venues. Due consideration will be given to the suitability of any persons or homes so incorporated into the programme of events.
8. Leaders of the groups should keep a register of all children attending the group. As soon as a new child seems likely to continue attending, details of the group activities will be provided to, and formal permission to attend will be sought from, the child's parent(s). Typically, this would occur after a month or so of fairly regular attendance.
9. The leaders should have rapid access to pertinent details (such as medical conditions, parental or other contact phone numbers) of the children attending the group, in case of incident. Ideally, the forms with such details, returned by the parents with their permission for the child to attend, should be available during group sessions at whatever location.
10. Any unusual incidents (accident, suspicious language, fights, intrusions etc) should be noted in writing, dated and countersigned by the witness and / or the leader of the group, and retained indefinitely by the Coordinator in an "incident book".
11. Should individual supervision of children be required at any time (for example, for toileting, counselling), appropriate privacy must be maintained, but the leader so involved must inform another leader of the location and nature of the supervision.
12. Leaders should not invite children from these groups into their homes without the knowledge of the other leaders of the group, or without the knowledge and consent, of the parent(s).

Such activities would also require the presence of more than a single leader and ideally not be engaged with, with a single child.

13. If transport is provided to and from any activity, qualified and insured drivers, and properly maintained vehicles must be used. Seat belt rules must be adhered to.
14. The church recognises the necessity to ensure that, as far as is reasonably possible, the premises and any equipment conform to all current safety requirements. A properly stocked First Aid box should always be accessible to any group meeting at the chapel.

Residential Camps

Whenever any of the groups of Oakwood Chapel, singly or collectively, organise a residential camp, the following shall apply:

1. The Leadership Team will appoint a Camp Organiser(s), and a Camp Safeguarding Coordinator. The latter will act in all respects as the Coordinator defined above, but with reference only to the running of the specified camp.
2. Policy ownership – The Leadership Team recognise that where workers from other churches / organisations may be joining the camp, there is a need for clarity relating to the reporting mechanism and response to allegations of abuse. For the benefit of the camp, and for clarity, it is therefore expected that all the sending churches agree to the following:
 - a. All allegations of child abuse will be referred to the Camp Safeguarding Coordinator (hereafter, the “Camp Coordinator”) or their deputy. Any allegation which in any way involve both, such would be reported direct to the Social Services.
 - b. All allegations will be dealt with on a need-to-know basis; this may not include the Church Coordinator.
 - c. If allegations involve a child or worker from a sending church, then the leader of that church or a nominated person (i.e. their Safeguarding Coordinator) will be informed. It is expected that they will keep confidence and not investigate the matter themselves.
 - d. The Camp Coordinator will have the responsibility to action all investigations (unless he / she were involved in the allegations).
 - e. The Camp Coordinator will contact either the home Social Service Department, or the Social Service Department) and police, if appropriate) local to the camp.
3. All leaders or assistant leaders at the camp require the same accreditation as those engaged in regular youth meetings of the church, including the need to provide acceptable references.
4. Written parental permission for attendance and involvement in camp activities must be obtained before leaving for camp. Details of sleeping arrangements at camp must be specified in the information provided to parents. An example permission slip is included in Appendix A.
5. It is the responsibility of workers to know the whereabouts of all children and young people on the camp.
6. Incidents at camp should be noted and recorded in the same way as those occurring during normal youth sessions.
7. A properly stocked First Aid box should always be available at camp, and a trained First Aider should be available throughout. The location and telephone numbers of the nearest doctor and hospital should be readily available.
8. All safety information relevant to the camp site must be clearly communicated to all concerned and all relevant safety procedures (for example, preparation of food, care with regard to fire hazard) must be adhered to.

Abuse of trust

The Home Office booklet, "Caring for young people and the vulnerable? Guidance for preventing abuse of trust", is primarily aimed at protecting young people over the age of consent but under 18 years of age, and vulnerable adults where there is a "relationship of trust" with an adult looking after them.

"Relationship of trust" is defined therein as one in which one party is in a position of power or influence over the other by virtue of their work or the nature of the activity. This may include youth workers in the church.

As a church we undertake to follow the principles found within the Abuse of trust guidance issued by the Home Office. It will therefore be unacceptable for those people in a position of trust to engage in any behaviour which might allow a sexual relationship to develop whilst ever the relationship of trust continues.

Principles and Guidelines for Discipline

Discipline is the education of a person's character. It includes nurturing, training, instruction, verbal rebuke, teaching and encouragement. It brings security, produces character, prepares for life, is evidence of love and is God's heart (Hebrews 12: 5 – 12; Proverbs 22: 6).

- Ask God for wisdom, discernment and understanding, and pray for and with the child.
- Work on each individual child's positives; do not compare them with each other, but encourage them and build them up, giving them responsibility for simple tasks.
- Build healthy relationships with children and be a good role model, setting a good example. You can't expect children to observe good rules if you break them yourself.
- Take care to give quieter and well-behaved children attention, and don't allow some children to take all your time and energy.
- Be consistent in what you say and ensure that other team members know what you have said. This avoids manipulation.
- Look honestly at your programme. If children are bored, they misbehave. Is the programme at fault?
- *Never* smack or hit a child, and don't shout (change voice tone if necessary).
- Discipline out of love, *never* anger. Call on support from other leaders if you feel you may deal with the situation unwisely in your anger.
- Lay down ground rules (for example no swearing, racism or calling each other names, a respect for property) and make sure the children understand what action will be taken if these are not kept.
- Each child is unique, special and individual, and needs a different method of dealing with. We need to ask why the child is behaving that way.
- Separate children who have a tendency to be disruptive when together. Give them a chance, warn them, and only separate as a last resort if they continue to be disruptive.
- Have the disruptive child sit right in front of you. Or get a helper to sit next to them.
- Be pro-active and encourage helpers to be pro-active and not wait to be told to deal with a situation.
- Take the child aside and talk to them, challenge them to change, whilst encouraging them on their strengths.
- Warn a child that you will speak to their parents and do so if necessary. Warn them, send them outside the room (care re: supervision!) or ban them for a week. Never administer a total ban without reference to the leader, and ensure parents are advised in cases of banning.
- If a child's behaviour is constantly disruptive, seek advice and guidance from the leader.

- Pray before you meet and talk over the session before you leave.

How to respond to a child wanting to talk about abuse

It is not easy to give precise guidance, but the following may help.

General points

- Show acceptance of what the child says (however unlikely it may sound)
- Keep calm
- Look at the child directly
- Be honest
- Tell the child you will need to let someone else know – don't promise confidentiality
- Even when a child has broken a rule, they are not to blame for the abuse
- Be aware that the child may have been threatened or bribed not to tell
- Never push for information. If the child decides not to tell you after all, then accept that and let them know that you are always ready to listen

Helpful things you may say or show

- "I believe you" (or showing acceptance of what the child says)
- "Thank you for telling me"
- "It's not your fault"
- "I will help you"

Don't say

- "Why didn't you tell anyone before?"
- "I can't believe it!"
- "Are you sure this is true?"
- "Why?" "How?" "When?" "Who?" "Where?"
- "I am shocked, don't tell anyone else."
- Never make false promises

Concluding

- Again, reassure the child that they were right to tell you, and show acceptance.
- Let the child know what you are going to do next, and that you will let them know what happens (you might consider referring to Social Services or the Police to prevent a child or young person returning home if you consider them to be at serious risk of further abuse.
- Contact the person in your church responsible for coordinating safeguarding concerns. Or contact an agency such as 31:8 for advice; or go directly to Social Services / Police / NSPCC.
- Consider your own feelings and seek pastoral support if needed.

Make notes as soon as possible (preferably within one hour of the child talking to you). Write down exactly what the child said and when he/she said it, what you said in reply, and what was happening immediately beforehand (for example a description of the activity). Record dates and times of these events, noting also when you made the record. Keep all handwritten notes, even if subsequently typed. Such records should be kept safely for an indefinite period.

Recognising abuse

The following signs may or may not be indicators that abuse has taken place, but the possibility should be considered.

Physical signs of abuse

- Any injuries not consistent with the explanation given for them.
- Injuries which occur to the body in places which are not normally exposed to falls, rough games, etc.
- Injuries that have not received medical treatment.
- Neglect – under nourishment, failure to grow, constant hunger, stealing or gorging food, untreated illnesses, inadequate care, etc.
- Reluctance to change for, or participate in, games and swimming.
- Repeated urinary infections or unexplained stomach pains.
- Bruises, bites, burns, fracture, etc. which do not have an accidental explanation.
- Cuts / scratches / substance abuse.

Indicators of possible sexual abuse

- Any allegations made by a child concerning sexual abuse.
- Child with excessive preoccupation with sexual matters and detailed knowledge of adult sexual behaviour, or who regularly engages in age-inappropriate sexual play.
- Sexual activity through words, play or drawing.
- Child who is sexually provocative or seductive with adults.
- Inappropriate bed-sharing arrangements at home.
- Severe sleep disturbances with fears, phobias, vivid dreams or nightmares, sometimes with overt or veiled sexual connotations.
- Eating disorders: anorexia, bulimia.

Emotional signs of abuse

- Changes or regression in mood or behaviour, particularly where a child withdraws or becomes clinging. Also depression / aggression, extreme anxiety.
- Nervousness, frozen watchfulness.
- Obsession with phobias.
- Sudden under-achievement or lack of concentration.
- Inappropriate relationships with peers and / or adults.
- Attention seeking behaviour.
- Persistent tiredness.
- Running away / stealing / lying.

Appendix A: Example permission slip

48 New Drive
Bridgetown
AA1 2BB

Tel: 01234 567890
Mob: 07777 987654
Email: Joe.Bloggs@email.provider

1 June 2023

Dear <Group> parents/guardians,

<Group> trip to <venue> on <date>

We are planning a <Group> trip to <venue> for <purpose>. We suggest that your child(ren) bring about £10 with them to cover the cost of anything they may wish to buy. They may also want to bring a packed lunch with them or buy food once we arrive at <destination>.

We will be meeting at the Chapel / Harlow Town station / etc at: <departure time> and returning to the Chapel / Harlow Town station / etc at: <return time>. Please make the necessary arrangements to drop off and collect your child(ren) at the appropriate times.

Please return the permission slip below by <date> if you are happy for your child(ren) to take part in this activity.

Please contact me if you have any questions about this event.

Best wishes,

Joe Bloggs (on behalf of <Group> leaders)

<Group> trip to <venue> on <date>

Name of child(ren):

I give my consent for my child(ren) to take part in this activity.

Signature: