# Safeguarding Policy

BCV Kids and Youth ministry
Updated December 2025

Belfast City Vineyard

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# 1.POLICY STATEMENT

At Belfast City Vineyard, we are committed to providing an environment that values our children by promoting their welfare and by protecting them from harm. We aim to provide and maintain a safe environment, characterised by love and trust, in which our children can grow spiritually, emotionally and relationally with God and with other people.

The staff at Belfast City Vineyard recognise and accept our duty to promote awareness of safeguarding issues and to respond comprehensively to safeguarding concerns and allegations. We are committed to regularly reviewing our policy, procedures, practice, and updating it regularly in line with changing government policy.

**To protect our children, we endeavour to adhere to the following:**

- Full implementation of the child protection policy.

- Adopting church recommendations of good practice, based on the 'Our Duty to Care' document, published by the Volunteer Development Agency.

- Adhering to statutory requirements on safeguarding children and young people, including legislation related to Positions of Trust in faith settings[1].

- Providing regular, annual training for everyone involved in caring for our children, both staff and volunteers. This will specifically relate to child protection information and promotion of good practice.

- Adhering to procedures for appointment of leaders and helpers involved in children's and youth ministry.

- Following church procedures for reporting of concerns involving parents, children and people working with them.

- Ensuring health and safety procedures are followed.

- Keep child protection on the agenda

  The Board of Directors has the responsibility to be aware of child protection issues and concerns relevant to our church. That said, the whole Board may not always be made aware of every incident or issue because of confidentiality reasons, and in some cases they may simply be informed that there was an incident and no other specifics will be given. In order to ensure

[1] Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, Section 29A.

the Board is kept up to date, child protection should be an item on each meeting agenda. Even if there is nothing to report, it should be recorded that this is the case.

It is a legal requirement for churches to have a policy in place and we have a duty of care to the children, youth and vulnerable adults in our church and ministries.

The Children (NI) order 1995 emphasise key principles.

- A fundamental principle of childcare law and practice is the welfare of the child must be the paramount consideration.
- Parents have a responsibility to children rather than rights over them.
- The most effective way of ensuring a child's needs are met is to work in partnership. The provision of services must therefore take into account the views of parents.
- Children should be safe and should be protected by early intervention if they are in danger.

# CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

- A **child** is a person under 18 years old. Where either children or youth are mentioned in the guidelines, both are intended.

- A **leader** is anyone 18 years old or over who is engaged in work or voluntary activity which involves regular contact with children or youth.

- A **young leader** or **helper** is a person aged between 15 and 18 years who assists in programmes working with children, but with appropriate oversight from adult staff and/or adult volunteers.

- A leader in a **regulated position** is an adult working either as a volunteer or in a paid position, four or more times a year, in direct contact with children or vulnerable adults.

- An adult at risk of harm is anyone aged 18 or over who cannot adequately protect or take care of themselves. This may be because they have a mental health problem, a disability, visual or hearing problems, are old and frail, or are ill. These conditions may result in an elevated risk to abuse, exploitation or neglect.

# 2. CODE OF CONDUCT FOR ADULTS SERVING IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRY

In planning our code of behaviour towards children in BCV, we take our example from Jesus' teaching and ministry to children. We read in the Bible that:

- He welcomed them and told us to do likewise.
- He rebuked anyone that might cause them to sin.
- He instructed us not to look down on them.
- He laid hands on them and prayed for them, with parents and other witnesses present.
- He told us not to hinder them or stand in their way.

Based on these principles we expect anyone involved in children's and youth ministry to fully adhere to the following guidelines for good practice:

- We will do our utmost to be positive role models for the children in our prayer, our commitment to reading the Bible, our worship and in how we serve them and other people.

- We will always praise good behaviour.

- Children will be encouraged, but not forced to participate fully in activities.

- We will value children by providing a high quality of teaching, worship and resources.

- We will always respect a child by listening to them when they come to us. We will not ask a child to wait until later if they wish to tell us something. They may not remember by later and it may be very important.

- We will treat all children fairly, equally and consistently.

- Sexual abuse or sexual contact with children is strictly forbidden. All reports or allegations of sexual abuse will be followed up robustly, including reporting to statutory services (Police and Social Services).

- Private communication with a child or young person by an adult, including online forms of communication, are strictly

forbidden and will be appropriately challenged and followed up. This may include disciplinary measures being taken against the adult.

- Physical punishment is strictly forbidden. All discipline will be based on love and will involve the children's parents / guardians.

- Verbal abuse in the form of shouting at a child is strictly forbidden. We appreciate that a leader may on specific occasions need to shout, for example, to warn a child of danger, but shouting should never be used as a tool for managing challenging behaviour, as it can foster fear and anxiety rather than acceptance, security and value.

- An appropriate ratio of adults: children will be maintained at all times (see supervision in appendices for recommended figures).
  **It is never appropriate for a child to be alone with an adult.**

- Any personal information regarding children will be kept confidential, in line with data protection laws.

- Appropriate physical contact is always in direct response to a child's need. It will always be ability and age appropriate.

# 3. CODE OF CONDUCT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- Positive behaviour will be encouraged, recognised and rewarded at all times.

- Children will be encouraged to respect other people at all times. This means behaving well towards friends and leaders, listening well to others and speaking words that build up rather than tear down.

- In light of this ethos, physical fighting is never acceptable. Children who harm another child physically with intention (e.g. punching, kicking) will be taken back to their parents/guardians for the remainder of the service. Time will be set aside after the service for the children's/youth pastor to talk through what has happened with the child and their parents. The safety of children attending vineyard kids and youth ministry is paramount, and if the child repeats the offense, they will face a ban from attending kids'/youth ministry. This will be for a length of time agreed with the parents/guardians of the child and the Children's/Youth Pastor.

- We understand that when a toddler hits or bites, etc, this is a very different thing. In this scenario we will aim to deal with an issue in the moment while it is fresh in the child's mind. Toddlers are constantly testing cause and effect. They don't have the skills to get what they want in a reasonable way, so they may act pushy or overly defiant, using the only tools they have. Should a toddler's behaviour show an ongoing pattern that causes their leader concern, we will discuss a plan to move forwards with the child's parents.

- Bullying is never acceptable. This includes any online bullying that occurs between children and young people whose relationship is primarily derived from the BCV context. Physical and verbal bullying will not be tolerated and if persistent may also result in a ban. Again this will be based on discussion with the Children's/Youth Pastor, the child and their parents/guardian.

# 4. SHARING AND STORING INFORMATION

In BCV, we view our children's spiritual development as a partnership between the church and the home, but we understand that parents have the leading role in discipling their own children. As such, it is imperative that there is good communication between children's ministry leaders and parents. General information regarding children's ministry will be available for circulation to parents, the children's ministry team and those attending the church and through information sessions and training nights.

### Information from parents

Any essential information will be gained by completion of parental consent forms for every child.

Kids Parental Consent Form 2025/26
Youth Parental Consent Form 2025/26

Emergency contacts will also be obtained. Parents are strongly encouraged to communicate relevant medical and mental health conditions, and/or potential treatment and management plan that leaders need to know about, e.g. epilepsy, ~~nut~~ allergies, asthma, anxiety, autism etc. This will be documented and communicated to leaders, to ensure the child is well cared for and appropriately supported. The leader in charge of each room will check for updates each time they're on.

### Confidentiality

Information regarding children will only be shared on a need to know basis. Information and consent forms will be stored as confidential information in the church office or electronically on church suite. They are only to be accessed by the nominated officers, senior pastors and the parents of the child concerned. **It is the responsibility of the parents to inform us of any changes regarding their child's needs.** This includes anything that would affect or impact BCV's ability to adequately care for and provide the right environment to meet the child's needs.

### Record Keeping

The children's ministry team will be aware of record keeping procedures. All children aged 0-11 years, being left in the care of our children's ministry teams must be signed in before they arrive by an adult with parental responsibility and checked in by a leader on arrival, in accordance with Vineyard Kids welcome procedures. At the end of the church service, they must be collected in person, following which they are no longer the responsibility of the children's ministry team. Youth attending any youth event will have their attendance recorded by a youth leader. Special youth events will require specific permission for attendance from parents in advance. Records of attendance of children and leaders will be stored on church suite. **Accidents should always be**

**documented no matter how minor,** using an accident report form (see appendices). Parents should be informed as soon as possible.

### Parental Consent Forms

Parental consent forms will be completed for all children under the age of 18 in our ministries to ensure that we have current contact and medical information of all children in our care. These forms are electronic and will be stored on Church Suite and shared in line with all data protection laws and procedures. Annually parents will be asked if any details have changed.

### Photos

We may use photographs of children in our church for projects in our ministries. Consent for taking and sharing of photographs will be obtained on the parental consent forms. Occasionally, we may use these photos on Sundays for announcements and for BCV publicity on the webpage and kid's flyers. We will always gain additional consent and show these to parents for review before publishing. Young people attending any youth programmes will be asked whether they consent to photographs being taken and shared. Please see our "Social Media" section for details on publishing photos via these mediums.

### Parent's Contact Details

Email addresses of the parents will also be obtained with permission to be shared with kid's leaders. All children listed on our permanent registers will have completed the consent form. See appendices for form.

## DATA PROTECTION

Under the Data Protection Act (1998) registered organisations should be aware that they must be careful when handling personal data belonging to children and leaders e.g. names, phone numbers, addresses and medical information.

Organisations must only hold data which is adequate, relevant and not excessive in relation to the purpose for which it is held. They must ensure that personal data is accurate and where necessary, kept up to date. Organisations must do what they can to prevent unauthorised or accidental access to personal data and must hold data for no longer than necessary. Therefore the following principles should be followed for all organisations in answer to the questions below:

**Where should forms be kept?**

- All consent forms, accident forms, or any information on children or leaders should be kept in a confidential but accessible location. We use a locked filing cabinet in the Vineyard Centre for any forms that are recorded on paper. Electronic consent forms are stored on Church Suite.

- All consent forms, accident forms, or any information on children or leaders should not be kept in a person's own home for long periods of time.

- Leaders must ensure that they have easy access to relevant data such as children's contact details and medical information when the organisation is meeting.

- Incident/accident forms should also be held securely on church premises.

**Who should have access to information on children and leaders?**

- Information about children and leaders should be on a need-to-know basis.

- The exception to this is medical information where it is important that all leaders in a supervisory role are aware of conditions that children have.

- Information about leaders and children should not be given to any external party but only used for the purpose for which it was given. This excludes situations where a child or young person is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm and this information is relevant to a report to statutory services[2].

**What about data kept on computers?**

- The same rules apply for data kept on computers; data is confidential and should be kept on church premises. In order to keep the data protected, it should be held on a dedicated password protected file.

**How long should records on children and leaders be kept?**

- Consent forms (basic information such as name, date of birth and address) should be kept for up to six years after the child has left the organisation. Thereafter, it should either be destroyed (i.e. shredded or burnt) or given back to the child or parent.

- The same applies to information on leaders – i.e. it is retained for up to six years after they have left their position.
- Incident/accident forms and the register of all leaders should be kept indefinitely.

[2] Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, Article 66.

# 5. WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

Child abuse occurs when the behaviour of someone in a position of greater power than a child causes them harm. Fundamentally, all forms of child abuse comes down to the misuse of adult power over children. There are also occasions where children can abuse other children and this has different causes. The common denominator of all forms of child abuse is that it makes children feel bad and worthless. Whatever the reason, abuse is always wrong, and it is never the child's fault.

Abusers can be from any background. While they are predominantly male, women and other children are also known to abuse. **Abusers are generally known to the child and are frequently trusted adult figures. They are rarely strangers.** Child abusers are often highly skilled, manipulative individuals, whose primary intention is to get close to children in order to gain their trust and co-operation. They might single out a child for special attention, or target vulnerable children and families. Since children don't expect adults to harm them, especially those who take care of them, and are generally taught to be obedient and to believe adults, it is only too easy for abusers to persuade children that there is nothing wrong and that they shouldn't tell. It is our responsibility to accept that both victims of abuse and child abusers may attend our church and we must therefore do our utmost to protect children by being aware of the types and signs of abuse and to manage offenders robustly.

The recognition of child abuse is never a black and white issue. As a church community we have a responsibility for the protection of our children. There are different types of abuse and a child may suffer more than one type of abuse. As children can be abused in a number of ways, the harm caused cannot always be easily categorised, but we can identify four broad definitions of abuse ("Co-operating to Protect Children", volume 6 of the Children (NI) Order Regulations and Guidance):

**Physical abuse** may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces illness in a child.

Signs and symptoms may include:

- unexplained recurrent injuries or burns
- improbable excuses or refusal to explain injuries
- self-destructive tendencies
- fear of physical contact, a shrinking back if touched

**Neglect** is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health and development.

Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance misuse.

Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)
- protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger
- ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-takers)
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment
- meet a child's basic emotional needs

Signs and symptoms may include:

- Constant hunger
- Inadequate clothing
- Constant tiredness
- Poor personal hygiene

**Emotional abuse** is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyber bullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

Signs and symptoms may include:

- Delays in physical, mental and emotional development
- Continual belittling of oneself
- Over-reaction to mistakes
- Extreme fear of any new situation
- Inappropriate response to pain
- Neurotic behaviour

**Sexual abuse** involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet).
Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

Signs and symptoms may include:

- Sexual knowledge, including drawing sexually explicit pictures, or use of language inappropriate for the child's age
- Being over affectionate in a sexual way that is inappropriate to the child's age or excessive curiosity with sex or genitalia.
- Regression to younger behavioural patterns such as thumb sucking
- Self-mutilation, suicide attempts, running away, overdosing, anorexia :: sudden loss of appetite or compulsive eating
- Physical complaints regarding certain body parts or physical injury.

**Child Sexual Exploitation** is form of sexual abuse where a child or young person is tricked, forced or manipulated into sexual activity in exchange for things they may need or want. This may be for physical items like gifts, phones, money, or drugs. It can also be for receipt of love, affection and status. Victims of CSE may not realise they are being coerced or lied to and may feel the relationship is equal and consensual. Anyone, adult or minor, can perpetrate CSE and it can occur in real life or online.

Signs and symptoms may include:

- possessing new items, (e.g. phone, clothes, video games), without any obvious explanation for how these were bought/procured.
- noticeable change in mood/demeanour
- increased isolation from family/friends or friction in pre-existing relationships.
- secrecy and being unwilling to explain any of the signs above.
- physical changes, including injuries or increasing lack of hygiene.
- inappropriate sexual behaviour or medical issues resulting from sex (e.g. sexually transmitted infections; pregnancy).

## SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Youth attending church ministries are also at risk of being exposed to substance abuse. This can range from smoking to experimenting with solvents, alcohol and drugs. It is important leaders are aware of the danger signs and include awareness training in their programme planning for high risk groups.

## DOMESTIC ABUSE AND CHILDREN

Violence against women and men in the home is a serious crime, which causes enormous health and social problems and emotional and psychological damage, not only to the victims, but also to their children. The law now recognises that children exposed to domestic abuse are victims of this crime in their own right[3]. Children are often witnesses and are necessarily affected by the anxiety and personal threat to themselves. Domestic violence is the most common form of interpersonal crime and also the least reported.

Leaders should be aware that children may not only overhear or observe violence in the home, but may become direct victims, either accidentally or deliberately. The social pressures to remain within a violent home and the stigma that parents perceive in relation to living in refuges or temporary accommodation as single parents should not be underestimated. It is important for leaders of our ministries to be aware that agencies such as PSNI and Health & Social Care Trusts have developed policies to help in situations of domestic violence and that advice, support and help are available from the Women's Aid Federation. Men experiencing domestic violence may also have to seek refuge; accommodation may be available in the Simon Community.

The impact of domestic violence on children can lead to physical, psychological and behavioural disorders and may subsequently affect them when they become parents.

## BULLYING

Our church should be a safe and welcoming place for all children and our programmes should develop a culture of openness where children and leaders feel able to say if they or their friends are being bullied.

**What is bullying?**

The government defines bullying as, "Deliberately hurtful behaviour repeated often over a period of time".[2] Bullying can happen anywhere to anyone; anyone has the potential to bully others.

[2]

[3] Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021

www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Yourchildshealthandsafety/WorriedAbout/DG_10015786

**What forms does it take?**

Bullying can be name-calling or teasing. Bullying is often physical; victims are pushed, punched, kicked and hit. Victims can be forced to do things they don't want to do or are left out of games or ignored by others. Cyber bullying is when bullies contact their victims via text messaging or the internet. This often intensifies the bullying as victims have little escape from their bullies.

## Preventative Measures

All leaders should try to prevent bullying within their teams. However, if it does happen, leaders must deal with it and not ignore it.

If children are new to the group or spend a lot of time on their own, leaders should encourage others to befriend them. Having friends is one of the best defences against bullying. Leaders should always reward and acknowledge positive behaviour, especially young people who befriend others or prevent or stop bullying. Bullying should be discussed openly within the group and young people should be regularly encouraged to talk to the leaders about anything that is bothering them.

## How to deal with bullying

- Talk to the victim(s) and find out what has happened. Reassure them that it is not their fault and they have made the right decision in telling you. Make sure they are supported throughout the process.

- Meet with those involved. It might be suitable to discuss the issue with all members of the group, not just those who are bullying. It is not necessary to mention the victim by name. Talk about how they would feel if they were being left out/called names etc.

- Discuss how the situation could be improved - if bullying is happening how it can be stopped and how can everyone feel happier in the group? Make sure everyone within the group is adhering to the code of conduct.

- If the bullying continues, make sure the agreed consequences are carried out.

- If the bullying is serious, report it to the designated person and to parents.

- Ensure that adequate support is in place for the one who has been doing the bullying and all attempts have been made for them to be discouraged from repeating this behaviour.

- Keep the situation under constant review.

## SELF-HARM AND SUICIDE

Increasingly people who work with children and young people are being faced with the issue of self-harm. In very basic terms it is 'the inflicting of physical pain to mask an emotional imbalance'. Anyone in this situation needs to be supported.

In 2004 the Royal College of Psychiatrists observed, 'deliberate self-harm is a term used when someone injures or harms themselves on purpose. Common examples include "overdosing" (self-poisoning), hitting, cutting, or burning oneself, pulling hair, or picking skin, or self strangulation. It can also include taking illegal drugs and excessive amounts of alcohol. Self-harm is always a sign of something being seriously wrong."[4] Disclosure of any self-harm should never be ignored; it is a clear sign that someone needs help and that self-esteem is low. Care should always be taken in how this problem is managed and advice should be sought at all times.

### Suicide

Whilst self-harm does not always lead to suicide, nor do those who attempt suicide self-harm, suicide can at times be seen as the ultimate act of self-harm.

*Leaders must be aware that if a child discloses they are suicidal then the leaders have a duty to inform parents or make sure they are informed.* As in the case of all other pastoral concerns, ensure individuals of any age are safe and have a network of support.

Signs and symptoms of suicide:

- Withdrawing from friends and family
- Loss of interest in usual activities
- Signs of sadness, hopelessness and irritability
- Making negative remarks about themselves
- Talking or writing about suicide
- Putting their affairs in order
- Giving away personal items
- A sudden change from extreme depression to appearing to cope and being calm

[4] 3 Royal College of Psychiatrists Self Harm fact sheet 26, 2004

These signs are not definitive but are possibly some of the signs displayed by someone who is suicidal. Others may show no sign of their pain at all. The only way to address our concern is to ask.

**What to do if you think or know that a young person is suicidal?**

- Listen to how they feel
- Take them seriously
- Offer your support
- Encourage them to seek further help i.e. a doctor, professional counsellor, family member or friend
- Follow the reporting process (see appendices)
- If they appear acutely suicidal and unable to talk, it may be necessary to seek immediate help through hospital casualty department

# 6. RESPONDING, REPORTING AND RECORDING

The Volunteer Development Agency (2003) defines a concern as that which "*relates to the possibility of a child suffering harm."* A basic rule of thumb is that if you become aware of anything which causes you to feel uncomfortable, you should talk about it with someone else. This means being aware of the attitudes of church staff, leaders and volunteers, and of interactions between them and the children and between each other. You should be alert to any unusual incidents or activities which take place where you felt that staff and volunteers are putting themselves or others in a vulnerable position. All concerns, whether related to activities within BCV or not, should be reported to the nominated officer. Anyone, (including but not limited to parents, staff member or volunteer), can report a concern to the nominated officer. This includes concerns relating to a child's family or school situation. Concerns include sudden unexplained or worrying changes in behaviour, physical signs or symptoms that may be indicative of abuse, worrying remarks made by a child.

### Incidents

An incident is "*a situation where a child or young person, staff or volunteer is affected by a breach of the Code of Behaviour during organisational activities*", e.g. verbal abuse, deliberate harm of another person, etc. (V.D.A 2003). All incidents must be recorded and reported to a nominated officer.

### Disclosures

A disclosure is "*when a child or young person tells a staff member/volunteer that they have been or are being harmed or abused in some way,"* (V.D.A 2003). This may be physical, sexual or emotional abuse, neglect or bullying. It is important that the person who has made the disclosure is supported and that a report is made immediately.

### Concerns/Allegations about Behaviour of Leaders

Inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour, favouritism or negligence regarding conduct of an adult working with children, may lead you to feel concerned. If you are concerned you should report your concern to the leader in charge of the room or the Children's Pastor. All concerns will be logged in the Children's Pastor's 'pastoral diary,' and if necessary the Children's Pastor will follow the concern up with a conversation. Guidance will be taken from the other nominated officers and senior pastors.

It may be that you need to make an allegation about the behaviour of a leader in children/ youth ministry. An allegation occurs when a child, parent or person involved in children or youth ministry reports specific

unacceptable behaviour, where a child has been abused or harmed in some way. **All allegations should be reported to one of the nominated officers. Should a nominated officer be the subject of allegation, report any concerns to the Senior Pastors**. A nominated officer will complete a Disclosure Report form and provide you with feedback. (See appendices).

### Becoming Aware of Abuse

There are a number of ways in which you may become aware of abuse:

- A child may tell you.
- Someone else may tell you that a child has told them or that they strongly believe a child has been or is being abused.
- A child may show some signs of physical injury for which there appears to be no satisfactory explanation.
- A child's behaviour may indicate to you that it is likely that he/she is being abused.
- Your awareness of, or suspicion about abuse may come about as a result of something disclosed by a third party (parent, friend, co-worker) who suspects or has been told of the abuse.
- You might observe something you suspect is abusive.
- Something in the behaviour of one of the workers or in the way a worker relates to a child alerts you or makes you feel uncomfortable in some way.

While it is difficult to accept that abuse may happen within our church, and equally difficult to express our concerns, it is important that you communicate your concerns to the nominated officer. You must not attempt to deal with this alone and you will be fully supported throughout the reporting process. It is your primary responsibility to report actual or likely abuse and to ensure that your concern is taken seriously. You are not responsible for deciding whether or not abuse has occurred. That is a task for the professional agencies following a referral to them of concern about a child.

If you have any concern, it is imperative that you take action and report it immediately. Always ask God for wisdom when working with children. Try to remain calm and listen carefully to the child. Reassure them, but under no circumstances should you make promises not to tell. Write down everything the child has told you afterwards. Contact the nominated officer. Record your report on a disclosure report form.

What to do and what not to do if a child discloses to you:

### Do

- Stay calm
- Listen
- Give time for the child to say what they want
- Reassure them that they have done the right thing in telling
- Write down what was said to you or what you observed as soon as possible

- Write down the exact words that the child used
- Use the Report of Concern form
- Ensure that the Designated Person is informed without delay

Don't

- Do not panic
- Do not make a child repeat the story unnecessarily
- Do not promise to keep secrets
- Do not investigate
- Under no circumstances should you attempt to deal with the problem alone

# RECORDING

## Child's words

It is very important that any words a child says are recorded accurately. If a child says something of concern to a leader, this should be recorded immediately on any piece of paper at hand and then the Report of Concern form written up at a later stage. Once completed, the Report of Concern form should be given to the Designated Person or minister and kept confidentially.

# DISCLOSURE REPORT FORM

The person who has reported the concern should complete a Disclosure Report Form

Try to have available the following information:

- The name and address of the child
- Age of the child
- The nature of any injury or complaint
- The need for medical attention (if any)
- What your concern actually is
- What course of action you have already taken (if any)
- Any other information you may have (e.g. what school they attend, the name of their GP)

## BCV Referral Procedure

- Report your concern directly to one of the nominated officers.
- Document your concern on the appropriate record form, with a nominated officer.
- It is the responsibility of the nominated officer to decide on the appropriate action. If unsure they will consult with Gateway Services for advice.
- A meeting will be organised to give feedback to the person who reported the concern. A record of the decision will be attached to the disclosure report form and stored as confidential information in the church office.

**It is your legal responsibility to report any concern you have about a child and to ensure that your concern is taken seriously. If you are not happy with the decision made, you can approach Social services yourself in an independent capacity.**

## ACCIDENT REPORT FORM

We have accident report booklets with forms to record details of accidents. These forms should be used for the recording of accidents, incidents, injuries and any action taken, no matter how minor. Each entry should be signed by the leader in charge. Parents/guardians should be informed of the accident/incident in person or by phone as soon as possible. Completed forms should be removed from the booklet and given to a member of BCV staff.

# 7. SHARING SIGNIFICANT INFORMATION

Due to our ethos of partnership, parents, children and those on the children's ministry team are always welcome to schedule a meeting with the Under 18s Pastors or with the Senior Pastors. If you wish to discuss anything, you may schedule an appointment with the relevant leader. It is our aim to foster positive relationships, which should encourage a swift and loving response when dealing with any problems.

It is the statutory responsibility of the church as a community to report any concerns regarding a child's safety or well-being. It is essential that all members of the church remain informed and alert to circumstances in which a child may be ill-treated. If you do have knowledge or a suspicion that a child is at risk, you should immediately inform one of the nominated officers within BCV, who will then consider appropriate action. It is not the responsibility of anyone attending BCV to identify and investigate possible instances of abuse of children. This is the role of the statutory agencies, Social services, PSNI and the NSPCC. The role of the nominated officers is to make contact with the relevant agencies to report any allegations against staff, incidents, disclosures or concerns, as appropriate. BCV will endeavour to fully support anyone through the reporting process.

## Safeguarding Officers

| **Safeguarding Lead** | **Safeguarding Deputy** |
|---|---|
| Andy Shields | Alan Carson |
| Tel: 07389 765972 | Tel: 07800 732903 |

# Additional Contacts

Any abuse issues relating to children in Northern Ireland should be dealt with either by the PSNI or Social Services.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Health and Social Service Trusts** | All reports of a child protection nature in Northern Ireland are dealt with by either PSNI or by a local **Gateway** Team located with the Health & Social Service Trusts, who provide integrated health and social care services across Northern Ireland. Contact details for Social Services located within each Trust can be found on the Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland website **www.n-i.nhs.uk.** |
| **NSPCC Helpline** | 0808 800 5000 |
| **Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI)** | Within the PSNI, it is the Child Abuse Investigation Units (CAIU) that deals with issues relating to children. They are part of the overarching Public Protection Unit, there is one CAIU in each of the 8 policing districts. They are made up of male and female detectives who work in plain clothes and are specifically trained to investigate all alleged and suspected cases of child abuse. Contact the central number **0845 600 8000** or in the event of an emergency phone **999** |

# 8. GETTING INVOLVED IN CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH MINISTRY

In BCV, we believe that God equips and calls us to serve within our church. We could not run our youth and children's ministries without the help and commitment of those willing to serve our children and parents. It is our responsibility to look after and support all those who are involved, as well as maintaining a safe and nurturing child-centred environment. In order to facilitate this, the church will ensure that:

- All those who serve in Children and Youth ministry adhere to the safeguarding policy. Our children and young people deserve the very best in teaching and care. In following the policy, we wish to maintain standards of care and eliminate risk.

- A recruitment procedure will be followed for all those who work with children and youth. Anyone wishing to serve in Children's or Youth ministry must complete a Children's / Youth ministry online application form, which can be requested by contacting one of the Under 18s Pastors or contacting the church office. Applicants will be vetted by 'Access NI.' Everyone working with under 18's in our church are required to have an enhanced check. All applicants should be aware that in submitting an Access NI application they are agreeing to us making a 'barred list check application.' Two references will be gathered and stored as confidential by the nominated officers for anyone with substantial access. An informal meeting will be held with the Under 18s pastor(s).

- Anyone beginning to volunteer in Under 18s ministry must watch an 'Intro Training' video before they begin serving. All volunteers must attend safeguarding training ~~and~~ on a yearly basis. Leaders will also attend any other necessary special skills training.

- The safeguarding policy is available to staff, volunteers and parents on the BCV website.

## INDEPENDENT SAFEGUARDING AUTHORITY

It is a legal requirement that churches must inform the Independent Safeguarding Authority (i.e. the Disclosure and Barring Service) if they remove a person from volunteering or working in regulated activity with

children or vulnerable adults in Northern Ireland[5]. According to the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007, a regulated activity provider must refer to the ISA when they have withdrawn permission for a person to engage in regulated activity because they think that the person meets the following criteria:

- The person has received a caution/conviction for a relevant offence. This would be a serious offence that automatically bars a person from working with children or vulnerable adults.

- The person is suspected of being engaged in endangering conduct. Examples include conduct which endangers a child or vulnerable adult or is likely to endanger them and conduct of a sexual nature involving a child. This conduct could be acts of omission or commission.

- When the harm test is satisfied. The harm test is where it is thought that a person may harm a child or vulnerable adult, cause them to be harmed, or where a person has put a child/vulnerable adult at risk of harm, attempted to harm a child/vulnerable adult or incited another to harm a child/vulnerable adult. More information can be found on the Independent Safeguarding Authority website: **www.isa.homeoffice.gov.uk**.

# VETTING

## General vetting principles

In order to comply with the law and good practice, all leaders taking up a regulated position to work with children and young people must be vetted.

The process of vetting leaders involves a criminal records check which will show if an applicant has any criminal convictions. The vetting process does take time and because of this, churches are urged to recruit their leaders well in advance and allow for this time when planning events. Just because a person does not have a criminal record, does not mean that they are suitable to work with children. It simply means they have no criminal record. A person who does have a criminal conviction will not necessarily be barred from working with children and young people within a church setting. Only convictions considered relevant will be taken into consideration when an appointment is made.

Please be assured that all certificates, forms and conviction information are treated sensitively and confidentially.

[5]https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/disclosure-and-barring-protecting-children-and-vulnerable-adults#toc-3

## ~~Northern Ireland~~

~~Leaders who are working in a regulated activity with children and young people should complete an Access Northern Ireland form. Leaders should only complete the application form if they meet the frequency test (see section below). The leader in charge of each ministry should also be vetted~~

## Regulated Activity

Leaders who are working in a regulated activity with children and young people should complete an **Enhanced** Access NI **Check**.

Regulated activity is defined by Part 1, Schedule 2 of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007[6], as amended by the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, Schedule 7, Part 1[7]. Regulated activity is work that someone barred from working with children must not do. Typically, this refers to: *"Teaching, training or instruction of children, carried out by the same person frequently (once a week or more often), or on 4 or more days in a 30-day period, or overnight. Day to day management or supervision on a regular basis of a person providing this activity which would be regulated if unsupervised. Para 1(152")[8].*

There are now some exceptions to this. The NI Department of Justice states that the level of supervision for the activity is now the determinative factor for whether it is considered regulated activity or not[9]. The activity is no longer considered regulated for a person if it is a group activity under the direction or assistance, or reasonable day-to-day supervision of someone who is performing their role as regulated activity[10]. Due to the nature and frequency of BCV Under 18s ministries throughout the year, and a lot of volunteer roles having the opportunity to be considered regulated activity, our position is that all volunteers are asked to complete an Enhanced Access NI check.

## Position of Trust

The law in Northern Ireland recognises that adults who regularly coach, teach, train, supervise or instruct minors in matters of faith hold a position of trust[11]. Where an adult uses that position of trust in order to sexually harm a child, they will be subject to criminal sanction.

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[6] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/2007/1351/schedule/2

[7] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/9/schedule/7/paragraph/1

[8] https://www.healthni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dhssps/regulated-activity-children.pdf

[9] https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/articles/regulated-activity-and-enhanced-checks

[10] https://www.healthni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dhssps/regulated-activity-children.pdf

[11] Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, Section 29A

# MANAGING OFFENDERS

The Vineyard Church believes that within the context of grace and forgiveness, attendance at worship services is open to everyone. At the same time, a person who has cautions or convictions on their record may still be involved in the life of the Church. However, if a person has convictions of abuse against children then they will never be in a position of leadership with children or young people, either as staff or as a volunteer.

If it becomes known that a person who has been convicted of offences against children/young people is attending church, the BCV staff should be notified. This is not to say they cannot attend but so that advice can be taken to ensure that attendance becomes safe for the protection of the children/young people and others attending church and for the offender themselves. This may include the need to draw up a contract between the convicted offender and the church, to manage the risk and maintain a safe environment for all children and young people. This may include the need for an appropriate chaperone of the offender during their attendance at church meetings and church-related activities, (if appropriate). If an offender has restrictions placed upon them from PSNI or Probation Services, the church must work in partnership with these agencies.

For more information see our policy on the recruitment of ex-offenders.

# 9. HEALTH AND SAFETY

## TEAM WORK

1. **Each leader and helper must be fully acquainted with the child protection policy and reporting process.**

2. Each ministry should draw up clearly defined aims and objectives for its overall running and review this on an annual basis.

3. Each leader and helper should be acquainted with, and be in full support of, the code of conduct for the group.

4. Within each ministry, a clearly defined line of accountability should be in place, whereby all leaders and helpers report to the appointed leader in charge.

5. At any given meeting, leaders and helpers should be informed of the specific programme, and be clear about one another's responsibilities.

6. Acquaint the team (especially new leaders and helpers) with useful advice on getting to know children i.e. trying to get to know the names of the children as quickly as possible; talking to the children about themselves, what they like, what they do during the rest of the week; talking to the children about yourself.

7. At the conclusion of the session, there should be an evaluation of the time together, when leaders and helpers can share information about issues and any difficulties that may have arisen.

On Sundays, children are in our care from when they are signed into ~~Vineyard Kids~~ the appropriate room, until they are ~~signed out again~~ collected by a parent at the end of their programme.

- BAbbas and Preschool are **registered** electronically (using the tablets) at the start of the service, where they are given two stickers (one for the child and one for the room leader). They are **signed in** when their sticker is given to the room leader and stuck in the sign-in book at the start of their programme.
- Primary Kids are also **registered** electronically at the start of the service and are **signed in** at the same time. They will also receive two stickers, one for the child and one that will immediately go into the sign-in book.
- Youth are not signed in, but a register will be taken for use in case of emergency, such as fire in the building.

In order to ensure the safety of children in BCV, it is essential that all members of the children's ministry team are aware of the following:

## General Safety

It is important that under 18s ministry leaders ensure that the room they are using is a safe environment for children to come in to. Fire exits are to be kept clear at all times. Sanitation facilities should be kept clean at all times. A first aid box will be kept in each of the children's ministry rooms.

## Toileting & Nappy Changing Procedures

While it is important that children are never alone with an adult, leaders must also do their utmost to protect the dignity of children when providing care of a personal nature.

### BAbbas Room (age 0-2)

Nappy changing stations are in the bAbba's room (and in the access toilet in the main church entrance). Children who are wearing nappies and are attending our programmes should only be changed by their parents.

### Preschool Room (age 2-4)

Children who are being potty trained and who need assistance with toileting routine may be supervised and helped by a leader (unless stated otherwise by a parent). In this instance, one leader should be outside the toilet, with another leader visible at the preschool room door.

### Primary Room (age 4-11)

If a child can use the bathroom by themselves, they should. While a child is using the bathroom, one leader should stand at the door between the sports hall and the side foyer, with sight of both male and female toilet entrance doors. If a child requires assistance, the leader should call a second leader over to stand at the door while they help (or while they go and get their parent).

### Youth Room (age 11-18)

Under normal circumstances, assistance and monitoring is not necessary for children over the age of 11. (Leaders may want to limit how many children can go to the toilet at one time to avoid misbehaviour.) If necessary, female leaders can mention to girls that all toilets in BCV have menstrual products available.

Older children and young people with special needs may also be assisted when going to the bathroom, but any known case where this is necessary should have prior agreements and arrangements made between leaders and parents, and with consent of the child or young person.

## Supervision and Ratios

No adult is to be alone with a child. An acceptable adult:children ratio should be maintained. This will vary depending on the age and ability of the children in the group, and also on the nature of the activity. Additional adult supervision may be necessary for activities such as painting or outdoor games.

Sunday Rooms:

bAbbas – 1:2
Preschool – 1:4
Primary – 1:6 (p1-4)
Primary – 1:8 (p5-7)
Youth – 1:10

## Fire alarm procedures

Leaders should be well acquainted with our policy and procedures for evacuating the building in the event of a fire. The designated assembly area is the grass at the front of the church building.

Those in the upstairs rooms should evacuate the building via the fire door located in the rear stairwell and make their way with their leaders to the designated assembly area~~,~~ where a register will be taken there.

Those using the kitchen are to use the fire exit located at the base of the rear stairwell and make their way to the designated assembly area where a register will be taken.

Those in the sports hall ~~and youth in the kitchen~~ will exit the building via the fire escape in their room and walk to the assembly point ~~which is on the grass at the front of the church building,~~ where a register will be taken.

Leaders and children should wait ~~there~~ in the designated assembly point until the building is declared safe. Parents can take their children once a register has been taken and they have been handed over to their parent by the room leader.

All team WhatsApp group chats have access to an evacuation video made for each room in the building. Video to be reviewed (and remade if necessary) on an annual basis

## Risk Assessment

An annual 'facilities risk assessment' will be carried out by the board of directors. A risk assessment should also be carried out when planning activities in order to maximise the safety of children. This will be overseen by the nominated officers, who take responsibility for health and safety overall. We would however encourage leaders of each group to help us with risk assessment by carefully considering the nature of any the activities they are planning, number of children, age-range, supervision, potential danger of any equipment being used, and the individual needs of the children in the group.

The following guidance will help leaders when completing a risk assessment form:

- A hazard is something which may cause harm e.g. chairs piled high which a small child could climb on to. Hazards should be identified and noted on the risk assessment form.
- A risk is the chance that a person may be hurt by a hazard. Risks may vary according to different age groups who attend the organisation e.g. piled up chairs would not be considered a risk to an older person but would definitely be a risk to a toddler or small child.
- A control is something that can be put in place or something that can be changed to limit the risk e.g. the chairs could be set around the hall instead or only piled together in pairs.

## Communicating with Young People

Those leading in our kids and youth rooms may from time to time need to contact young people. This should never be private between the ~~youth~~ leader and child alone. It should always have at least one other person, to facilitate a group message, increasing accountability for all.

When texting remember "Communication NOT Conversation"

1. Texts should be used to communicate information about events and programmes. For example: Dates, times, location.
2. Texts can be used by means of encouragement to young people. For example : "Hope exam goes well" or "well done for leading worship today". When texting messages like these, it is important to include another leader or the parent ~~in this message~~ so that the message is not misinterpreted. (Where possible if a female leader is messaging a male young person, a male leader should be included in the message and vice-versa.)
3. Leaders working with young people should only have a young person's number if the nature of their involvement requires it (for example: a young person is part of a serving team for a church activity.)
4. Parental permission should be sought if the leader in this role will be contacting a young person via mobile phone. (See kids and youth parental consent forms for details).

5. If a leader has a young person's phone number, it should only be used for the purposes given and contact information should not be shared.
6. In the event that a child or young person privately messages a leader and a lack of response would do more harm than good, replying is permitted and encouraged, but should be done with vigilance - not encouraging a prolonged text conversation, and arranging to speak face to face if necessary. If a private communication takes place, leaders must inform at least one of the Under 18s Pastors who will keep a written record of the communication. Leaders should be proactive in communicating to one or both of the Under 18s pastor if this has happened.

## Communicating with young people (social media)

Social Media is a useful means of communicating information to our young people and parents if used safely and correctly. Staff of BCV will communicate information via this method if it is appropriate and effective to the event/programme being communicated. Staff of BCV will not be 'friends/followers' with anyone under the age of 18 who attends our church. It is also our policy that our kid's and youth leaders will not be friends/followers on social networking sites with any of the young people in the group that they lead.

If Young people want to engage with ministries via social media they will be encouraged to follow our church profiles to stay up to date with information about individual ministries (Reference: Youthlink Scotland's Social Networking Guidance).

When using social media, BCV have adopted the following policy in order to protect staff/leaders and young people engaging with this method of communication:

1. The page/profile must be password protected and the password will be held by the nominated officers (see subsection 7) as well as the leader in charge of that particular ministry.
2. The nominated officers will act as supervisors for social media sites and will monitor its content on a regular basis.
3. Any inappropriate posts by children/young people/leaders should be removed by the designated supervisor. Reasons for its removal should then be explained to the person who posted the content. Where possible the settings on the profiles should be set so that posts can be reviewed before being made public.
4. The use of personal addresses and telephone numbers should be avoided at all times.
5. The identity of the young people should not be disclosed (ie- no tagging photos, no use of handles/profile names to be used in social media posts.)
6. Content of all postings should be consistent with the aims of the organization. In cases of doubt, leaders should seek advice from the nominated officers.

7. Leaders should only communicate to young people in public/open forums (for example group messages, conversation threads on public profiles.)
8. In the event of sending an email another leader should be cc'd into the conversation (can be bcc'd if necessary.)
9. Leaders should avoid communicating with young people late at night/ early in the morning.
10. In signing off posts/emails leaders should not do so in a way that could be misconstrued or misinterpreted by the recipient e.g.: "xoxo". Simply sign your name.
11. Parental permission is required before pictures or videos of children or young people are posted online. Before posting on social media the photo should be shown to the young people to gain their permission for their photo to be on the site.
12. Photos should not disclose personal information about the child/young people (ie- school uniforms, address/location or names etc.)

## Outings and Residentials

As outings will encompass different activities and environments than those usually experienced, it is paramount that adequate preparation takes place. A robust risk assessment should be carried out in advance of any planned outings or events, and adequate adult supervision should be in place for all outings in relation to gender, age and activities. Leaders / instructors should be qualified for the activities that they are supervising. As part of the risk assessment and in advance of any outing or event, parents are expected to communicate clearly and honestly about any needs or issues their child may have which may affect them during an outing/event. This may include medical, mental health or other issues which may affect the child, and their safety and wellbeing while in attendance. Where the need or issue is felt too great to safely manage by the staff, leaders, or volunteers, it may not be possible for the child or young person to attend without a parent being present throughout. All parents must agree to having their phones turned on during any outing or event, so that they are contactable, should the need arise. They must also agree to come and collect their children early, if requested.

Parents will receive information outlining details of the proposed activities and written consent obtained. Medical and health details should also be obtained along with emergency contact numbers for each child or young person. A First Aid box should be taken and a leader should always have a mobile phone with them on outings.

Before taking a group away, ensure that parents/carers are aware of the following:

- The programme/activities their child is encouraged/expected to participate in, especially high-risk activities e.g. bouldering, canoeing etc.
- Whether there will be shopping trips or other free time in town areas and, if so, the level of supervision during such trips.
- The names of leaders/helpers accompanying the group and a contact number (Where possible it is advisable to arrange a pre-residential briefing for the parents, giving information and allowing parents an opportunity to meet the leaders/helpers).
- The centre telephone number and address.
- The group's 'contract' i.e. what rules the young people will be asked to abide by, and possible consequences if these are broken.
- What clothes and other items the young people might be expected to need.
- How much pocket money might be sufficient? (It is advisable to set a limit on this).
- That the names and contact details of all young people and leaders attending a residential/camp etc. will be left with a nominated person in the congregation.

## Transportation of Young People

As leaders are in a position of trust, (both paid staff and volunteers) it is the position of BCV that leaders do not give lifts to children or young people.

Carpooling is possible if a parent is also a leader, as long as the leader's child (or children) are attending the event. (For example: a leader would be allowed to bring their child and their child's friends to and from youth club). If carpooling, parents do so at their own risk and must ensure appropriate insurance and health and safety measures are in place.

In the case of an emergency where it is safer for the child or young person to be transported than left alone, leaders should never travel alone with a child or young person and should have another leader present in the vehicle. If this is not possible, we suggest that you also phone one of the Under 18s Pastors at the start and end of your journey, for the sake of accountability.

Transport should be assessed, and road worthiness should be checked e.g. MOT, tax and insurance up to date. The vehicle should be suitable for the purpose, e.g. seat belts fitted in cars and coaches, and car seats / booster seats should be used if necessary. The driver should hold a valid licence.

**Meetings in Leader's homes**

When holding meetings in the homes of leaders, such as home groups or parties, children should be dropped off and collected by their parents at a pre-arranged time. Recommended ratios of adults: children apply.

Leaders must arrive in advance of the children / young people to ensure that no-one is ever alone with them.

**Leaders should never:**

- Spend an excessive amount of time alone with children away from others
- Take children to your home without the child's parents and the leader of the organisation or other responsible person knowing
- Allow or engage in inappropriate touching in any form
- Allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged
- Make sexually suggestive comments about, or to, a child, even in fun
- Let allegations made by a child go unchallenged or unrecorded
- Do things of a personal nature for children that they can do for themselves
- Engage in rough or inappropriate behaviour
- Rely solely on their reputation to protect themselves

We not only want to protect and promote safety of children and youth but also leaders and BCV staff. Sometimes leaders may think parts of the guidelines are not necessary, however remember it is for their own protection too and no one should rely on reputation to protect them.

## Supporting Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and 1-to-1 Care

BCV is committed to welcoming and safeguarding all children, including those with Special Educational Needs or disabilities. Parents and carers will be invited to share relevant information about their child's needs, strengths, triggers, and helpful strategies. Where appropriate, an **SEN Support Plan** will be completed by the parent/carer and one of the Under 18s pastors, outlining what support will help the child participate safely and confidently. (Only necessary information will be recorded, and all records will be stored securely in line with data protection requirements.)

Where it is agreed that a child requires additional support, including 1-to-1 care, this decision will be made by the Under 18s Pastor and/or the Safeguarding Team in consultation with the parent or carer. The nature and limits of the support will be clearly communicated, and the child, parents/carers and volunteers will agree to arrangements.

Any volunteer providing 1-to-1 support must be safely recruited according to the BCV safeguarding procedures. Volunteers will be briefed on the child's needs and the boundaries of the role. 1-to-1 support should take place in open, visible, and appropriately supervised

spaces. Volunteers must avoid working in isolation and should maintain appropriate personal space, avoiding unnecessary physical contact. Intimate or personal care will only be provided where this has been formally agreed in advance, recorded within the SEN Support Plan. Any concerns or notable incidents must be reported promptly and recorded.

Some children may communicate distress or unmet needs through their behaviour. Volunteers supporting the child will follow the strategies outlined in the SEN Support Plan, using agreed approaches to help calm, de-escalate, or redirect as appropriate. Physical restraint may only be used to prevent immediate harm, and any such incident must be reported to the Safeguarding Team and documented.

Parents and carers will be kept informed of any significant incidents and will be included in regular reviews of the support arrangements. The SEN Support Plan should be updated as needs change to ensure care remains safe, appropriate, and effective. The Under 18s Pastors, together with the Safeguarding Team, will oversee all SEN and 1-to-1 arrangements to ensure they are being delivered consistently and in line with safeguarding requirements.

# Appendices

## RELEVANT LEGISLATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The main relevant legislation relating to child protection in Northern Ireland includes:

- The Criminal Law Act 1967
- The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989)
- The Children (NI) Order 1995
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- The Sex Offenders Act 1997
- The Family Homes and Domestic Violence (NI) Order 1998
- The Criminal Justice (Children) (NI) Order 1998
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Sexual Offences (NI) Order 2008
- Protection of Children & Vulnerable Adults (NI) Order 2003
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007

**How long should records on children and leaders be kept?**

- Consent forms (basic information such as name, date of birth and address) should be kept for up to six years after the child has left the organisation. Thereafter, it should either be destroyed (i.e. shredded or burnt) or given back to the child or parent.
- The same applies to information on leaders – i.e. it is retained for up to six years after they have left their position.
- Incident/accident forms and the register of all leaders should be kept indefinitely.

# Vulnerable Adults

Everyone should be treated with respect and dignity. There are many adults in the Vineyard Church family, both young and old, who are vulnerable, and they should feel that the Church provides a place of safety and cares for them. Others may become vulnerable for a limited time, following a medical procedure or accident.

**WHO IS A VULNERABLE ADULT?**

**A vulnerable adult is anyone aged 18 or over who cannot take care of themselves.** Vulnerable adults may not be able to protect themselves against significant harm or unfair treatment. This may be because they have a mental health problem, a disability, visual or hearing problems,

are old and frail, or are ill. Because of this, these adults may receive a care service in their own home or in the community. They may live in a residential care home, nursing home or a similar setting.

**WHAT IS ADULT ABUSE?**

Adult abuse can take a number of forms and cause victims to suffer pain, fear and distress. Abuse of a vulnerable adult may be physical, emotional, sexual or financial. Victims may be too afraid or embarrassed to raise any complaint. They may be reluctant to discuss their concerns with other people, or unsure who to trust. There may be some situations where victims are unaware that they are being abused or have difficulty in communicating this to others.

**PROTECTION FOR VULNERABLE ADULTS**

**What to do if abuse is suspected**

It is important that if suspected, adult abuse is reported as soon as possible to PSNI

**Vetting those who work with vulnerable adults**

Northern Ireland

At the time of writing, it is necessary for those who apply to work as a volunteer or in a paid post with vulnerable adults in a regulated position to complete the appointment process which includes an Access Northern
Ireland form

# Vineyard Kids Welcome Procedures

Children are to be registered on Church Suite before arrival. When a family arrives on a Sunday, they will be directed to the appropriate venue for their child. Our children who are in primary school will gather in the sports hall accessed via the side entrance. Our preschool children will remain with their parents for worship, before being taken to their rooms upstairs. On arrival in their Kids' Ministry room, a leader will register each child to keep a record of attendance on church Suite. New families will be directed to sign their children in as guests. Parents wishing to have their child's name added to our register will be emailed a parental consent form to complete.

For their protection, a child can only be collected by an adult with parental responsibility. For children of youth age, we operate a self-sign-in system, where they can register themselves upon arrival.

The age groups in Vineyard Kids and Youth Ministry are as follows:

0-1 year olds
2 years old-Nursery
P1s-P7s
Youth

When children are signed into their rooms they are the responsibility of the kid's ministry team. Once a child has been signed out, they become the responsibility of their parents. Parents should know where their children are at all times, and keep them with them outside church.

A copy of this Child Protection Policy will be kept at all times by the Vineyard Kids Welcome team, for parents to reference. Any parents wishing to obtain a personal copy can request one by asking the Children or Youth Pastor.

## Supervision

Levels of supervision must be adequate at all times. When deciding how many adults should be present, practical matters should be taken into consideration and a risk assessment carried out, before the leader in charge makes a professional judgement, taking into account policy guidelines.

There should be no less than two adult leaders at all times, whether the group activity is outdoors or indoors. Based on the standard recommended ratios we have outlined our leader requirements for each room below. Always begin with two leaders, even for an individual child. The ratio of adults to children with special needs will be dependent on the needs of the child, and will be decided on an individual basis. Leaders may be 16 years or over, however, at all times there must be a leader present who is over 18.

Babies Room: 1 adult to 3 children
Preschool Room: 1 adult to 4 children
P1-P7's: 1 adult to 8 children
Youth: 2 adults (preferably one of each gender) for up to 20 children. There should be one additional adult for every extra 10 children or young people.

## Role of the Nominated Officers

- To provide information and advice on child protection within the context of Belfast City Vineyard.
- To provide information and advice on child protection within the context of Belfast City Vineyard and to ensure that training happens annually.
- To inform Social Services of any concerns regarding individual children.
- To ensure that appropriate information is available at the time of referral, and that the referral is confirmed in writing.
- To ensure that confidentiality is maintained at all times regarding information stored and any referrals being made.
- To liaise with Social Services and other agencies as appropriate.
- To forward any individual applications to Access NI.
- To advise the church of any training needs in the area of child protection.
- To ensure that individual case records are maintained of any action taken by Belfast City Vineyard in liaison with external agencies, and the outcome.

- The Lead signatory will attend the Faith Based Child Protection Group, which meets bi-annually.

*The nominated officers are responsible for serving as a source of advice on child protection issues, for co-ordination of action within the church, and for liaising with Health and Social Services and other agencies about suspected or actual cases of child abuse. Before Social Services are contacted, the child's parents will be informed unless the parent(s) is the subject of the allegation.*

We will provide support for our teams to ensure we can answer or get answers for the questions you might have.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Many thanks to Wendy Twamley, former Lead Child Protection Officer at Belfast City Vineyard, for her hard work and extensive research towards the content of this policy and to Deborah Webster from the Take Care Office of PCI for providing so much source information to Wendy.

**Review**

| Type of Review | Date of Review | Date Approved by Board |
|---|---|---|
| Revised Policy | December 2024 | 02/12/2024 |
| Revised Policy | December 2025 | 01/12/2025 |
| Clarity Amendments | February 2026 | |
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