

What is safeguarding?

Every human being has a value and dignity which we as Catholics acknowledge as coming directly from God's creation of male and female in his own image and likeness. We believe therefore that all people should be valued, supported and protected from harm.

In the Catholic Church this is demonstrated by the provision of carefully planned activities for children, young people and adults; supporting families under stress; caring for those hurt by abuse in the past; ministering to and managing those who have caused harm.

It is because of these varied ministries that we need to take all reasonable steps to provide a safe environment for all which promotes and supports their wellbeing. This will include carefully selecting and appointing those who work with children, young people or adults at risk and responding robustly where concerns arise.

Safeguarding Children

The term 'child' is used to include all children and young people up to the age of 18; that is, someone who has not yet had their 18th birthday.

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined as:

- Protecting children from maltreatment;
- Preventing impairment of children's health and development;
- Ensuring that children are growing up with safe and effective care;
- Enabling children to have optimum life chances and enter adulthood successfully.

The main Government guidance setting out duties and responsibilities for all agencies and organisations who work with Children and Families is 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' which was published by the Department for Education in 2015; it provides guidance under the Children Acts 1989 and 2004.

'Working Together to Safeguard Children' refers directly to Faith Communities and sets out the responsibilities and expectations of all churches and faith communities in safeguarding children and promoting their welfare.

It recognises that churches provide a wide range of services for children; and that religious leaders, staff and volunteers have an important role in safeguarding and supporting children and families.

Children may be in need of protection from abuse or maltreatment in their own home or in other environments including the church itself. Wherever a child is at risk or concerns are raised about a child, all adults have a duty to act to safeguard that child and promote his or her welfare.

The need to safeguard children is not confined to any particular age group or groups in the community and all concerns should be responded to equally, always bearing in mind that the welfare of the child is paramount.

In all research and in reviews where a child has died or been seriously injured as a result of abuse, the same messages to all organisations come back time and again – namely, the importance of adults responding promptly to concerns, listening to children with respect and most importantly, communicating effectively with one another within and between organisations and agencies.

All churches and faith communities are expected to have in place arrangements which include:

- Procedures to respond to and report concerns
- Codes of practice
- Safe recruitment procedures

Child Protection

Is a part of safeguarding and refers to the activities undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering or are at risk of suffering ‘significant harm’.

Significant harm

‘Harm’ means ill-treatment or the impairment of health or development, including for example, impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another;

‘Development’ means physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development;

‘Health’ means physical or mental health; and

‘Ill-treatment’ includes sexual abuse and forms of ill-treatment which are not physical.

More information about ‘significant harm’ and types of abuse can be found in the Information Sheet ‘Abuse of Children’ on the CSAS website.

Safeguarding Adults

In the same way arrangements must be in place to respond to concerns about any form of abuse or maltreatment of an adult at risk.

The Catholic Church in England and Wales is fully committed to:

- Actively promoting the empowerment and well-being of adults through the church;
- Recognising that everyone has the right to live their life free from violence, fear and abuse; and
- Recognising that adults have the right to be protected from harm and exploitation.

All adults acting in the name of the Catholic Church in England and Wales have a responsibility to act and intervene when it appears that adults at risk need to be made safe from risk of abuse or maltreatment.

The Church is fully committed to working actively and constructively within the framework set out in the Care Act 2014, the Social Services and Wellbeing Wales Act 92014) and associated statutory and good practice guidance.

To achieve this, the Church will act in an open, transparent and accountable way in working in partnership with Adult Social Care Services, the Police, Health Agencies, Probation Providers and other relevant agencies to safeguard adults and assist in bringing to justice anyone who has committed an offence against an adult at risk.

Anyone who brings concerns or allegations to the notice of the Church will be responded to sensitively, respectfully and seriously. All concerns and allegations will be addressed using these national procedures and in a timely manner.

Statutory safeguarding duties apply to an adult who meets the following criteria:

1. Has needs for care and support (whether or not a local authority is meeting any of these needs);
2. Is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect¹; and
3. As a result of these care and support needs, is unable to protect themselves from either the risk of, or the experience of abuse or neglect.

More information on abuse of adults can be found in other information sheets on the CSAS website.

¹ Physical abuse, domestic violence, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, financial or material abuse, modern slavery, discriminatory abuse, organisational abuse, neglect, self-neglect