2026

Diocese of Durham

SAFEGUARDING POLICY

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Policy Owner: Diocesan Secretary

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND
DIOCESE OF DURHAM

BLESSING OUR COMMUNITIES IN JESUS' NAME

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Safeguarding Policy Statement

The Diocese of Durham and the Durham Diocesan Board of Finance recognise and are committed to fulfilling our obligation to the protection and safeguarding of all children, young people and adults at risk of abuse.

The care and protection of children, young people and adults at risk of abuse involved in church activities is the responsibility of the whole church. Everyone who participates in the life of the church has a role to play in promoting a safer church for all.

The Diocese of Durham is committed to safeguarding as an integral part of the life and service of the Diocese.

This document sets out the Diocese of Durham's Safeguarding Policy which should be read in conjunction with the relevant Church of England safeguarding policies and practice guidance as set out in Annex I. Taken together, this policy and Church of England safeguarding policies and practice guidance help the diocese, parishes and individuals work towards a safer church for everyone.

Scope

The policy applies to all church bodies and church officers within the Diocese of Durham. This is a Diocesan Safeguarding Policy and is not applicable to the Cathedral. Those who work or volunteer in the Cathedral must adhere to Cathedral specific safeguarding policies and procedures.

For Local Ecumenical Partnerships this document should be used in conjunction with Safeguarding Guidance for Local Ecumenical Partnership (2023) and a decision taken within the partnership with regard to which safeguarding policy will be followed.

The Ecclesiastical Insurance Group has made it clear that their insurance cover is only valid where national safeguarding policy and practice guidance is being followed.

In accordance with the Church of England's policy statement Promoting a Safer Church 2017, the Diocese is committed to:

- Promoting a safer environment and culture
- Safely recruiting and supporting all those with any responsibility related to children, your people and vulnerable adults within the church
- Responding promptly to every safeguarding concern or allegation
- Caring pastorally for victims/survivors of abuse and other affected persons
- Caring pastorally for those who are the subject of concerns or allegations of abuse and other affected persons
- Responding to those that may present a risk to others

Promoting a safer environment and culture

The safeguarding and protection of children and adults at risk is the responsibility of everyone within a church community. The church community, including all its members, must be alert to risks and dangers and be prepared to report concerns and to take action as, and when, necessary.

- The Diocese will strive to create and maintain environments that are safer for all, that promote well-being, that prevent abuse and that create nurturing, caring conditions for children, young people and vulnerable adults. This is the responsibility of all who work and volunteer in the Diocese, and particularly those who have regular contact with children, young people and vulnerable adults.
- In Promoting a Safer Church a 'vulnerable adult' is defined as 'a person aged 18 or over whose ability to protect himself or herself from violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation is significantly impaired through physical or mental disability or illness, emotional fragility or distress, or otherwise; and for that purpose, the reference to being impaired is to being temporarily or indefinitely impaired'.
- The Diocese will strive to support all those who have regular contact with children, young people and vulnerable adults to adhere to safer working good practice and to challenge the abuse of power. We will work to continue to strengthen and review these environments through the provision of training, support, communication, learning, governance and quality assurance processes.
- The Diocese Board of Finance commits to ensuring that all staff members complete Basic Safeguarding Training as a minimum requirement regardless of their role.
- The Diocese strongly encourages and supports full and consistent use of the Parish Safeguarding Dashboard by parishes, as an administrative tool for recording actions against requirements as set out in current national safeguarding policy, practice guidance and this policy. As this allows the diocesan safeguarding support team to confirm parish progress directly, this reduces the need for in-depth Archidiaconal inspections to confirm safeguarding compliance.
- In accordance with House of Bishop's guidance, those holding the Bishop's Licence, Commission, authorisation or permission (clergy, PTO, Readers, LLMs) must ensure that their training **and** DBS checks remain current. Where either training requirements or DBS

checks lapse, ministers will be asked to step back from public ministry by the Bishop until they are once again compliant with the requirements of House of Bishop's guidance. Whilst the diocesan safeguarding team will make every effort to ensure reminders are provided in good time, that training courses are made available and that DBS checks are processed promptly, responsibility remains with the minister themselves to ensure that they fulfil their obligations under House of Bishop's guidance.

Safely recruiting and supporting all those with any responsibility related to children, young people and vulnerable adults within the Diocese

The Diocese is committed to implementing safer recruitment practice in the recruitment of all Church officers (ministers, volunteers and employees) and accepts and follows the Church of England's Safer Recruitment and People Management Code of Practice (2026). It is expected that parishes will follow the same practice guidance in their recruitment of volunteers and paid staff with responsibility for children, young people and vulnerable adults.

The Diocese will equip and train all those who have responsibility related to children, young people and vulnerable adults to have the confidence and skills they need to care and support children, young people and vulnerable adults and to recognise and respond to abuse. This will be done by providing and co-ordinating consistent and accessible safeguarding training in accordance with the Church of England's Safeguarding Learning and Development Framework.

Responding promptly to every safeguarding concern or allegation

- Anyone who brings any safeguarding suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation of current or non-current abuse to the notice of the Diocese will be responded to respectfully and in a timely manner, in line with statutory child and adult safeguarding procedures and the relevant policy and practice guidance from the Church of England: Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults (2021) and Managing Safeguarding Concerns & Allegations (2025).
- All safeguarding concerns must be reported to the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (DSO) and will be recorded in line with the relevant safeguarding practice guidance.
- All suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations that reach the threshold for reporting to the statutory authorities will be reported via the DSO, or other designated safeguarding officer in another church body, to the appropriate statutory authorities. This will be done irrespective of the status of the person.
- The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) will be informed when the threshold for referral is met.
- All Church Officers will co-operate with the statutory authorities in all cases.
- In responding to concerns or allegations of abuse relating to Church Officers, the Diocese will act in accordance with the requirements of criminal, civil and ecclesiastical law, and so will respect the rights and uphold the safeguards afforded in these, both to the victim/survivor and the subject of concerns or allegations: Managing Safeguarding Concerns & Allegations (2025)
- Anyone should feel able, if a child, young person or vulnerable adult is at immediate risk, to contact either the police or local social services. Where possible, consent should be given by the child's or young person's parents or the vulnerable adult, unless it is considered that seeking consent will increase the risk of harm.
- The Diocese is committed to continuing to learn how to respond to victims and survivors in a supportive way.
- The Whistleblowing Policy and Operating Procedure is available for anyone who is unhappy with the way their concern has been addressed by the Diocese.

Caring pastorally for victims/survivors of abuse and other affected persons

- The Diocese will offer care and support to all those in their care who have been abused, regardless of the type of abuse, when or where it occurred. All victims or survivors and other affected persons will be offered the support of a safely recruited and trained support person.
- The Diocese is committed to continuing to learn how to respond in a supportive and healing ways to the needs of those who have experienced abuse and offers trauma informed response to disclosure training for anyone who wishes to engage with it.
- Those who have experienced abuse connected to the Diocese will receive a compassionate response, be listened to and be taken seriously. The Diocese will respond to any disclosure of abuse in accordance with the policy and the practice guidance of the Church of England. This will be done in collaboration with the relevant statutory agencies in accordance with criminal, civil and (where appropriate) ecclesiastical law. They will be offered appropriate pastoral care, counselling and support.
- An appropriate pastoral response to the family, parish, congregation or others will be considered with due regard to the right of privacy of those directly involved and to the administration of justice.

Caring pastorally for those who are the subject of concerns or allegations of abuse and other affected persons

- The Diocese, in exercising its responsibilities to suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations of abuse, will respect the rights under criminal, civil and (where appropriate) ecclesiastical law of any accused. A legal presumption of innocence will be maintained during the statutory and (where appropriate) Church inquiry process. As the process progresses additional assessment, therapy and support services may be offered.
- The Diocese will take responsibility for ensuring that steps are taken to protect others when there are known persons accessing church services and activities who are considered to be a risk to children, young people and vulnerable adults. This will be done by working to mitigate any identified risks according to a safeguarding risk assessment and safety plan.
- Church Officers who are subject of concerns or allegations of abuse belong to families, congregations and church communities. The Diocese will be mindful of the need to provide support to members of families as well as the parishes and congregations affected by the concerns or allegations of abuse.

Responding to those that may pose a present risk to others

- The Diocese will ensure that any risk has been assessed and is being managed in a safety plan in accordance with the relevant policy and practice guidance. This will be done in collaboration with the relevant statutory agencies in accordance with criminal, civil and (where appropriate) ecclesiastical law.
- The Church based on the message of the Gospel, opens its doors to all. It will therefore endeavour to offer pastoral care and support to any member, or anyone who seeks to become a member of a church community, who may present a risk of harm to others due to the following:
    - having a conviction or caution for offences against children or vulnerable adults or;
    - who has been barred or prohibited in some way from working with children or adult or;
    - is considered to present a risk to either group but the outcome of an investigation is as yet unknown

- Where an individual comes to the attention of the Diocese we will seek to implement a safety plan where it is safe to do so in line with advice from the local statutory agencies. Any agreement will contain safeguards for the individual and children and/or adults at risk and the parish.

Safeguarding and Seal of the Confessional

- The Code of Practice document Managing Safeguarding Concerns & Allegations (2025) Section 1.11 to 1.17 provides guidance in respect to what constitutes a safeguarding concern or allegation and how these should be responded to.

- The only exception to this requirement concerns information received under what is known as "the seal of the confessional", which is subject to a duty of absolute confidentiality. (The legal position here follows from the unrepealed and therefore still binding Proviso to Canon 113 of the Code of 1603, which stipulates this duty of confidentiality).

- The seal of the confessional does not apply to each private or confidential conversation between a priest and another person, but only to confessions heard formally, in the manner set out in Canon B29, sections 2, 3 and 4. This provides for priests, in specific circumstances and following the directions of the Canon, to hear personal confessions and – if the confessor is truly penitent – grant absolution. This practice is often called "the Ministry of Reconciliation." Questions around the possibility of crimes being confessed in this context but then not being reported – with the obvious implications for safeguarding – continue to cause disagreement and debate in the Church of England.

- The Further Work on the Seal of the Confessional is the latest position statement available, and this should be read and understood by clergy offering the Ministry of Reconciliation.
- This report quotes in full clear guidance given to clergy around the Ministry of Reconciliation in section 3 of Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy | The Church of England. .Sections 3.6 and 3.7 of this guidance should particularly be noted and followed:

> '3.6 If, in the context of such a confession, the penitent discloses that he or she has committed a serious crime, such as the abuse of children or vulnerable adults, the priest must require the penitent to report his or her conduct to the police or other

statutory authority. If the penitent refuses to do so the priest should withhold absolution.

3.7 The canonical duty of absolute confidentiality does not apply to anything that is said outside the context of such a confession. In particular, if information about abuse that was disclosed when seeking the ministry of absolution is repeated by the penitent outside that context the priest must follow the established procedures for reporting abuse of children or vulnerable adults.'

Annex I: Church of England Safeguarding Policy & Practice Guidance

Promoting a Safer Church

National Safeguarding Standards

Key Roles and Responsibilities of Church Office Holders and Bodies

Safer Recruitment and People Management Code of Practice (2026)

Safeguarding Learning and Development Framework

Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults (2021)

Reporting Safeguarding Concerns & Allegations (2025)

Managing Safeguarding Concerns & Allegations (2025)

Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse

Domestic Abuse: Best Practice Guidance

Records Retention Schedule

Safeguarding Guidance for Local Ecumenical Partnership

Safeguarding Serious Incident Reporting to Charity Commission

Annex II: Local and National Organisations providing Safeguarding Contacts, Information and Resources

Police : Call 101 or 999 in emergency

Local Contacts - Adult and Children's Social Care

Stockton

Adult Tel: 01642 527764 **Email:** firstcontactadults@stockton.gov.uk

Children Tel: 01642 130080 Emergency Duty Team (outside of office hours) 01642 524 552

Darlington

Children Contact the Children's Access Point on 01325 406222 or Emergency Duty Team on 01642 524552.

Adult Contact the First Point of Contact Team on 01325 406111 or the Emergency Duty Team on 01642 524552.

Durham (both numbers are operated 24 hours)

Adult Social Care Direct on 03000 267 979.

Children First Contact on Tel: 03000 267 979.

Gateshead

Adult Adult Social Care Direct - 0191 433 7033

Children Gateshead Council's Children's Services (in confidence) on: 0191 433 2653 (office hours: Monday - Friday, 8.30am to 5pm) or Emergency Duty Team 0191 477 0844 (outside of office hours)

South Tyneside

Adults Let's Talk Team 0191 424 6000 (Monday-Friday 8.30 am to 5.00pm or 0191 456 2093 (outside of the above office hours)

Children 0191 424 5010 (Monday to Friday 8.30-5.00) or 0191 456 2093 (outside of the above office hours)

Hartlepool

Adult Tel: 01429 523390 or Out of Hours 01642 524 552

Children Tel: 01429 284284 or Emergency Duty Team (outside of office hours) 01642 524 552

Sunderland

Adult Tel: 0191 520 5552 or Out of Hours 0191 5205552

Children Contact Children's Safeguarding on 0191 520 5560 or Out of Hours 0191 5205552

Helplines for further support

NSPCC For adults concerned about a child Tel: 0808 800 5000

ChildLine For children and young people Tel: 0800 1111

Hourglass (was Action on Elder Abuse) Helpline: 0808 808 8141

24-hour National Domestic Violence Helpline Helpline: 0808 2000 247

NAPAC Offer support and advice to adult survivors of childhood abuse 0808 801 0331

Stop It Now Preventing child sexual abuse 0808 1000 900

Cruse Bereavement helpline 0808 808 1677

The Survivors Trust 7 days a week (Note: hours vary- please see website below)

Helpline 0808 801 0818 Text: 07860 022956

LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline 0800 999 5428 help@galop.org.uk

Men's Advice Line Domestic Abuse helpline 0808 801 0327 info@mensadviceline.org.uk

Age UK Advice Line 0800 678 1602

Samaritans If you are struggling to cope and need someone to talk to Helpline 116 123

Websites for further information and resources

www.nspcc.org.uk

www.womensaid.org.uk

https://www.restoringrelationships.org/

www.scie.org.uk

www.ceop.police.uk

www.wearehourglass.org/action-elder-abuse-now-hourglass

www.ageuk.org.uk

https://www.barnardos.org.uk/

www.spiritualabuse.com

www.modernslavery.co.uk

www.the survivorstrust.org