

Code of Conduct and Practice for Church  
Members working with Adults who may be  
Vulnerable

All those involved in pastoral ministry, whether paid or unpaid, clergy or lay, should be working to these guidelines.

Following these guidelines should both ensure that vulnerable people are protected and that workers are not wrongly accused of abuse or misconduct.

*Guidance taken from the Carlisle Diocesan Safeguarding Policy Version 5.3*

<http://www.carlisle-diocese.org.uk/our-diocese/safeguarding/safeguarding-policy.html>

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## Who is a Vulnerable Adult?

A person is a vulnerable adult if they are 18 or over who, by reason of mental or other disability, age, illness or other situation is permanently or for the time being unable to take care of him or herself, or to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation

## Important Contact Details

Parish Safeguarding co-ordinator for adults: Jane Clark Tel 01228 711183

Diocesan safeguarding advisor: [safeguarding.adviser@carlisle-diocese.org.uk](mailto:safeguarding.adviser@carlisle-diocese.org.uk)

Carlisle Adult Social Care: 01228 221590

Cumbria Safeguarding Hub (for concerns about the safety of children): 0333 240 1727

LetGo Domestic Violence Service: 03448 736 290

To contact the police in emergency dial 999

## Conversations and interviews in a ministry context

Formal interviews and informal conversations in a ministry context are pastoral encounters. Church workers should be aware of their language and behaviour. For example, innuendos or compliments of a sexual nature are always inappropriate. When a person asks questions or seeks advice around topics of a sexual nature, the worker should be discerning about the motives and needs of the person and question their own ability to assist.

The church worker should consider in advance:

- The place of the meeting, arrangement of the furniture and lighting, and the worker's dress.
- The balance of privacy for conversation with the opportunity for supervision (open doors or windows in doors, another person nearby).
- The physical distance between people determined by hospitality and respect, being aware that someone may have suffered abuse or harassment in the past.
- Whether the circumstances suggest a professional or social interaction.
- The propriety or danger of visiting or being visited alone, especially in the evening.
- The personal safety and comfort of all participants.

- Establishing at the outset the nature of the interview in respect to subject matter, confidentiality and duration.
- The appropriateness of initiating or receiving any physical contact, for example gestures of comfort, which may be unwanted or misinterpreted.

## Pastoral Relationships

Exercising any kind of ministry involves workers developing an understanding of themselves and how they relate to others, how they increase the well-being of others and how they ensure their own wellbeing and safety. People in positions of trust necessarily have power, although this may not be apparent to them, therefore respecting professional boundaries is particularly important. Many pastoral relationships can become intertwined with friendships and social contacts, making this guidance even more necessary.

Church workers should:

- Exercise particular care when ministering to persons with whom they have a close personal relationship or family relationship.
- Be aware of the dangers of dependency in pastoral and professional relationships and seek advice or supervision when these concerns arise.
- If exercising healing ministry, be trained in the theology and non-intrusive practice of that work.
- Recognise their limits and not undertake any ministry that is beyond their competence or role (e.g. therapeutic counselling, deliverance ministry, counselling victims of abuse and domestic violence, or their perpetrators, or giving legal advice). In such instances, the person should be referred to another person or agency with appropriate expertise.
- Avoid behaviour that could give the impression of inappropriate favouritism or the encouragement of inappropriate special relationships.
- Treat those with whom they minister or visit with respect, encouraging self-determination, independence and choice.
- Take care when helping with physical needs, washing and assistance in using the toilet, always respecting the choices of the individual concerned and seeking their consent.
- Never do things of a personal nature to someone which that person can do for themselves.
- Be aware that pastoral relationships may develop into romantic attachments and such situations should be handled sensitively. Workers need to recognize such a development and make it clear to both the person concerned and a supervisor or colleague. No intimate relationship should begin while the member of staff or voluntary worker is in a position of trust over them. The power and influence that

a person in a position of trust has over someone attending a group or activity or in a counselling situation cannot be under-estimated; such an abuse of trust with a person under 18 years may be a criminal offence (Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000). Alternative arrangements should be made for the ongoing pastoral care of the person concerned.

- Not undertake any pastoral ministry while they are under the influence of drink or non-prescribed drugs.

## Behaviour outside work and ministry

In church ministry, behaviour outside work can often impinge on that ministry. Church workers are expected to uphold Christian values throughout their lives.

## Record keeping and privacy

Church workers should:

- Consider keeping a daily record of significant pastoral encounters to include date, time, place, subject and actions to be taken.
- Know that the content of any encounter should only be recorded with the person's consent, unless it is a matter of child protection or might be a record of abuse or mistreatment.
- Ensure that records are factual and avoid rumour or opinion.
- Ensure that records concerned with abuse should be kept indefinitely (at least 50 years).
- Be aware that the publishing, sharing or keeping of personal data or images should follow the appropriate legislation. You could be asked to share any notes you have at some point.

## Working with colleagues

The standards maintained within a pastoral relationship are equally relevant in relationships with colleagues. Harassment or bullying should never be condoned. All workers need to be aware of the possibility of stress within the work place. The needs of family must be acknowledged and all who work together should acknowledge the boundaries between work and home, allowing sufficient time for relaxation and holidays.

Everyone who works with vulnerable people should know to whom they are accountable and have a designated person with whom to discuss their work.

Church workers should:

- Be aware of the responsibilities, function and style of other church workers and encourage co-operation and consultation between workers in the tasks they do.
- Be aware that colleagues should not be discriminated against, harassed, bullied or abused for any reason.
- Be aware that colleagues should not be penalised for following this guidance, or for taking action regarding others and this guidance.
- When leaving office or relinquishing any task, church workers should relinquish any pastoral relationship, except with the agreement of a successor.
- Know to whom they are accountable and be regularly mentored by them or another person who can assist. Such mentoring is especially necessary for those undertaking a continuing individual pastoral ministry of counselling, or when their ministry takes them outside normal church work.
- Church workers should ensure that their tasks can be carried out by another if they are ill or otherwise unable to fulfil their responsibilities.

## Sexual conduct

It is never appropriate for workers to take advantage of their role and engage in sexual activity with anyone with whom they have a pastoral relationship. Workers should be aware of the power imbalance inherent in pastoral relationships.

Church Workers should:

- Never sexually abuse any adult.
- Take responsibility for their words and actions if wishing to make physical contact with another adult (e.g. a hug may be misunderstood) or to talk to them about sexual matters. This will include seeking permission, respecting the person's wishes, noticing and responding to non-verbal communication, and refraining from such contact if in doubt about the person's wishes.
- Refrain from viewing, possessing or distributing sexually exploitative images of adults.
- Avoid situations where they feel vulnerable to temptation or where their conduct may be misinterpreted.

## Financial integrity

Financial dealings can have an impact on the church and the community and must always be handled with integrity. Those with authority for such matters should maintain proper systems and not delegate responsibility to anyone else.

## Church Workers should:

- Not seek personal financial gain from their position beyond their salary or recognized allowances.
- Not be influenced by offers of money.
- Ensure that church and personal finances are kept apart and should avoid any conflict of interest.
- Should ensure that money received by the church is handled by two unrelated lay people.
- Ensure that any gifts received are disclosed to a supervisor or colleague where it should be decided whether they could be accepted.
- Take care not to canvas for church donations from those who may be vulnerable, e.g. the recently bereaved.

## E-safety

- Ensure all electronic communications are appropriate and professional.
- Do not make any relationship with a vulnerable adult through a social networking site
- Maintain a log of all electronic contacts with individuals or groups including messages and texting. (*in practice your phone or computer will keep a log so what this means is 'maintain the integrity of your device's log'*)
- For further advice see: [http://www.carlisle-diocese.org.uk/uploads/235/Guidelines\\_on\\_social\\_media-pdf.html](http://www.carlisle-diocese.org.uk/uploads/235/Guidelines_on_social_media-pdf.html)