

Foreword

 3 minutes read

Last updated: 16 December 2021

Version: 1

Safeguarding is at the heart of the Christian faith which believes each person is made in the image of God, but also acknowledges our fallibility and our deep capacity for sin.

Time and time again, scripture points us towards those for whom God has particular concern – the widow, the orphan, the stranger, those who are marginalised and often powerless. Proverbs 31:8 calls us to ‘speak out on behalf of the voiceless, and for the rights of all who are vulnerable’. The needs of the vulnerable were at the heart of Jesus’ ministry, and they need to be at the heart of ours.

Historically, the Church has all too often failed in this calling, protecting the institution rather than those whom we are called to serve. People have felt exploited where they should have felt protected, ignored when they should have been heard and respected. Great repentance is required of us where we have not done justice.

Scripture tells us that safeguarding is not some optional extra. It’s not just a business of filling out the right forms and following correct procedures. It goes to the heart of Jesus’ mission for His church, and to the core of our lives as Christians.

People come to the church looking for the healing, love and acceptance that we know God promises them. They come to us, whether they hope it will be a safe place, whether they’re just curious or whether they are looking to get to know the God who would die out of love for us.

It is our job to create a culture which honours that trust and hope: one where people are served, heard and loved. It is our job to challenge deference, clericalism and hierarchy where it can lead to cultures of secrecy and shame, where accountability can be avoided and power abused.

Safeguarding raises some of the biggest theological questions there are: about sin and forgiveness, grace and justice. Developing frameworks and Guidance in response to these issues to make sure safeguarding is embedded in everything we do is at the core of who we are as Christians and as a Church because it’s what Jesus requires of us. We are called to create a culture where we don’t cover up, or feel ashamed, or ignore difficult things because they seem too hard to handle but honour vulnerability and shine light on darkness.

As we are led into Jesus’ call to stand with those who are vulnerable, those who feel broken and are suffering, we are reminded that God has a purpose for a new creation, one where His justice and mercy reigns supreme. At the core of that purpose is God’s love for every single person and His faithfulness to His children. Our prayer is that God may comfort all who are hurting, that he may call us all to the holiness Christ shows us and that He may guide us in being a part of His purpose for the Kingdom of Heaven.

Archbishop Justin Welby

Archbishop Steven Cottrell

March 2021

Introduction

 5 minutes read

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The Church of England's Safeguarding policy statement '[Promoting a Safer Church](#)' (2017) outlines the Church's commitment to promoting a safe environment and culture across all church communities for children, young people and vulnerable adults.

This Guidance does two things:

1. It describes what is meant by "safeguarding" and defines the different forms that abuse and safeguarding concerns can take. As such, it provides the context and foundation for the complete suite of Church safeguarding Guidance documents. (With two exceptions, the forms of abuse are based on existing Church guidance, which have been updated and brought together in one place).
2. It provides more detailed guidance on three important safeguarding issues:
 - Domestic abuse, because many Church Officers will themselves be victims and survivors of domestic abuse, and / or will be in contact with victims and survivors who, for example, might be members of a congregation or work colleague.
 - Spiritual abuse and deliverance ministry as these are particularly relevant to safeguarding in a Church / faith context.

This Guidance replaces: "Facts Sheet: Types of Abuse 2018" (which is part of *Responding to Safeguarding Concerns or Allegations that relate to Children Young People and Vulnerable Adults practice guidance 2018*) and parts of *Responding Well to Domestic Abuse practice guidance 2017*.

What is the status of this document?

This document is safeguarding Guidance issued by the House of Bishops under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016.

Section 5 requires all authorised clergy, bishops, archdeacons, licensed readers and lay workers, churchwardens and parochial church councils to have “due regard” to safeguarding Guidance issued by the House of Bishops^[1]. A duty to have “due regard” to Guidance means that the person under the duty is not free to disregard it but is required to follow it unless there are cogent reasons for not doing so. ‘Cogent’ for this purpose means clear, logical and convincing.

Failure by a member of the clergy to have “due regard” to House of Bishops’ safeguarding Guidance is an act or omission which may constitute misconduct under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 (‘CDM’). Failure by a Reader or lay worker to have due regard to House of Bishops’ safeguarding Guidance would be grounds for the revocation of that Reader’s or lay worker’s licence by the Bishop, and failure by a churchwarden or parochial church council could result in an investigation being carried out by the Charity Commission and the churchwarden or PCC members being disqualified as charity trustees.

It is intended to amend the law to allow the House of Bishops to put in place a new Code of Practice on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults which will specify both requirements (which will be mandatory) and good practice (which will be advisory). The amendments will also expand the categories of person to whom the section applies. We expect that these changes will be introduced in early 2022. This document is designed to be used both before and after the law changes.

This document is structured into sections that contain both “Requirements” and “Good Practice Advice”. **Sections labelled “Requirements” are House of Bishops’ Guidance to which the people specified above are required to have “due regard”** from the date that this document comes into force, and they will also comprise the mandatory parts of the Code of practice when it comes into force. **All “Requirements” are clearly marked as such and are in a blue box.**

The **good practice advice** explains, for example, how to deliver some of the Requirements, sets out some good practice examples, and explains why some Requirements are necessary. **In other words, it explains “why and how” to deliver the Requirements.** Whilst the case examples and other associated advice should be considered as best practice which should be followed, **the duty to give due regard under Section 5 of the 2016 Measure does not apply to them**, and they will not be mandatory once the Code of Practice comes into force.

Scope

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and adults is everyone’s responsibility. Everyone who may come into contact with children, young people, adults and their families has a role to play. For the avoidance of doubt, this Guidance applies without exception to all Church Bodies^[2] and Church Officers^[3].

Related Guidance and Processes

This Guidance is a foundational document. That is, whilst it contains few actual process requirements itself, it provides the definitions and concepts that underpin all other House of Bishops Safeguarding Guidance.

In terms of “what to do” when safeguarding concerns and abuse as described in this Guidance are identified, the key Guidance documents are:

- In respect of Church officers: [“Responding to, assessing and managing concerns or allegations against church officers practice guidance” \(2017\)](#)
- In respect of those who are not Church officers: [“Responding to safeguarding concerns or allegations that relate to children, young people and vulnerable adults” \(2018\).](#)

This Guidance also provides the foundation for the following which are available on the Church of England webpage^[4]

- [Safer Recruitment and People Management \(2021\)](#)
- [Safer Environments and Activities \(2019\)](#)
- [Safer Working Practices \(2019\)](#)
- [Key Roles and Responsibilities \(2017\)](#)
- [Responding well to those who have been sexually abused practice Guidance \(2011\)](#)
- [Safeguarding Learning and Development Framework \(2021\)](#)
- [Safeguarding in Religious Communities \(2020\)](#)
- [Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse \(2021\)](#)
- [Guidance: Identifying and Reporting Safeguarding Serious Incidents to the Charity Commission: Guidance for DBFs, PCCs and Religious Communities \(2021\)](#)

Other organisational policies and procedures

It is important that safeguarding guidance exists alongside other organisational processes and policies; for example, bullying and harassment policies, disciplinary and capability processes. It is important for Church bodies to ensure that safeguarding guidance and professionals are not used to manage situations that these other policies and procedures are designed for.

Review

This Guidance will be reviewed no later than June 2024.

[1] Cathedral chapters were added to this list by the Cathedrals Measure 2021, the relevant provision will come into force for each Cathedral when it adopts its new constitution and statutes under that Measure.

[2] Church Bodies include PCCs, diocesan bodies, cathedrals, religious communities, Guild churches and the National Church Institutions. This Guidance applies to the whole of the provinces of Canterbury and York (including the diocese in Europe subject to local variations/modifications). There is also an expectation that the Guidance will apply to the Channel Islands and Sodor and Man, unless there is specific local legislation in a jurisdiction that would prevent adoption.

[3] A 'Church Officer' is anyone appointed/elected by or on behalf of the Church to a post or role, whether they are ordained or lay, paid or unpaid.

[4] <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/promoting-safer-church/policy-practice-Guidance>

1. Context

 9 minutes read

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This section provides an overview of what safeguarding is and why it is important. It is a good place to start for all those concerned with safeguarding in a Church context.

1.1 What is this Guidance about?

This Guidance helps Church Officers to recognise the signs that a child, young person or vulnerable adult might be being abused. It explores certain specific types of abuse in more detail which are most relevant to a Church context.

This Guidance does not detail the processes which must be followed if abuse is detected. These are contained in "[Responding to, assessing and managing concerns or allegations against church officers practice guidance](#)" (2017) and "Responding to safeguarding concerns or allegations that relate to children, young people and vulnerable adults" (2018).

1.2 What is safeguarding?

The concept of safeguarding, and the promotion of a safeguarding culture, is wider and more pro-active than just responding to the actual abuse of one person by another.

1.2.1

It is important that safeguarding is seen in broad terms that extend beyond abuse-related concerns. As such, safeguarding can be understood as 'acting in ways that mitigate any risk of harm'. There may be concerns about the safety and wellbeing of an individual which are not linked to abuse by another but are still on the safeguarding continuum. This might be to do with personal conditions or contextual circumstances; for example, poor mental health, homelessness and rough sleeping, suicidal thoughts, dementia and poverty. It is important to remember that safeguarding is as much about prevention as reaction, and so also covers risk assessment of environments and activities, anything that will help contribute to keeping people safe. This means that the types of safeguarding incidents which are most prevalent may be different according to the Church setting, be that a cathedral, parish or religious community.

1.2.2

According to Working Together^[1], safeguarding children means:

- protecting children from maltreatment
- preventing impairment of children's mental and physical health or development
- ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care
- taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.

"Child protection" refers to the acute end of the safeguarding continuum. It focuses on protecting individual children identified as suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. This includes child protection procedures operated by local authority children's services and other statutory agencies which detail how to respond to concerns about a child.

For the purposes of this Guidance, a child is anyone under the age of 18.

1.2.3

Under the Care Act 2014, "adult safeguarding" is working with adults with care and support needs to keep them safe from abuse or neglect. All statutory organisations^[2] have a duty to ensure that the welfare of all adults is ensured. As part of this, they need to understand when to implement their safeguarding adults reporting procedures. Safeguarding duties apply to an "adult at risk", defined as one who:

- "has needs for care and support (whether or not the local authority is meeting any of those needs) and;
- is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect; and;
- as a result of those needs is unable to protect himself or herself against the abuse or neglect or the risk of it".

1.2.4

The Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016, Section 6[3] outlines the Church's requirements for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults in Church settings. The Measure uses the term "vulnerable adult" and defines it 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, old age, emotional fragility or distress, or otherwise; and for that purpose, the reference to being impaired is to being temporarily or indefinitely impaired".

This definition, which has been Church law since 2016, encompasses the possibility that the ability of people to keep themselves safe can depend on the context they find themselves in, as well as on their own personal characteristics or abilities. For example, in some settings or relationships, people may find themselves in less powerful positions than others, and this could, depending on all the circumstances, significantly impair their ability to protect themselves from physical abuse or exploitation by the person who is in the more powerful position. Other people may have physical or mental disabilities which may significantly impair their ability to protect themselves from abuse. The definition of 'vulnerable adult' recognises that people may move in and out of being vulnerable at various points in their life or when the context changes.

Deciding whether a person should be considered a 'vulnerable adult' with regard to a particular safeguarding concern or allegation involves making an assessment of the facts of the particular case and forming a view on whether the ability of the individual concerned to protect himself or herself from the abuse in question was significantly impaired through physical or mental disability or illness, old age, emotional fragility or distress, or otherwise.

It is recognised that all definitions have their limitations. The definition of "adult at risk" taken from the Care Act 2014 has limitations which could adversely impact on the realities of safeguarding in the Church context.

Therefore, the most important starting point when dealing with any scenario is to ask the question: "Is this a safeguarding situation – is there evidence of abuse as set out in this guidance?"; and to then exercise informed judgment and record the rationale for the decision.

1.2.5

In the Church context, safeguarding is the action Church Officers take to positively promote a safer culture and encourage safer behaviours.

This means the Church will[4]:

- Promote a safer environment and culture.
- Safely recruit and support all those with any responsibility related to children, young people and vulnerable adults within the Church.
- Respond promptly to every safeguarding concern or allegation.
- Care pastorally for victims/survivors of abuse and other affected persons.
- Care pastorally for those who are the Respondent of concerns or allegations of abuse and other affected persons.

- Respond to those that may pose a present risk to others.

1.3 Why is safeguarding at the heart of all we do in the Church?

“At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!^[5]”

“Safeguarding is at the heart of our Christian faith. We are all made unique and in the image of God^[6]”

Archbishop Justin Welby, Parish Safeguarding Handbook

Whilst this is a safeguarding document, it is necessary to highlight key points on theology here. For a fuller discussion on the theology of safeguarding, please see ‘Theology and Safeguarding: trauma, justice, forgiveness, wholeness, experience and calling’, a document developed jointly by Church Officers and survivors. Safeguarding is rooted in the gospel. It is a Christian imperative to take care of the young, the vulnerable and most in need. As every person is made in the image of God, this begins with value of all God’s people.

“The Church is called to share the good news of God’s salvation through Jesus Christ. The life of our communities and institutions is integral to how we address this task. The good news speaks of welcome for all, with a particular regard for those who are most vulnerable, into a community where the value and dignity of every human being is affirmed and those in positions of responsibility and authority are truly trustworthy. Being faithful to our call to share the gospel therefore compels us to take with the utmost seriousness the challenge of preventing abuse from happening and responding well where it has.^[7]”

Promoting a Safer Church, 2017

“Safeguarding is everyone’s business. For faith-based organisations and communities, getting this right can be challenging but it must be at the heart of everything they do. Recognising the risks and understanding that abusers can hide in plain sight is more than a tick-box exercise, it’s about culture and behaviour.”

Paul Burstow, Chair, SCIE

1.4 Why is safeguarding needed?

It is important that every individual knows how to respond well if they observe, hear or suspect that a child, young person or vulnerable adult is at risk of, or is being, abused or suffering in some other way. Significant numbers of children and adults experience abuse or vulnerability in some form. Sexual abuse and physical abuse are perhaps the most obvious forms which spring to mind, but abuse and vulnerability also cover homelessness, poor mental health, online abuse and exploitation.

1.5 Who does abuse affect?

Safeguarding concerns can affect everyone, irrespective of social class, race, education or gender. It is inevitable that at some point everyone will encounter someone who has experienced abuse or is currently experiencing abuse, whether as victim, as someone who poses a risk or as a vulnerable person. This includes clergy and their families, where there might be the same kind of abuse issues as non-clerical families.

In the context of a Church setting, where people (including perpetrators, victims / survivors of abuse and those otherwise at risk) come in times of need and to seek help, it is even more important that everyone is aware of the different forms of abuse and safeguarding concerns, and is able to respond in an appropriate manner.

1.6 A safeguarding continuum

1.6.1

As outlined in section 1.2 above, there is a safeguarding continuum which ranges from those cases requiring immediate emergency response, to those where a pastoral response will be most helpful. Consider some examples below:

- An individual is expressing suicidal thoughts and is reporting they have made active plans to carry this out.
- An individual reports having been feeling down for several weeks, is not eating and has not been to work.
- An individual looks upset after a service and reports they have lost their job.
- Someone has been sleeping rough in the church yard, they have dried blood around their head, they are shivering and are confused and incoherent.
- Someone has been sleeping rough in the church yard. They are coherent, in touch with social services, understand the situation they are in and expect it to be temporary.

When thinking about what needs to be reported to a Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA) or Cathedral Safeguarding Adviser (CSA), it is easy enough to separate out the emergency situations which will require immediate police intervention, and the non-emergency issues requiring a pastoral response, but we remain left with a considerable grey area. For example, workplace bullying and harassment (unless there is an obvious safeguarding dimension) should be dealt with under an organisation's HR policies and procedures. In our homeless example above, it is likely that the DSA/CSA would be informed in the first scenario but not the second, and not at all if there was no connection to a Church Body or Church Officer.

While there are patterns we can learn about types of abuse, all safeguarding situations are slightly different from each other and that is why this document contains good practice advice as well as requirements.

[1] [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

[2] For the avoidance of doubt, the Church of England is not classed as a statutory agency under this Act.

[3] [Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

[4] [safer \(churchofengland.org\)](https://www.churchofengland.org)

[5] Matthew 18: 1-7

[6] Archbishop Justin Welby, Parish Safeguarding Handbook

[7] [Promoting a safer church](#)

2. Definitions

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This section sets out definitions and signs of abuse, updating existing House of Bishops guidance. You may see, hear or observe these signs as part of the life of your Church, or as part of your engagement in the wider community.

If Church Officers hear, observe or suspect any of these, action needs to be taken.

This could mean raising the issue with the incumbent, the PSO or the Diocesan / Cathedral Safeguarding Adviser, or with statutory services in the case of an emergency or injury. It could also mean raising it with a more appropriate agency, for example a local charity or a national helpline.

For full information on what to do in response to a safeguarding concern, please refer to the following Guidance documents:

- [Responding to, assessing and managing safeguarding concerns or allegations against church officers](#)
- [Responding to safeguarding concerns or allegations that relate to children, young people and vulnerable adults.](#)
- [Responding well, to victims and survivors of abuse.](#)

Relevance to other countries

Please note that whilst there might be different perceptions of what constitutes abuse in different countries, abuse cannot be understood as a relative concept only applicable in certain contexts. Abuse is abuse. Domestic abuse and the trafficking of children for sexual exploitation, for example, are still forms of abuse whichever country they take place in and must be responded to.

Physical Abuse

Physical Abuse (children and adults)

What it is	Signs you may see [1] , [2] , [3]
<p>In children this may involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hitting • shaking • throwing • poisoning • burning or scalding • drowning • suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. <p>Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.</p> <p>In adults this may be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assault • hitting • slapping • pushing • misuse of medication • restraint • inappropriate physical sanctions. 	<p>Bumps and bruises don't always mean someone is being physically abused. Although there isn't just one sign or symptom to look out for, it's important to be aware of the signs.</p> <p>If someone regularly has injuries, there seems to be a pattern to the injuries or the explanation doesn't match the injuries, then this should be reported.</p> <p>Symptoms may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bruises • flinching away from others • wearing clothes that cover up, even in warm weather • burns or scalds • broken or fractured bones • bite marks. <p>Head injuries in babies and toddlers can be signs of abuse so it's important to be aware of these. Visible signs may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • swelling • bruising • fractures • being extremely sleepy or unconscious • breathing problems • seizures • vomiting • unusual behaviour, such as being irritable or not feeding properly.

[1] <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/physical-abuse/>

[2] See also [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) Annex A for definitions of child abuse and also Annex B for related resources

[3] [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) Section 14.16 onwards outlines categories of adult abuse

Domestic Abuse

Domestic Abuse (children)

What it is	Signs you may see ^[1]
<p>Domestic abuse is any type of controlling, bullying, threatening or violent behaviour between people in a relationship. It can seriously harm children and young people and witnessing domestic abuse is child abuse.</p> <p>It's important to remember domestic abuse:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• can happen inside and outside the home• can happen over the phone, on the internet and on social networking sites• can happen in any relationship and can continue even after the relationship has ended <p>and that both males and females can be abused or abusers</p>	<p>The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 now recognises that children are victims of domestic abuse as well as their parents. It may be harder to detect in children, but signs you might see include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• aggression or <u>bullying</u>• anti-social behaviour, like vandalism• <u>anxiety, depression or suicidal thoughts</u>• attention seeking• bed-wetting, nightmares or insomnia• constant or regular sickness, like colds, headaches and mouth ulcers• <u>drug or alcohol use</u>• eating disorders• problems in school or trouble learning• tantrums• withdrawal.

Domestic Abuse (adults)

What it is	Signs you might see [2]
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Domestic abuse is any type of controlling, bullying, threatening or violent behaviour between people in a relationship. It's important to remember domestic abuse:

- can happen inside and outside the home
- can happen over the phone, on the internet and on social networking sites
- can happen in any relationship and can continue even after the relationship has ended
- both men and women can be abused or abusers.

and that both men and women can be abused or abusers.

At time of writing, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has been passed, but much is not yet in force. The Act can be found at [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#). This will create a statutory definition of domestic abuse, emphasising that domestic abuse is not just physical violence, but can also be emotional, coercive or controlling, and economic abuse. See [Section 3](#) for more information.

Productivity signs

- Change in the person's working patterns: for example, frequent absence, lateness or needing to leave work early;
- Reduced quality and quantity of work: missing deadlines, a drop in usual performance standards;
- Change in the use of the phone/email: for example, a large number of personal calls/texts, avoiding calls or a strong reaction to calls/texts/emails;
- Spending an increased amount of hours at work for no reason.

Changes in behaviour or demeanour

- Conduct out of character with previous employment history or social engagement;
- Changes in behaviour: for example, becoming very quiet, anxious, frightened, tearful, aggressive, distracted, depressed;
- Isolating themselves from colleagues or friends;
- Obsession with timekeeping;
- Secretive regarding home life;
- Worried about leaving children at home.

Physical signs

- Visible bruising or single or repeated injury with unlikely explanations;
- Change in the pattern or amount of make-up used;
- Change in the manner of dress: for example, clothes that do not suit the climate which may be used to hide injuries;
- Substance use/misuse;

- Fatigue/sleep disorders.

[1] [How to Protect Children From Domestic Abuse | NSPCC](#)

[2] For a full description, see [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#), [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#), [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Neglect

Neglect (children)

What it is	Signs you may see [1] , [2]
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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 or development.

Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. 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-givers)
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

The NSPCC adds:

Neglect can be a lot of different things, which can make it hard to spot.

But broadly speaking, there are 4 types of neglect.

- Physical neglect: A child's basic needs, such as food, clothing or shelter, are not met or they aren't properly supervised or kept safe.
- Educational neglect: A parent doesn't ensure their child is given an education.
- Emotional neglect: A child doesn't get the nurture and stimulation they need. This could be through ignoring, humiliating, intimidating or isolating them.
- Medical neglect: A child isn't given proper health care. This includes dental care and refusing or ignoring medical recommendations.

Neglect can be really difficult to spot. Having one of the signs doesn't necessarily mean a child is being neglected. But if you notice multiple signs that last for a while, they might show there's a serious problem.

Children and young people who are neglected might have:

Poor appearance and hygiene:

- being smelly or dirty
- being hungry or not given money for food
- having unwashed clothes
- having the wrong clothing, such as no warm clothes in winter
- having frequent and untreated nappy rash in infants.

Health and development problems:

- regular illness, infections or dental issues
- missed medical appointments, such as for vaccinations
- poor language or social skills
- tiredness
- repeated accidental injuries, often caused by lack of supervision
- skin issues, such as sores, rashes, flea bites, scabies or ringworm.

Housing and family issues:

- living in an unsuitable home environment, such as having no heating
- being left alone for a long time
- taking on the role of carer for other family members.

Change in behaviour:

- becoming clingy
- becoming aggressive

- being withdrawn, depressed or anxious
- changes in eating habits

Neglect and acts of omission (adults)

What it is	Signs you may see ³
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ignoring medical, emotional or physical care needs.• Failure to provide access to appropriate health, care and support or educational services.• The withholding of the necessities of life, such as medication, adequate nutrition and heating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An out of character failure to engage in social interaction and activities• Inconsistent or reluctant contact with support, such as medical and social care organisations• Poor personal hygiene• Inappropriate or inadequate clothing• Poor state of home environment• Malnutrition or unexplained weight loss• Untreated injuries and medical problems• Accumulation of untaken medication.

Self-neglect (adults)

What it is	Signs you may see ⁴
<p>Self-neglect covers a range of behaviour related to neglecting to care for one's personal hygiene, health or surroundings and includes behaviour such as hoarding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very poor personal hygiene, wearing the same clothes every day • Unkempt appearance • Lack of essential food, clothing or shelter/heating • Malnutrition and/or dehydration • Living in squalid or unsanitary conditions • Neglecting household maintenance • Hoarding • Collecting a large number of animals in inappropriate conditions • Non-compliance with health or care services, accumulation of untaken medication • Inability or unwillingness to take medication or treat illness or injury.

[1] [Neglect is also Child Abuse: Know All About It | NSPCC](#)

[2] See also [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) Annex A for definitions of child abuse and also Annex B for related resources

• ³Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) Section 14.16 onwards outlines categories of adult abuse

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Organisational abuse (adults/children)

What it is	Signs you may see ^[1]
<p>Including neglect and poor care practice within an institution or specific care setting such as a hospital or care home, or in relation to care provided in one's own home, for example. This may range from one off incidents to on-going ill-treatment. It can be through neglect or poor professional practice as a result of the structure, policies, processes and practices within an organisation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An unsafe, unhygienic or overcrowded environment. • A strict or inflexible routine. • Lack of privacy, dignity, and respect for people as individuals. • Withdrawing people from community or family contacts. • No choice offered with food, drink, dress or activities. • No respect or provisions for religion, belief, or cultural backgrounds. • Treating adults like children, including arbitrary decision-making.

[1] [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/care-and-support-statutory-guidance) Section 14.16 onwards outlines categories of adult abuse

Sexual abuse

Sexual Abuse (children)

What it is	Signs you may see ^{[1],[2]}
<p>“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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse.</p> <p>Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.”</p>	<p>Knowing the signs of sexual abuse can help give a voice to children and young people. Sometimes children won't understand that what's happening to them is wrong. Or they might be scared to speak out. Some of the signs you might notice include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoiding being alone with or frightened of people or a person they know. • Language or sexual behaviour you wouldn't expect them to know. • Having nightmares or bed-wetting. • Self-harm. • Changes in eating habits or developing an eating problem • Alcohol or drug misuse. <p>If a child is being or has been sexually abused online, they might:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • spend a lot more or a lot less time than usual online, texting, gaming or using social media • seem distant, upset or angry after using the internet or texting • be secretive about who they're talking to and what they're doing online or on their mobile phone • have lots of new phone numbers, texts or email addresses on their mobile phone, laptop or tablet. <p>Children and young people might also drop hints and clues about the abuse.</p>

Sexual abuse (adults)

What it is	Signs you may see ^[3]
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rape • indecent exposure • sexual harassment • inappropriate looking or touching • sexual teasing or innuendo • sexual photography or filming, “revenge porn” • subjection to pornography or witnessing sexual acts • sexual assault • sexual acts to which the adult has not consented or was pressured into consenting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • excessive fear/apprehension of, or withdrawal from, relationships • fear of receiving help with personal care • reluctance to be alone with a particular person. • self-harming • poor concentration, withdrawal, sleep disturbance • the uncharacteristic use of explicit sexual language or significant changes in sexual behaviour or attitude • bruising, particularly to the thighs, buttocks and upper arms and marks on the neck • pregnancy in someone who is unable to consent to sexual intercourse

[1] <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/child-sexual-abuse/>

[2] See also [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/681116/Working-Together-to-Safeguard-Children-2018.pdf) Annex A for definitions of child abuse and also Annex B for related resources

[3] [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/681116/Working-Together-to-Safeguard-Children-2018.pdf) Section 14.16 onwards outlines categories of adult abuse

Exploitation

Child Exploitation - Sexual (a form of child sexual abuse)

What it is	Signs you may see [1]
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“Occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity:

(a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or

(b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator.

The victim may have been sexually **exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual.**

Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.”

Exploitation can take place between a child and an adult as well as ‘peer on peer’ (for example between one young person and another)

The NSPCC^[2] adds:

When a child/young person is sexually exploited online they might be persuaded or forced to:

- send or post sexually explicit images of themselves
- film or stream sexual activities
- have sexual conversations.

Once an abuser has images, video or copies of conversations, they might use threats and blackmail to force a young person to take part in other sexual activity. They may also share the images and videos with others or circulate them online.

Gangs use sexual exploitation:

- to exert power and control
- for initiation
- to use sexual violence as a weapon.

Sexual exploitation can be difficult to spot and sometimes mistaken for "normal" teenage or pre-teen behaviour. Signs include:

- Signs of sexual abuse and grooming
- Unhealthy or inappropriate sexual behaviour.
- Being frightened of some people, places or situations.
- Being secretive.
- Sharp changes in mood or character.
- Having money or things they can't or won't explain.
- Physical signs of abuse, like bruises
- Alcohol or drug misuse.
- Sexually transmitted infections.
- Pregnancy.

Other signs may include:

- Having an older boyfriend or girlfriend.
- Staying out late or overnight.
- Having a new group of friends.
- Missing from home or stopping going to school or college.
- Hanging out with older people, other vulnerable people or in antisocial groups.
- Involved in a gang.
- Involved in criminal activities like selling drugs or shoplifting.

Child Exploitation: Criminal (including 'county lines')

What it is	Signs you may see ^{[3],[4]}
<p>As set out in the Serious Violence Strategy, published by the Home Office, where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity:</p> <p>(a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or</p> <p>(b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or</p> <p>(c) through violence or the threat of violence.</p> <p>The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child criminal exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.</p> <p>This includes 'County Lines', a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of 'deal lines'. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money, and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.</p> <p>Exploitation can take place between a child and an adult as well as 'peer on peer' (for example between one young person and another).</p>	<p>Signs you may notice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequently absent from and doing badly in school. • Going missing from home, staying out late and travelling for unexplained reasons. • In a relationship or hanging out with someone older than them. • Being angry, aggressive or violent. • Being isolated or withdrawn. • Having unexplained money and buying new things. • Wearing clothes or accessories in gang colours or getting tattoos. • Using new slang words. • Spending more time on social media and being secretive about time online. • Making more calls or sending more texts, possibly on a new phone or phones. • Self-harming and feeling emotionally unwell. • Taking drugs and abusing alcohol. • Committing petty crimes like shop lifting or vandalism. • Unexplained injuries and refusing to seek medical help. • Carrying weapons or having a dangerous breed of dog.

[1] See also [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) Annex A for definitions of child abuse and also Annex B for related resources

[2] <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/child-sexual-exploitation/>

[3] <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/gangs-criminal-exploitation/>

[4] See also [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) Annex A for definitions of child abuse and also Annex B for related resources

Financial abuse (adults)

What it is	Signs you may see ^[1]
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• theft• fraud• internet scamming• coercion in relation to an adult's financial affairs or arrangements, including in connection with wills, property, inheritance or financial transactions• the misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Missing personal possessions• An unexplained lack of money• Power of attorney or lasting power of attorney (LPA) being obtained after the person has ceased to have mental capacity, or being obtained by someone you would not expect.• Sudden or unexpected changes in a will or other financial documents• Appearance of previously uninvolved relatives or 'close friends'.• Failing to provide receipts for shopping or other financial transactions carried out on behalf of someone else.

[1] [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Modern Slavery (adults/children)

What it is	Signs you may see ^[1]
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • slavery • human trafficking • forced labour and domestic servitude. • traffickers and slave masters using whatever means they have at their disposal to coerce, deceive and force individuals into a life of abuse, servitude and inhumane treatment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows signs of physical or psychological abuse and untreated injuries • Looks malnourished or unkempt, or appears withdrawn and neglected • Seems under the control or influence of others • Wears the same clothes every day • Wears no safety equipment even if their work requires it • Living in dirty, cramped or overcrowded accommodation • Living and working at the same address • Appears unfamiliar with their neighbourhood or where they work • Rarely allowed to travel on their own • Collected and dropped off on a regular basis early in the morning or late at night • In a crowded minibus with other workers • Has no control of their identification documents such as their passport • Reluctant to seek help and avoids eye contact • Appears frightened or hesitant to talk to strangers • Fear of police, don't know who to trust or where to get help • Afraid of deportation, and risk of violence to them or their family.

[1] <https://www.theclewerinitiative.org/spot-the-signs>, also [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/care-and-support-statutory-guidance) section 14.7 and [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/684806/Working-Together-to-Safeguard-Children-2018.pdf)

Extremism and radicalisation (adults/children)

What it is	Signs you may see ^{[1],[2], [3], [4]}
<p>Radicalisation is the process through which a person comes to support or be involved in extremist ideologies. It can result in a person becoming drawn into terrorism and is in itself a form of harm.</p> <p>Extremism goes beyond terrorism and includes people who target the vulnerable – including the young – by seeking to sow division between communities on the basis of race, faith or denomination; justify discrimination towards women and girls; persuade others that minorities are inferior; or argue against the primacy of democracy and the rule of law in our society. This can include harmful minority religions (“cults”)^[5]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• isolating themselves from family and friends• talking as if from a scripted speech• unwillingness or inability to discuss their views• a sudden disrespectful attitude towards others• increased levels of anger• increased secretiveness, especially around internet use. <p>Children who are at risk of radicalisation may have low self-esteem, or be victims of bullying or discrimination. Extremists might target them and tell them they can be part of something special, later persuading them into cutting themselves off from their friends and family.</p> <p>However, these signs don't necessarily mean a child is being radicalised – it may be normal teenage behaviour or a sign that something else is wrong.</p>

[1] <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/reporting-abuse/dedicated-helplines/protecting-children-from-radicalisation/>

[2] [Revised Prevent duty guidance: for England and Wales - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/612222/Revised-Prevent-duty-guidance-for-England-and-Wales-2019.pdf)

[3] [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/612222/Working-Together-to-Safeguard-Children-2018.pdf)

[4] [Part B: Practice Guidance \(londoncpc.co.uk\)](https://www.londoncpc.org.uk/part-b-practice-guidance)

[5] For more information, see [Welcome to Inform | Inform](https://www.inform.org/)

Discrimination and bullying (adults/children)

Discriminatory abuse

What it is	Signs you may see ^{[1],[2]}
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • harassment • slurs or similar treatment because of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • race, including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin • gender and gender identity, including gender reassignment • age • disability • sexual orientation • religion • pregnancy and maternity • marriage and civil partnership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overhearing harassment or abuse • A person appearing to be excluded from activities or groups for discriminatory reasons. • The support on offer does not take account of the person's individual needs in terms of a protected characteristic • Expressions of anger, frustration, fear or anxiety.

Bullying, cyber bullying and online abuse (adults/children)

What it is	Signs you may see [3] , [4] , [5] , [6]
<p>Bullying can include many different forms of abuse, including physical and emotional abuse, and typically (but not exclusively) takes place between peers.</p> <p>Bullying is behaviour that hurts someone else. It includes name calling, hitting, pushing, spreading rumours, threatening or undermining someone.[7]</p> <p>It can happen anywhere – at school, at home, online, at work or in church. It's usually repeated over a long period of time and can hurt a child both physically and emotionally.</p> <p>Cyberbullying can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sending threatening or abusive text messages • creating and sharing embarrassing images or videos • trolling – the sending of menacing or upsetting messages on social networks, chat rooms or online games • shaming someone online • setting up hate sites or groups about a particular child • encouraging young people to self-harm • revenge porn • trolling. 	<p>Signs include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being afraid to go to school or youth groups (or work or church), being mysteriously 'ill' each morning, or skipping school/youth group • being nervous, losing confidence, or becoming distressed and withdrawn • problems with eating or sleeping • belongings getting 'lost' or damaged • spending a lot more or a lot less time than usual online, texting, gaming or using social media • seem distant, upset or angry after using the internet or texting • be secretive about who they're talking to and what they're doing online or on their mobile phone • physical injuries, such as unexplained bruises • not doing as well at school • asking for, or stealing, money (to give to whoever's bullying them) • bullying others.

[\[1\] Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[\[2\] Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

[\[3\] https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/online-abuse/](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/online-abuse/)

[\[4\] Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Female Genital Mutilation (adults/children)

What it is	Signs you may see [1] [2]
<p>Female genital mutilation (FGM) is when a female's genitals are deliberately altered or removed for non-medical reasons. It's also known as 'female circumcision' or 'cutting', but has many other names. The practice is not required by any religion and is medically unnecessary, painful and has serious health consequences at the time it is carried out and in later life.</p> <p>The procedure is typically performed on girls of any age but is also performed on newborn infants and on young women before marriage/ pregnancy.</p> <p>FGM may be practised illegally by doctors or traditional health workers in the UK, or girls may be sent abroad for the procedure.</p> <p>FGM is illegal in the UK [3], under the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 (as amended).</p>	<p>Signs FGM might happen:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A relative or someone known as a 'cutter' visiting from abroad.• A special occasion or ceremony takes place where a girl 'becomes a woman' or is 'prepared for marriage'.• A female relative, like a mother, sister or aunt has undergone FGM.• A family arranges a long holiday overseas or visits a family abroad during the summer holidays.• A girl has an unexpected or long absence from school.• A girl struggles to keep up in school.• A girl runs away – or plans to run away - from home. <p>Signs FGM might have taken place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Having difficulty walking, standing or sitting.• Spending longer in the bathroom or toilet.• Appearing quiet, anxious or depressed.• Acting differently after an absence from school or college.• Reluctance to go to the doctors or have routine medical examinations.• Asking for help – though they might not be explicit about the problem because they're scared or embarrassed

[1] <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/female-genital-mutilation-fgm/>

[2] [Female genital mutilation \(who.int\)](http://www.who.int)

[3] <https://www.gov.uk/female-genital-mutilation-help-advice>

Emotional and psychological abuse

Emotional abuse (children)

What it is	Signs you may see [1] , [2]
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In children:

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 a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person.
- not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate.
- age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children, interactions that are beyond a child's developmental capability
- overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction.
- 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.

There might not be any obvious physical signs of emotional abuse. A child or young person might not tell anyone what's happening until they reach a 'crisis point'. That's why it's important to look out for signs in how a child or young person is acting.

As children grow up, their emotions change. This means it can be difficult to tell if they're being emotionally abused. But children who are being emotionally abused might:

- seem unconfident or lack self-assurance
- struggle to control their emotions
- have difficulty making or maintaining relationships
- act in a way that's inappropriate for their age.

Babies and pre-school children who are being emotionally abused or neglected might:

- be overly-affectionate to strangers or people they don't know well
- seem unconfident, wary or anxious
- not have a close relationship or bond with their parent
- be aggressive or cruel towards other children or animals.

Older children/young people might:

- use language you wouldn't expect them to know for their age
- act in a way or know about things you wouldn't expect them to know for their age
- struggle to control their emotions
- have extreme outbursts
- seem isolated from their parents
- lack social skills
- have few or no friends.

Psychological abuse (adults)

What it is	Signs you may see ^{[3],[4]}
<p>In adults this may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emotional abuse • threats of harm or abandonment • deprivation of contact • humiliation • blaming • controlling • intimidation • coercion • harassment • verbal abuse • cyber bullying • isolation • unreasonable and unjustified withdrawal of services or supportive networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An air of silence when a particular person is present • Withdrawal or change in the psychological state of the person • Insomnia • Low self-esteem • Uncooperative and aggressive behaviour • A change of appetite, weight loss/gain • Signs of distress: tearfulness, anger • Apparent false claims, by someone involved with the person, to attract unnecessary treatment.

Spiritual abuse (children and adults). This is not a separate category of abuse, it is a form of emotional and psychological abuse relevant for faith contexts. It is important to be clear about this when discussing cases with statutory services who may be unfamiliar with its use. See also separate section below for full details

What it is [\[5\]](#), [\[6\]](#)

Signs you may see

Spiritual abuse is a form of emotional and psychological abuse. It

is characterised by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour in a religious context. Spiritual abuse can have a deeply damaging impact on those who experience it and can be experienced in a variety of different relationships.

This abuse may include:

- Manipulation and exploitation
- Enforced accountability
- Requirements for secrecy and silence
- Coercion to conform, for example, seeking to enforce rather than encourage behavioural changes; failing to allow an individual autonomy to make their own choices
- Exercising control through using sacred texts or teaching to coerce behaviour
- Requirement of obedience to the abuser
- The suggestion that the abuser has a 'divine' position
- Isolation as a means of punishment
- Superiority and elitism.

Spiritual abuse may occur on its own, or alongside other forms of abuse, such as physical or sexual abuse. It may be used to 'legitimise' or facilitate other forms of abuse.

Use of scripture to justify abusive behaviour

- Use of scripture to manipulate or force a person into acts they would not wish to consent to.
- Prophetic ministry is an important part of the work of the Church, and this is affirmed. However, a warning sign of spiritual abuse can be exercising control through invoking fear of spiritual consequences for disobedience. To be clear the issue is not the discussion of spiritual consequences as provided in the Bible, but the exercise of control over another person through instrumentalising their fear
- Exercising control through the suggestion that obedience to the abuser is equivalent to obedience to God
- Emotional manipulation in the guise of righteousness
- Being manipulated or feeling pressured into service or conformity
- Feeling unable to say no to increasing demands for time, service and obedience
- Pressure to conform to expectations and believe exactly the same as others in the church context
- Forcing or requiring a person to share every aspect of their life for scrutiny under the guise of accountability.
- Censorship, including inability to ask questions, raise concerns or disagree.
- Isolation or rejection of those who will not conform
- The misuse of a pastoral or mentoring relationship in such a way the individual experiences coercion and control justified by theology, scripture or **Divine position**.

Note that there may be long periods of time in which the victim of spiritual abuse experiences positive moments, before the spiritually

abusive behaviour occurs or reoccurs. This may lead to self-doubt that the behaviour is harmful

[1] <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/emotional-abuse/>

[2] [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

[3] <https://www.scie.org.uk/safeguarding/adults/introduction/types-and-indicators-of-abuse>

[4] See also [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) s 14.7 for definitions of adult abuse

[5] 'Escaping the Maze of Spiritual Abuse – Creating healthy Christian cultures' – Dr Lisa Oakley and Justin Humphreys, 2019

[6] Oakley, L., Kinmond, K., & Humphreys, J. (2018). Spiritual Abuse in Christian faith settings: Definition, policy and practice Guidance. *Journal of Adult Protection*, 20(3-4), 144-154.

Refugees and asylum seekers

“Refugees and asylum seekers have the same fundamental rights to safety and protection* as any other person and the fact that their citizenship status may not have been resolved does not alter this.....From a safeguarding point of view refugees and asylum seekers are not necessarily vulnerable and their autonomy should be respected. They are, after all they have gone through, survivors and shouldn't be treated as victims.....However, refugees and asylum seekers may face certain risks associated with their particular circumstances and experiences.....Asylum-seeking children who are unaccompanied are in a highly vulnerable situation”

These key points are taken from: [“Guidelines for safeguarding refugees and asylum seekers”](#) produced by Thirtyone:eight and Welcome Churches where a full discussion of safeguarding issues in respect of refugees and asylum seekers can be found.

* This means emergency safeguarding - access to non-emergency services provided by statutory agencies may differ.

3. Domestic Abuse

 13 minutes read

Last updated: 19 December 2021

Version: 1

This section sets out some general advice for Church Officers on how to identify and how to initially respond to domestic abuse. More detailed procedural Guidance on when and how to respond is available in [Responding to, assessing and managing safeguarding concerns or allegations against church officers](#); [Responding to safeguarding concerns or allegations that relate to children, young people and vulnerable adults](#), and [Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse](#).

3.1 Definition

The Government definition of domestic abuse is currently[1]:

“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members[2] regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.'

The Government definition, which is not a legal definition, includes so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group."[\[3\]](#)

3.2 Context

3.2.1

Domestic abuse is a widescale problem, and the reporting of abuse has increased during the 2020 periods of lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic[\[4\],\[5\]](#). There is a clear need in society for a cultural change with regard to the perception of domestic abuse, and it is important to embed this into every aspect of Church life. This includes the Church being a "safe space" for people to disclose. The Church should raise awareness through sermons and teach children and young people about healthy relationships.

3.2.2

Research[\[6\]](#) carried out with 438 congregation members in Cumbria found that one in four (109 individuals) had experienced at least one abusive behaviour in their current relationship. More broadly, 42.2% of the whole sample had experienced at least one of the abusive behaviours in a current or previous relationship. More importantly, while 71.3% of the sample were aware of domestic abuse in their community, only 37.6% thought it was a problem in their church. The perception that domestic abuse is not as common within a church congregation as the community is a false one and can discourage victims/survivors from seeking help. The study reports:

“One in six men and one in four women who answered this question had sought support from a church. In just over half of cases, the response received was supportive, and primarily took the form of emotional support/a listening ear. However, there were also examples of dangerous practice and disclosures of domestic abuse being minimised or silenced”

There is therefore a wide variety of scenarios where Church Officers may need to deal with a disclosure of domestic abuse. This section highlights initial responses to each of these scenarios, the more detailed procedural Guidance on when and how to respond is available in [Responding to safeguarding concerns or allegations that relate to children, young people and vulnerable adults practice guidance 2018](#), [Responding to, assessing and managing safeguarding concerns or allegations against church officers](#) and [Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse](#)

3.2.3

Challenging inappropriate behaviours, being alert to the signs of possible abuse, and knowing what to do should such issues arise are the most important things the Church can do to keep people safe. It is good practice to have freely available information and phone numbers for local and national helplines, hostels and refuges.

3.3 How can Domestic Abuse be recognised?

Indications in a Church setting that someone may be a victim of domestic abuse could include: [\[7\]](#)

Productivity signs

- Change in the person’s working patterns: for example, frequent absence, lateness or needing to leave work early;
- Reduced quality and quantity of work: missing deadlines, a drop in usual performance standards;
- Change in the use of the phone/email: for example, a large number of personal calls/texts, avoiding calls or a strong reaction to calls/texts/emails;
- Spending an increased amount of hours at work for no reason.

Changes in behaviour or demeanour

- Conduct out of character with previous employment history or social engagement;
- Changes in behaviour: for example, becoming very quiet, anxious, frightened, tearful, aggressive, distracted, depressed;
- Isolating themselves from colleagues or friends;
- Obsession with timekeeping;
- Secretive regarding home life;

- Worried about leaving children at home.

Physical signs

- Visible bruising or single or repeated injury with unlikely explanations;
- Change in the pattern or amount of make-up used;
- Change in the manner of dress: for example, clothes that do not suit the climate which may be used to hide injuries;
- Substance use/misuse;
- Fatigue/sleep disorders.

Other signs

- Partner or ex-partner following employee in or around the workplace or Church setting or repeatedly turning up at the workplace or Church setting;
- Partner or ex-partner exerting unusual amount of control or demands over work schedule or social activities;
- Flowers/gifts sent to employee for no apparent reason;
- Isolation from family/friends.

3.4 Dealing with domestic abuse within the congregation

3.4.1

If domestic abuse is suspected, and it is safe and appropriate to do so, a general wellbeing question such as “How are things going?” can be asked. There may be no response forthcoming, as it may take a while for the individual to disclose. It is particularly the case that men and those in the LGBTQI+ community are more reluctant to disclose they are being abused[8]. Therefore, it is important to have available information for confidential reporting lines such as www.mensadviceline.org.uk, Domestic Abuse – Galop and www.womensaid.org.uk.

3.4.2

If a disclosure is made that someone is a victim of domestic abuse, there are some key factors to remember in addition to those set out in Responding Well to Victims and Survivors

Do:

- Call 999 if the person or any children are in, or appear to be in, immediate danger, or if there are any concerns about their safety.

- Listen and accept what is being said, no matter who the allegation is being about or by whom it is being made.
- Encourage the person disclosing to seek help themselves, and offer support to help them with that. This could be via their GP, or one of the organisations listed above.
- Confirm that the abuse is not their fault, no matter what they have been told by their abuser and, if necessary, assure them the marriage covenant is broken by the abuse, not the reporting of it.
- Make a note of what was said^[9], record any visible injuries and pass this information onto the PSO or DSA/CSA as soon as possible.

Do not:

- Put yourself at risk – call 999 if this is required.
- Engage in any way with the person who is the alleged abuser, and specifically do not tell them the location of the victim.
- Offer any form of counselling or mediation, or encourage reconciliation.
- Allow religion to be used to excuse violent behaviour.
- Offer them emergency accommodation (assuming appropriate emergency accommodation is available) without informing the police and receiving assurance that it is safe to do so.

3.5 Ongoing pastoral issues

3.5.1

Once the immediate situation has been resolved, Church Officers will need to look at the longer-term support of the individuals involved. Where both individuals wish to continue to attend church, consideration will need to be given to ensuring they can attend different services. It may be the case that one individual will need to be accommodated at another church. Both individuals will need support, noting that one person cannot support both parties, and input from others may be required. This may require the sharing of information, and this needs to be made clear to all parties. Anyone supporting a victim/survivor or a perpetrator should have undergone the Church of England domestic abuse training.

3.5.2

If Church Officers are aware of any formal restrictions around alleged abusers (such as safeguarding agreements or restraining orders) they should ensure that their behaviour supports rather than undermines those restrictions. This may come from information being shared by other agencies, or by prior personal engagement.

3.5.3

Where the issue has not met the level of requiring a statutory intervention, there is a need for those with knowledge of the situation to remain vigilant, to remain open to offering support and to ensure that information on relevant support services is placed in locations where they can be easily accessed without generating attention. The DSA/CSA will be able to advise on the best way to support both parties in these scenarios. This may involve the use of a Domestic Abuse Specialist where one is available, and will require information to be appropriately shared.

3.6 Employees and volunteers who are alleged perpetrators

If a Church employee or volunteer is accused of being abusive towards their partner, ex-partner or family member, the immediate process to be followed is set out in the [Responding to, assessing and managing safeguarding concerns or allegations against church officers](#).

Once the immediate risk has been dealt with, there remain important considerations to be made. Neither employees nor volunteers should be treated any differently to other alleged perpetrators. However, employees will need to be dealt with under the relevant HR provisions regarding committing offences, and HR advice must be sought at the earliest opportunity, and agreement reached as to who will be leading the case.

Volunteers will need to be dealt with according to the terms of their Volunteer Agreement. There is a duty to refer individuals to the DBS in certain circumstances, for more information refer to the [Safer Recruitment and People Management Guidance](#).

3.7 Employees and volunteers who are victims

These should be treated in the same way as anyone else reporting domestic abuse, but in addition, the Church has specific responsibilities as an employer, and the Church of England has developed a [toolkit](#) to assist with this.

3.8 Clergy and clergy spouses/partners

Clergy marriages/civil partnerships are not free from abuse, and clergy and their spouses can be both victims and perpetrators. Each of these situations may require a slightly different response. Every Diocesan Bishop is required to offer a Bishop's Visitor to the spouse/partner when a clergy marriage/partnership breaks down and there is separation for any reason, not just in the case of domestic abuse. Clergy and clergy spouses/partners should expect to be taken seriously and treated with respect by their Bishop when disclosing abuse and should be supported by the Bishop should they wish to separate or divorce. Clergy and clergy spouses/partners are entitled to at least the same level of treatment and support as any other person disclosing abuse, given the often public nature of their relationship.

3.8.1 Members of clergy who are victims

As with all allegations of abuse, priority must be given to the safety of the victim and any children, and ensuring they have alternative accommodation provided for them. This may mean moving them temporarily from the property where they, as a member of clergy, have a right to live. The priority then becomes planning for the alleged perpetrator to be removed from the property, in order that the member of clergy (and any children) can return safely. As well as the safety and support for all parties involved, this is a complex situation and advice must be sought from the Diocesan Secretary and/or Registrar at the earliest opportunity, as well as potentially other agencies. This will require information to be appropriately shared, and the victim must be made aware of this.

3.8.2 Clergy spouses/partners who are victims/survivors

As with all allegations of abuse, priority must be given to the safety of the victim and any children, and ensuring they have alternative accommodation provided for them. There is growing awareness that this is an under reported type of abuse^[10], which can happen anywhere in any denomination. This group has historically experienced a refusal to believe their disclosures, or to appreciate their particular circumstances. This includes the power imbalance in the relationship which makes it more difficult for the spouse to seek help. In addition to the general principles of responding well to allegations, there are specific issues which must be considered in these circumstances.

Aside from any immediate risk to their safety or that of their children, clergy spouses/partners can find themselves homeless, in considerable financial distress and separated from their regular worshipping community when having to leave an abusive relationship. The Church needs to ensure it helps a clergy spouse/partner find suitable accommodation to allow them to leave an abusive relationship. This may include a period of “exit planning” with statutory agencies, requiring the sharing of information. As far as possible, and if that is what they wish, the clergy spouse/partner should be supported in maintaining their existing support network, and risks may need to be managed to facilitate this. The Bishop’s Visitor should be able to provide advice and signposting where this is required.

Clergy spouses/partners are particularly vulnerable to spiritual abuse. Section 4.2 sets out how to respond well to spiritual abuse, and the Bishop’s Visitor will need to take a lead role in supporting the spouse/partner to reintegrate them back into the congregation, or even into a new one. It is also likely that there may be an imbalance of power in a clergy relationship which makes it more difficult for the victim to come forward, and indeed they may not be able to do so until they have left the relationship.

3.8.3 Members of clergy who are perpetrators

Those members of clergy who are alleged to have carried out domestic abuse will be subject to the processes set out in [Responding to, assessing and managing safeguarding concerns or allegations against church officers](#).

3.9 Role of the Bishop’s Visitor

Specifically in the event of a clergy marriage/partnership ending due to domestic abuse, the safeguarding role of a Bishop’s Visitor^[11] is to:

- Support the victim/survivor of abuse who is a clergy spouse or partner.
- Identify with the victim/survivor any additional pastoral needs or other needs they have, and take advice as to how these may be best met.
- Meet with the victim/survivor as often as the victim/survivor wishes in the short term, and support the victim/survivor to plan their next steps.
- Be alert to risk of any nature to the victim/survivor and any children in the immediate aftermath of exiting the abusive relationship.
- Report to the DSA/CSA immediately any concerns for the safety of the victim/survivor and any children.

The Bishop's Visitor should be seen as an addition to, not a replacement for, the Support Person, who should also be offered where required.

See Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse for further information.

[1] At time of writing, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has been passed, but much is not yet in force. The Act can be found at [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#). This will create a statutory definition of domestic abuse, emphasising that domestic abuse is not just physical violence, but can also be emotional, coercive or controlling, and economic abuse. This guidance will be updated as relevant sections are brought into force.

[2] Family members are: mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister & grandparents; directly-related, in-laws or step-family.

[3] [Information for Local Areas on the change to the Definition of Domestic Violence and Abuse \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

[4] [UK lockdown: Calls to domestic abuse helpline jump by half - BBC News](#)

[5] [Covid 19: Increase in parents abused by children in lockdown - BBC News](#)

[6] [churches_web.pdf \(contentfiles.net\)](#)

[7] https://www.freefromfear.wales/sites/www.freefromfear.wales/files/responding_to_colleagues_experiencing_domestic_abuse.pdf

[8] [Afraid to Come Forward: Why Men Don't Report Domestic Violence - Break The Silence Against Domestic Violence \(breakthesilencedv.org\)](#)

[9] Keep this note factual, as it may be disclosed to the individual as part of a Subject Access Request. For more information on receiving a disclosure, see Responding Well to Victims and Survivors.

[10] [Raped, tracked, humiliated: Clergy wives speak out about domestic violence - ABC News \(Australian Broadcasting Corporation\)](#)

[11] For further information on Bishops Visitors, please see the [revised Guidance](#)

4.1 Deliverance Ministry

 5 minutes read

Last updated: 16 December 2021

Requirements

4.1.1 Deliverance Ministry must only be carried out in accordance with the House of Bishops Guidance on Deliverance Ministry.

4.1.2 Diocesan Deliverance Ministry Teams must have access to, and consult and work with, other clergy, medical practitioners, psychologists and psychiatrists who are employed by (and thus accountable to) local health services and will be bound by their own codes of professional conduct.* Where formal rites of deliverance are being considered, a medical professional must be consulted, and all issues of consent, capability and ongoing safeguarding actions must be discussed with that person.

4.1.3 The Deliverance Ministry Team must meet with the DSA on at least an annual basis, the purpose being encouraging joint working and knowledge sharing.

4.1.4 Formal rites of deliverance, including those involving touch, must not be carried out on any person under 16 years of age without parental consent, which must be confirmed in writing. In the majority of cases involving young people aged 16 and 17, they are able to give consent in their own right, but issues of age and consent should always be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. In other words, it is a judgement call and the medical professional will need to make an individual assessment of the competence and understanding of the young person at the time. In addition, with 16-17 year old children consideration should still be given to whether or not the parents should be informed and the decision documented. In all cases, the rite must have been authorised by the bishop after consultation with the DSA and a medical professional

4.1.5 For the avoidance of any doubt, and in line with the decision of the General Synod of the Church of England in July 2017, it is made clear that nobody, whether a member of a Diocesan Deliverance Ministry Team or otherwise, is permitted to use any form of deliverance ministry in pursuit of changing or influencing somebody's sexual orientation. This applies whether or not the individual concerned wishes to receive such ministry. Individuals asking for such ministry must be treated with compassion and understanding, and should be referred both to pastoral support and to links to appropriate resources

*There may be circumstances where the mental health professional is not in local health service employment, but is in private practice or academia. In these circumstances, they must be members of the appropriate professional body, e.g. Royal College of Psychiatrists or British Psychological Association.

Good practice advice for Section 4.1

In its widest meaning, “deliverance” is part of pastoral care: it is the ministry of liberating, freeing, or delivering a person from a burden which they carry. It is used here in the applied sense of delivering a person from the influence of evil or sin, within the context of faith and by means of imperative or invocatory prayer. The field of Deliverance Ministry is very wide, and it is not expected that DSAs/CSAs would need to be involved in every case. However, it is good practice that DSAs/CSAs meet with their Deliverance Team more than annually and attend their training.

Christian exorcism is a specific act in which imperative or invocatory appeal to Christ or to the Godhead, is made in order to rid a person or place of an evil spirit by which they are possessed. It is the ‘binding and releasing’, the ‘casting out’ or ‘expelling’ of an evil or malevolent possessing spirit that is not human. The requirements around formal rites of deliverance do not preclude the saying of prayers, including the Lord’s Prayer, or the giving of Holy Communion, but are intended to put in place additional safeguarding procedures where the laying on of hands or any ‘casting out’ of demons is deemed necessary. For adults, this will require consultation with a medical professional, and for under 18s this requires specific and documented consultation with a medical professional, the diocesan bishop and the DSA. For the avoidance of doubt, this does not apply simply because there are children present in a house, or a school, where deliverance ministry is taking place. It is specifically designed to ensure that any child or young person is given the appropriate support for their needs, be they medical or pastoral, and to ensure that parents cannot put undue pressure on a member of clergy to carry out such a ministry.

The UK is culturally diverse and care must be taken when encountering the use of the word ‘exorcism’ in different cultural contexts. In some settings, ‘exorcism’, ‘casting out demons’ and ‘deliverance’ can refer to in-community codes for settling issues and a way of reconciling particular matters without naming and shaming particular individuals. To this end, exorcism language and rituals in such contexts can mean a variety of different things and no assumptions should be made about their meaning and intention without appropriate dialogue, learning and understanding. Notwithstanding, as some high-profile cases have shown, some forms of ‘exorcism’ result in individuals or groups doing violence to the bodily ‘shell’ of a person in order to drive out evil spirits and recover the souls. Practices may include beating, drowning, repeated intense rituals, restraint and/or starvation or other privation. If any Church Officer knows or suspects that a child or an adult is at immediate risk of being subject to these practices, the police must be contacted straight away and the DSA informed afterwards. If any Church Officer becomes engaged in a conversation about these beliefs but does not know or suspect immediate risk, then advice can and should be sought from the Diocesan Deliverance Ministry Team and the National Officer for Deliverance Ministry.

Deliverance Ministry is an area of ministry where particular caution needs to be exercised from a safeguarding perspective. Consideration also needs to be given to data protection and the processing of often very sensitive personal data. The House of Bishops’ guidelines on both healing and deliverance ministry is currently being revised and will need to be incorporated into any local practices. The guidelines contain advice in relation to both safeguarding and data protection.

4.2 Spiritual Abuse

 19 minutes read

Last updated: 20 December 2021

Requirements

4.2.1 Church Officers must be aware that spiritual abuse is often an integral element of other experiences of abuse within the Christian and other faith contexts and must be considered when investigating disclosures of other forms of abuse.

4.2.2 In addition to the requirements and advice set out in Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse, in particular in relation to spiritual abuse, Church Officers must:

- i) Listen carefully, avoid interrupting and allow a full disclosure without feeling they must defend the Church or the individual.
- ii) Respond in a non-judgemental manner, demonstrating that the disclosure of spiritual abuse is being taken seriously.
- iii) Avoid minimising what they are being told or showing disbelief or denial.
- iv) Be aware that victims may have experienced harmful teaching.
- v) Avoid suggesting the use of Matthew 18 (resolving disputes by speaking directly to the person). It is harmful to suggest that someone speaks to their abuser about their abuse.
- vi) Be aware that a disclosure of spiritual abuse may also be part of a disclosure of other forms of abuse.
- vii) Where abuse has involved use of scripture or prayer, think carefully and be judicious about whether it is appropriate to use this as a first response to a disclosure

Spiritual Abuse is not a separate category of abuse but is a form of psychological and emotional abuse. It is important when discussing such cases with statutory agencies to be clear that spiritual abuse is a form of psychological and emotional abuse within a religious context.

Good practice advice for section 4.2

Spiritual abuse is a form of emotional and psychological abuse. It is important when discussing such cases with statutory agencies who may not be familiar with the concept to be clear that the case is psychological or emotional abuse within a religious context. It is characterised by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour in a religious context. (A summary definition, and signs you may see, can be found in [Section 2 \[1\].](#))

The Church of England accepts that there is an ongoing discussion about the use of the term 'spiritual abuse', and that some hold a view that an alternative term or wording should be used. It is, however, vital to give people the language to talk about this type of abuse, to recognise it, act on it and prevent it. The term 'spiritual abuse' is used by survivors and at present is the most widely recognised, and so it is the term used here. The term used will, however, remain under review. It is important to understand that work in this area acknowledges harm experienced but also seeks to create healthier, safer cultures in which all can flourish. Therefore, the work is preventative, responsive and protective for the Church. The use of the term spiritual abuse is recent and there has been some concern that the term could become "weaponised" to attack particular positions, rather than to identify and address harm and abuse. Holding a particular theological position may not be in and of itself abusive. What matters is how the position is held and shared - it is important that this must be done in a way that respects and values others.

Spiritual abuse may occur on its own, or alongside other forms of abuse, such as physical, sexual or domestic abuse. It may be used to 'legitimise' or facilitate other forms of abuse. It is often an integral element of other experiences of abuse within the Christian Church and other faith contexts and it is important that in investigating disclosures of other forms of abuse, spiritual abuse is considered. Spiritual abuse shares some of the hallmarks of bullying and harassment, including intimidation, manipulation and inducing fear. However, what makes this distinct are the elements associated with religious belief including coercion through religious position, membership of the religious community, scripture, biblical discourse and spiritual threats.

Within safeguarding, spiritual abuse of a child is a form of emotional abuse, and spiritual abuse of an adult is a form of psychological abuse. This distinction is important to ensure that any incidents of spiritual abuse can be addressed within the statutory definitions and categories of abuse that are currently in use, which are different for children and adults. The key aspect of spiritual abuse is the religious context in which the abuse occurs and the ways in which people are controlled through the misuse and abuse of religious scripture, divine position^[2], spiritual threats and fear of spiritual consequences and the suggestion of God as complicit. All or some of these features can be used to control or coerce:

"There are profound consequences to someone who feels unable to comply with abusive behaviour...If you believe that to disagree or to fail to comply means that you are letting God down or even, in extreme cases, that you will not enter heaven, the pressure on you is immense"

"His primary tactic was to weaponise scripture and use it to induce a religion of fear and performance"^[3]

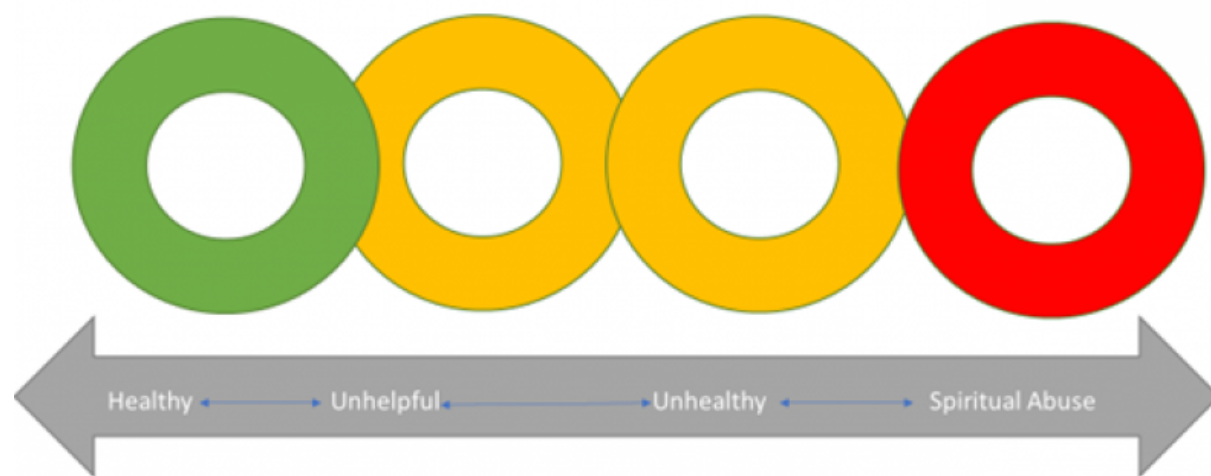
^[1] Oakley, L., Kinmond, K., & Humphreys, J. (2018). **Spiritual Abuse in Christian faith settings: Definition, policy and practice Guidance.** *Journal of Adult Protection*, 20(3-4), 144-154.

^[2] Divine position is defined as being seen to be appointed or anointed by God; to hold a position or role and this equating to the individual being beyond question or reproach.

^[3] Stibbe, Mark. Foreword to 'Escaping the Maze of Spiritual Abuse – Creating healthy Christian Cultures' – Dr Lisa Oakley and Justin Humphreys, 2019

4.2.2 A spectrum of behaviour (Oakley, L: 2021)

A spectrum of behaviour



It is important to situate spiritual abuse in the spectrum of behaviour we experience within Christian contexts. The diagram above is helpful in understanding this spectrum. At one end there is good, healthy, nurturing behaviour in which people flourish and grow, and there are many examples of this in our communities. Then as we move along the spectrum, we reach unhelpful behaviour. This is where someone's reaction/behaviour is not harmful but not helpful and we all behave in this way at times. If we continue along the spectrum and if, in the context of spiritual abuse, we start to see a consistent pattern of behaviour that is negative, where we check ourselves before approaching that person; where they are not open to question etc., it starts to become unhealthy and much of the behaviour that concerns us sits here. It can often be challenged and addressed at this stage.

If it becomes a persistent pattern of coercive controlling behaviour that reflects the definition of psychological abuse with a religious rationale, it can cross the threshold into spiritual abuse. As with other forms of psychological abuse, it is anticipated the number of cases that cross this threshold will be small but where they do, they should be referred onwards as with other cases of psychological abuse. It is also important to note that people can move up and down this spectrum of behaviour. If behaviour is identified and responded to effectively it can be addressed and not escalate into unhealthy or spiritually abusive behaviour. In addressing and reflecting on behaviours this provides an opportunity for early intervention and support through a variety of pathways. These pathways may include pastoral support, supervision, training and learning to "disagree well", using the Pastoral Principles as a starting point^[1]. As stated above, it is anticipated that the number of cases requiring referral through safeguarding or disciplinary means would be small, as some situations may be more appropriately dealt with through Dignity at Work or anti-bullying policies.

As spiritual abuse is a new and emerging area of understanding the box below shows the spectrum of behaviour with worked examples to show where something can be considered to cross the threshold into spiritual abuse. It also details the response and referral required at each stage.



<p>Example 1 of behaviour [1]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching about financial giving in a way that allows understanding of biblical passages and discipleship. Accepting that some will be more able than others to give financially. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suggesting that most people could give more if they managed their finances more effectively. Being overly defensive when speaking to someone who has a different opinion to you on tithing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pressuring individuals or groups into financial giving. Giving more attention to individuals who are able to give financially. Developing a pattern of defensive and critical conversations with individuals who are unable to give financially. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent, intrusive, coercive requests for financial giving, suggesting that the level of giving is the most important measure of the individual's commitment to God. The use of biblical scripture to persistently coerce financial giving or using threats of spiritual consequences to invoke fear if finance is not provided.
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Response required	Affirm good practice	<p>If this is a one-off situation, it could be that a little extra pastoral support is needed, or some help with capability.</p> <p>The response required will in part depend on whether the individual appreciates that their behaviour was unhelpful in that situation. If they don't, this would be a warning flag which might trigger a more robust response (see next column).</p>	<p>More robust, formal intervention, would be needed at this stage to help the individual move back down the spectrum and prevent them moving forward.</p> <p>This might include closer supervision, re-training on safeguarding or disagreeing well, coaching, mentoring or counselling.</p>	<p>A persistent pattern of such behaviour would constitute spiritual abuse. If this was towards a child of vulnerable adult, this would be a safeguarding matter.</p>
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<p>Example 2 of behaviour</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All individuals in the congregation are able to question, discuss and respectfully challenge messages that are shared and how things are done. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being overly defensive when asked a question or being challenged respectfully. • Not actively listening to a concern. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a pattern of defensive and aggressive responses to any question or challenge. • Creating a culture in which challenge and questioning are seen as threatening unity. • Regularly suggesting that anyone raising an issue is themselves the issue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A consistent pattern of controlling behaviour suggesting that questioning or challenge is an inability to be obedient to God and a reflection of a problematic personal faith. • Seeking to use Scripture or spiritual threats to close down discussion or silence an individual rather than to engage with the issues they are raising.
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Response required	Affirm good practice	<p>If this is a one-off situation, it could be that a little extra pastoral support is needed, or some help with capability.</p> <p>The response required will in part depend on whether the individual appreciates that their behaviour was unhelpful in that situation. If they don't, this would be a warning flag which might trigger a more robust response (see next column)</p>	<p>More robust, formal intervention would be needed at this stage to help the individual move back down the spectrum and prevent them moving forward.</p> <p>This might include closer supervision, re-training on safeguarding or disagreeing well, coaching, mentoring or counselling.</p>	<p>A persistent pattern of such behaviour would constitute spiritual abuse. If this was towards a child of vulnerable adult, this would be a safeguarding matter.</p>
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<p>Example 3 of behaviour</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering spiritual mentorship and support, which is mutually beneficial with agreed boundaries. • Aiming to be self-reflective and self-aware about one-to-one pastoral conversations. • Being aware of the likely power imbalance in a pastoral mentoring relationship. • Possibly having confidential supervision for one-to-one pastoral conversations, or 'checking in' with a third party confidentially about these. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being a little too directive in one mentorship conversation. • Being overly defensive when one piece of advice is disagreed with or ignored. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requiring the individual to share personal details which they do not wish to share. Going beyond agreed boundaries[2] • Spiritual mentorship or support becoming very directive and difficult to disagree with or not comply with. • Exploring and interpreting personal psychological history to a depth appropriate to a trained counsellor or psychotherapist. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent pattern of highly controlling and directive mentorship. • Use of scripture to control behaviour consistently. • Using God's name to enforce actions the mentor recommends. • Making someone feel unable or afraid to disagree with any advice given. • Presenting oneself as akin to a professional counsellor, anointed by God for this role, with equivalent skills and competencies.
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<p>Response required</p>	<p>Affirm good practice</p>	<p>If this is a on- off situation, it could be that a little extra pastoral support is needed, or some help with capability.</p> <p>The response required will in part depend on whether the individual appreciates that their behaviour was unhelpful in that situation. If they don't, this would be a warning flag which might trigger a more robust response (see next column)</p>	<p>More robust, formal intervention would be needed at this stage to help the individual move back down the spectrum and prevent them moving forward.</p> <p>This might include, closer supervision, re-training on safeguarding or disagreeing well, coaching, mentoring or counselling.</p>	<p>A persistent pattern of such behaviour would constitute spiritual abuse. If this was towards a child of vulnerable adult, this would be a safeguarding matter.</p>
<p>Example 4 of behaviour</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checking to see if a member of the clergy is OK • Ensuring the member of clergy has protected time to rest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheduling a regular meeting on a day that should be the clergy members day off 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistently undermining a member of the clergy privately and publicly including commenting on their working hours as a means of undermining them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistently using passages of scripture for example on servant leadership to control and undermine a member of the clergy and to exploit them in demanding excessive working hours with the rhetoric that this is required by God

	Affirm good practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take advice from Area Dean 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Request formal support from a senior colleague 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider escalating to Bishop, Archdeacon, or HR for intervention
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The Senior Leadership Pathway has a strong focus on how to identify and create a culture which is protective, preventative, healing, and restorative. Examples of characteristics of a healthy Christian culture include a culture in which:

- There is a genuinely open dialogue, there is positive encouragement and active welcoming of different perspectives and views.
- Everyone is valued, respected and nurtured and no one is isolated or excluded.^[3]
- Harmful behaviour, e.g. bullying, can be (and is) challenged by anyone.
- Power is distributed, not vested in one or two individuals or groups.
- Self-reflection in each member is promoted.
- Safeguarding is foundational and actively promoted, preventative and responsive processes are in place.
- Survivors are heard, supported and responded to.

It is important to understand that spiritual abuse can be experienced by anyone irrespective of position. It can be perpetrated from a member of clergy to the congregation, but also from the congregation to the member of clergy and by people in equal power positions. Where the member of clergy is the alleged perpetrator, this must be reported using the process set out in the Managing Allegations Guidance. Where the member of clergy is the alleged victim, this will still require a safeguarding response, and the DSA should be contacted to advise.

Openness to the presence and work of God in the life of the Church will often involve trust in, and a degree of vulnerability to, other people within the community of faith. This is true both in more formal contexts, such as public worship, and more informal ones, such as prayer ministry and spiritual guidance of individuals.

Spiritual abuse can lead to lasting damage to people, it often impacts the ability to enter into situations of trust and future relationships. Abusers act in a way that is contrary to scripture. The betrayal of trust can lead to fear and lack of safety. The depth of impact should not be underestimated. The Church has a duty to guard against the dangers of spiritual abuse and the harm it can bring to individuals and communities.

As with other safeguarding concerns, any Church Officer who has a concern about spiritual abuse must follow the referral processes set out in the Managing Allegations Guidance.

4.2.3 Who may perpetrate or experience spiritual abuse?

Anyone can experience spiritual abuse and any person may control and coerce another. It is important to understand that whilst many experience spiritual abuse from those who lead, leaders can and do experience spiritual abuse also. Spiritual abuse is not necessarily tied to a person's institutional power position. Abuse may occur from the top down (i.e. from the leadership) or from the bottom up. It may occur between peers. It also may occur with members of a congregation who hold or appear to hold influence. However, holding power in institutional structures can place individuals in positions where spiritual abuse is complex to challenge and, therefore, accountability for those in positions of power and influence is essential.

Spiritual abuse may be perpetrated by an individual in an otherwise healthy culture, or it may be endemic in a Church setting such that it is the predominant culture.

Spiritual abuse may occur within a range of ministerial and pastoral relationships, and it is important to recognise this.

Spiritual abuse is not tied to a denomination, expression of Church or faith. Holding a particular theological position may not be in and of itself abusive. What matters is how the position is held and shared. For example, a church may teach about tithing (giving 10% of your salary to the Church). If this teaching is shared and people are allowed to then make their own decisions about whether or not they wish to give, this is not by its nature coercive. If, however, there is repeated pressure to give, and giving is equated to a person's standing as a Christian or in the community, then this does become coercive.

4.2.4 What are the key characteristics of spiritual abuse?

- **Misusing scripture to coerce behaviour** - Behaviour may be coerced through the use of scripture in order to meet the abuser's personal agenda. Biblical messages of submission, sacrifice, obedience and forgiveness can be used to manipulate, control and coerce. The discourses will be recognised by many in the Christian faith and can be healthy and helpful. However, when distorted they can be difficult to challenge.
- **Coercing through censorship** – This may include pressuring people to secrecy and silence. People may feel unable to ask questions, disagree or raise issues and this can be associated with the need to keep unity or protect the individual, Church or God.
- **Requiring unquestioning obedience** – This may include requiring obedience to the abuser, with an implicit or explicit suggestion that this equates to obedience to God. People may feel unable to make their own choices and can feel pressured into providing financial, emotional and psychological support, service or even sexual activity in order to please their abuser and, it may be implied, to please God.

- **Using a sense of divine position to exert pressure to conform and suggesting this position is unchallengeable.** A spiritually abusive culture/relationship is characterised by a pattern of coercion and control, in which an individual's fear of disobeying God is used to require them to act or adopt a pattern of behaviour without there being free consent.
- **Enforced accountability** – For example, being required to be accountable to another without consent, and without choice and control over boundary setting in the relationship. It should be noted that there are times when accountability is required (for example, where there is a safeguarding agreement), but these are enacted in accordance with Church of England Policies, Procedures, and Practice Guidance and not as a punishment.
- **Exclusion or isolation of individuals as a punishment for non-compliance** – An individual may be isolated from others due to perceived non-conformity or disobedience.
- **Coercing behaviour through exploitation and manipulation** – This may include extreme pressure to conform, for example requiring a degree of commitment to the Church or the abuser that exceeds what is required of others in the Church. The level of commitment may be equated to an individual's loyalty to the abuser or to God.
- **Publicly shaming and humiliating individuals in order to control their behaviour** - Individual/s may experience public shaming and humiliation because of a perceived lack of obedience or conformity.
- **Threats of spiritual consequences** – This may include exercising control through threats of spiritual consequences for non-compliance with personal directives.
- **Inappropriate mentoring relationships.** The misuse of the pastoral relationship in such a way that the mentor does not hold appropriate boundaries, and justifies this by theology, scripture or by claiming special spiritual insight or divine sanction.

4.2.5 What is the impact of spiritual abuse?

As with other forms of abuse, spiritual abuse can result in significant harm to a person. It can also seriously impact a person's faith. As this abuse is a new and emerging area of understanding and is, in fact, often misunderstood and minimised, this can exacerbate the situation.

The impact may include:

a. **Distrust**

Distrust is one of the main consequences of spiritual abuse. Coercion and control can leave individuals unsure of who and what they can trust. It can also lead to a distrust of any believed to be connected to the Christian faith. This could undermine an individual's confidence in any support offered by the Church, including safeguarding and investigation into the abuse.

b. Crisis of faith

Spiritual abuse can lead to damage to, or a loss of, faith. The role of faith and scripture in the experience of this abuse can lead individuals to questioning what, if anything, they believe. Individuals who choose to re-engage with a Christian faith may need considerable support to explore scripture for themselves (if they choose to do this) and to understand the misuse of scripture in their own experience.

c. Feelings of powerlessness

As with all forms of abuse, those affected will often feel powerless during the abusive experience and after. They may have felt compelled to be obedient to their abuser, and to defer to their decisions. They may struggle to regain control over their lives and may be frightened about doing this.

d. Feelings of anger and self-blame.

People often feel angry about what has happened. The anger can be magnified by the knowledge that it happened in a Christian context and that scripture and teaching has been used to justify it. People may also blame themselves. They may feel they have been complicit in their abuse or 'allowed' it to take place. They may worry they have unknowingly been complicit in the spiritual abuse of others.

e. Loss of self and identity

For many, faith is central to a sense of self and identity. A loss of faith, or loss of a Church role and damaged relationships, can result in a direct challenge to this. It may take some time for an individual to build a new positive image of themselves and it should be recognised that not all individuals may be able to do this where trust has been severely damaged. This is another reason why effective response to abuse is so important.

f. Isolation

Individuals who leave spiritually abusive relationships or environments may find themselves isolated. Other relationships may have diminished due to the effects of the abusive relationship. This may leave the individual with a lack of social support. The distrust experienced can result in deep complexities associated with accessing support and intervention.

4.2.6 Responding well to disclosures of spiritual abuse

Hearing about and listening to disclosures of spiritual abuse can be particularly challenging on a personal level, particularly as they touch on individual faith beliefs. Requirements and practice advice about responding to disclosures of all forms of abuse are outlined in full as part of [Responding Well to Victims and Survivors of Abuse Guidance](#).

4.2.7 Theology of safeguarding and spiritual abuse

As this is a new area it is important to demonstrate how addressing spiritual abuse is rooted in theology and biblical principles. For Christians, it is also important to think theologically about safeguarding. A conversation has now started in the Church about theology and safeguarding. The paper 'Theology and Safeguarding: trauma, justice, forgiveness, wholeness, experience and calling' has been co-developed with survivors. This paper is not a final product; rather it is the start of a process of continual dialogue and self-reflexivity which is essential if the Church is to get safeguarding right.

[1] Oakley, L, 2021

[2] This example does not relate to situations in which a safeguarding agreement is needed. Such an agreement is a requirement, this example relates to mentorship relationships freely entered in to in order to develop.

[3] It is recognised that there are contexts in which a safeguarding agreement is appropriate and this could limit the activities in which individuals can participate.

This document is version 1 and was printed on 31 January 2022. The most up to date version of this policy can be found on the Church of England website: <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding>

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-e-manual/safeguarding-children-young-people-and-vulnerable-adults-1>