

SUPPORTING VULNERABLE ADULTS IN OUR CONGREGATIONS AND COMMUNITIES



Guide to Good Practice

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Supporting carers and understanding their needs

Our pastoral care ministry extends to those family members in particular who care for vulnerable adults and who may have their own need for support and guidance. Here, too, adopting the guiding principles of respect and dignity in our contacts is crucial, enabling consideration of what practical support and assistance the church can offer to provide, for example, a short break. Carers are also entitled to an assessment of their own needs from their local authority although this does not guarantee that services can be provided to meet all their needs.

Increasingly churches and other voluntary organisations are being looked to as potential providers of informal support to vulnerable adults and their families so as to avoid unnecessary acute admissions to hospital or institutional care, so it is a good plan to start thinking about what your church or circuit can offer.

Further resources

Encircled in Care - a training resource for pastoral visitors - details on the Methodist Church website
<http://www.methodist.org.uk/ministers-and-office-holders/pastoral-care/training-in-pastoral-care>

Visiting people with dementia - MHA
<http://www.mha.org.uk/getcomponent.aspx?c=Visiting%20People%20With%20Dementia%202011.pdf>

For more information or to seek further advice please contact the District Safeguarding Officer, Graham Kay.

Telephone: 07704 037011.

Emails:

BandR.methodist.safeguarding@gmail.com

Cumbria.methodist.safeguarding@gmail.com

Lancs.methodist.safeguarding@gmail.com

Salford:

Office Hours and Out of Hours: **0161 909 6517**

Stockport:

Office Hours: **0161 217 6029**

Out of Hours: **0161 718 2118**

Tameside:

Office Hours: **0161 342 2400**

Out of Hours: **0161 342 2222**

Trafford:

PPU Investigation Team **0161 856 7584/7577**

Greater Manchester Police **0161 872 5050**

Wigan:

Office Hours: **01942 828777**

Out of Hours: Mon-Fri 8pm-8.45am Sat 1pm-Mon 8.45am **0161 834 2436**

Cumbria District**County Wide:**

Office Hours: **01228 606060**

Out of Hours: **01228 526690**

Lancashire District**Blackburn with Darwen:**

Office Hours: **01254 585949**

Out of Hours: **01254 587547**

Blackpool:

Office Hours: **01253 477592**

Out of Hours: **01253 477600**

Lancashire:

Office Hours: **0845 053 0009**

Out of Hours: **0845 053 0028**

Introduction and purpose of guide

This guide has been produced to help churches model best practice in their witness to and work with vulnerable adults. It is designed to be a simple and practical guide to support churches deliver effective pastoral care when vulnerabilities first become apparent or are anticipated through ageing or other threats to wellbeing.

The guide stresses the importance of aiming to prevent concerns becoming critical but does remind church leaders and pastoral visitors that all the local authorities in the area publish details of what to do if you have a particular concern about a vulnerable person. Their contact telephone numbers are shown at the end of this guide.

Knowing your congregation and community

Churches exist within the context of their local community, with members and adherents both sharing a number of common characteristics as well as reflecting a diverse community with varied cultural and life experiences, some of which may well relate to how vulnerable people are looked after or cared for.

There may also be a mismatch between the worshipping community and those community groups or private organisations who hire our premises. It is therefore important that church leaders develop a common view about who and what groups make up the wider church community so that they can plan their approach to safeguarding adults who may be vulnerable.

For example:

- Is the congregation all elderly?
- Are there significant numbers of disabled people accessing worship or activities?
- Are church members from minority communities with strong traditions of providing family support to elders?
- Is poverty a key element which determines capacity for individuals to be resilient or maintain good health?

Having answers to these questions will help churches understand their preventive, pastoral role better.

What is meant by vulnerability?

In 2000, the Department of Health defined a Vulnerable Adult as “a person aged 18 or over, who is in receipt of, or maybe in need of, community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness and who is, or may be unable to take care of themselves or unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.” This is a broad definition and serves to make us think of the various reasons why someone might be included in its remit. Examples include physical and learning disabilities or impairment as well as factors such as ageing, addiction or dementia. For other people, a change in their personal circumstances might render them vulnerable – for example a period of unemployment, relationship breakdown which may be accompanied by domestic violence, becoming homeless or leaving care. Such things do not mean that someone is vulnerable in all areas of life – they may be, but not necessarily.

The forms of abuse to which individuals, whether children or vulnerable adults, may be prone are usually considered under six headings: Physical, Sexual, Psychological, Spiritual, Neglect and Financial. Of these, Spiritual and Financial abuse have a particular relevance to Vulnerable Adults. People can be adversely affected by oppressive or obtrusive ministries and by forms of excessive pastoral interference or over-directive preaching and teaching. This can be interpreted as Spiritual Abuse, irrespective of the intention of the perpetrator. Financial Abuse can take the form of wilful extortion or manipulation of rights, including misappropriation of monies or goods, and can often, though not always, involve relatives and family members.

Thinking about worship and church activities, including specific activities for vulnerable groups

It is helpful to take time to think about worship and activity spaces.

Churches should provide clear access to all these areas. Consider the suitability of stairs, ramps and doorways, and good lighting. Are our buildings fit for purpose for the range of vulnerabilities we may encounter i.e. the partially sighted, those less able to walk, and those with hearing difficulties? Churches will, like other organisations, need to consider potential hazards and take the necessary steps to protect all adults using the premises, so also ensuring compliance with insurance policies.

Anyone who has contact with vulnerable adults and hears disclosures or allegations, or has concerns about potential abuse or neglect has a duty to pass them on appropriately.

Adults are generally deemed to have capacity to make decisions for themselves. However in cases of suspected abuse where a vulnerable adult is unable or reluctant to report it themselves, seeking the necessary permission to make contact with an appropriate agency is not required. However immediate guidance should be obtained from the minister or safeguarding officer if it is thought this should be done.

In the area the contact phone numbers for Adult Safeguarding Services are:

Bolton & Rochdale District

Bolton:

Office Hours:

BL1, BL2, BL6, BL7: **01204 333410**

BL3, BL4, BL5: **01204 337000**

Out of Hours: 6pm-8.45am and weekends **01204 33777**

Bury:

Office Hours: **0161 253 5151**

Out of Hours: 5pm-8.45am **0161 253 6606**

Lancashire:

Office Hours: **0845 053 0009**

Out of Hours: **0845 053 0028**

Manchester:

Office Hours and Out of Hours: **0161 234 5001**

Oldham:

Office Hours: **0161 770 1515**

Out of Hours: 5pm - 9am and weekends **0161 770 6936**

Rochdale:

Office Hours: **0300 303 8886**

Out of Hours: 5pm-8am and weekends **0300 303 8875**

Adults in Hospital or Residential Care

Vulnerable adults in hospital or residential care, frequently express feelings of loneliness and isolation. They may quickly become institutionalised and find their individuality ebbing away. They can feel threatened by authority and at the mercy of those who administer care. They no longer have a voice. It is a basic human right to live a life free from abuse, neglect or harm of any form.

Whilst it is not the role of the church to investigate abuse, neglect or harm administered by a third party it is the role of any visitor to report any disclosure by the resident or witness of abuse to the designated Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator, Ward Manager or Care Home Manager and then to ask later for details of what happened next.

Alternatively visitors may witness some examples of really good care and attention being given to a vulnerable person and passing this on to the church and relatives (if appropriate) can provide comfort and re-assurance on this and for future occasions.

It's really important in these cases to take some identification such as a visiting card as the staff on duty may not know who the visitor is and which church or organisation is being represented. Also a courtesy call in advance to the care home or hospital ward may be helpful to avoid arriving at an inappropriate time.

Recognising signs of abuse and knowing what to do about it

We have already seen that abuse is categorised under several headings, although it must be noted that more than one form of abuse can happen at the same time. The list can include Physical, Psychological, Sexual, Financial, Neglect, Discriminatory, and Institutional abuse. All forms of abuse have a negative emotional impact and the abused person may suffer feelings of insecurity, fear, rejection, hopelessness, a loss of self-respect and self-worth.

Such damaging emotions inevitably affect the person's physical and mental health. Signs of abuse or neglect may include sudden changes in behaviour, expressions of anxiety, isolation or withdrawal. Other signs could be bruising, pain, or sudden unexplained changes to appearance

Churches should also give thought to less obvious but potentially excluding traditions they follow such as passing the offertory plate - those less well off, hearing continued pleas for more giving may feel uncomfortable at times. Are worship and meetings arranged at convenient times for the groups and individuals who would like to attend, e.g. for single parent families, especially those under stress, taking into account child care or other needs?

Older members may not like to venture out at night. Consideration should also be given to ensuring a safe number of leaders are in place for working with groups of vulnerable adults so as to be well prepared for unexpected events such as an accident or someone falling ill.

A risk assessment process will help here and church or circuit safeguarding officers can offer help and support as necessary.

What is the church's unique contribution to supporting vulnerable adults?

As Christians we believe that everyone is created in God's image and we have, therefore, a duty to value everyone and protect the dignity of all, especially the vulnerable. Jesus set us an example by giving the vulnerable love, respect, time and attention. Vulnerability can create a loss of identity and worth. It is our role to respect the dignity of the individual and play our part in restoring the feeling of self-worth. This perspective helps us to frame our guiding principles:

Guiding Principles:

Respect:

- Give the same respect as you would to any adult.
- Respect individual differences e.g. preferred form of address, opinions, ability and appearance.
- Use appropriate language in conversation; show an interest in them by asking about their interests etc.
- Support them by doing tasks with them not for them.

- Respect choices made even when they may seem risky. Seek advice from experienced church leaders or your safeguarding officer and Intervene only if there is an issue of safety.
- Allow choices about what the individual wishes to be included in but ensure all public areas of the church premises are accessible to all.
- Be aware that decision making may be difficult. Even the simplest decisions e.g. choosing what to eat, or wear, where to sit, may be a challenge.

Dignity:

- Always remember that as with respect, dignity is something we can both give to another and take away from them
- Consider seriously the effect and impact of words and actions on those around us.
- Show empathy with the needs of others with whom you are working and be prepared to explain what you expect of them.
- Avoid interrupting people and speaking across others.
- Try to acknowledge people, even when they are a bit invisible.

What makes a good pastoral care system in our churches?

Pastoral care is a key feature of our Methodist life and so we can aim to build on what people already do well.

Having an efficient pastoral care system that is well co-ordinated by a pastoral care secretary who can advise on best practice, offer support and ensure pastoral visitors are properly trained for their role is essential. Knowing both members and worshipers as individuals will, for example, help to identify those who are less mobile and may need a helping hand to move around the building, always letting them take the arm of a helper and going at their own pace. Church leaders and pastoral teams will know who prefers to talk about things and those who welcome more silent support. Offering prayerful support is a usual part of our church life too.

Most visits to someone in their own home will be straightforward as they will be well known to the church. But if visiting someone new for the first time it's probably best for pastoral visitors to let someone else know whom and when they are visiting.

Visiting in twos may be advisable as well as taking a mobile phone and some identification such as a visiting card that your church will probably provide.

Be aware of and plan for any particular issues that could affect the visit, such as a pet.

On entering, keep to the common courtesies, your host will probably show you where to go.

Be clear about what support can be offered to the vulnerable person if they ask for some help with particular problems and refer back to the church if uncertain.

Don't make any referrals to any agency that could provide help without the person's permission, and ideally encourage him/herself to set up the contact. Support can be offered to them to do this.

Encourage visitors to report back about their visit and say what is concerning or going well.

Church members offering pastoral support should be aware of their own vulnerabilities too – so many of our churches have a loyal band of increasingly elderly members who are the bedrock of our pastoral ministry. They should be encouraged to take care of themselves and they can also benefit from active support that helps them to manage what they can and cannot do. Dementia sufferers, for example, may often use language or behave in ways that are upsetting but there are resources available to help pastoral visitors understand what may be happening. Ministers, too, should think about their own needs in this respect.

Pastoral visitors should be wary of accepting any gifts from vulnerable adults other than token items, to avoid misunderstandings or malicious accusations from the person or their family. If in any doubt early consultation with the minister is strongly advised.