

SAFEGUARDING

# Learning for trainers delivering Creating Safer Spaces modules

The Report on the PAST CASES REVIEW

## TEN THEMES



## TEN THEMES: from the Past Cases Review for those delivering the Foundation and Leadership modules

### Introduction

The aim of this session is to develop the awareness of those who deliver the Foundation and Leadership modules about key findings from the Past Cases Review (PCR).

By the end of the session you should:

- know more about some important learning from the Past Cases Review
- have thought about how you might use this learning to enhance your delivery of the *Creating Safer Space* Foundation and/or Leadership modules.

This training module follows on from the **Past Cases Review report *Courage, Cost and Hope*** Recommendation 5: “That all people who deliver safeguarding training at Foundation Module (FM) or Leadership Module (LM) level be required to attend training on the findings of the PCR.”

The session assumes that you have read the report and are aware of the general content.

Rather than focusing on the types of abuse which have occurred within the Church, it identifies themes which have emerged as significant learning from the Past Cases Review about safeguarding in the Church and how people respond to it.

**A question:** How much can we infer from the past and assume it applies to the present?

**An answer:** Working on the PCR cases and the responses received to our interventions gives us a guide to issues from which we can learn and develop our awareness. Some of the abuse, and failure to respond well, is historic and you might think that this doesn't happen now. However, when we in the Safeguarding Team think about our work on more recent cases, we know that it can happen and does. There are some differences with the past but many of the issues are similar.

**There are ten main themes:** You will see that they overlap and interconnect in many ways. Examples are provided, drawing on situations known to the Connexional Safeguarding Team. Inevitably they are brief snapshots and do not convey the complexity of the whole case. However we hope that they will provide illustrations and material to use reflectively. All the examples have been anonymised and altered slightly to protect confidentiality.

As we go through the ten themes, **for each one try to identify how:**

- the theme links to the topics covered in the Foundation/Leadership modules
- you might use this to enhance your delivery of the Foundation/Leadership module training.

Most themes relate more directly to the Leadership module – because they are about Responding Well (Sections 5). However awareness of the other aspects should contribute to a deeper understanding of the relevance of safeguarding in the Church for all those delivering *Creating Safer Space* Leadership and Foundation module training. Inevitably there tends to be a focus on where things aren't working as well as they should. While we know, and welcome, the development and changes that have been made in understanding and practice, we cannot be complacent. These themes are relevant to current safeguarding as well as past work.

## THEME 1: Abuse and risk are still not always recognised

### Your notes...

- Behaviour which might be of concern is still not recognised.
- In particular, behaviour which is potentially *grooming* behaviour is not recognised.
- *Patterns* of worrying behaviour are not recognised.

**Example: from a case worker's notes:** K had to eventually move on as things had been difficult for her once she raised the previous concerns about J and the continued risk he was posing. K told me that the minister said that J “had merely put his hand between her legs”, insisting that he was no longer posing a risk, though he knew about other similar behavior in another district.

**Example:** An attendee at a church drop-in centre was upsetting other vulnerable adults by propositioning them and talking graphically about sexual matters. Awkwardness about the person's sexuality and a wish to try and understand issues led to people being confused about what was not acceptable behaviour and uncertain as to how to act.

**Example:** The risk of an open door policy – for young people and vulnerable adults to a lay worker's private home – is not always recognised.

**Example:** A youth leader had organised trips away from home for two sixteen-year-old young women from the youth group. He also sent one of them inappropriate Facebook messages and texts. This had been known for some time, but not acted upon. It had not been seen as grooming behaviour.

**Example:** The potential risks of inviting vulnerable older people to contribute money to the church fund are not always recognised.

- The significance of behaviour and potential risk is particularly not appreciated when the behaviour is not criminal or police do not proceed or there is not a finding of guilt. The PCR report notes: “It is hard for many in the Church to acknowledge risk when there is no conviction and a difficult assessment of risk is required.” (p. 34)

Hence ↗ relevant information is not always shared  
 ↗ behaviour can be minimised.

**Example: From a church congregation:** We write to express our dissatisfaction and disgust at the way the church has handled the matter. The police have closed the matter but to hear that the church is intending to conduct its own investigations is appalling and has caused dismay and anger. Is this box-ticking or to demonstrate the church's political correctness?

**Example:** After a safeguarding panel required a Covenant of Care and monitoring in relation to worship for a man who had groomed young women, the following response was received: “The congregation will find the conclusions regarding worship punitive and vindictive; a view that we (superintendent and deacon) would have little stomach to challenge. B has not been charged. We do not believe B presents any threat whatsoever now he has been removed from office.”

## THEME 2: The huge and ongoing impact of abuse on those who have been harmed

The PCR report says: “The ongoing pain and distress of victims/survivors is deep and lasting. It is amplified when they feel they have not been listened to. It is still not always recognised/responded to well.” (p.30)

*Your notes...*

**Example:** A survivor approached a church to say how she felt about a minister who 20 years earlier had behaved inappropriately. She did not feel able to speak up at the time and because the behaviour did not constitute a criminal offence, those she contacted struggled to handle it. The abuse she has suffered, combined with domestic abuse, has conditioned her not to speak up. She still feels devastated by her experiences, which are still causing ongoing debilitating anxiety.

**Example: the words of a survivor:** I have suffered sleepless nights, regular panic attacks and I have often imagined not being on earth any more as dealing with all of this is too painful. I have found it tremendously difficult to come to my church and have avoided social situations as much as possible, and friendships have been deeply affected. I am trying to simply survive on a day-to-day basis. My concentration level is very poor, so it is difficult to accomplish things at work – which in itself is proving a challenge.

**And there are people in church congregations who have been harmed in the past whom we won't know about.**

**Example: the words of a survivor:** One of my brothers died a broken man at 54; the other has serious mental health problems; I have mental scars of a childhood filled with sheer terror. I was lucky enough to escape to boarding school, so only had to endure the torture during school holidays during my teenage years.

## THEME 3: Abuse which has occurred in the church setting is even more distressing and a devastating breach of trust

### Your notes...

**Example:** Her experience as a teenager has made her wary of church people and she keeps herself to herself.

**Example: the words of a survivor:** I cannot go into a church without feeling physically sick these days. I will carry the abuse I suffered until the day I die.

**Example: the words of a survivor:** It took away everything: my home, my security, my family, my self-respect and my God.

**Example: the words of a survivor:** I don't go to church; I have no faith any more. I do want you to make very, very sure that it never happens like this again. I have spent my entire life, 50 years this year, fighting to deal with what was done to me. You have another statistic to add to your list.

**Example:** A minister who was in a pastoral relationship with women in his congregation used the relationship to introduce sexual touching.

A survivor wrote in distress: "How could he think he was above normal rules and boundaries?"

**But there is still 'blaming' of the victim and a lack of recognition of the impact of abuse on people's mental health.**

**Example:** The survivor was described as "highly strung".

**Example:** The alleged perpetrator described the victim as "a pathological liar".

**Example:** A minister who had an inappropriate relationship with a vulnerable member of the congregation said: "D is one of the most dangerous people I have ever met."

## THEME 4: There is a need for the further development of listening skills

**Example:** A young woman had been sexually assaulted on church premises. She told several people in the church but did not feel that she was properly listened to, or that the harm was taken seriously. This led to her feeling excluded from the church community and isolated.

**Example:** The Past Cases Review workers have worked with many, many survivors of church-based abuse who have said that this is the first time that they have been properly listened to in the Church.

*Your notes...*

## THEME 5: People in the Church are still not responding well to serious situations

### Your notes...

**Example:** Neighbours and people within the church had concerns about domestic issues relating to the minister and his family, but felt unable to tackle the issues due to unwillingness of the parties to take action. Several different people could have made reports to statutory authorities about the welfare of the children but did not do so due to uncertainty as to how to act and whether they should intervene against the wishes of the adults.

#### Well-meaning people can be naive.

**Example:** Ministers and members of the congregation have wanted to give references for those appearing in court without thinking through the implications of the alleged behaviour and the implications for the church.

**Example:** Mr X made an application for his name to be removed from the Violent and Sex Offender Register as allowed by the introduction of Section 91 (f) of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (Remedial Order 2012). Part of that application included a letter of reference from the superintendent.

**There are still 'lone safeguarding rangers' who think they can manage situations on their own.** There have been leaders in the church who were aware of an issue but felt it could best be managed by keeping an eye on the individual. There have also been relatively current examples of this.

**Example:** A had committed sexual assaults on two girls and received a conviction. His superintendent insisted on keeping him included in the life of the church, which turned the lives of others – including female ministers with their own children – into a nightmare, due to his continued abuse.

**Example:** A report about a child's behaviour at a church activity resulted in church staff offering counselling. No referral was made to Children's Services. Enthusiasm to support the parent overtook need to get professional support for issues that were likely to be beyond the competence of individuals without specialist skills and training. The child had witnessed traumatic events in early childhood in another country.

**Example:** A man who had served a prison sentence for downloading indecent images and been on the Violent and Sex Offender Register was being managed by the local church without formal arrangements being in place. The duties he volunteered for included his having lone access to the church.



## ... Theme 5 continued

**Example from the notes of a PCR worker:** “Revd W seems to have good safeguarding awareness and has carried out a thorough review of F’s contract when she arrived in the circuit – it not having been reviewed for several years. She also discussed with F the nature of his conviction. He shared with her and what he said implies that he abused a member of his own family. As F told her this in confidence, she did however not feel entitled to share this with me. She also said that she feels torn as she would not have allowed F any responsibilities but she inherited a situation where he does hold some. However, now she knows F and has observed him to be fully compliant, she tends to think that he does not pose any risk.”

**Ministers can be very anxious about safeguarding and this may lead to concerns not being shared.**

**Example:** After the death of an active church member (who was also a local preacher), indecent images of children were found on his computer. This was not reported to the statutory agencies and the images were destroyed.

**Sometimes safeguarding is not seen as a team activity.** There is a lack of recognition of the need to have team support in order to be able to check one’s perceptions and from which to gain support.

**Example:** The minister in pastoral charge was made aware of safeguarding concerns in relation to a member of his church. The information was not shared with the district safeguarding officer and therefore the perpetrator was able to continue engaging with children and young people without any restrictions or monitoring in place. The minister did not submit a PCR response form in relation to this case, and had the victim not come forward, we would not be aware of this person of concern.

**Example:** District safeguarding officer to PCR caseworker: “Until you notified me, the local church had never contacted me or put me in the loop.”

**Example:** A serious situation concerning the behaviour of the children of a local preacher came to light via Children’s Services. It transpired that the minister had been aware of this but had not shared it.

Your notes...

## THEME 6: People find it difficult to put respectful uncertainty into practice

### Your notes...

There is a lack of skill in dealing with potentially contradictory views of people, so people find it difficult to recognise that those who are their colleagues and friends – and have done good things – can also do harm.

**Example:** A comment about a minister from a colleague: “He acknowledged that he had always felt very troubled when one of his colleague ministers had been accused of wrongdoing, so the initial response was always to protect them as brothers.”

**Example:** A church member revealed a previous investigation of a sexual offence in relation to a family member. However, this did not result in a prosecution. Despite information from statutory agencies, those working locally with the subject found it difficult to accept that the person they knew and valued could have behaved in this way. They chose to focus on the lack of prosecution and struggled to accept that the case had not gone forward because the person who had been abused would be an unreliable witness in criminal proceedings.

**Example:** During exploration of a case in the PCR, a minister was asked about a colleague. Serious concerns had been raised that this man failed to keep safe boundaries with women in the congregation. The minister, in disbelief, wrote the following:

“The common thread is caring. Having reviewed the Y situation – where would she have gone for help that weekend? ... Because the only person who really helped me in those dark days when no-one would listen was him. And yes, he spent many long hours listening and helping me. I can report that on those nights, nothing but genuine care occurred.”

**Example from case notes:** N has had a significant role in the church carrying many responsibilities and doing many helpful things. It has come to light that he also has a conviction for indecency with children. As N’s circle of supporters has broadened, it has become more difficult for the minister to defend the safeguarding measures. At a meeting called to explain the issues, a group challenged the minister, saying a good man was being treated unjustly.

**There are many links between this theme and the next.**

## THEME 7: Responding well to the church congregation in difficult safeguarding situations continues to be a challenge

Ministers often struggle to deal with conflicts and tensions within congregations. The PCR report says: “The impact of abuse within a church community is often deep and lasting and sometimes cannot be resolved by those enmeshed in it.” (p.35)

*Your notes...*

**Example:** Disagreements and disputes were widespread within the church with a culture of distinct groups. There were arguments about who should have different roles – and in amongst this, a safeguarding issue between a child and a youth worker was not dealt with promptly. The safeguarding issue got lost amongst the tensions in the church.

**Example:** A member of the congregation was made subject to safeguarding measures by a safeguarding panel. Members of the church community either sided with the individual, believing she had done no wrong, or with safeguarding. The minister wrote of “the current discord among some of the congregation” and of “the fuelling of division”.

**Example: From a district safeguarding officer:** “This is a close-knit fellowship many of whom are friends of family of J. They believe that he is innocent. It would appear that there is a continuing revolt going on. They don’t see there being even the lowest level of risk and are refusing to implement the measures of the safeguarding panel.”

## THEME 8: Recording: Practice has improved but record keeping is still not consistent enough

### Your notes...

**Example:** No records in church, circuit or district. Abuse of children was suspected.

**Example:** A first account was not made of the victim's disclosure of abuse because it was conveyed in unexpected circumstances during a social event. Important opportunities were lost to listen and record what the victim was trying to tell the person. Instead the victim had to keep retelling the story.

**Example:** Records were not kept because there were difficult personal relationships between people in key roles.

**Example:** Records were not kept because the person who should have made a note left the area after a short period. This left only verbal information about the suspension of a church steward after he was involved in a violent offence. There was no record of what was done to follow this up. The man was found during the PCR to be still carrying out the same role.

**Example:** The allegation against L ended his music teaching career. It is not known whether there was a conviction because there either were no records kept in the church or they have been lost. There is a belief that there was a short prison sentence. It seems that L's wife had reported the incident. It also seems that information has been passed on from minister to minister over the years with no proper records to access the complete story, monitor change and manage any risk in an informed way.

## THEME 9: Effective working with other agencies still requires development

**Example:** M was looking for DBS clearance to carry out a steward's role. He had previously been a Scout leader and information was needed from the Scout Association who would only disclose through the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). It took numerous reminders to get a response from the LADO.

**Example:** I learnt today that the police are refusing to provide information even to LADOs – let alone us and the other faith and volunteer groups.

**Example from a PCR worker:** There is huge variation in the provision and responsiveness of LADOs. This means that extreme patience and persistence can be needed. Arrangements are different according to the local authority. Some LADOs work on a rota basis; some are dedicated. It is often necessary to explain with care the structure and arrangements in the Methodist Church.

*Your notes...*

## THEME 10: There has been, and remains, insufficient understanding of the significance of safeguarding concerns about those who hold leadership roles in the Methodist Church

### *Your notes...*

There are many instances of people, other than ministers, who are in roles of church leadership (for example, local preachers, worship leaders, stewards) and who have behaved in a way that is not consistent with safeguarding. Yet among some in the Church there is limited appreciation that firstly, this may present a risk to others, and secondly, that this presents an inappropriate role model.

**Example:** A concern was raised that a man who was a youth worker and local preacher in training had been using pornography and been violent to his partner when their children were present. The seriousness of this for someone taking on a leadership role in the Church was not fully acknowledged.

**Example:** A man with a long record for offences linked to drugs, including violence, was made the subject of safeguarding measures by a safeguarding panel. He had taken on a number of responsibilities with the encouragement of the local church – including being a local preacher ‘on note’. The panel took a cautious approach to further responsibilities which involved leadership. The response from some in the church was that this was over-rigorous and an overreaction.



## PAST CASES REVIEW PRAYER

**For those who are abused  
and those who abuse  
for those who are care-less about others  
and those who are care-full;  
for those who offer guidance through the dark  
and those who endeavour to safeguarding the vulnerable  
good Lord we pray.**

**Good Lord  
give hope to the hurt  
and a sense of your love and righteousness.  
May we all be led into safe and sound living.  
Give us  
your strength for today  
your hope for tomorrow  
and the light of your love to guide us in all things.  
Amen.**



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