



SAFEGUARDING RISK ASSESSMENT GUIDE

The Congregation



The **Methodist** Church 

Introduction

The Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe environment in which all may flourish and develop through their engagement with the Church. The Church has a responsibility to make sure that all activities and locations are safe for everyone to access worship and leisure, by implementing safeguarding practice. Risk assessment plays a key role in that process in ensuring that fair, informed and proportionate decisions are made about safeguarding concerns.

This leaflet may be a useful resource in the following circumstances:

- Where a person you know is involved in the Connexional Risk Assessment process.

If you have been asked to be a pastoral supporter for the risk assessment process, please read the additional leaflet for that role. A comprehensive guide to the process is available via the Safeguarding Risk Assessment Policy and Procedures, which can be found on the Methodist Church website. There are additional information resources available online for other parties involved in the process.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a safeguarding concern?

A safeguarding concern may arise due to the words or behaviour of someone who is an employee, volunteer, minister, member or wishes to be involved with the Methodist Church. The words or behaviour are believed to be abusive, harmful or neglectful towards children, young people and/or adults who may be vulnerable. This will also include circumstances where someone has failed to exercise his or her responsibilities for safeguarding children, young people or vulnerable adults in a church context.

Why does a Connexional Risk Assessment take place?

The Methodist Church Connexional Safeguarding Team will have received information about the subject and their individual circumstances indicating a safeguarding concern that has led to a Connexional risk assessment being authorised by the Safeguarding Adviser. This information may have come from a variety of sources including a blemished criminal record, statutory agencies and from districts, churches and circuits. It could relate to a current or past concern. It may have arisen due to a referral relating complaints and/or disciplinary processes within the Church or an appeal arising from automatic prohibition of appointment under Standing Order O10. Preparatory discussions between the District Safeguarding Officer and the Connexional Safeguarding Team will take place, prior to arrangements being made.

Why does there need to be a Connexional Risk Assessment when we do not believe they are a risk to children or vulnerable adults?

It is often difficult to know the full circumstances of any situation. This may be because we did not witness what happened or we see the person in a different context. We may base our judgement on what that person has told us, which may be different to the way other parties see

events. It is also natural to feel loyal to those we know and with whom we have had positive experiences or who share our commitment to the Church. This can lead us to find it difficult to believe that a person could present a risk. It is sometimes easier to disbelieve the person who raised concerns when they are not known to us. In some cases, those who wish to cause harm have taken the opportunity to groom people around them to facilitate abuse and to discredit people who raise concerns.

In a church context, it is easy to feel that looking into the past, can run contrary to offering forgiveness and a new start to those who have been responsible for causing harm in the past. The new Advanced Safeguarding Module provides a detailed discussion of these issues. Please ask a safeguarding officer, if you would like to read more about this.

It is the role of a risk assessor and those looking into a safeguarding concern to take an independent view of the circumstances, which may not match those who are connected to the person who is assessed or any parties involved. The assessor must act to protect the safety of all those who engage with the Methodist Church in a proportionate, objective and fair manner.

It is important to recognise conflicting emotions and concerns, which any member of the congregation may be feeling and take time to explore those thoughts. Your minister in pastoral charge or a safeguarding officer will be able to suggest the most appropriate person with whom to discuss these issues or be able to provide further support.

Why is a risk assessment necessary if the person doesn't have a conviction or caution for a sexual offence?

A conviction results from the criminal court prosecution process where the case must be proven beyond reasonable doubt. Prosecutions may fail for many reasons, which include procedural issues and reasonable doubts being introduced by the defence. A 'not guilty' finding does not remove the need for the Church to consider potential safeguarding risks that may be present. There is a clear, legal expectation that churches will look at whether safeguarding risks may be present on the balance of probabilities. This means that the risk is more likely than not to be present. Truth, guilt and innocence can be emotive words for many. The risk assessment process aims to assess potential risk and put proportionate and appropriate measures in place. It does not make findings of fact or determine guilt or innocence.

The Methodist Church provides a place of safety and welcome for people from all ages, backgrounds and circumstances. Safeguarding concerns do not solely relate to sexual behaviour or convictions but consider wider protection issues relating to children, vulnerable adults and the church community as a whole.

Why have I not been told what is happening?

In many cases, you may not be given full information about a situation where action is being taken in relation to a Connexional Risk Assessment or safeguarding concern. It is natural for all of us to want to know exactly what is going on at all times when it affects those around us.

However, it may not always be possible or appropriate for details to be shared.

This may be for one of the following reasons:

- a) Limited information is provided in consideration of the safety and welfare of any party involved in the process and their families.
- b) The matter is being investigated or reviewed by police, children or adult social services. The Church may not be permitted to release further information at this point, as it may affect the investigation or evidence gathered by statutory agencies.
- c) The case is currently within the court process (sub judice) and therefore the provision of further information is not permitted while proceedings are ongoing.
- d) Personal data is protected under law by both the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act (2018). It may not be legally permissible to share information about a person's circumstances beyond those who need to know to manage the situation.

The welfare of the persons involved in a risk assessment and any legal requirements are carefully considered by the Connexional Safeguarding Team and the District Safeguarding Officer, along with local ministers and line managers (where appropriate). It is likely that the Connexional Communications and Media Team will work together with ministers and other relevant parties, in order to ensure that information provided to congregations is appropriate and takes into account the above considerations.

On some occasions, personal loyalties and feelings about a situation may cause division and conflict. This can often be inflamed by uncertainty. It is important at these points that everyone shows respect and consideration in their communications with each other, even where there may be differing perspectives or strongly held views. The impact on the recipient and the situation as a whole, should be key considerations on all occasions.

What help can I offer to someone who is subject of a Connexional Risk Assessment?

Any person who is subject to a Connexional Risk Assessment can choose or request a pastoral supporter to ensure that their welfare needs are addressed during the process. The person may approach you or request a local minister to do so. Please read the information leaflet for pastoral supporters before agreeing to take up this role, as some people are not deemed suitable due to their roles within the Church or the process.

During a risk assessment, the party being assessed often feels anxious about their privacy and worried about being talked about within their communities. They can become isolated due to embarrassment, bringing additional anxiety. Their family members may feel the pressure of unfavourable attention as well. It is important that the Church respects the privacy of individuals and does not encourage gossip about the situation to flourish. Prayers for **all parties** affected by a situation may help bring people together at an appropriate time. Please contact your minister or safeguarding officer to discuss any concerns that you may have.

