Parish of St Mary's, Summerstown

Policy for handing disclosures or observations of abuse or inappropriate behaviour

Approved by PCC on 28th September 21. To be reviewed annually

Latest review: *24th February 2026*

This document is based on advice from Section 6 of the Diocese of Southwark – A Safe Church. Please refer to this document for further information and advice.

This policy relates to all kinds of safeguarding disclosures or observations which occur on our church premises (including in situations where the premises are hired), in our church-related activities, and regarding those who attend our church and its related activities.

Allegations of abuse or concerns about a child or adult who may be vulnerable may arise in a number of ways in the parish context:

- a child or adult who may be vulnerable discloses alleged abuse
- an adult discloses concern for a child or adult who may be vulnerable
- an adult discloses concerns about the behaviour of another adult, or a child
- you notice signs of potential abuse of a child or adult who may be vulnerable.

There may also be situations where you are informed of or observe behaviour which is inappropriate and may potentially lead to abuse. For such concerns, you are advised to consult with the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.

What to do if you hear a disclosure or observe signs of potential abuse or mistreatment:

All disclosures must be taken seriously. It is of vital importance that if a child or adult who may be vulnerable discloses experience of abuse or mistreatment, you listen carefully to the child or adult disclosing. Similarly, if you observe injuries or behaviours in children or adults who may be vulnerable you should.

- take him or her seriously
- don't judge
- ask open, non-leading questions
- don't promise to keep it secret
- tell him or her, if you can, what you will do next
- check you have got their details
- carefully write down the conversation as soon as possible (within an hour) and keep the record in a secure place

If you receive a disclosure or observe the signs of abuse, you should:

- not delay - inform either the incumbent or the Parish Safeguarding Officer within 24 hours of the disclosure being made
- never speak directly to the person against whom allegations have been made, or whom they may suspect; if the alleged perpetrator is under the age of 18, seek advice before speaking to his or her parents

- never attempt to investigate the situation yourself
- write down what has happened or been said – keep your notes.

When you have passed it on to the Parish Safeguarding Officer or incumbent, you should then:

- check that an appropriate referral has been made
- make sure support is in place for the child or vulnerable adult seeks support for themselves
- make a record of what actions you have taken, give their record to the Parish Safeguarding Officer and ensure it is kept in the secure cabinet.

The incumbent or Parish Safeguarding Officer should:

- without delay, seek advice and share the information immediately with the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA)
- if the allegation or observation of abuse relates to clergy or a church officer, the DSA will instigate the procedures to be followed
- if it does not relate to clergy or a church officer, with the DSA assess whether the referral may constitute significant actual or potential harm, and, if a child, make a referral to Police or Social Care Services with the support of the DSA.

<u>There is further advice below:</u>

Disclosures from adults about a child or adult who may be vulnerable

Adults may speak of concerns about a child or vulnerable adult, or the behaviour of an adult. These should be listened to carefully, and the conversations should be recorded. The adult needs to know that if it is considered that a child or adult who may be vulnerable is suffering significant harm, the information may have to be passed on, whether or not the adult making the disclosure wishes this to happen.

In an emergency

- If a child or adult who may be vulnerable needs immediate medical help, call emergency services, and ensure that ambulance and hospital staff are informed of any protection concerns.
- If it would be dangerous for the child or adult who may be vulnerable to return home, or he or she does not want to return home and you are sufficiently concerned for their safety, contact the emergency social care service or the police.

Disclosures of historic abuse

- In the course of their work ministers and those offering pastoral support may hear disclosure from adults regarding abuse that happened to them when they were children or younger adults, or from children regarding abuse that happened to them when they were younger.
- The wishes of an adult disclosing abuse are very important. For some adults, just being able to talk to a trusted person about their experiences

can be in itself healing, and the pastoral care of the person who has been abused should be a priority.

- A referral to the police will not always be necessary unless the individual wishes to report the offence; however, they should be encouraged and supported to do so.
- Adults disclosing historic abuse need to be made aware, however, that if the alleged abuser is still potentially working with or caring for children, a referral to the Children's Social Care Service will be made, and the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser must be informed.

More information and advice can be found in Section 6 of The Diocese of Southwark – A Safe Church.