Unacceptable Behaviour, Violence, and Aggression Policy 1.0
Approved by PCC on 28th September 21
To be reviewed annually
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Guidance: unacceptable behaviour, violence and aggression

From time to time, children and adults who are vulnerable may present behaviour which is challenging both for individuals and for other members of the congregation or the group concerned. This may include behaviour affected by mental health issues and learning disabilities. In such circumstances, behaviour perceived as disruptive may be the person's attempt to communicate. In every such situation, we have to make a judgement about what behaviour can safely be tolerated, and what behaviour must be restricted or prevented for the safety of all concerned. It sometimes helps to have worked out and publicised some 'ground rules' for acceptable behaviour in any setting, and for church or group leaders to have worked out how they will enforce such ground rules.

What always constitutes unacceptable behaviour?

We each have different thresholds of what counts as unacceptable behaviour from another person. The following behaviours, however, are never acceptable and should always be challenged and addressed, whatever a person's age, ability or mental health:

- Abusive or threatening behaviour, violence or risk of violence
- Misuse of drugs or alcohol on premises
- Someone behaving in a way that would intimidate or frighten others due to the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Harassment
- Racist behaviour
- Unwanted touching of other people
- Any behaviour that scares children or vulnerable adults

Who are particularly at risk from unacceptable behaviour?

The following list is not exhaustive; but these groups of people should think through how any of the behaviours above would be responded to, and how their situation can be made as safe as possible:

- Clergy at home or on their own – and their families
- Members of the congregation in church (especially in small groups)
- Leaders of activities
- Workers in church

What precautions can you take?

Build in some of the following as ground rules for how you run things in order to help to minimise risk:

- Don't allow anyone who you think may pose a risk into your home or any environment where you are alone
- Keep doors locked if you are inside church alone or in a small group
- Always aim to have at least 2 adults present in any place
- Always have access to a phone
- Have readily available contact details for emergency services
- Do regular risk assessments of activities

- Wardens or welcome team to prevent entry to anyone obviously under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Set ground rules for belonging/joining activities or groups – and stick with them

Guidance for Church Workers:

- If challenging behaviour becomes part of a group's culture, leaders should meet to plan how to address it
- When challenging behaviour arises, leaders should meet to debrief after the meeting, in order to learn from mistakes, make a record, decide what needs to be done, and how leaders will be supported
- For vulnerable people you know, develop contact with carers and support agencies, and take advice on how to handle their behaviour
- Gain an understanding of particular disabilities or mental health issues in order to understand the behaviour better
- Learn how best to communicate with adults with specific vulnerabilities
- Refer to health or care agencies if you are concerned about someone's behaviour
- If the behaviour of a vulnerable adult is known to be erratic or challenging, work out with them, and in association with their primary carer, an agreement on how their behaviour will be managed, and what sanctions applied if necessary
- If you have received threats of violence or intimidating behaviour, inform the local police, and ensure you have a plan for how you will respond if an incident occurs.

Guidelines on managing violence and aggression

The context of these guidelines is managing violence and aggression within a church situation and amongst a group of people who are there voluntarily with leaders/helpers who are also for the most part volunteers. There can rarely be justification for knowingly involving church volunteers in situations which put them at personal risk, either physically or emotionally. (Verbal abuse can be as hurtful, and indeed traumatic, as a physical attack.) It should be safe to assume that the carers of a potentially violent individual would not consider it appropriate for that person to participate in social or other activities if he or she was known to pose a risk to other people. However, violence and aggressive behaviour is, by nature, often unpredictable so some guidelines for dealing with emergency situations are suggested below. Always remember that de-escalation of a situation can resolve it – confrontation just makes it worse.

Our body language is very important and often communicates far stronger messages than those we articulate verbally so adopt:

- a relaxed and non-aggressive stance, with feet apart for balance
- relaxed but attentive facial expression
- calm and reassuring manner and tone of voice
- appropriate eye contact (neither avoiding nor staring)
- relaxed jaw (unclench your teeth)
- relaxed open hands (not clenched fists) hanging by your side.

DO

- always treat the person with respect
- name yourself (if the person doesn't know your name)
- address the person by name
- speak loudly enough to be heard by the individual concerned but not necessarily by everyone else in the room
- try to manoeuvre into a place of safety: move slowly away from stairs and glass windows to somewhere with an exit, where both you and the person won't feel cornered or trapped, and where there are other people around who are aware of what is happening
- stand more than an arm's length away from the person, partly so that they can't grab hold of you but also so you aren't invading their personal space. (But a characteristic of aggressive behaviour is invasion of another person's personal space so keeping your distance also protects your own space.)
- avoid physical contact
- stand at an angle, not face to face, so reducing eye contact
- keep yourself calm by taking a few deep breaths to slow your heart rate
- Use active listening skills – "you seem upset";
- Open body posture without crossing legs or arms;
- be aware that the person has feelings they are trying to express and that
- they may be frightened by the situation they have created and not know how to get out of it.

Guidance for Church Workers aware of what is happening:

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