Governance: Safeguarding Leadership and Oversight

What it is
Effective safeguarding governance ensures that safeguarding is embedded at all levels of an organisation, from leadership to frontline staff. It involves clear accountability, robust policies, and a culture that prioritises the safety and well-being of all individuals.

How to implement good governance

- **Board-level responsibility**: Trustees and senior leaders must recognise safeguarding as a fundamental governance priority. This includes ensuring your organisation has an adequate safeguarding policy, code of conduct, and procedures, and that these are regularly reviewed and updated to remain fit for purpose.
- **Designated safeguarding lead**: Appoint a Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or equivalent, responsible for overseeing safeguarding policies and practices. The DSL should meet regularly with the safeguarding team, support the preparation of safeguarding reports, and ensure staff are trained and supported.
- **Safeguarding lead trustee**: Appoint a Lead Safeguarding Trustee to ensure that safeguarding is a priority at board level. This trustee should work closely with the DSL to monitor safeguarding practices and report to the board on safeguarding matters.
- **Independent oversight**: Establish independent safeguarding panels or advisory groups to provide external scrutiny and challenge to safeguarding practices. This helps maintain transparency and accountability, especially in response to past failures or criticisms.
- **Regular audits and reviews**: Conduct regular safeguarding audits and reviews to assess the effectiveness of policies and practices. This should include feedback from staff, volunteers, and those affected by safeguarding issues.
- **Cultural change**: Promote a culture where safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. This involves training, open communication, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

Why it matters
Strong governance provides the foundation for a safe environment, ensuring that safeguarding is not just a policy but a core value embedded in every aspect of the organisation's work. It helps prevent abuse, respond effectively when concerns arise, and rebuild trust with communities.

Culture

What it is
Culture encompasses the shared values, beliefs, and practices within your community that influence how individuals interact, make decisions, and respond to safeguarding concerns. A positive safeguarding culture is one where safety and respect are integral to every aspect of community life, from leadership to everyday interactions.

How to develop a healthy safeguarding culture

- **Leadership Commitment**: Leaders must actively model safe behaviours, demonstrate transparency, and prioritise safeguarding in all aspects of ministry. This sets a tone that permeates the entire congregation.
- **Open Communication**: Foster an environment where individuals feel safe to voice concerns without fear of retaliation. This includes providing accessible channels for reporting and ensuring that all disclosures are taken seriously and acted upon promptly.
- **Regular Training**: Implement ongoing safeguarding training for all members of your community, ensuring that everyone understands their role in maintaining a safe environment and is equipped to recognise and respond to potential concerns.
- **Inclusive Practices**: Recognise and respect the diverse backgrounds and experiences within the congregation. Tailor safeguarding approaches to be culturally sensitive and inclusive, ensuring that all members feel valued and protected.
- **Continuous Reflection and Improvement**: Regularly assess and reflect on safeguarding practices and culture. Engage with feedback from the congregation and external bodies to identify areas for improvement and implement necessary changes.

Why it matters
A healthy safeguarding culture ensures that safety is not merely a set of policies but a lived experience for every individual in your community. It builds trust, encourages openness, and creates an environment where individuals feel valued and protected. By embedding safeguarding into the core culture, organisations can prevent harm and respond effectively when concerns arise.

Safeguarding Policy

What it is
A safeguarding policy is a formal document that outlines how an organisation protects children, young people, and adults at risk from harm. It defines the expected behaviours, procedures for reporting concerns, and the roles and responsibilities of leaders, staff, and volunteers. A clear policy ensures that safeguarding is not just a set of rules but a core part of an organisation's ethos and operations.

How to develop a safeguarding policy

- **Define roles and responsibilities**: Clearly state who is responsible for safeguarding oversight, reporting, and responding to concerns. This includes appointing a designated safeguarding lead and ensuring all members understand their role in safeguarding.
- **Set out procedures**: Include practical steps for recognising, reporting, and responding to abuse. Ensure these procedures comply with current legal requirements and best practice guidance.
- **Recruitment and training**: Incorporate guidance on safe recruitment, induction, ongoing supervision, and training of staff and volunteers to ensure safe practice.
- **Regular review**: Update the policy regularly to reflect changes in legislation, safeguarding standards, or learning from past incidents. This ensures the policy remains relevant and effective.
- **Accessibility and awareness**: Make the policy available and understandable to all members of you community. Promote awareness through training, briefings, and visible communication.

Why it matters
A robust safeguarding policy provides a framework that ensures consistency, accountability, and transparency in how safeguarding concerns are handled. It communicates your commitment to safety, reduces confusion in challenging situations, and supports a culture where every member feels valued, respected, and protected.

Safer Recruitment

What it is
Safer recruitment ensures that staff and volunteers are carefully selected, vetted, and trained to work safely with children, young people, and adults at risk. It helps reduce the risk of harm by identifying unsuitable candidates before they take up positions of trust.

How to implement safer recruitment

- **Clear role descriptions**: Define responsibilities, expectations, and contact with vulnerable groups.
- **Application and interview process**: Use structured interviews to assess suitability, including scenario-based questions and verification of qualifications.
- **SCRC for paid staff**: Organisations can request a Sexual Conviction Record Check (SCRC). Applicants receive a unique 14-digit checking code, which employers use to verify via the Police's ATAS. The result indicates whether the applicant has or does not have relevant convictions.
- **Double reference system for volunteers**: Request two references—one professional and one personal (someone who has known the applicant for at least two years)—to assess character and suitability.
- **Induction and training**: Ensure all staff and volunteers receive safeguarding training, including recognising abuse, reporting procedures, and maintaining professional boundaries.
- **Probation and supervision**: Monitor new staff closely during the initial period, providing supervision and support to embed safe practice.
- **Ongoing monitoring and feedback**: Maintain regular supervision and encourage open communication, so concerns are raised promptly and policies are consistently followed.

Why it matters
Safer recruitment helps prevent abuse and builds confidence that everyone in ministry roles is properly vetted and prepared. Using SCRC checks for staff, a double reference system for volunteers, and structured interviews provides a practical and effective approach to safeguarding, creating a foundation for a culture of trust, safety, and accountability.

Training and Awareness

What it is
Training and awareness ensure that staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to safeguard children, young people, and adults at risk. It enables them to recognise signs of abuse, respond appropriately, and adhere to safeguarding policies.

How to implement training and awareness

- **Induction training**: Provide comprehensive safeguarding training when staff or volunteers begin their roles to establish a strong foundation in safeguarding principles and practices.
- **Annual refresher training**: Ensure all staff and volunteers receive refresher training at least once a year to reinforce knowledge and update them on any changes in law or best practice.
- **Role-specific training**: Tailor training to the responsibilities of different roles. Leaders, frontline workers, and volunteers should receive training relevant to their level of contact with vulnerable individuals.
- **Practical and scenario-based learning**: Use case studies, real-life examples, and role-playing exercises to help staff and volunteers apply safeguarding principles in practice.
- **Promote ongoing awareness**: Encourage open discussions, briefings, and sharing of safeguarding updates to maintain vigilance and understanding.
- **Evaluation and feedback**: Monitor training effectiveness by collecting feedback, assessing understanding, and addressing any gaps in knowledge.

Why it matters
Induction and regular refresher training ensure safeguarding is consistently understood and applied across your organisation. When everyone knows their responsibilities, can recognise risks, and understands how to act, it strengthens accountability and fosters a culture where the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable individuals is prioritised.

Working Safely

What it is
Working safely means adopting practices and behaviours that minimise risk and protect both vulnerable individuals and staff or volunteers. It involves understanding boundaries, maintaining professional conduct, following safeguarding policies, and fostering a culture of mutual care and vigilance.

How to work safely

- **Clear codes of conduct**: Establish and communicate behavioural expectations for all staff and volunteers, including interactions with children, young people, and adults at risk.
- **Teamwork and mutual support**: Encourage staff and volunteers to look out for one another, step in if concerns arise, and share responsibility for safe practice.
- **Supervision and accountability**: Ensure regular supervision, mentoring, and oversight to monitor practice, provide support, and address concerns promptly.
- **Safe environments**: Maintain physical and digital spaces that are secure and free from hazards, with clear guidelines for supervision ratios, visitor access, and safe use of technology.
- **Boundaries and professional relationships**: Train staff and volunteers on maintaining appropriate physical, emotional, and digital boundaries.
- **Reporting and escalation**: Ensure all staff and volunteers understand how to report concerns, near misses, or breaches of safe practice, and that reports are acted upon promptly.
- **Ongoing reflection and review**: Encourage self-assessment and team discussions about practice, learning from incidents, and improving systems to maintain safety.

Why it matters
Working safely protects both vulnerable individuals and those in ministry roles. When staff and volunteers support each other, communicate openly, and maintain safe practice together, it reduces risk, builds trust, and fosters a culture of care, accountability, and shared responsibility. Safe practice becomes a lived, relational reality rather than just a set of rules.

Managing Staff and Volunteers

What it is
Managing staff and volunteers involves providing clear direction, support, and oversight to ensure that everyone can carry out their roles safely and effectively. Effective management promotes accountability, consistency in safeguarding practice, and the wellbeing of both vulnerable individuals and those in ministry roles.

How to manage staff and volunteers

- **Clear roles and responsibilities**: Define expectations for each position, including safeguarding duties, reporting responsibilities, and limits of authority.
- **Induction and ongoing training**: Provide comprehensive induction training and regular refresher sessions to equip staff and volunteers with the knowledge and skills required for safe practice.
- **Supervision and support**: Offer regular supervision, either individually or in small groups, so staff and volunteers have opportunities to discuss practice, raise concerns, and receive guidance.
- **Performance management**: Set objectives, review progress, and provide constructive feedback to encourage accountability and continuous improvement.
- **Encourage teamwork**: Promote a culture where staff and volunteers support each other, raise concerns collaboratively, and share responsibility for safe practice.
- **Recognise and value contributions**: Celebrate achievements and ensure staff and volunteers feel appreciated, motivated, and included in your community.

Why it matters
Effective management ensures that safeguarding is embedded in everyday practice. When staff and volunteers are supported, supervised, and held accountable, it reduces risks, strengthens confidence in the your safeguarding arrangements, and nurtures a culture where safety, respect, and care for others are prioritised.

Working with External Organisations

What it is
Working with external organisations involves forming partnerships, collaborations, or joint activities with other organisations, charities, or community groups while maintaining robust safeguarding standards. It ensures that all parties share responsibility for protecting children, young people, and adults at risk.

How to work safely with external organisations

- **Due diligence**: Assess the safeguarding policies, procedures, and reputation of partner organisations before engaging in joint activities or delegating responsibilities. Do not assume that external organisations have prior safeguarding knowledge or experience.
- **Joint training and induction**: Strongly recommend a joint training session before any events or activities. This ensures all staff and volunteers have a shared understanding of safeguarding guidelines and requirements.
- **Safeguarding agreements**: Require all partner organisations to sign safeguarding agreements covering codes of conduct, reporting procedures, and responsibilities. Ensure that signatures reflect genuine understanding, not just procedural formality.
- **Communication and coordination**: Maintain open lines of communication to share information, report concerns, and ensure consistent safeguarding practices across organisations.
- **Monitoring and review**: Regularly review partnerships and joint activities to ensure safeguarding policies are followed and any concerns are promptly addressed.

Why it matters
Collaborating with external organisations can extend the reach and impact of ministry work. Ensuring all parties understand and commit to safeguarding practices protects vulnerable individuals, builds trust, and strengthens a culture of accountability and safety across all organisations involved.

Responding to Concerns

What it is
Responding to concerns involves recognising, reporting, and taking appropriate action when there are signs of abuse, neglect, or other safeguarding issues. Prompt and correct responses help protect vulnerable individuals and ensure that concerns are handled consistently and safely.

How to respond to concerns

- **Recognise signs**: Train staff and volunteers to notice indicators of abuse or neglect, including physical, emotional, behavioural, or spiritual harm.
- **Immediate action**: Ensure urgent matters, especially those involving risk to life or serious harm, are reported immediately to appropriate authorities.
- **Follow clear reporting procedures**: Establish a transparent system for reporting concerns within the organisation and externally where required. Staff and volunteers should know exactly whom to contact and how.
- **Confidentiality**: Handle concerns with discretion, sharing information only with those who need to know in order to protect individuals.
- **Support for all affected**: Provide care and support to those affected by the concern and to the person raising it.
- **Record keeping**: Keep accurate, factual, and timely records of all concerns, actions taken, and outcomes.

Why it matters
A clear and confident approach to responding to concerns ensures that abuse or neglect is addressed quickly and appropriately. It reinforces trust, demonstrates accountability, and shows that you prioritise the protection and wellbeing of all affected individuals.

Working with Those Who May Pose a Risk

What it is
Working with individuals who may pose a risk involves managing relationships with those who have a known history of harmful behaviour or who may present a safeguarding risk. The goal is to ensure safety for all while offering pastoral care, accountability, and support for rehabilitation.

How to work safely

- **Clear communication and agreements**: Set out expectations clearly and ensure individuals sign agreements or behaviour contracts before participating in relevant activities. These should outline boundaries, responsibilities, and consequences for any breaches.
- **Risk assessment**: Conduct thorough risk assessments to determine the level of supervision and support required.
- **Supervision and mentorship**: Provide regular supervision and mentorship to help individuals who have previous convictions understand boundaries, comply with safeguarding expectations, and support their rehabilitation.
- **Training for staff and volunteers**: Equip staff and volunteers with guidance on managing potentially risky situations safely and appropriately.
- **Communication and transparency**: Maintain open communication with relevant leaders and, where appropriate, external agencies, while keeping information confidential as necessary.
- **Regular review**: Review risk assessments, agreements, and support plans regularly to ensure they remain appropriate and effective.

Why it matters
By clearly communicating expectations, signing agreements, and providing supervision and mentorship, organisations can protect vulnerable individuals while supporting those with previous convictions to engage safely and responsibly. This approach fosters accountability, trust, and a culture of safety and rehabilitation.