

01

Introduction



TAKINGCARE

www.presbyterianireland.org/takingcare

1. INTRODUCTION

::1.1 INTRODUCTION

Taking Care is the name of the child protection programme of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Our aim is to create and promote a safe environment for children, young people, leaders and staff. Our Church receives through its doors every year over one hundred and twenty thousand children and young people. We have a legal duty of care to look after these children and provide a safe environment for them as best we can.

These guidelines provide guidance to all involved in youth and children's work and ministry within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to help ensure that children and young people enjoy their activities with optimum physical safety and are free from the threat of abuse. It will also alert leaders to signs of distress which may indicate that a child has been harmed.

Each Kirk Session must appoint a Designated Person(s) for child protection, follow the recruitment and appointment process for new leaders which includes the vetting process, make sure the right number of leaders are present, make sure all leaders attend child protection training and are fully aware of the reporting process in case a child protection concern or incident were to arise.

By adopting and using these guidelines each congregation will be raising the standard of care for those entrusted to them, no matter how brief the event or small the organisation they attend. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland reaches out to children and young people throughout the island of Ireland and welcomes those from households where there is no Presbyterian or other denominational connection.



Every congregation in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland must have adopted these guidelines and should be implementing them in all its organisations which work with children and young people, according to the General Assembly.

::1.2 WHY DOES THE CHURCH NEED A CHILD PROTECTION POLICY?

There are four main reasons why we need to have a child protection policy within the Church:

1. A Legal Requirement

The law rightly requires us to have a policy in place and says we have a duty of care to children and young people that we work with. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that "children have the right to be protected from all forms of violence. They must be kept safe from harm. They must be given proper care by those looking after them".¹

¹The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Five Key Principles of Child Care

The Children (NI) Order 1995 and the Child Care Act (RoI) 1991 emphasise the following key principles:

- ∴ **Paramount Consideration** – It is a fundamental principle in child care law and practice that the welfare of the child must be the paramount consideration in decisions taken about him/her.
- ∴ **Parental Responsibility** – Parents have a responsibility to children rather than rights over them. There may be situations where other significant adults share this responsibility with one or both parents.
- ∴ **Prevention** – We should aim to prevent situations arising where children are separated from their families. The state should provide support and services to keep children within their families and communities, in order to promote their health and welfare.
- ∴ **Partnership** – The most effective way of ensuring that a child's needs are met is by working in partnership. The provision of services must therefore take into account the views of parents.
- ∴ **Protection** – Children should be safe and should be protected by intervention if they are in danger.

2. Biblical Basis

As well as a legal imperative, there is also a biblical one. We have our own duty of care found in the Bible. 1 Peter 5:2 says, "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be". Next to proclaiming God's Word and the love of Christ, what could be more important than keeping our children safe?

3. Our own Protection

Taking Care is not there only to protect children and young people but leaders and staff too and ultimately the organisations of the Church. Sometimes leaders may think that aspects of the guidelines are not necessary, however it should be remembered that it is for their own protection and they should not rely on their reputation to protect them.



By having the guidelines in place leaders and helpers will be assured of their own protection in the event of false allegations.

4. The world that we live in

No denomination is immune from the problem of trusted adults misusing their position. This requires a response which is aimed at both prevention and care for those who may have been mistreated. We must not be naive to the fact that there are people in the world today who want to harm children and so we as a Church must do all that we can to protect our children, promote good practice and prevent abuse.

::1.3 CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

A **child** is a person under 18 years old. Where either children or young people are mentioned in the guidelines, both are intended.

A **leader** is anyone 18 years old or over who is engaged in work or voluntary activity which involves regular contact with children or young persons.

A **young leader** or **helper** is a person aged between 15 and 18 years who assists in organisations working with children.

A leader in a **regulated position** is an adult working either as a volunteer or in a paid position, four or more times a year, in direct contact with children or vulnerable adults.

A **vulnerable adult*** is anyone aged 18 or over who cannot take care of themselves. This may be because they have a mental health problem, a disability, visual or hearing problems, are old and frail, or are ill.

::1.4 CHILD PROTECTION POLICY



Every congregation in the Presbyterian Church must have a child protection policy in place which is based on the Taking Care guidelines.

The child protection policy should relate to all children and youth organisations within the Church. A child protection policy should be displayed clearly on church premises. A sample policy is found in Section 12. This sample policy should be developed to suit the congregation's individual needs and formally adopted by the Kirk Session. Each leader should be given a copy of the congregation's child protection policy and be in agreement with it.

*This definition is from the leaflet 'Adult Abuse - Guidance for Staff', published by the Northern Ireland Office and Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in 2009.