

Safeguarding Children (NI) POLICY

i. Policy Statement

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland believes that everyone has a responsibility to promote the welfare of all children and to keep them safe.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland believes that children should never experience abuse of any kind.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland is committed to safeguarding all children and protecting them from harm.

It is the policy of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to safeguard all children and young people interacting with its ministry in any form

This includes actively protecting children from all forms of harm or abuse

The denomination demonstrates and achieves this by providing this policy and accompanying procedures, for all involved in youth and children's work and any form of children or youth ministry within the denomination, to ensure that children and young people enjoy their engagement with our denomination, free from the threat of abuse and in a safe environment.

ii. Biblical basis for Safeguarding

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland determine first and foremost that we have a biblical imperative for safeguarding.

Safeguarding is imperative for our denomination and a central component to our mission; when we do it well, we are proclaiming the excellencies of our Lord Jesus.

It is therefore our duty to use the Bible as our reference point, where we find guidance in how to safeguard others as part of, not only our legal and ethical duty, but as who we are as a denomination at heart.

For example;

- love our neighbour as ourselves, (Lev 19:18 / Luke 10:27 / Gal 5:13-15)
- treat others as we would want to be treated (Matt 7:12)
- meet the needs of others (Romans 15:1-2 / Philippians 2:3-4)
- seek justice and correct oppression (Psalm 89:14 / Isaiah 1:17 / Micah 6:8)
- protecting the weak and those in need (Psalm 82:3-4/ Matt 18:10)

iii. Legal Context

This policy and accompanying procedures have been developed with the following legislation and guidance documents considered, which all seek to protect and safeguard children;

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
- European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)
- The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995
- Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, October 2024
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007
- The Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015

iv. Core Principles

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland engages with children and young people throughout the island of Ireland and welcomes those from households where there is no Presbyterian or other denominational connection.

The welfare of any child is paramount, no matter how brief their engagement with our denomination or small the organisation they attend.

All children, regardless of age, disability, gender, racial heritage, religious belief, sexual orientation or identity, have the right to equal protection from all forms of harm or abuse.

We recognise some children are additionally vulnerable because of the impact of previous experiences, communication needs, disabilities, adverse environments and other issues.

The voices of children and young people are crucial to our learning and development as a safe denomination and we seek to always improve our engagement with them.

The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, highlights the following key principles:

- The child or young person welfare is paramount
- The voice of the child or young person should be heard
- Parents should be supported and families helped to stay together
- Children should be safe from harm at all times, including when a parent is not meeting their needs
- Partnership with statutory services is required to ensure effective safeguarding
- Prevention and our role therein should be a focus for all organisations working with children
- Responses to issues should be proportionate and decision making should be well informed

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland will therefore;

1. Ensure that every congregation has an aligned Designated Person
2. Maintain robust procedures for the recruitment, checking and monitoring of staff and volunteers working with children
3. Ensure that anyone engaging with children and young people through the denomination will be trained at least once every 3 years in how to recognise, respond to and report abuse as well as understand their role in the prevention of abuse

4. Ensure the denomination has clear processes for the reporting of abuse and the risk of harm, both externally to statutory services and internally through a clearly identified chain of responsibility
5. Ensure that identified risks to children and young people are assessed and managed
6. Ensure that any person of risk engaged in our ministries (for example those with a history of serious offending behaviour) is safely managed, monitored and supported
7. Ensure that we have a timely, effective and sensitive approach to managing non-recent abuse disclosures
8. Ensure that children and young people from other countries are protected and cared for while engaging in our ministries and missions
9. Ensure we have appropriate and actual methods for children and young people to voice their opinions and concerns, and be listened and responded to
10. Ensure we have safe and confidential methods for managing information

This Policy will be executed across the denomination in Northern Ireland through a series of procedures.

This Policy is displayed at each local congregation.

Provision of alternative formats, when necessary, for example, large print or easy read versions, can be accessed via PCI Safeguarding Office.

v. Review

This Policy will be reviewed every three years by Council for Social Witness. Changes will be reported to the General Assembly, with the Assembly being asked to approve any significant policy changes.

If there is a legislative change that requires the Policy to be updated or reviewed within that time period, this will be the responsibility of the Council for Social Witness. Where this is urgent, the General Council can act on behalf of the General Assembly to approve a significant policy change. The Safeguarding Lead will advise them if this is the case.

Accompanying procedure will be reviewed at least every three years by the Safeguarding Development Committee, Council for Social Witness, as well as at any point there are legislative/good practice updates required.

Procedural changes will be reported to the Council for Social Witness, with the Council being asked to approve any significant procedural changes.

It is the responsibility of the Council for Social Witness, to ensure changes are communicated in a timely and effective manner to the denomination.

Policy End

Procedures commence