

Summary from Designated Person / Designated Liaison Person Safeguarding Roadshows

The Safeguarding team undertook 9 roadshows across the denomination during February and March 2026 covering NI and ROI, the below is a summary of the key points.

Objectives the roadshows –

- Outline key responsibilities
- Outline how procedures should work
- Outline some of the key changes
- Give some preparation ideas
- FAQ

The Body of Christ – safeguarding is everyone's responsibility

1st Corinthians 12 – There are different kinds of gifts, **but the same Spirit distributes them**. There are many kinds of service, **but the same Lord**. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and everyone it **is the same God at work**.

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts **form one body**, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and **we were all given the one Spirit to drink**. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

Robust child and adult safeguarding will defend people's rights. The safeguarding team started work to reform our approach to safeguarding in early 2024 and after much work and consultation, the new policies for Adults and Child Safeguarding were agreed at our 2025 General Assembly. We aim to give safeguarding teams in PCI the tools to deliver strong safeguarding across our denomination.

Vetting – AccessNI

The Safeguarding Team are aware the recent performance of AccessNI needs improved. We are listening and learning from your feedback, as well as enhancing our admin staffing team. We will be continually adapting our AccessNI forms and engaging with AccessNI to develop these. Please be aware that regulations are set by AccessNI who adhere to regulations set by the Department of Health, PCI must adhere to these regulations.

Key Responsibilities

Designated Persons / Designated Liaison Persons

- Appointed by Kirk Session to **administer safeguarding** locally and **advise and support Kirk Session** in their safeguarding decisions and arrangements.

- To be the lead person for most safeguarding issues in the local church.

Kirk Session

- Overall responsibility for safeguarding in their local church
- Accountable for the safeguarding decision in their local church
- Accountable for the oversight of the procedures and addressing when there is an issue with an individual / group

Central Safeguarding Team (PCI)

- Provide guidance and advice
- Provide a standard policy, procedure and guidance for safeguarding
- Support the management of offenders and those about whom serious allegations are made
- **To equip and empower local churches to managed their own safeguarding**

Every church is a charity in itself and holds safeguarding responsibility. Kirk Session has the ultimate responsibility. There is NO emergency service for safeguarding.

PCI are not a statutory body and do not have the authority to investigate anything that could be criminal nor to make professional child and adult protection assessments.

There is NO requirement for you to tell the central safeguarding team about general safeguarding issues. YOU must be able and equipped to manage safeguarding in your general locale. You do not report to us first – you must NEVER delay in reporting possible child or adult abuse concerns to the relevant statutory body.

There are 3 key types of safeguarding training:

- Leaders/volunteers/helpers
- Designated Person / Designate Liaison Person
- Kirk Session

What has changed?

You will be familiar with Taking Care and the Taking Care folder which is likely in your church office somewhere however, we no longer go under that name and simply we are the Safeguarding Department.

One policy and procedure is not appropriate. We have both children and children and adults to safeguard and we are working across 2 jurisdictions that have very different sets of legislation. With this in mind, we will NOT be issuing anymore folders and written copies of these procedures. You will access them on the PCI website. Safeguarding is constantly developing as is legislation, so by having them online they will be easier accessed and changed when needed according to legislation changes.

Moving forward we will be enhancing the use of website. We aim to use “pop-ups” on the safeguarding page which is how we will let you know if and when something has changed. We need the website to work for you and be the most up to date version.

There is a change in understanding and culture – **you must not delay in reporting. You do not have to come through our office.**

These are broad procedures and we simply cannot write a policy that covers every church and their specific activities. You are welcome to copy and paste them but you and your Kirk Session must take the time to go away and update your own policies and procedures. Once the policies and procedures go live, there will be a grace period for churches to get everything in order, the Republic of Ireland have a grace period of 3 months and we believe it will be the same for Northern Ireland.

We need to learn and that is why reviewing auditing is going to become standard practice for us as a denomination. When you review your policy and procedure you must ensure that you get appropriate signage from your Kirk Session as well as the date that it was reviewed. This is the only way to demonstrate that an intentional review has taken place.

It is important that people within your church are aware of the new policies and procedures such as leaders/helpers/volunteers and parents. Communities should be confident and those with malicious intent see that your church takes safeguarding very seriously. **You do not need to send your churches policies and procedures in to PCI for approval**, your Kirk Session will approve them – make sure they are signed and dated.

Key changes to be aware of but not limited to

Safeguarding Adults – Don’t panic, always remember that all adults should be treated with dignity and respect, you are already doing that – if we have any concerns at all we will take the advice of statutory social work teams who are trained professionals to navigate the more complex world of adult safeguarding. We cannot assume that people are vulnerable and we cannot report people simply because they are living in a manner which we do not personally approve. Safeguarding adults can feel complex but do pick up the phone. With safeguarding adults, it would be a good idea to have an ASC – Adult Safeguarding Champion who will oversee safeguarding adults – this could be the current Designated Person / Designated Liaison Person however your church could appoint someone else to be ASC.

Vetting Checks / Recruitment – Retvetting now needs done every 3 years. 16 & 17 year olds now need vetting when in a leadership role (please note 16 & 17 year olds in leadership or helper roles should never be left alone with children or adults at risk)

Health and Safety – This is not within the remit of safeguarding.

New focus – Be aware of faith-based barriers and concerns in safeguarding for example what will the church think of me, my previous “sin” etc. Is this a barrier to disclosure?

Overview of Chapters in Safeguarding Adults

Chapter one

Introduction to the Procedures for Safeguarding Adults

Chapter two

Recruitment and selection of staff and volunteers

Chapter three

Recognising Abuse in Adults

Chapter four

Adult Safeguarding Champion (Designated Safeguarding Person)

Chapter five

Responding to, recording and reporting concerns about abuse

Chapter six

Risk assessment and management

Chapter seven

The management of concerns, complaints and comments

Chapter eight

Management of records, confidentiality and sharing of information

Chapter nine

Code of Behaviour

Chapter ten

The management of Offenders & Serious Allegations in our congregations

Chapter eleven

Standards, accountability and review

Glossary of terms

Review

This will be available online and will contain live links to documents you may need.

New chapters in Safeguarding Children

Online safeguarding

Safeguarding children from other countries

The voice of children and young people

Practice tips that might help

- Appoint a deputy Designated Person / Designated Liaison Person.
- Appoint a couple of Elders to specifically lead on safeguarding.
- Use a working spreadsheet for the management of leaders recruitment / vetting / training.
- Use a church-based email address (this does not have to be a presbyterian Ireland email address, what we mean by this is create a church-based email address that is 1) dedicated to safeguarding, 2) secure and password protected and 3) only accessible by the safeguarding team within your church / Designated Persons / Designated Liaison Persons.)
- Make a poster to go up in your church so people can identify your Designated Person / Designated Liaison Person – add your church-based email address to the poster.
- Form relationships with other Designated Persons / Designated Liaison Persons in the area – this is especially important for smaller churches, team up and discuss safeguarding confidentially with each other.
- Have a safeguarding Sunday – let your community know that you take safeguarding seriously.

Please remember – you are not alone – your support should come from your Kirk Session. Work together, keep them informed because they are responsible. Confidentiality is an important matter for your Kirk Session, they must have a plan to manage.

ROI Specific Requirements under Children First

- Role of mandated person – their duty is to report to Tusla, this could be the Minister or pastoral care worker.
- Relevant Person – they are responsible for completing the Tusla required risk assessment.
- Designated Liaison Person – this role is appointed by Kirk Session who takes the lead role in safeguarding and links to Tusla.
- Development of risk assessment which feeds into a requirement to undertake by Children First.
- Child safeguarding statement – this is a legal requirement for churches and this must be signed off by Kirk Session.
- Once the new policies and procedures go live, churches in the Republic of Ireland will have three months to get everything in order.

Safeguarding Checklist

We have created a safeguarding checklist for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, these are found under the Northern Ireland Safeguarding Guidance / Republic of Ireland Safeguarding Guidance on the safeguarding page. This is a checklist for Designated Persons / Designated Liaison Persons to fill in and feed back to their Kirk Session.

Commonly asked questions from Designated Persons / Designated Liaison Persons

What do I do if I am worried my Kirk Session doesn't take safeguarding seriously?

- Kirk Sessions should be taking safeguarding seriously, we need to protect those within our church, if you have any concerns, call the Safeguarding Department or send an email to get some advice.

What happens if I am not available, who oversees safeguarding in our church?

- Kirk Session are ultimately responsible for safeguarding and they need a back up plan. DPs/DLPs might not always be available, this is why it would be good practice to form a small safeguarding team within your church, so that someone else will be available to stand in.

A concern has been raised about the Minister, who do I tell?

- Follow the same reporting procedure as you would for anyone else – social services or PSNI if it requires. An Elder/Session will know to discuss with the Clerk of Presbytery, but keep it confidential.

We are a small church with, how are we going to manage safeguarding now?

- We need to work together, team up with neighbouring churches, meet with other DPs / DLPs, take advice from each other.

Am I legally liable for the decisions made while I am in this role?

- Yes, we are all legally accountable for our actions. Child protection is everyone's business. We cannot ignore risk issues. However, Kirk Session are the court of the church and the accountable body to the Charity Commission and others. They are your governing body. Please remember that the majority of our work is preventative, our main role in safeguarding is to prevent abuse, never investigate, only report.

What do I do if someone refuses to get vetted?

- This person **cannot** lead/help/volunteer, tell them to come back to you when they are ready to be checked.

Finally, we just want to say thank you, this is not a glib thank you, we know how affected you all have been by the issues facing our denomination. We know many of you have worked tirelessly to keep your congregation safe and up to date. You have worked quietly with one of the most difficult aspects not only of church life but life in general, in the service of your brothers and sisters in Christ and those in your community whom you desire so deeply to come to faith through the ministries.