

Minster Abbey Safeguarding Policy Supplement

‘All guests are to be welcomed as Christ...’
Rule of St Benedict Chapter 53

February 2025

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Minster Abbey Safeguarding Statement

The community at Minster Abbey lives by the Gospel and the Rule of St Benedict and the precept that all who live, work or visit here are to be 'welcomed as Christ'.

Our dignity as human beings created in the image and likeness of God is to be respected at all times and made concrete in the way we speak, behave and listen to one another.

Christ is especially present in the guest and in the sick. Our community should be a place where everyone feels safe and supported. We take a zero tolerance approach to any kind of abuse.

“The protection of minors and vulnerable persons is an integral part of the Gospel message that the Church and all its members are called to proclaim throughout the world. Christ himself, in fact, has entrusted us with the care and protection of the weakest and defenceless: “whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me” (Mt 18:5). Therefore, we all have the duty to welcome openheartedly minors and vulnerable persons and to create a safe environment for them, with their interests as a priority. This requires a continuous and profound conversion, in which personal holiness and moral commitment come together to promote the credibility of the Gospel proclamation and to renew the educational mission of the Church’.

Pope Francis ‘On the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons’ 2019

Types of Abuse

Safeguarding is more than just about sexual or physical abuse; it involves protecting vulnerable groups from the sorts of harm listed here (with examples).

physical abuse - someone being hit, slapped or kicked, being locked in a room or restrained inappropriately

sexual abuse - someone made to take part in sexual activity when they haven't given consent or are not able to give consent

emotional or psychological abuse - someone being shouted at, bullied, being made to feel frightened or pressurised into decisions

financial abuse - stealing, fraud, withholding or misusing someone's money or possessions

neglect and acts of omission - this includes not giving someone the care that they need

modern slavery - human trafficking or being forced to work against their will

domestic abuse - when abuse occurs between partners or by a family member

discriminatory abuse - poor treatment or harassment because of someone's age, gender, sexuality, disability, race or religious belief

organisational abuse - inflexible systems and routines in place that stop people making their own choices about their lifestyle, not considering a person's dietary requirements or inappropriate ways of addressing people

self neglect - when someone chooses not to look after themselves. This might include not eating or refusing help for their health or care needs which can have a significant effect on their wellbeing.

CHILDREN (those under 18 years old)

Safeguarding is the action that is taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm.

Safeguarding means:

- protecting children from abuse and maltreatment
- preventing harm to children's health or development
- ensuring children grow up with the provision of safe and effective care
- taking action to enable all children and young people to have the best outcomes.

Child protection is part of the safeguarding process. It focuses on protecting individual children identified as suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. This includes child protection procedures which detail how to respond to concerns about a child.

ADULTS

Protecting an adult's right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect.

It is about people and organisations working together to prevent and stop both the risks and experience of abuse or neglect, while at the same time making sure that the adult's wellbeing is promoted including, where appropriate, having regard to their views, wishes, feelings and beliefs in deciding on any action. This must recognise that adults sometimes have complex interpersonal relationships and may be ambivalent, unclear or unrealistic about their personal circumstances.

CODE OF BEHAVIOUR

DO:

- Treat all people with dignity and respect
- Provide an example you wish others to follow
- Respect people's right to personal privacy
- Plan activities which involve more than one person being present, or at least within sight or hearing of others
- Encourage children, young people and adults at risk to feel comfortable to point out attitudes or behaviours they don't like
- Remember that others may interpret your actions, no matter how well intentioned
- Recognize that caution is required even in sensitive moments of counselling such as when dealing with bullying, bereavement or abuse
- Challenge unacceptable behaviour and report all allegations/suspensions of abuse.

DO NOT:

- Permit abusive peer activities (ridiculing, bullying)
- Play physical contact games with children and young people
- Have any inappropriate physical or verbal contact with others
- Jump to conclusions without checking the facts
- Show favouritism to any individual
- Make suggestive remarks or gestures even in fun
- Let suspicion, disclosure or allegations of abuse go unrecorded or unreported.

In our relationships with one another in community we reflect the good practice we believe is the right of every individual who visits our community.

*(Taken from '**Integrity in Ministry**': Principles and Standards of Conduct for Religious within England and Wales)*

The 5 'R's of Safeguarding

- Recognise

You must have a clear understanding of what the different signs and symptoms of potential abuse, harm and neglect can be. Listen and keep on listening.

- Respond

If you do have a safeguarding concern, it is essential that you respond appropriately and do not ignore the situation. Don't ask questions.

- Refer

It is usually the responsibility of the Safeguarding Lead or management to pass on safeguarding concerns to the appropriate authorities. However, if the safeguarding risk is more urgent and you suspect somebody is under immediate or severe threat, you should contact the relevant local authority or police services.

- Report

Safeguarding concerns need to be reported without delay. Confidentiality is important, so only share information with those who are a part of the safeguarding process.

- Record

This is the who, what, when and where of safeguarding. Take precise, comprehensive notes that detail everything about your safeguarding concern. For example, who it involves, what happened, and include times and dates. You should do this as soon as possible.

Suspecting Abuse or Hearing a Disclosure

If you receive any information about a safeguarding concern or an allegation, you must do all that you can to ensure that children, young people and adults in a vulnerable situation are not put at continued risk and that a proper investigation may be made.

Key Principles

If you are told or suspect that a child, young person or adult at risk is being, has been or is likely to be abused you must take action.

To do nothing is not an option

If there is an immediate danger call the police or social services.

If there is no immediate danger, collect the fullest possible information at the time the concern or allegation reaches you. That may include details of what you see, as well as what you are told.

At the first possible opportunity report the matter to the Religious Life Safeguarding Service RLSS (via the community Safeguarding Lead) 0151 5562311

If there is immediate danger ring 999

Recording the Disclosure and Keeping a Record

- At the time of the disclosure only make very brief notes if this does not interfere with the intimacy or flow of the disclosure. Try to focus on who, when, where, what.
- Write up your notes as soon as possible after the disclosure. Ensure you record the place, date and time the conversation took place and who was present.
- Do not destroy your original notes.
- Record the actual words used, including any swear words or slang.
- Depending on the age of the person, you might want to go through your written record with them afterwards to ensure you have captured everything correctly. They may or may not wish to do this or they may wish to add their own written notes too. Be led by the wishes of the person disclosing. Ensure you add a note of any amendments made post-disclosure.
- If you have seen bruising or an injury, use a body map to record details. Again, ensure that the map is dated and attached to information relating to the person's comments about the injury.
- Submit written record to relevant safeguarding lead/regulatory body/local authority/police without delay.
This will normally be done via your Safeguarding Lead in conjunction with the RLSS.

If any investigation is needed it will be done by the police, Social Services or the RLSS. To protect vulnerable people they need to make a careful assessment of risk, based on fact and judgement, and they - not you-must be the one to carry out the investigation.

Responsibility for Safeguarding at Minster Abbey

The safety and welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults is the responsibility of the whole community.

The Safeguarding Lead and her assistant are appointed by the Prioress.

They will ensure that the whole community and employees are familiar with the expectations of this policy and its practical implications, including

- Facilitate DBS checks for the community and those entering the Postulancy.
- Facilitate the DBS checks for those employees who work in the infirmary with vulnerable sisters, as part of the employment process.
- Facilitate appropriate checks on chaplains
- Facilitate appropriate checks on volunteers as required
- They will attend training and updating courses and feed information back to the community as necessary and arrange training for the community members.
- Refer to the RLSS all disclosures of concern made to members of the community, or to the statutory authorities where there is an immediate risk.

The community will bring to her attention situations that involve concerns re the safeguarding of children, young people and adults at risk who visit the monastery

Typical situations at Minster Abbey

As an enclosed, contemplative Benedictine community we are visited by individuals and groups.

One to ones

Individuals can ask to speak to sisters on a 'one to one' basis. We are **a listening ear** and do not offer therapeutic services. Should it become clear that someone needs more than a listening ear we have a duty to point the individual in the direction of more appropriate support.

When the individual is a vulnerable adult and there are concerns about their own safety, we have a responsibility to refer the matter in the first instance to the RLSS for advice.

We can not guarantee absolute confidentiality and this should be made clear to people who come to speak to us.

Visiting groups of children

Occasionally, school groups, parish groups or other groups of children visit our community. The organiser is responsible for ensuring that the group come to the monastery with the appropriate adult: child ratio for the particular age group. Nuns cannot be counted in the ratio.

An individual child should not be left with a nun away from the rest of the group. If a nun is leading a session with a smaller group of children/young people another adult should be present.

Activities are to be arranged and agreed with the visiting school or group prior to the visit. The organizer is responsible for completing a risk assessment.

Volunteers and working guests

Volunteers and working guests should not be given activities that allow unsupervised access to children or adults who may be vulnerable.

Useful Contacts

Monastery Safeguarding Lead: **Sr Johanna Caton** johannacaton@gmail.com tel. **01843 821254**

In Sr Johanna's absence please contact Sr Walburga Paget tel. 01843 821254.

Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS) 0151 5562311

Safe Spaces Victim and Survivor Support 0300 3031056

Kent Safeguarding Adults 03000 41 61 61 social.services@kent.gov.uk

Kent Safeguarding Children 03000 41 11 11 social.services@kent.gov.uk

NSPCC 0800 8005000

Child Line 0800 1111

Stop it Now Helpline 0808 1000 900

Hourglass (Action on Elder Abuse) 0808 808 8141

Age UK 0800 055 6112

Alcoholics Anonymous 0800 9177 650 help@aamail.org

National Domestic Violence Helpline 0808 2000247

Kent Domestic Abuse Support 0808 1689111

Local Social Services: Adults 03000 41 61 61

Children 03000 41 11 11

Emergency out of hours 03000 41 91 91 (adults and children)

Police: 999 Emergency or 101 Enquiry

St Mildred's Abbey, Minster, Kent

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