

Safeguarding policy Addendum: Responding to Allegations of Domestic Abuse

SECTION A

Bridge Chapel Policy Statement on responding to domestic abuse

All forms of domestic abuse are wrong and must stop. We are committed to promoting and supporting environments which:

- ensure that all people feel welcomed, respected and safe from abuse
- protect those vulnerable to domestic abuse from actual or potential harm
- recognise equality amongst people and within relationships
- enable and encourage concerns to be raised and responded to appropriately and consistently.

We recognise that:

- all forms of domestic abuse cause damage to the survivor and express an imbalance of power in the relationship
- all survivors have the right to equal protection from all types of harm or abuse
- domestic abuse can occur in all communities
- domestic abuse may be a single incident, but is usually a systematic, repeated pattern which escalates in severity and frequency
- domestic abuse, if witnessed or overheard by a child, is a form of abuse by the perpetrator of the abusive behaviour
- working in partnership with children, adults and other agencies is essential in promoting the welfare of any child or adult suffering abuse.

We will endeavour to respond to domestic abuse by:

In all our activities

- valuing, listening to and respecting both survivors and alleged or known perpetrators of domestic abuse.

In our publicity

- raising awareness about other agencies, support services, resources and expertise.

When concerns are raised

- ensuring that those who have experienced abuse can find safety and informed help
- working with the appropriate statutory bodies during an investigation into domestic abuse, including when allegations are made against a member of the church community.

In our care

- ensuring that informed and appropriate pastoral care is offered to any child, young person or adult who has suffered abuse
- identifying and outlining the appropriate relationship of those with pastoral care responsibilities with both survivors and alleged or known perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Where there are concerns about domestic abuse, these should be discussed with the ministry area leader or with the safeguarding team safeguarding@bridgechapel.co.uk. The safeguarding team is the main point of contact for all domestic abuse concerns, even in situations where there are no safeguarding concerns with respect to children, young people or vulnerable adults.

SECTION B

Responding to concerns about domestic abuse

This guidance has been abbreviated from the Church of England Safeguarding e-manual and highlights initial responses to disclosures and concerns about domestic abuse.

Definition

The Government definition of domestic abuse is currently: "Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical

- sexual
- financial
- emotional

Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

The Government definition, which is not a legal definition, includes so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

Where domestic abuse occurs within a home that includes children, there is a mandatory duty to report the concerns to children's social care.

How can Domestic Abuse be recognised?

Indications in a Church setting that someone may be a victim of domestic abuse could include:

Productivity signs

- Change in the person's working patterns: for example, frequent absence, lateness or needing to leave work early
- Reduced quality and quantity of work: missing deadlines, a drop in usual performance standards
- Change in the use of the phone/email: for example, a large number of personal calls/texts, avoiding calls or a strong reaction to calls/texts/emails
- Spending an increased number of hours at work for no reason.

Changes in behaviour or demeanour

- Conduct out of character with previous employment history or social engagement
- Changes in behaviour: for example, becoming very quiet, anxious, frightened, tearful, aggressive, distracted, depressed; Isolating themselves from colleagues or friends
- Obsession with timekeeping
- Secretive regarding home life
- Worried about leaving children at home.

Physical signs

- Visible bruising or single or repeated injury with unlikely explanations
- Change in the pattern or amount of make-up used
- Change in the manner of dress: for example, clothes that do not suit the climate which may be used to hide injuries
- Substance use/misuse
- Fatigue/sleep disorders.

Other signs

- Partner or ex-partner following employee in or around the workplace or Church setting or repeatedly turning up at the workplace or church setting
- Partner or ex-partner exerting unusual amount of control or demands over work schedule or social activities
- Flowers/gifts sent to employee for no apparent reason; Isolation from family/friends.

Responding to domestic abuse within the congregation

Challenging inappropriate behaviours, being alert to the signs of possible abuse, and knowing what to do should such issues arise are the most important things the Church can do to keep people safe.

If domestic abuse is suspected, and it is safe and appropriate to do so, a general wellbeing question such as “How are things going?” can be asked. There may be no response forthcoming, as it may take a while for the individual to disclose. It is particularly the case that men and those in the LGBTQI+ community are more reluctant to disclose they are being abused.

If a disclosure is made that someone is a victim of domestic abuse, consider the following:

Do:

Call 999 if the person or any children are, or appear to be, in immediate danger, or if there are any concerns about their safety.

Listen and accept what is being said, no matter who the allegation is being about or by whom it is being made. Encourage the person disclosing to seek help themselves and offer support to help them with that. Information and phone numbers for local and national helplines are available in our Safeguarding Policy.

Domestic abuse advisors can provide important specialist support particularly around safety planning and legal advice. Confirm that the abuse is not their fault, no matter what they have been told by their abuser.

Make a note of what was said, record any visible injuries and pass this information onto your ministry leader or the safeguarding team as soon as possible.

Do not:

Put yourself at risk – call 999 if this is required.

Engage in any way with the person who is the alleged abuser, and specifically do not tell them the location of the victim. Offer any form of marriage counselling or mediation or encourage reconciliation.

Allow religion to be used to excuse violent behaviour.

Offer them emergency accommodation (assuming appropriate emergency accommodation is available) without informing the police and receiving assurance that it is safe to do so.

Ongoing pastoral support

Once the immediate situation has been resolved, ministry or senior leaders/elders will need to look at the longer-term support of the individuals involved. Where both individuals wish to continue to attend church, consideration will need to be given to how to do that safely or whether one individual will need to be accommodated at another church.

Both individuals will need support, noting that one person cannot support both parties, and input from others may be required. This may require the sharing of information, and this needs to be made clear to all parties. Anyone supporting a victim/survivor, or a perpetrator should have undergone domestic abuse training.

Where the issue has not met the level of requiring a statutory intervention, there is a need for those with knowledge of the situation to remain vigilant, to remain open to offering support. The DSL will be able to advise on the best way to support both parties in these scenarios. This may involve the use of a Domestic Abuse Specialist and will require information to be appropriately shared.

If ministry area leaders are aware of any formal restrictions around alleged abusers (such as safeguarding agreements or restraining orders) they should ensure that arrangements support rather than undermine those restrictions.

Employees and volunteers who are victims should be treated in the same way as anyone else reporting domestic abuse. But in addition, the Church has specific responsibilities as an employer.