OTFORD EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

CHILD PROTECTION AND SAFEGUARDING POLICY 2019

Reviewed October 2024

Purpose:

To describe our practice in safeguarding and protecting children at Otford Evangelical Free Church.

Our Mission Statement:

As in the words of Luke 18 v 6 (NIV):

Jesus said, ”Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these”.

Our aim is to fulfil these words ensuring the emotional, physical, social and spiritual needs of the children within our church

Our core safeguarding principles:

- We honour God by protecting children. Therefore the church’s responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of children/young people is of paramount importance.
- Safer children have greater wellbeing and have positive social and emotional outcomes.
- Representatives from across the church community will be involved in policy development and review.
- Policies will be reviewed at least annually unless an incident or new legislation or guidance suggests the need for an interim review.

Child protection and safeguarding statement:

We recognise our Biblical and statutory responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of all our children and young people.

We endeavour to provide a safe and welcoming environment where children and young people are respected and valued.

We will be alert to the signs of abuse and neglect and follow our procedures to ensure that children and young people receive effective support, protection and justice.

The procedures contained in this policy apply to all those in the church working with children and young people and the church members and are consistent with those of the Kent Safeguarding Children Board (KSCB).

Policy principles

The welfare of the child or young person is paramount.

All children and young people, regardless of age, gender, ability, culture, race, language, religion have equal rights to protection.

All staff, volunteers and church members have an equal responsibility to act on any suspicion or disclosure that may suggest a child or young person is at risk of harm.

Children, young people and adults who work with them, who are involved in child protection issues, will receive appropriate support and training every two years.

The Designated Senior Person Responsibilities:

- Is appropriately trained, with updates every two years.
- Acts as a source of support and expertise to all those working with young people and children in the church setting.
- Encourages a culture of listening to children and young people, taking account of their wishes and feelings.
- Is alert to the specific needs of children and young people in need, those with special educational needs and young carers.
- Has a working knowledge of Kent Safeguarding Children Board (KSCB) procedures.
- Makes staff, volunteers and church members aware of the latest policies on safeguarding.
- Has an understanding of locally agreed processes for providing early help and intervention.
- Keeps detailed written records of all concerns, ensuring that such records are stored securely.
- Refers cases of suspected abuse to children's social care or police as appropriate.
- Attends and/or contributes to child protection conferences.

• Develops effective links with relevant statutory and voluntary agencies including the KSCB.

• Ensures that all staff, volunteers and church members indicate that they have read and understood the child protection policy.

• Ensures that the child protection policy and procedures are regularly reviewed and updated annually.

• Reports on a regular basis to the pastor and elders.

• Keeps a record of staff attendance at child protection training.

• Makes the safeguarding policy available publicly, on the church's website and church notice board.

• Informs parents when a referral about suspected abuse or neglect about their child or young person is made.

The Deputy Designated Person:

Should be appropriately trained and, in the absence of the Designated Senior Person, carries out those functions necessary to ensure the ongoing safety and protection of the children and young people. In the event of the long-term absence of the Designated Senior Person, the Deputy will assume all of the functions above.

Good practice guidelines and staff conduct:

To meet and maintain our responsibilities towards the children and young people we need to agree standards of good practice which form a code of safe conduct for all staff.

Good practice includes:

• Treating all children and young people with respect.

• Setting a good example by conducting themselves appropriately.

• Involving children and young people in decisions that affect them.

• Encouraging positive, respectful and safe behaviour among our children and young people

• Being a good listener.

• Being alert to changes in children's and young people's behaviour and to signs of abuse, neglect and exploitation.

• Recognising that challenging behaviour may be an indicator of abuse.

• Asking the child's or young person's permission before initiating physical contact, such as assisting with dressing, physical support or administering first aid.

• Maintaining appropriate standards of conversation and interaction with and between the children and young people and avoiding the use of sexualised or derogatory language.

• Being aware that the personal and family circumstances and lifestyles of some lead to an increased risk of abuse.

• Applying the use of reasonable force only as a last resort and in compliance with the safeguarding policy procedures.

• Referring all concerns about a child's or young person's safety and welfare to the Designated Senior Person or, in his or her absence, to the Deputy Designated Person.

Staff, volunteers and church members' relationships with children and young people:

• Ensure that relationships with the children and young people remain professional at all times, not behaving in a way that may lead a child or young person to believe they are favoured or have a special relationship.

This includes:

• Physical contact with the children and young people must be appropriate, functional and in sight of other adults. Comforting with a hand on a shoulder or gently holding the hand of a young child is appropriate touch. Having a child sat on your lap should be avoided.

• Adults should leave the door open when alone in a room with a child.

• Staff, volunteers or church members should not engage in any online activity or phone messaging with a child or young person. They must follow the procedures for taking photographs and videos set out in this policy.

Abuse of position of trust:

All staff, volunteers and church members must be aware that inappropriate behaviour towards children and young people is unacceptable and that their conduct must be beyond reproach.

Staff, volunteers and church members must remember at all times the serious words of Jesus in Matthew 18 v 6 (NIV)

"If anyone causes one of these little ones … to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung round their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea".

Children who may be particularly vulnerable:

Some children and young people may have an increased risk of abuse – not due to their personality but because they have experienced such things as prejudice, discrimination, isolation, social exclusion, break up of families. To ensure that all of our children and young people receive appropriate protection, special consideration should be given to those who are:

- Disabled or have special educational needs.
- Young carers.
- Affected by parental substance misuse, domestic violence or parental mental health needs.
- Asylum seekers.
- Living away from home.
- Vulnerable to being bullied, or engaging in bullying.
- Living in temporary accommodation.
- Living transient lifestyles.
- Living in chaotic and unsupportive home situations.
- Vulnerable to discrimination and maltreatment on the grounds of race, ethnicity, religion, disability
- At risk of sexual exploitation

Support for those involved in a child protection issues:

Child abuse is devastating for the child or young person and can also result in distress and anxiety for staff, volunteers or church members who become involved. We will support children, young people and their families, staff, volunteers and church members by:

- Taking all suspicions and disclosures seriously.
- Nominating a link person who will keep all parties informed and be the central point of contact.
- Where a member of staff, volunteer or church member is the subject of an allegation made by a child/young person, a person, within the church, if possible, a church member, who has no involvement with the allegation will be appointed to avoid any conflict of interest.
- Responding sympathetically
- Maintaining confidentiality and sharing information on a need-to-know basis only with relevant individuals and agencies.

- Storing records securely.
- Offering details of helplines, counselling or other avenues of external support.
- Following the procedures laid down in our child protection, church's whistleblowing and complaints' policies.
- Cooperating fully with relevant statutory agencies.

Complaints procedure:

This will be followed when someone raises a concern about poor practice towards a child or young person that initially does not reach the threshold for child protection action. Poor practice examples include unfairly singling out a child/young person or attempting to humiliate them, bullying or belittling a child/young person or discriminating against them in some way. Complaints will be dealt with by the church leaders.

Complaints which escalate into a child protection concern will automatically be managed under the child protection procedures.

Whistleblowing:

If you have concerns about a colleague in their conduct towards a child/young person this undoubtedly places you in a very difficult situation. You may worry that you have misunderstood the situation and will wonder whether a report could jeopardise the colleague's future. **All staff, volunteers and church members must remember that the welfare of the child or young person is paramount.** The whistleblowing code enables staff, volunteers and church members to raise concerns or allegations, initially in confidence and for a sensitive enquiry to take place. All concerns of poor practice or possible child abuse by colleagues should be reported to the Designated Senior Person. Complaints about the Designated Senior Person should be reported to the church leaders.

Allegations against staff, volunteers or church members:

A person, with whom children or young people can speak to if they have a concern about the way they are being treated by an adult in the church, will be appointed by the pastor and elders. They will be made aware of whom this person is. When an allegation is made against a member of staff, volunteer or church member, set procedures must be followed. It is rare for a child/young person to make an entirely false or malicious allegation, although misunderstandings and misinterpretations of events do happen. Staff, volunteers or church members who are the subject of an

allegation have the right to have their case dealt with fairly, quickly and consistently and to be kept informed of its progress. Whilst the investigation is being carried out this person will have no contact with the child or young person.

Procedures for managing Child Protection allegations against staff or church members:

The complaints procedure (displayed on the church notice board) will be followed in respect of all cases in which it is alleged that a person who works or has had contact with children has:

• Behaved in a way that has harmed, or may have harmed, a child

• Possibly committed a criminal offence against, or related to, a child;

• Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates s/he is unsuitable to work with children or young people.

What to do if you witness abuse by anyone:

Anyone who witnesses a child being abused by a staff, volunteer or church member (as defined above) must report this immediately to the Designated Senior Person (but not to the person who is the subject of the allegation). It is essential that any concerns are reported immediately as any delay could put a child or young person at further risk or contaminate any reasonable investigation. If the allegation is against the Designated Senior Person, please inform the Pastor or Elders.

What to do if a staff member informs you about an allegation of abuse:

On receipt of an allegation all available information must be documented but you must not investigate the incident. You must inform the Designated Senior Person (but not the person who is the subject of the allegation) who will then take the lead.

Photography and images:

Most people who take or view photographs or videos of children do so for entirely innocent and legitimate reasons. Sadly, some people abuse children through taking or distributing images, so we must ensure that we have some safeguards in place. To protect our children and young people we will:

- Seek their consent for photographs to be taken or published (for example, on the church website or in newspapers or publications).
- Seek parental consent.
- Use only the child or young person's first name with an image.
- Ensure child or young person is appropriately dressed.
- Encourage them to tell us if they are worried about any photographs that are taken of them.

Staff training:

It is important that all staff receive training to enable them to recognise the possible signs of abuse, neglect and exploitation and to know what to do if they have a concern.

This training should be updated every two years.

Recognising abuse:

To ensure that our children and young people are protected from harm, we need to understand what types of behaviour constitute abuse and neglect. Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child or young person by inflicting harm, for example by hitting them, or by failing to act to prevent harm, for example by leaving a small child home alone, or leaving knives or matches within reach of an unattended toddler. Abuse may be committed by adult men or women and by other children and young people.

Categories of abuse:

Physical abuse is a form of abuse which may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child (this used to be called Munchausen's Syndrome by Proxy, but is now more usually referred to as fabricated or induced illness).

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to a child or young person that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child or young person opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations

being imposed on children or young people. These may include interactions that are beyond a child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child or young person participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill - treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyber bullying), causing children or young person frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of them. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child or young person, although it may occur alone.

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not they are aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children or young people looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging them to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming them in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children or young people.

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's or young person's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of their health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- Provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)
- Protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger
- Ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers)
- Ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Bullying between children or young people is not a separate category of abuse and neglect but it is a very serious issue that can cause considerable anxiety and distress. At its most serious level, bullying can have a disastrous effect on a child's wellbeing and in very rare cases has been a feature in the suicide of some young people. All incidences of bullying, including cyber-bullying and prejudice-based bullying should be reported to the Designated Senior Person. If the bullying is particularly serious the Designated Senior Person will consider implementing child protection procedures.

Indicators of abuse:

Physical signs define some types of abuse, for example:

- bruising
- bleeding
- broken bones resulting from physical or sexual abuse, or injuries sustained while a child has been inadequately supervised.

The identification of physical signs is complicated, as children or young people may go to great lengths to hide injuries, often because they are ashamed or embarrassed, or their abuser has threatened further violence or trauma if they 'tell'. It is also quite difficult for anyone without medical training to categorise injuries into accidental or deliberate with any degree of certainty. For these reasons it is vital that staff and church members are also aware of the range of behavioural indicators of abuse and report any concerns to the Designated Senior Person. It is their responsibilty to report their concerns. It is not their responsibility to investigate or decide whether a child or young person has been abused. A child or young person who is being abused, neglected or exploited may:

- Have bruises, bleeding, burns, fractures or other injuries.
- Show signs of pain or discomfort.
- Keep arms and legs covered, even in warm weather.
- Be concerned about changing for PE or swimming.
- Look unkempt and uncared for.
- Change their eating habits.
- Have difficulty in making or sustaining friendships.
- Appear fearful.
- Be reckless with regard to their own or other's safety.
- Self-harm.
- Show signs of not wanting to go home.
- Display a change in behaviour – from quiet to aggressive, or happy-go-lucky to withdrawn.
- Challenge authority.
- Become disinterested
- Be constantly tired or preoccupied.
- Be wary of physical contact.
- Be involved in, or particularly knowledgeable about drugs or alcohol.
- Display sexual knowledge or behaviour beyond that normally expected for their age.

Individual indicators will rarely, in isolation, provide conclusive evidence of abuse. They should be viewed as part of a jigsaw, and each small piece of information will

help the DSP to decide how to proceed. It is very important that staff and church members report their concerns – they do not need 'absolute proof' that the child or young person is at risk.

Impact of abuse:

The impact of child abuse, neglect and exploitation should not be underestimated. Many children do recover well and go on to lead healthy, happy and productive lives, although most adult survivors agree that the emotional scars remain, however well buried. For some children, full recovery is beyond their reach, and the rest of their childhood and their adulthood may be characterised by anxiety or depression, self-harm, eating disorders, alcohol and substance misuse, destructive relationships and long-term medical or psychiatric difficulties.

Taking action:

Any child or young person in any family, in any school, in any church, could become a victim of abuse. Staff and church members should always maintain an attitude of "it could happen here".

Key points for staff and church members to remember for taking action are:

- Report your concern as soon as possible to the DSP, definitely the same day
- Do not start your own investigation.
- Share information on a need-to-know basis only – do not discuss the issue with colleagues, friends or family.
- Complete a report
- Seek support for yourself if you are distressed.

If you are concerned about a child's or young persons' welfare:

There will be occasions when staff may suspect that a child or young person may be at risk, but have no 'real' evidence.

The child's or young person's behaviour may have changed due to a variety of factors, for example, a parent has moved out, a pet has died, a grandparent is very ill or an accident has occurred. It is fine for staff or a church member to ask a child or young person if they are OK or if they can help in any way. They should write down their initial concerns.

If the child or young person does begin to reveal that they are being harmed in any way the member of staff or church member should discuss their concerns with the DSP.

Remember that if a child or young person discloses to you it takes a lot of courage. They may:

- feel ashamed, particularly if the abuse is sexual;
- their abuser may have threatened what will happen if they tell;
- they may have lost all trust in adults;
- they may believe, or have been told, that the abuse is their own fault.

Sometimes they may not be aware that what is happening is abusive. If a child or young person talks to a member of staff or church member about any risks to their safety or wellbeing, they will need to let them know that they must pass the information on – staff or church members are not allowed to keep secrets. The point at which they report this is a matter for professional judgement. If they jump in immediately the child or young person may think that they do not want to listen. If left until the very end of the conversation, they may feel that they have been misled into revealing more than they would have otherwise.

During their conversations with the child or young person, staff or church member will:

• Allow them to speak freely.

• Remain calm and not overreact – the child or young person may stop talking if they feel they are upsetting their listener.

• Give reassuring nods or words of comfort – 'I'm sorry this has happened', 'I want to help', 'This isn't your fault', 'You are doing the right thing in talking to me'.

• Not be afraid of silences – be aware how hard this must be for the child or young person.

• Under no circumstances ask leading questions.

• At an appropriate time tell the child or young person that in order to help them, the member of staff or church member must pass the information on **and explain to whom and why.**

• Not automatically offer any physical touch as comfort. It may be anything but comforting to a child or young person who has been abused.

• Avoid admonishing the child or young person for not disclosing earlier. Saying things such as 'I do wish you had told me about this when it started' or 'I can't believe what I'm hearing' may be the staff member's way of being supportive but may be interpreted by the child or young person to mean that they have done something wrong.

• Tell the child or young person what will happen next. The child or young person may agree to go to see the Designated Senior Person. Otherwise let them know that someone will come to see them as soon as possible. • Report verbally to the DSP even if the child or young person has promised to do it by themselves.

• Write up their conversation as soon as possible and hand it to the designated person.

Notifying parents:

The church will normally seek to discuss any concerns about a child or young person with their parents. This must be handled sensitively and the DSP will make contact with the parent in the event of a concern, suspicion or disclosure.

If the church believes that notifying parents could increase the risk to the child or young person or exacerbate the problem, advice will first be sought from children's social care.

Referral to children's social care:

The DSP will make a referral to children's social care if a concern is raised that a child or young person is suffering or may be at risk of suffering significant harm. The child or young person (subject to their age and understanding) and the parents will be told that a referral is being made, unless to do so would increase the risk to the child or young person.

Conclusion:

As a church we will have these words from Proverbs 22 v6 (KJV) always in our minds:

"Train up a child in the way he should go: even when he is old he will not depart from it".

Amended: October 2024