



## ***Safeguarding vulnerable adults in churches***

Adapted excerpt from 'Guidance for Christian Faith Organisations in the Support and Value of Older People' by Prof. Keith Brown and Karen Grimshaw available free through Faith in Later Life.

### **Who is an adult at risk?**

'Adults at Risk' includes those who are living with severe and enduring mental illness. Have learning disabilities or autism, are known to have severe physical disabilities or sensory impairments, live with Dementia, struggle with substance misuse and addiction, live alone who are lonely and isolated, or are homeless, have no fixed abode or are seeking asylum.

People may be 'at risk' for different, sometimes overlapping, reasons. Churches are often in a position to support and protect people. Safeguarding adults at risk means protecting an individual's right to live in safety. It requires organisations working together to prevent and stop both the risks and experience. It involves supporting people to protect themselves, where possible, enabling them to make informed choices and take control of their own lives. Safeguarding adults is not only about the prevention of abuse and protection from harm – it is also about making sure that the individual's wellbeing is promoted and their views, wishes, feeling and beliefs are respected.

### **Where are older adults at risk or abuse or neglect?**

Categories of adult abuse, as defined by the Care Act (2014) include:

- Physical harm - assault, misuse of medication, neglect of care.
- Psychological/emotional abuse - harassment, bullying, exploitation, scamming.
- Sexual - unwanted sexual attention, sexual interference or rape.
- Financial exploitation and scamming - through fraud, scams from individuals or organised scamming.
- Institutional or organisational abuse - lack of care, neglect, physical or sexual abuse.
- Discrimination causing harm - hate crimes, discrimination on the basis of race, age, gender, sexuality, disability.
- Neglect - harm caused by lack of appropriate care, mismanagement of medication, lack of food, inappropriate care to manage known safety risks.

Some individuals living in the fourth age may be struggling to manage independently at home and reluctant to seek or receive care, which risks self-neglect through:

- Lack of self-care, personal hygiene or living conditions which pose a threat to personal health and safety.
- Behaviours which cause self-harm or pose a threat to own personal health and safety.
- Failure to manage one's own personal affairs safely to seek help and support or follow medical care/advice.
- Hoarding or neglect of property leading to safety issues.

## The role of churches

The Mental Capacity Act (2005) requires all organisations to take practicable steps to help those individuals who lack mental capacity to make their own decisions, which may include older people who may be at risk of the kinds of abuse and neglect described above, of emotional/psychological abuse, fraud/scamming or exploitation by others.

Churches are often in a good position to offer support, prayer, information and guidance to older people facing difficult decisions – to support them to make their own decisions, without interfering with the decision-making process (see other guidance about Advance Care and End of Life, for example). Where there are concerns, churches should support the person and their family (if appropriate), and work with other agencies and statutory organisations, to ensure that appropriate action is taken and the right support is provided. They have a moral and ethical obligation to keep safe older adults who may be at risk of abuse and a statutory duty to respond, report and refer any concerns or disclosure of abuse, neglect or exploitation

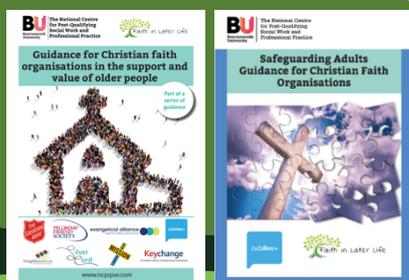
Churches and other Christian faith organisations should have appropriate processes and procedures in place to ensure they meet their ethical responsibilities and statutory duties:

- Publish a safeguarding policy, roles and procedures in line with local authority standards.
- Identify a nominated safeguarding co-ordinator – including both children and adults.
- Provide safeguarding awareness training to all those working/volunteering with children and adults at risk.
- Have in place Safer Recruitment processes – to ensure appropriate checks and supervision for all paid and voluntary workers.
- Provide pastoral care and support for any adult at risk of abuse, harm to themselves or who pose a risk to others.
- Create an open and inclusive culture, with a focus on identifying risks of abuse, early response to concerns and partnership working/reporting to local authority if needed.

Individuals can help by:

- Signposting to statutory services and voluntary organisations
- Developing relationship and trust, so those at risk accept help, follow advice from health & social care services and make good decisions regarding their self-care and independence
- taking positive action to meet the needs of those at risk, and offer advice and support
- raising awareness of the risks and types of abuse
- support older people to improve or resolve situations which may be putting them at risk
- encourage and empower people to take action to address any safeguarding concerns or situations and work with them and the statutory agencies, to ensure outcomes the older person would wish for. If we know older people at risk, do we know how to refer for help?

**Download full guidance free at [www.faithinlaterlife.org](http://www.faithinlaterlife.org)**



Adapted excerpt of 'Guidance for Christian Faith Organisations in the Support and Value of Older People' by Prof. Keith Brown and Karen Grimshaw, available free through Faith in Later Life. **Faith in Later Life inspires and equips Christians and churches to reach, serve and empower older people.** [www.faithinlaterlife.org](http://www.faithinlaterlife.org), Registered Charity 1186661, [info@faithinlaterlife.org](mailto:info@faithinlaterlife.org)