

Update from the National Safeguarding Team regarding COVID-19

As the [Archbishops of Canterbury and York have said](#), the Church's life together will look very different over the coming period. In particular, the Archbishops have urged the Church to continue to meet the needs of vulnerable people in our communities. The National Safeguarding Team has outlined some brief safeguarding advice based on national guidance, to go alongside advice already being offered by Diocesan Safeguarding Advisers (DSAs).

We hope this will assist dioceses, cathedrals, religious communities and parishes in ensuring that during these challenging times good safeguarding practice continues to be observed.

The [Local Government Association](#) (LGA) has warned of strangers and cold callers trying to exploit the elderly and vulnerable while we all try to meet the challenge of COVID-19. We must be alert, support our communities and ensure our outreach and ministry continues to be compassionate and safe.

We hope the guidance below will assist in ensuring everyone remains as safe as possible during these unprecedented circumstances, which we expect to continue for some time. The 'frequently asked questions' (FAQs) will be made available online in due course and will be updated as further queries and information become available.

Please be aware that this is an evolving situation, with government departments providing updated information on an almost daily basis. Advice and responses to FAQs will be updated as new guidance is provided from the government.

Key points:

- Keep up to date with the latest information from the government regarding [COVID-19](#).
- [National safeguarding policies and practice guidance](#) remain in effect and this note is based on them.
- If you have safeguarding concerns about a child or adult, contact your DSA within 24 hours. If a child or adult is in immediate danger or requires medical attention, call the police and/or social services immediately.
- We would encourage everyone who can help others to let their family, friends and neighbours know if they are available and what they can do to help, whilst following government advice.
- As the Archbishops have noted, there are many encouraging schemes happening right now. Do reach out to local foodbanks who will need support at this time¹.
- Remember to consider government guidance regarding [social distancing](#) and [shielding](#) for those who are at increased risk from severe illness. Anyone who has been particularly advised by the government to stay at home should be encouraged to do so.
- The government has produced some helpful guidance about [helping safely](#).
- There are additional issues to consider if your church/cathedral takes responsibility for organising a volunteering service. We have been advised by the [Office for Civil Society](#) that new government guidance regarding organised volunteer services is being prepared and will be available in the coming days. When this information is available the NST will provide further updates. In the interim, current regulations remain in place.
- Your church/cathedral may already have many volunteers who were previously safely recruited for other roles. You may wish to 're-deploy' existing volunteers, who were previously safely recruited, into new voluntary roles to help in the community.

¹ Check local council websites for your nearest food bank. Many are run by the [Trussell Trust](#).

Version: 30.03.2020

- Do ensure you continue to follow [Safer Recruitment](#) practice if welcoming new volunteers to church-run activities.
- Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) renewals must still take place when required. The DBS has provided [updated information](#) regarding identity checks in light of COVID-19, and updated [FAQs](#). The NST will provide any further relevant information from the DBS as it becomes available.

FAQs

1. Our church/cathedral would like to help people who are self-isolating with shopping and other essentials. What do we need to be aware of?

Please note: We have been advised by the [Office for Civil Society](#) that new government guidance regarding organised volunteer services is being prepared and will be available in the coming days. When this information is available the NST will provide further updates. In the interim, current regulations remain in place.

Individuals

Wherever possible people who are self-isolating are being encouraged to ask for help from family, friends, and neighbours. We would encourage everyone who can help others to let their family, friends and neighbours know if they are available and what they can do to help, whilst following government advice. The government has produced some guidance about [helping safely](#).

Check your [local council website](#) to see what support is available or being set up in your area and how members of your church may be able to assist.

The [Archbishops](#) have particularly highlighted the need to support food banks during this difficult time. Many may need additional volunteers or donations. Check the website of your local council to find out about food banks in your area. Many are run by the Trussell Trust, see their [website](#) for more information on how to help.

There is some helpful information for individuals wishing to help neighbours on the National Council for Voluntary Organisations [website](#), as well as helping older neighbours and friends/family on the Age UK [website](#). Age UK also have information about their 'Neighbourly Volunteering' service, including a short helpful [video](#) about what to consider.

Remember to consider government guidance regarding [social distancing](#), and guidance regarding [shielding](#) for those who are extremely vulnerable. Anyone who has been particularly advised by the government to stay at home should be encouraged to do so.

If someone declines help, it is important to accept their choice. There may be many reasons for this. The LGA has advised that anyone who is stuck without food or medical supplies and does not have any friends and family or neighbours that they know in the area can contact their local council for support.

If you have safeguarding concerns about a child or adult, contact your DSA within 24 hours. If a child or adult is in immediate danger or requires medical attention, call the police and/or social services immediately.

Organised volunteering

If your church/cathedral is taking responsibility for organising a volunteering service (rather than people helping neighbours or family as private citizens), then you must follow usual safeguarding policies and practice guidance. These include [Safer Recruitment](#) (which also applies to volunteers), the [Parish Safeguarding Handbook](#) and [Safer Environment and Activities](#) (which provides helpful information about safely leading activities). The DSA must be consulted for advice.

There is also government guidance about [planning the coordination of spontaneous volunteers in emergencies](#). Although it is primarily written for agencies involved in emergency planning, it helpfully highlights different aspects you may wish to consider.

An online group called [Covid-19 Mutual Aid](#) (run by volunteers) has some interesting resources, including aspects of planning and safeguarding you also may wish to consider.

When you are supporting people in the community, do follow the risk assessment guidance within [Safer Environment and Activities](#) (page 11 onwards), and remember:

- Follow all [government guidance](#) regarding COVID-19, including in relation to contact with others and [helping safely](#).
- Consider how your church/cathedral may safely offer 'non-contact' outreach such as phone calls or supporting existing local foodbanks with donations.
- If appropriate to visit people's homes/doorsteps, where possible this should take place in pairs. Follow guidance in [Safer Environment and Activities](#) (page 23 onwards), which includes other information about home visits. Remember to follow government guidance regarding [social distancing](#). In most cases it will only be appropriate to visit doorsteps.
- If you have safeguarding concerns about a child or adult, contact your DSA within 24 hours. If a child or adult is in immediate danger or requires medical attention, call the police and/or social services immediately.
- Your church/cathedral may already have many volunteers who were previously safely recruited for other roles. You may wish to 're-deploy' them into new voluntary roles to help in the community. Speak to your DSA for advice.
- Do ensure you continue to follow [Safer Recruitment](#) practice if welcoming new volunteers to church-run activities.
- It may be helpful to have an existing volunteer support a new volunteer when undertaking their volunteer duties (whilst maintaining [social distancing](#)).
- The Disclosure and Barring Service has published [FAQs](#) in relation to community work and COVID-19.
- Some voluntary roles may not be eligible for an enhanced DBS check because the types of activity they will be undertaking don't meet the relevant legal requirements for eligibility. More information is available in [Safer Recruitment](#). Even if individuals are not eligible for an enhanced DBS check, you can still seek references; request CVs/application forms and interview someone to assess their suitability for a role. There are lots of templates available to help (see Appendices in [Safer Recruitment](#)).
- There are some types of activity where an enhanced DBS check (with barring information) is required. This particularly relates to those roles which work/engage closely with children or adults at risk. Check [Safer Recruitment](#) for more information, and speak with your HR Advisor or Diocesan Registrar if you are unsure.
- [Foundation Safeguarding training](#) is available online to all.

Q2. Members of our church/cathedral would like to look after other people's children who are not at school because their school has closed, what do we need to consider?

First, follow all [government guidance](#) regarding COVID-19 and contact with others, including [social distancing](#). Be aware of [government guidance](#) in relation to school and care provision for the children of 'key workers'. Many may be able to still access school or nursery provision.

If your church/cathedral is co-ordinating any arrangements (rather than private arrangements being made between individuals), then you must follow the usual safeguarding policies and practice guidance. These include [Safer Recruitment](#) (which also applies to volunteers), the [Parish Safeguarding Handbook](#) and [Safer Environment and Activities](#) (page 17 onwards includes specific guidance around children's activities). Consult your Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor for advice.

Be aware that there are [legal requirements](#) that relate to looking after other people's children. The Childcare Act 2006 states that childcare is 'any form of care for a child, including education or any other supervised activity'. Most people caring for children under eight years old for more than two hours a day in England must register with Ofsted or a childminder agency. It is a criminal offence to provide unregistered childcare, or on unapproved premises, if you are legally required to register. There are some exemptions for registration which can be found [here](#). More information is also available from [Ofsted](#).

Q3. How will this affect the renewal of DBS checks for all clergy and relevant church officers?

[Safer Recruitment](#) and [Safer Recruitment – Permission to Officiate](#) remain in effect and checks on DBS renewal must still take place. The DBS has provided [updated information](#) regarding identity checks in light of COVID-19. The change will enable:

- ID documents to be viewed over video link
- scanned images to be used in advance of the DBS check being submitted

The applicant will be required to present the original versions of these documents when they first attend their employment or volunteering role.

The DBS has also published [FAQs](#) regarding DBS checks and COVID-19.

The DBS Contact Centre also has [amended opening hours](#), although as of 24th March 2020, the contact centre is temporarily [closed](#). The NST will provide any further relevant information from the DBS as it becomes available.

If it is still not possible for someone to renew their DBS whilst [self-isolating or shielding](#), even in the light of the new arrangements provided by the DBS, then unfortunately the PTO will need to lapse until the DBS can be renewed. Clear records of any clergy to whom this applies should be kept. Once the individual is no longer self-isolating, the DBS may be applied for and the PTO renewed, subject to all other criteria being met.