

# Appropriate Boundaries

## Safeguarding Guidance for Workers & Volunteers

**Foundation principle:** Safeguarding is a core Christian activity. It is built on an understanding of the **dynamics of power and vulnerability** in relationships. Anyone in a church role, paid or unpaid, holds a degree of trust and authority over others. This must always be used to **serve and empower**, *never to exploit or create dependency*. (*Safer Environment & Activities, 2019, p.6*)

### This guidance applies across all St Mary's ministries

<b>ignite</b> Children & youth (0-18)	<b>Connect</b> Community space; open to all	<b>Cafe Hope</b> Incl. additional needs volunteers
<b>Hope Central</b> 18-30 ministry	<b>Lifegroups</b> Small group pastoral contexts	<b>Prayer Ministry</b> Mostly 1:1 prayer
<b>Pastoral Visiting</b> Home visits	<b>Alpha</b> Enquirers & new believers	<b>All church contexts</b> Including informal & online

### Positions of Responsibility

The following roles carry inherent power and must be exercised with particular care:

- Clergy and licensed/authorised lay ministers
- ignite leaders, children's & youth workers
- Leaders of groups involving vulnerable adults
- Pastoral home visitors and authorised listeners
- Prayer ministry team members
- Lifegroup leaders
- Worship leaders
- **Note:** other roles not listed above, however informal, also carry perceived authority in the eyes of visitors, children and vulnerable adults

### Power & Appropriate Boundaries

- **Be aware** of the power your role gives you; it operates even subtly
- **Empower** those you serve; avoid creating dependency or intimacy beyond your role
- Do not bully, coerce, exploit or undermine anyone in your care
- Those seeking help are often distressed: **extra care applies** in these moments
- Church relationships are less formal than other settings; this makes boundaries *more*, not less, important
- Sexual activity between an adult worker and a 16-17 year old is **a serious safeguarding breach**, regardless of legal consent age

### Online & Digital Boundaries

- Avoid one-to-one messaging with children or vulnerable adults
- Use **official group accounts** (e.g. ignite or Hope Central page), not personal profiles
- More than one leader should have access to any group account
- Conversations should happen in **visible/public areas** of platforms
- Do not 'friend' youth (under 18) on personal social media
- Behave online exactly as you would offline
- Never share personal mobile numbers with youth without PSO permission
- Copy PSO into any direct digital communication with under-18s

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## Confidentiality Boundaries

- **Never promise total confidentiality** to a child or vulnerable adult
- The standard line: *“This conversation is confidential, unless what you tell me suggests that you or someone else is at risk of harm.”*
- Say this at the **start** of any sensitive pastoral conversation
- Report any safeguarding concern to the PSO within **24 hours**; if there is immediate risk of harm, call **999** without delay
- Do not share information beyond the PSO / Vicar without their direction

## Home Visiting (Pastoral Care)



See [Friends Home Visiting Checklist](#) and [Church Pastoral Team Home Visiting Checklist](#)

- Give advance notice before visiting, especially for first visits
- **Visit in pairs** where possible, especially for first visits
- Carry identification; be proactive in showing it
- Tell someone your location and expected return time
- Record the visit: date, time, and significant points (share if asked)
- Do not over-promise or create a dependent relationship
- Declare any gifts (other than token items) to a churchwarden or PCC Treasurer
- Keep receipts for any purchases made on someone’s behalf

## Vulnerable Adults — Key Principles

- Focus on **abilities and gifts**, not only on needs
- Promote inclusion and participation in all aspects of church life
- Work in ways that **empower** adults to remain in control of their own lives
- Principle: *“No decision about me, without me”* (Care Act 2014)
- Be alert to signs of financial, emotional, spiritual or domestic abuse
- Additional needs workers (e.g. Cafe Hope): same boundaries apply as all roles

## Physical Contact — Quick Reference

 <b>Never</b>	 <b>Always</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Initiate or solicit physical contact with a child or vulnerable adult</li><li>• Contact outside safe zones: hands, forearms, shoulders, upper back</li><li>• Rough or physical play (e.g. playfighting, wrestling)</li><li>• Enter a toilet cubicle with a child (without written parental consent)</li><li>• Do not change nappies unless permission has been given by parents; if not, call parents to do so</li><li>• Be alone with a child in an enclosed, unseen space</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Any touch should be in response to the child's or person's need — never initiated by the worker</li><li>• Ensure at least two adults are present with children at all times (maintaining appropriate adult:child ratios)</li><li>• Report unwanted contact initiated by a child to the PSO</li><li>• In prayer ministry: ask before laying on hands; respect any refusal</li><li>• Keep any incidental touch (e.g. handshakes, the Peace) brief, congregational and never in a private or unseen setting</li><li>• Apply same principles in online ministry contexts</li></ul>

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**Concerns**  
Report to PSO within  
**24 hours**

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