

A Brief Guide to Safeguarding in Pastoral Relationships



Boundaries in relationships were once clearly symbolised by language, dress and behaviour but in today's far more relaxed and informal social culture we may need to take extra care in our pastoral relationships to avoid misunderstandings.

Pastoral encounters that are informal, unstructured, unpredictable or about which little is known, can't be avoided – but there is more potential for ambiguity, manipulation or misinterpretation in these encounters. However, this spontaneity and flexibility doesn't mean you can't think ahead or plan for things that may happen.

Always be aware that the relationship between a person in a position of responsibility in church and those they offer care or support to is one of power and influence – it is not a relationship between equals.

Working Safely

BOUNDARIES

- If you're offering pastoral care, *you* are responsible for the setting, communicating and maintaining of open, transparent and accountable boundaries
- The forms of communication may be different - but the same principles apply to both social media and face to face pastoral encounters
- Don't share pastoral confidentialities in other contexts without permission or a justifiable and valid reason – such as a concern for the person's welfare, to seek advice or, when justifiable, a review with colleagues

Always take a moment to reflect on

how what you do could be perceived by others

- If you feel uncomfortable, anxious or afraid of a pastoral encounter, things are more likely to go wrong - don't proceed - seek help and support

OVER-SHARING

Sharing personal experiences can help deepen an awareness of faith or understanding or empathy - but the pastoral relationship must not be used to unburden personal difficulties. Such over-sharing can create a sense of a 'special' or 'private' relationship so that it becomes less pastoral and more personal. Or it can overwhelm and cause anxiety to the person receiving the pastoral care

**Pastoral relationships can be challenging
– ensure you receive appropriate supervision and support**



FRIEND OR PASTOR?

- In order to maintain appropriate boundaries, you cannot be both friend and pastor
- Where there is both a pastoral and friendship relationship, pass the pastoral relationship to someone else and be a friend
- Personal relationships must not be allowed to compromise your safeguarding responsibilities – sometimes you may need to report concerns that you hear about as a friend

OVER-INVOLVEMENT

Be self-aware – of how your own needs and vulnerabilities - and how the needs and vulnerabilities of the person being offered pastoral care – may affect the pastoral relationship or lead to over-involvement in trying to meet them

Sometimes the decision not to continue

– or even begin - pastoral care is the right one

If you or the person being cared for is becoming over involved, gently reinforce the boundaries of the relationship and draw others into the pastoral care of the person - seek advice and supervision. Take care not to send a message of 'rejection'

Signs *you* may be becoming over-involved:

- You're always thinking about the person
- You find excuses to see the person
- You talk about yourself more
- You exchange significant or personal gifts
- You take more care over your appearance
- You seek or allow unnecessary physical contact

Any sexual encounter (physical and non-contact) in a pastoral relationship is sexual abuse because of the inherent inequality of power in the relationship. The person offering the pastoral care always carries the responsibility for safeguarding sexual and emotional boundaries

VISITING

- Be clear about why you are visiting someone, to make it easier to set boundaries
- Find out as much as you can about a visit before you go so you can assess the risks and decide if it's safe to go alone - be alert to the increased risks of visiting a vulnerable adult, or an adult determined to lack capacity, on your own
- Make an appointment – don't just turn up
- Carry ID with you – preferably something from your Church 'authorising' you
- Agree how long the meeting will be
- Tell someone when and where you're going – and when you get back

- Balance the need for privacy against the need to be seen by someone else – whenever possible meet in a public space
- If you feel uncomfortable or unsafe - don't proceed - or leave as soon as possible
- Be aware of your exit routes and have a way to summon help or raise the alarm – e.g. a charged mobile phone, an agreed emergency 'code' to alert someone else
- Never:
 - Buy for, offer or administer medicines
 - Accept anything other than small token gifts
 - Take anything you don't need for the visit with you
- Regularly review visits with co-leaders and seek support or supervision when a relationship is complex or problematic – anonymise as appropriate

**Seek to minimise risk – but it may not always
be possible to ensure 100% safety all of the time**

TOUCH

- People can be held without physical touch through attention and careful listening
- The pastoral care relationship is one of unequal power and any touch in this context may leave the receiver feeling conflicted, confused or uncomfortable or be experienced as manipulative, coercive or frightening
- The pastor must always seek explicit permission before touching and it must be clear that the person has complete freedom to refuse
- Touch in a pastoral situation must never be to meet your own needs



Record & Report

- Not every pastoral encounter will need to be recorded
- Keep a log of visits and more significant pastoral encounters
- Start to record a pastoral encounter as soon as it begins to cause you concern
- Ensure the record is kept securely and confidentially in accordance with your church's Data Protection Policy
- **ALWAYS** keep a record of, and report, safeguarding concerns, disclosures and allegations. Sign and date the record and pass it to your Parish Safeguarding Co-ordinator

For more information on working safely see The Church of England's Safer Environment & Activities Guidance and Code of Safer Working Practice at <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/policy-and-practice-guidance>