

Anti Bullying Behaviour Policy

1. Policy Statement

Waringstown Presbyterian Church recognises its responsibility to provide a church environment that reflects the love, justice, compassion and dignity of Jesus Christ. As a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI), we are committed to ensuring that all people who participate in the life and ministry of the Church are treated with respect, fairness and care.

Context

This Anti-Bullying Behaviour Policy has been developed in line with the recently updated safeguarding policies and procedures issued by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland for Northern Ireland congregations and ministries. These updated procedures, approved by the General Assembly in 2025, emphasise the importance of safeguarding, accountability, safe leadership, zero tolerance of abuse, and the creation of environments where all individuals can participate free from harm, intimidation, harassment or coercive behaviour.

The PCI safeguarding procedures affirm that safeguarding is central to the mission and witness of the Church and that every congregation must establish and maintain safe, welcoming and nurturing environments for all who engage with its ministries. While bullying behaviour may not always meet the threshold of statutory abuse, it can nevertheless cause significant emotional, psychological, spiritual and relational harm. Such behaviour is inconsistent with Christian discipleship and with the standards expected within the life of the Church.

Theological and Pastoral Basis

As a Christian community, we believe that every person is created in the image of God and therefore possesses inherent worth, dignity and value. Scripture calls believers to:

- "Love one another deeply, from the heart" (1 Peter 1:22)
- "Be kind and compassionate to one another" (Ephesians 4:32)
- "Carry each other's burdens" (Galatians 6:2)
- "Act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8)

The Church has both a pastoral and moral responsibility to prevent bullying behaviour, respond appropriately when concerns arise, and support those affected.

Connection to PCI Safeguarding Policies and Procedures

This policy should be read alongside:

- PCI Safeguarding Children (NI) Procedures
- PCI Adult Safeguarding (NI) Procedures
- PCI Codes of Behaviour and Safe Working Practices
- PCI Recruitment, Selection and Vetting Procedures
- PCI Complaints and Disciplinary Procedures
- Relevant congregational safeguarding policies and risk assessments

Zero Tolerance of Harm

PCI promotes a “zero-tolerance approach to abuse” and expects all congregations to actively prevent harm within church settings. Bullying behaviour, whether verbal, emotional, relational, physical, online or discriminatory, is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

Safe and Welcoming Environments

PCI safeguarding standards require congregations to create and maintain environments that are welcoming, nurturing and safe for everyone. This includes children, young people, adults at risk, volunteers, employees, leaders and members of the wider community.

Accountability and Good Practice

The PCI procedures emphasise accountability, proper leadership conduct, clear reporting structures and the importance of responding promptly and compassionately to concerns. This policy supports those expectations by establishing clear behavioural standards and procedures for reporting and addressing bullying concerns.

Equality, Inclusion and Respect

PCI safeguarding guidance recognises that some individuals may be additionally vulnerable due to age, disability, previous experiences, communication needs or other personal circumstances. Bullying behaviour directed toward any individual or group on the basis of personal characteristics, vulnerability or perceived difference is contrary to the values of the Church.

Shared Responsibility

Safeguarding guidance states that everyone within the Church has a responsibility for protecting others from harm. Preventing bullying behaviour is therefore a shared responsibility involving ministers, elders, staff, volunteers, leaders, parents, carers and members of the congregation.

Definition of Bullying Behaviour

For the purposes of this policy, bullying behaviour may be defined as repeated or intentional behaviour by an individual or group that hurts, intimidates, humiliates, threatens, excludes, undermines or causes distress to another person.

Bullying may include:

- Verbal abuse, insults or mocking
- Threatening or intimidating behaviour
- Deliberate exclusion or isolation
- Gossiping or spreading malicious rumours
- Misuse of power or authority
- Online or social media harassment
- Discriminatory language or behaviour
- Physical intimidation or aggression
- Spiritual manipulation or coercion
- Persistent criticism designed to humiliate or undermine

Bullying can occur in person, online, during church activities, in leadership settings, within pastoral relationships, through electronic communication or on social media platforms associated with church life.

Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Promote a culture of dignity, respect and healthy relationships within the congregation
- Prevent bullying behaviour in all church ministries and activities
- Provide clear expectations regarding acceptable conduct
- Encourage early reporting of concerns
- Ensure concerns are responded to fairly, sensitively and appropriately
- Support individuals who experience bullying behaviour
- Protect children, young people and adults who may be particularly vulnerable
- Assist the congregation in meeting its safeguarding and governance responsibilities under PCI procedures

Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to:

- Ministers and church leaders
- Kirk Session members
- Employees and volunteers
- Children's and youth organisations
- Members and adherents of the congregation
- Church committees and organisations
- Visitors participating in church activities
- Online and digital communication connected to church life

The policy applies to all church-related activities, whether taking place on church premises, in homes, online, during events, trips, outreach ministries or any other setting connected to the work and witness of the congregation.

Commitment of the Congregation

Waringstown Presbyterian Church is committed to:

- Creating a culture where all people are valued and respected
- Challenging bullying behaviour whenever it occurs
- Listening carefully and compassionately to concerns
- Responding appropriately, proportionately and promptly
- Following PCI safeguarding and reporting procedures where necessary
- Supporting those affected by bullying behaviour
- Ensuring leaders and volunteers understand expected standards of conduct
- Reviewing this policy regularly in line with PCI guidance and legislative developments

Kirk Session

It is the responsibility of the Kirk Session, in liaison with the Minister, to monitor the effectiveness of the Anti-Bullying Policy.

The Kirk Session will:

- Maintain a standing item on the agenda of each meeting where a report on Safeguarding and recorded incidents of bullying will be noted
- Identify priorities for action
- Assess the effectiveness of strategies aimed at preventing bullying behaviour
- Assess the effectiveness of strategies aimed at responding to bullying behaviour
- Engage with Safeguarding training as appropriate
- Ensure that this Policy is reviewed at least every three years.

Leaders will:

- Foster and cultivate self worth, self and mutual respect within the church family.
- Model high standards of personal social behaviour
- Be alert to signs of distress and other possible indications of bullying behaviour
- Explain the implications to young people of allowing bullying behaviour to continue unchecked for themselves and others
- Emphasise the importance of seeking help from a trusted adult about bullying behaviour when it happens or is observed.
- Listen sensitively to anyone who has been bullied, take what is said seriously, and provide reassurance that appropriate action will be taken
- Ensure that young people know how to seek support.
- Resolve difficulties in restorative ways to prevent recurring bullying behaviour and meet the needs of all parties.

Vulnerable People

Waringstown Presbyterian recognises that bullying behaviours can happen to anyone; however, we also acknowledge that some groups may be more vulnerable to experiencing or exhibiting such behaviours. This includes people with Special Educational Needs and/or disabilities, and those from minority ethnic or cultural backgrounds. We recognise that some people may, often without intention and due to their individual needs, display behaviours that could be perceived as bullying.

We understand that these behaviours may stem from difficulties in communication, emotional regulation, or social understanding. Therefore, we are committed to providing tailored support and interventions that help support people develop empathy, self-awareness, and positive relationship skills. We also recognise that children with additional needs may require extra guidance to understand how their actions and words can impact others. Our approach is rooted in compassion, early intervention, and restorative practices, ensuring that everyone is supported in learning how to interact respectfully and safely within our church family.

Responding to a bullying concern

Below is a framework of how the church will respond to a bullying incident. As bullying incidents vary greatly it is impossible to set down a rigid procedure. However, if a leader becomes aware of an incident of bullying behaviour they should follow the procedure below:

The leader of the organisation will:

- Clarify facts and perceptions
- Check records
- Identify any themes or motivating factors
- Identify the type of bullying behaviour displayed
- Inform the relevant members of the congregation (parents/carers)
Select and implement appropriate interventions for all those involved.
- Track, monitor and record effectiveness of interventions
- Review outcome of interventions
- Select and implement further interventions as necessary

The Kirk Session plays a central leadership role in fostering a church culture that actively prevents and addresses bullying. They must ensure this policy is implemented effectively and consistently across all areas of church life. They should promote an ethos where respect, inclusion, and kindness are embedded in daily practice. They should lead by example in modelling respectful and inclusive behaviour. Leaders should be supported in using restorative and supportive approaches when dealing with incidents.

Parents and carers have the responsibility of raising any concerns about alleged bullying behaviours at the earliest opportunity. It should also be noted that it is the responsibility of parents/carers to encourage their children to react appropriately to bullying behaviour and not to do anything to retaliate or to “hit back”.

Recording

Through the use of the Record a Concern form, Waringstown Presbyterian will keep a written record of all relevant information related to alleged incidents of bullying concerns including:

- How the bullying behaviour was displayed (the method)
- The motivation (if known) for the behaviour
- How each incident was addressed and supported by leaders
- The outcome of the interventions employed.

Records will be kept on the online secure system. Access to these records will be restricted and only provided to those members of the safeguarding team with a legitimate need to have access.

Monitoring and Review

Waringstown Presbyterian will ensure that this policy is reviewed within three years, in line with guidance or is reviewed following new guidance, revised procedures or changes in legislation.

Policy Review and Governance

This policy will be reviewed regularly by Kirk Session alongside the congregation's safeguarding arrangements and in accordance with PCI safeguarding procedures and best practice guidance.

The congregation acknowledges that safeguarding guidance and legal expectations continue to develop and commits itself to implementing any future updates issued by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, statutory safeguarding agencies or relevant authorities in Northern Ireland.

This policy is to be implemented under the authority of Holy Scripture and in accordance with the Confessional Standards of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Policy Approved By: Kirk Session of Waringstown Presbyterian Church

Date of Approval: June 2026

Next Review Date: June 2027