



Child Safeguarding Policy

"It is the policy of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to safeguard all children and young people interacting with its ministry in any form. This includes actively protecting children from all forms of harm or abuse ... Safeguarding is imperative for our denomination and a central component to our mission; when we do it well, we are proclaiming the excellencies of our Lord Jesus."

(Child Safeguarding Policy, June 2025, PCI)

1. Policy Statement

Waringstown Presbyterian Church is fully committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare and wellbeing of all who participate in the life and work of the congregation. This includes children, young people, and adults who may be at risk of harm.

Safeguarding is central to our Christian faith and witness. We believe that every person is made in the image of God and deserves dignity, respect, protection, and care.

We recognise our duty of care to protect individuals from harm, abuse, neglect, or exploitation and to create a safe, welcoming, respectful, and nurturing environment in which all can participate fully and confidently.

This policy operates in accordance with the safeguarding procedures and expectations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) and relevant safeguarding legislation in Northern Ireland.

This policy applies to all church activities, whether on church premises, off-site, residential, online, or during transport.

2. Scope of the Policy

This safeguarding policy applies to:

- The Minister
- Kirk Session members and leadership
- Designated Safeguarding Personnel

- Paid staff
- Volunteers
- Young helpers (aged 16–17)
- Children and young people (under 18 years)
- Adults, including adults who may be at risk
- All organisations, ministries, and activities of Waringstown Presbyterian Church

This includes:

- Children's groups
- Youth groups
- Overnight residential activities
- Pastoral visiting
- Community outreach ministries
- Online and digital ministries
- Worship services and events
- Transport connected with church activities

3. Definitions

Child / Young Person

Anyone under the age of 18 years.

Adult at Risk

An adult who may be vulnerable to harm due to age, disability, illness, mental health needs, or personal circumstances.

Safeguarding

The action taken to promote welfare and protect children and adults at risk from harm, abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

Designated Person (DP)

The person appointed to lead safeguarding practice within the congregation in accordance with PCI guidance.

Deputy Designated Person (DDP)

The person appointed to support the DP and act in their absence.

Abuse may include:

- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect

- Financial abuse
- Domestic abuse
- Spiritual abuse
- Institutional abuse
- Online abuse
- Exploitation

4. Safeguarding Principles

Waringstown Presbyterian Church adopts and implements the Safeguarding Procedures of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as approved by the General Assembly.

We are committed to the following safeguarding principles:

- Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.
- The welfare of children and adults at risk is paramount.
- Prevention of harm is better than response to harm.
- All concerns are taken seriously.
- Individuals are treated with dignity and respect.
- Confidentiality is respected but never promised.
- Safeguarding practice is transparent, accountable, and consistent.
- The voices of children and adults will be heard and respected.
- Safe recruitment and safe working practices are essential.
- We will respond promptly and appropriately to concerns.

5. Safeguarding Governance and Responsibilities

Designated Safeguarding Personnel

Designated Person (DP):

Sarah Irwin (IRWIN)

Mary Boyce (BOYCE)

The Designated Person(s) and safeguarding team are responsible for:

- Acting as the main point of contact for safeguarding concerns (DPs)
- Ensuring safeguarding procedures are followed
- Maintaining confidential safeguarding records
- Liaising with PCI Safeguarding Services
- Liaising with statutory agencies when required
- Supporting leaders and volunteers in safeguarding matters
- Monitoring safeguarding compliance
- Supporting safe recruitment procedures

- Keeping their own training up to date.
- Must review the congregational policy and procedures for safeguarding and update Kirk Session on any changes required at any time
- Must keep an active list of volunteers, their AccessNI vetting and training dates with the support from admin personnel within the congregation.
- Must ensure that all volunteers have access to the policy and procedures, and have attended training
- Must ensure that they are keeping Kirk Session apprised of any safeguarding issues
- Must raise concerns if they believe Kirk Session is not attending to its safeguarding policies and procedures: firstly, with Kirk Session, then escalated to PCI's central Safeguarding Team if necessary

Minister and Kirk Session Responsibilities

Each Kirk Session is responsible for the leaders and volunteers operating within its congregational remit.

The Minister and Kirk Session are responsible for:

- Ensuring safeguarding is embedded in church life
- Adopting and reviewing safeguarding policies
- Supporting safeguarding personnel
- Ensuring compliance with PCI safeguarding procedures
- Providing resources for safeguarding implementation
- Ensuring safeguarding information is publicly displayed
- Must have in place policy and procedure for the safeguarding of children engaged in their mission and ministries
- Must review those documents at least once every two years - best practice is annually.
- Must have safeguarding as a standing agenda item for Kirk Session
- Must support the Designated Person in their role pastorally.
- Must attend safeguarding training at least once every three years
- Must be accountable to Presbytery for its arrangements and give assurances that these are in place
- PCI governance makes Kirk Session a Court of the Church and its members are, usually, corporately responsible for all areas of church life for the local congregation to which they are appointed.
- This includes the overall safeguarding responsibilities for their congregational life.
- However, when it comes to safeguarding and any potential child protection issue, Kirk Session must not breach confidentiality at any stage.
- Anyone being given information about a child protection concern or details of any alleged perpetrator must have a valid and legal reason for being involved.

Responsibilities of leaders who oversee organisations

- Must keep their own training up to date
- Must understand the policy and procedures and their responsibilities.
- Must ensure that all of the leaders in their organisation/activity are adhering to the policy and procedures, including vetting procedures.
- Must inform admin start and end dates for any volunteer within their organisation.
- Must raise a concern if a leader does not adhere to the policy and procedure: firstly, to the designated person and Kirk Session, and escalate to PCI's central Safeguarding Team if necessary.
- Escalate all safeguarding concerns to the designated officers.
- If there is an emergency which results in a reduction of available leaders, the organisation/event must not go ahead. If necessary a leader from another organisation within the church that has been vetted can step in and support on a short term basis.

Responsibilities of Staff and Volunteers

All staff and volunteers must:

- Follow safeguarding procedures at all times
- Attend required safeguarding training and keep this up to date
- Must understand the policy and procedures and their responsibilities as stated within
- Maintain professional boundaries
- Treat all individuals with dignity and respect
- Report safeguarding concerns immediately
- Co-operate fully with safeguarding processes

Members of the Congregation

- Individual members of congregations, even if they have no role with children or young people, have responsibilities as members of this denomination to ensure that children are protected at all times from harm and/or abuse
- All members should be aware of the child safeguarding policy and procedures, and as a member understand that they too should behave in a manner that cooperates with the procedures
- All members should know how to raise a concern and to whom

Individuals who attend

- It is incumbent upon every member of society to regard the welfare of children as paramount. Therefore, we all have responsibilities, even if we do not belong to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
- Anyone visiting or engaging with our ministries, even on a temporary or one-off basis, should be aware that we have child safeguarding policy and procedures and that these help form our ethos and approaches to keeping children and young people safe.
- All individuals should be aware of our open and transparent approach and that we will act if we have any reasonable grounds for concern, even if someone is not a member.
- All individuals should be aware of our open and transparent approach and know to whom and how they can raise any concerns they have about child safeguarding when they engage in our mission or ministries.

6. Safer Recruitment and Selection

All individuals working with children or adults at risk must follow PCI safer recruitment procedures.

This includes:

- Completion of an application form
- Provision of two references (non-relatives)
- Informal interview or meeting
- Approval by the Kirk Session
- Access NI vetting where required
- Safeguarding training completion

No individual may begin regulated activity until clearance has been confirmed.

Access NI checks will be renewed in line with PCI requirements.

7. Safeguarding Training

All staff and volunteers must complete PCI-approved safeguarding training.

Training requirements include:

- Initial training before or shortly after commencing a role
- Refresher training every three years
- Attendance at updates where required

Training ensures awareness of:

- Safeguarding legislation
- Recognising abuse
- Responding to safeguarding concerns
- Safe practice expectations

8. Code of Behaviour

All leaders, helpers, and volunteers are expected to model safe and respectful behaviour at all times.

Acceptable Behaviour Includes:

- Treating individuals with dignity and respect
- Listening carefully to children and adults
- Maintaining appropriate boundaries
- Working openly and transparently
- Reporting concerns promptly
- Using positive behaviour management

Unacceptable Behaviour Includes:

- Being alone with a child or adult at risk unnecessarily
- Engaging in rough, physical, or inappropriate play
- Using humiliating, degrading, or abusive language
- Showing favouritism or discrimination
- Sharing personal contact details without permission
- Communicating privately with children online
- Photographing individuals without consent

9. Safeguarding Children and Young People

Waringstown Presbyterian Church is committed to safeguarding children and young people by:

- Providing safe and supportive environments
- Ensuring safe adult-to-child ratios
- Obtaining parental consent for activities
- Providing appropriate supervision
- Using safe recruitment practices
- Promoting respectful relationships
- Listening to the voice of children
- Encouraging children to share concerns

10. Young Helpers (Aged 16–17)

Young people aged 16–17 are legally classed as children and must be safeguarded.

Young helpers:

- Must be supervised at all times
- Must not be counted as responsible adults
- Must not undertake intimate care tasks
- Must have clear role boundaries
- Must receive safeguarding guidance appropriate to their age

They will be supported and protected under this safeguarding policy.

See ratio section below-

11. Safeguarding Adults at Risk - (see Adult Safeguarding Policy)

Waringstown Presbyterian Church is committed to safeguarding adults at risk by:

- Promoting dignity and respect
- Encouraging independence and participation
- Responding appropriately to concerns
- Supporting individuals through appropriate services
- Listening to the views and wishes of adults

12. Online and Digital Safeguarding (see Online Usage Policy)

All online engagement must follow safe communication standards.

This includes:

- Use of approved communication channels
- Avoidance of private messaging with children
- Obtaining consent for photographs and video
- Monitoring online group activity
- Ensuring safe livestreaming practice
- Maintaining professional boundaries online

13. Responding to Safeguarding Concerns

All our leaders play an important role in responding effectively and compassionately when someone comes forward to share concerns or to disclose abuse, or when we believe a child may be at harm or risk of harm.

***'Not reporting a relevant offence to the police, including those against children, is an offence in Northern Ireland.'* (Criminal Law Act (NI) 1967)**

All concerns must be handled in line with PCI safeguarding procedures.

If anyone has **reasonable grounds for concern** that a child may have been, is currently, or could become at risk of being abused or neglected, they should always inform Social Services via the Trust Gateway Team.

It is never necessary for any individual to prove that abuse has occurred, is occurring or could occur. It is the role of professional experts in Trust Gateways Teams to assess the concerns and make decisions based on this and any other information they have available to them.

The safety and well-being of the child must take priority over concerns about adults against whom allegations are made.

If what could be symptoms of abuse are ignored, it could result in ongoing harm to a child.

Doing nothing is not an option - you must always act!

The process follows:

Recognise

- Child abuse can occur any time, any place and to any child.
- Child abuse is not necessarily always through physical contact; children can be abused by omission, failure to act or via non-contact online abuse.
- Be alert to signs of harm or disclosure.

Record

Write down concerns accurately and promptly.

Report

- Inform the Designated Person immediately.
- Designated Persons report to the Trust Gateway Team any concern about the welfare of a child/young person
- PSNI 999 in an emergency circumstance where **immediate protection** is required
- You should always inform Social Services if you have reasonable grounds for concern that a child may have been, is being or is at risk of being abused or neglected.
- If you are ever unsure if you should report a concern, you should contact Social Services to discuss and take advice. Gateway / Social Services number - 08001000300 / 08001979995

- If it is not considered a safeguarding issue, and it is decided that there should be no referral made to a statutory authority, a record should be made of the concern and the details kept on file, including any action taken, the reasons for not referring, and the situation monitored on an ongoing basis. The employee or volunteer is advised that if they remain concerned about the situation, they are free to make a report to Social Services or PSNI.
- The Designated Person will refer concerns to PCI Safeguarding Services or statutory agencies as required.

Support

- Provide appropriate support to individuals involved.
- Confidentiality will be respected but cannot be guaranteed where safety is at risk.
- Church leaders must never investigate concerns independently.

14. Vetting process

See Vetting Process Policy.

15. Record Keeping and Data Management

Safeguarding records will be:

- Accurate and factual
- Stored securely
- Accessed only by authorised personnel
- Retained in accordance with PCI guidance and data protection legislation

Records may include:

- Safeguarding concerns
- Incident reports
- Training records
- Access NI records
- Any other concerns

16. Supporting Victims and Survivors

Waringstown Presbyterian Church is committed to supporting individuals affected by harm or abuse.

Support may include:

- Listening and responding sensitively
- Offering pastoral support
- Signposting to professional services
- Maintaining confidentiality where appropriate

17. Managing Individuals Who Pose Risk

Where an individual may pose risk, safeguarding arrangements will be implemented.

This may include:

- Risk management plans
- Supervision requirements
- Restrictions on participation
- Monitoring arrangements
- Removing a leader / volunteer from a specific organisation or space.
- Stepping down a leader / volunteer / elder or minister from all roles and responsibilities.

All such matters will be handled sensitively and in partnership with PCI Safeguarding Services.

Just because there is no ongoing statutory involvement does not mean there are no concerns to manage.

The church must take its lead from the statutory services assessment in this instance and act to fully protect children.

**Any disclosures of historical abuse, perpetrated within the denomination will be referred on to statutory bodies for further investigation.*

18. Toileting / Intimate Care

See Intimate Care Policy.

19. Listening to Children and Adults

We are committed to creating an environment where children and adults feel safe to speak.

We will:

- Encourage open communication
- Listen carefully to concerns
- Take concerns seriously

- Provide clear information about how to report concerns
- Respect individuals' voices and experiences

20. Ratios

Under 18s working with children and young people

- 16 and 17-year-olds can assist in providing children's activities.
- However, it is never appropriate to require someone aged less than 18 years to take on the role of leader or be in sole charge of children. This would mean, unacceptably, leaving a child in charge of children.
- At least two adult leaders should be in charge of any group of children at any time.
- 16- and 17-year-olds can be counted, in addition to the two adult leaders, in your ratios of children to adults if they have been through the full recruitment process, as above.
- **Anyone aged 15 and below who is helping with children does not count as part of leadership ratios.**
- Please note that 16- and 17-year-olds who go through the AccessNI vetting process must have parental/guardian consent for a criminal records check.
- 16- and 17-year-old leaders should receive the same levels of training as all other leaders in that organisation.
- Anyone under the age of 16 who is helping with children should receive an appropriate level of training provided by the leader of the organisation.
- Such training must also include the need to safeguard themselves.

Indoor

Under 2 years = 1 leader to 3 children

2 to 3 years = 1 leader to 4 children

4 to 7 years = 1 leader to 8 children

8 years and over= 1 leader to 10 children

14 years and over = 2 leaders to 20 children

Outdoor

Under 2 years = 1 leader to 3 children

2 to 3 years = 1 leader to 4 children

4 to 7 years = 1 leader to 6 children

8 years and over= 2 leader to 15 children

14 years and over = 2 leaders to 20 children

21. Implementation and Monitoring

The Kirk Session is responsible for ensuring the effective implementation of this policy.

This includes:

- Regular review of safeguarding practice
- Monitoring compliance
- Supporting safeguarding personnel
- Ensuring safeguarding training completion

Safeguarding information will be displayed within church premises.

22. Policy Review

This safeguarding policy will be:

- Reviewed annually
- Updated in line with PCI safeguarding guidance and relevant legislation
- Approved by the Kirk Session
- Recorded in Kirk Session minutes

23. Statement of Commitment

Waringstown Presbyterian Church affirms its commitment to safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of all who engage with the life of the congregation.

We commit to:

- Safeguard children and adults at risk
- Promote dignity, safety, and wellbeing
- Respond promptly and responsibly to concerns
- Create a culture of care, accountability, and trust

Safeguarding is central to who we are and how we serve.

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 (if not before)

- DP contact emails - Sarah.Irwin@waringtownpresbyterian.com / Mary.Boyce@waringtownpresbyterian.com
- PCI Safeguarding contact details - 02890417290
- Emergency statutory contact numbers - Social Services / Gateway - 02837567100
(9-5pm Mon - Fri) Out of Hours emergency social work services - 08001979995

Supporting Documents

Appendix 1 - Parental Consent Form (Also Available as Microsoft Forms Document in shared drive)

Appendix 2 - Adult Abuse Report Form

Appendix 3 - Reference Request Form - Vetting Process

Appendix 4 - Report a concern