**Church Opening**

A lot of practical guidance has been issued concerning the opening of church buildings for private prayer. There are also a range of safeguarding issues which must be considered. There has been a lot of media coverage of the increased risks and incidents of abuse during lockdown and some of those who attend church for private prayer may be experiencing some form of abuse. The church may be, for them, a safe space and they may seek help while there.

**Safeguarding considerations**

**1. Young people seeking to enter church when it is open:**

* How many young people would you allow in at one time?
* How would you ensure appropriate ratios if several young people wish to enter?
* How will you ensure no staff are alone with young people?
* Ensure you have a process for managing any situation where a young person wishes to talk privately
* Ensure there is always someone who knows how to respond to concerns / disclosures of abuse present
* Ensure there is material relating to safeguarding available – Stop it Now material etc.
* Ensure notes are made of any issues of a safeguarding nature

**2. Vulnerable adults seeking to enter the church when it is open:**

* How would you ensure appropriate ratios if vulnerable adults wish to enter?
* How will you ensure no staff are alone with a vulnerable adult?
* Ensure you have a process for managing any situation where a vulnerable adult wishes to talk privately
* Ensure there is always someone who knows how to respond to concerns / disclosures of abuse present
* Ensure there is material relating to safeguarding available
* Ensure notes are made of any issues of a safeguarding nature

**3. Domestic abuse:**

* Ensure you have a process for managing any situation where a vulnerable adult wishes to talk privately
* Ensure there is always someone who knows how to respond to concerns / disclosures of domestic abuse present
* Ensure there is material relating to domestic abuse available
* Ensure notes are made of any issues of any domestic abuse issues

**4. Other**

* Some people may want help / advice on a range of issues – foodbanks / finance / etc. Ensure, where appropriate, information is available, but beware of advising on things you are not qualified to do.
* Ensure all those staffing the opening are safely recruited and have the appropriate level of safeguarding checks.
* Remain aware of the huge number of scams associated with these times and ensure your team do not fall prey to these.
* Have a code of practice for those staffing the opening – eg. with decisions about giving money, contact details, etc.
* Consider how you will ensure people only access the areas of the church which are open and are prevented from gaining access to other areas.
* Consider how will manage any difficulties – more people wishing to enter than can safely be accommodated, people refusing to leave, people wanting to use toilets etc, unacceptable behaviour, etc
* If the church is an LEP you will need to consider the guidance of the building owners and the safeguarding requirements of the denominations whose safeguarding process is followed.
* Consider whether staff and visitors will be required to wear masks, gloves, etc. If so will the church provide these? Ensure the safe disposal of these items.

**5. Recommendations**

* It is advisable to have at least one member of the team who will be present at the church who has completed the Advanced Module. Ideally all will have completed at least the Foundation Module.
* The Church Safeguarding Officer should be involved in the team considering / planning for the opening of the church
* Have a range of material for people to take away covering the range of safeguarding issues
* A safeguarding risk assessment should be completed prior to opening
* Ensure there is a debriefing after each opening and that appropriate support is provided for those staffing the church
* Keep the risk assessment and procedures are kept under continual review and if necessary amended based on experience.

**RISK ASSESSMENT**

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| Hazards/Risks Think about the areas where contact takes place | Persons Affected Think of anyone who comes in contact | Likelihood | Severity | Risk Rating | Additional Covid-19 Controls – Reducing Risk Think of which prevention strategy could be used in each scenario to reduce the spread of Covid-19 \*If the building is listed, any changes need to be sensitive & reversible, please contact the Conservation Officer for further guidance | What needs to be done and by whom? |
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