



Protecting those in our care

**Safeguarding throughout
the church family**



Introduction

As a church, we take safeguarding the most vulnerable of our church community very seriously. We have the privilege of having an experienced and dedicated team who take the lead on safeguarding for The Hill and projects like Matthew's House. It is the way of things, that when safeguarding truly works, we rarely talk about it. Therefore, please take the opportunity to thank that team, when you can, for their diligence and care of us all.

This resource is a tangible outcome of that care. It is needed because the world is not a safe place, threats may not always be obvious and sensible steps to protect the vulnerable may not always be followed. The team correctly identified the fact that it is important for church members, parents, carers etc to be made aware of safeguarding issues. Some people may think that the need for this booklet arises solely from our work amongst those who may possibly be regarded as bruised, broken and at the bottom of society. This is rather because we live in a world where safeguarding is needed and certainly has nothing to do with perceived social status or material wealth.

This resource is for everyone who is part of The Hill. You might be a parent or carer of a child under 18. We might be pastorally responsible for vulnerable adults or children. We might be someone just building relationships in the church. Whatever our circumstances, it is essential for the flourishing of our church community, that we are aware and diligent in our steps to keep all those in our midst safe from harm – none more so than our children and vulnerable adults.

With that in mind, we thank you for taking the time to read and implement the advice in this resource. We have also recorded it as an audio file for anyone who is not a good reader. The link is on our website.

Love

The Hill Church Leadership

Make up a code word with your children. Teach them to use it when they are away from you and in a dangerous situation. When you hear the code word, immediately go and get them.



What is safeguarding?

Safeguarding is about sensible habits and necessary steps to protect every child and vulnerable adult from harm, abuse or neglect.

It is important that those who have responsibility for the wellbeing of others are educated to recognise the preventative steps to reduce risks but also the signs of potential harm, and finally the dangers and consequences of any harm.

Abuse takes many forms, including physical, financial, emotional, sexual and neglect. As a church we have a safeguarding policy which is reviewed twice a year by our

Safeguarding team. The policy is on the website and there is also a copy in the foyer of Matthew's House. Please make sure you are familiar with it.

We all have a civic duty to protect children and vulnerable adults from harm. However, every church must recognise the unique and challenging responsibility handed to it, to be willing and able to extend support to those who may have previously harmed children and vulnerable adults but who are on the path to recovery and growing faith in Jesus. This responsibility must be discharged with proportionality, care, wisdom and diligence. However, the safety and wellbeing of children and vulnerable adults will always be our first priority.

So how does this impact me?

No matter where you live or how you might perceive the safety of the church, the reality is that we live in a broken world with broken people. Every church or home is only as safe as the people guarding it. The wisdom of the Bible tells us that wolves will wear sheeps clothing – so we, as parents, carers, pastors or church members, cannot make assumptions simply based on appearances or stereotypes. It is sobering to realise how little we know about other people's histories, habits or mistakes.

We do not write this to unnecessarily worry you! However, we want parents, carers and the church community to be wise.

In addition, in every church (not just The Hill) that our leadership or safeguarding teams have been involved in, there are always significant pastoral challenges and this includes people who should not have 1-2-1 contact with children or vulnerable adults.

Again, this is not written to unnecessarily worry you or draw conclusions that don't need to be drawn. We simply write it so that we are all informed, safe and sensible regarding decisions we make with those in our care.

What does sensible look like?

Naturally, it is quite difficult to lay out steps or good practice for every situation. However here are some good principles to keep children and vulnerable adults safe – they are useful regardless of your setting or situation.

- Consider carefully who might care for those in your care e.g. babysitting
- Supervise those in your care when in public or at meetings

Teach your kids never to keep body secrets. If someone tells them to keep a secret involving body parts, teach them to tell you immediately.



- Don't judge simply by appearance, role or behaviours
- Consider asking for advice from those who are more experienced
- Educate and inform those in your care as to the risks
- Educate and inform those in your care to the steps that reduce risk
- Consider how those you care for manage their social media and online activity

The hidden danger of grooming

Grooming of children and vulnerable adults in our society is an ugly fact, but it is a fact all the same. Whilst the risks are low and we should not be unnecessarily alarmed, we must equally be sensible about the risks. Sadly, history and the news teach us that we cannot afford to be complacent, and so we simply want to play our part in helping parents and carers remain appropriately and proportionately diligent.

Therefore, it is also important that we are all familiar with what grooming means, how it can happen and how we can protect our children and vulnerable adults and how we can teach them about the dangers of grooming.

To help you, we have adapted some information from an anti-grooming website.

What is grooming?

When someone builds an emotional connection with a child or a vulnerable adult to gain their trust for the purposes of harm. Grooming can be done over years or in days. It can be online or face-to-face. It can be by someone (male or female, young or old) you know or

trust, even a member of the family, or a stranger. It is not easy to identify someone being groomed or the groomer. It is not uncommon for a groomer to build trust with the family or loved ones of those they are targeting. They can make use of positions of trust, reputation, reliance, or dependence to win favour.

Many children and vulnerable adults don't understand that they have been groomed or that what is or has happened is abuse. We realise this is all very sobering, but just by the adoption of consistent and sensible steps or good practice, we can reduce the risks considerably to those in our care.

What are the signs of grooming?

As you can imagine the signs of grooming are not always obvious and certainly not always the same. Groomers will often go to great lengths to avoid being identified. Some indicators that those in your care may be at risk include:

- Secretive or concealed activity (online or offline)
- Strong personal or close relationships with those older than themselves
- Unhealthy emotional connections to others older than themselves
- Choosing unusual places to meet friends or socialise
- Unexplained possessions such as money, clothes or mobile phones
- Easy access to drugs and alcohol
- Self-harming or thoughts about suicide
- Unexplained changes in behaviour, mood, or personality
- Sudden unexpected changes e.g. bed wetting, eating habits
- Inappropriate sexual behaviour or knowledge for their age or intelligence

Remember all of these may mean that they MAY be at RISK of being groomed, rather than they are! A few of them are just normal behaviour in growing up.



Teach your kids that if someone in a car is following them, they should run in the opposite direction. This will buy them a few seconds as the car turns around.

How many times have you seen kids struggling in an adult's arms and walked past them? Kids have tantrums all the time and we are immune to them. Teach your kids to scream out things that would alarm others.

Further information or advice

As a church, we take all steps possible to ensure a safe environment for your children and vulnerable adults.

- We regularly review and revise our relevant policies
- We security check all our children and youth workers
- We train on safeguarding
- We maintain our building security systems
- We produce resources like this one
- We consider carefully those appointed to positions of trust
- We encourage honesty and transparency
- We make the wellbeing and safety of others of paramount importance
- We have an experienced safeguarding team
- We use external agencies and organisations to support our safeguarding
- We seek to have good relationships with the police and social services

If you need to take action regarding safeguarding concerns, or you wish to have further advice on a subject that may be concerning you, then please go to the safeguarding page on The Hill website (the-hill.co/safeguarding).