

Guidance on Unaccompanied and Uncollected Children at Church Services and Activities and on Church Premises

Parish of St. Mary's Fishponds

There may be occasions when a child attends church on their own either for a specific children's activity of service or comes into the church at another time. Further there may also be occasions when a child is not collected by a parent or carer. This guidance outlines what will be done in these situations.

General Principles

All children/ young people, up to the age of 18, attending church groups including those on a Sunday should be registered using an annual information form completed by parents. If over 16 this form can be completed by the child themselves. The form will have medical information, contact numbers, and travel arrangements to and from church. They should be filed in a secure place in the Church where ministers, Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) relevant activity leaders or Church Wardens can access them. Relevant contact information and medical information should be made available to all activity leaders.

Generally children under the age of 11 years (Primary school age) should always be taken to and collected from an activity for which they have been registered by their parents/carers.

If a child is over 11 years of age, it is the responsibility of their parent/carer to make arrangements with their child for arriving at and leaving an activity. Children over the age of 11 may have suitable road sense and safety skills to manage their own way to church. However, the adult leaders of an activity should always be aware of any children making their own way home and have written consent, from their parent/ carer, for this to happen (this is included on the Registration Form). Any concerns about these arrangements should be discussed with the child's parents/carers.

Children arriving at a church activity or on church premises unaccompanied

On occasion, a child may attend church or church activities unaccompanied without their parents/carers knowledge and/or consent. If this happens

especially if it is a regular occurrence it could be a sign that something is amiss at home. Children in this situation should always be listened to in case this is an indication of a more serious concern.

Known Child

Where the child does not usually attend alone or parent has not consented to them attending alone then the Activity Leader / Minister/ Parish Safeguarding Officer should speak with the child and ask why they are at church alone. If the child says anything that suggests that they are at risk or would be at risk of harm if they returned home follow the usual Safeguarding procedures.

If the child is not deemed to be in any danger at home, parent/carer is to be contacted to come and collect the child.

All adult leaders should be alert before and after services when children don't always stay in the presence of their parents in order to ensure that they remain safe. However, Parents should be reminded that they are responsible for their children in church when an activity session has ended.

Unknown Child

If an unaccompanied child who is not known to the Church attends a service/activity the following steps should be taken:

- Make them welcome and ensure that they are looked after by a 'safer recruited' adult leader.
- If there are any safeguarding concerns follow the safeguarding policy and procedure.
- Try to find out who the parent/carer is and their contact details
- Contact the parent carer and:
 - Explain that the child is wanting to take part in the activity
 - Get permission for the child to remain for this activity
 - Explain there is a consent form (Email this to them or give a copy to the child to take home after)
 - Get all of the next of kin contact information/details of any medical needs and allergies
 - Ensure that they know what time the activity finishes; try to encourage the parent/carer to come and collect their child at this time. If the child is to return home unaccompanied (with parental

permission: it is not advisable that a child under 11 is permitted to leave the church on their own), make sure they take with them details of the activity they have attended along with contact details, inviting the parent/carer to get in touch with the activity leader.

In the event you cannot contact the parent/carer

- Try to discover from the child if their parents/carers know where they are and what time they are expected to return home. If this is before the session is due to end, encourage them to return home at this time unless their parents/carers can be contacted.
- Try to establish the child's name, age, address and home (parents) telephone number and complete a registration form with as much detail as the child can provide.
- Make sure they take with them details of the activity they have attended along with contact details, inviting the parent/carer to get in touch with the activity leader.
- If there are any safeguarding concerns follow the safeguarding policy and procedure

Uncollected children

It is rare in church life for children to be left uncollected at the end of an activity session except in exceptional circumstances. Occasionally this does happen, when this is the case, the following steps should be taken:

- Telephone the parents/carers and ask them to collect their child as soon as possible.
- If contact cannot be made, two leaders must wait with the child until this is possible.
- A child should not be escorted home, except in exceptional circumstances.
- If no contact can be made and the child appears to have been abandoned, the out of hour's duty social worker should be contacted at your local authority on **01454 615165**.

- Another adult should not be allowed to take responsibility for a child without receiving parental consent, written whenever possible. Church officers should not offer to take responsibility for uncollected children.

Any safeguarding concerns should be reported immediately to the Parish Safeguarding Officer.

If there is a risk that the child may run away before parent/carer arrives then, as appropriate, do not share with child that parent/carer has been called. Make a note of what they are wearing in case they need to be searched for. Additionally consider moving to a place in the building which is less open to quickly run away from, and think of something to occupy them in the meantime. Ensure that one adult is not left alone with the child.

If parent/carer of a young child or young person with additional needs is unable to be contacted by the end of the service, then provision must be made to supervise the child while continuing to try to contact parent/carer or another relative. If all avenues to contact a family member are unsuccessful then contact the Local Authority out of hours Emergency Duty service (Tel: **01454 615165**) to advise them a lone child is in church and that parents/carers are not contactable. Continue to try to contact the parent/carer.

If the child leaves the building then:

- If possible immediately contact the parent/ carer.
- If contact has not been able to be made with parent/carer - police to be contacted and child reported as missing.
- Generally the Child not to be followed in case it makes behaviour more unpredictable and therefore dangerous with traffic, etc. (if in doubt follow the advice of the police).
- If parent/carer is on the way make contact again with parent/carer and check that they are satisfied with the child not being followed.

In case of an emergency call the police on 999. In the event of an emergency safeguarding concern contact the Local authority or the police (101)

Always follow your safeguarding policy and procedures.