

**Guidance on Unaccompanied and Uncollected Children at Church Services and
Activities on Church Premises
Parish of St. Mary's Fishponds**

Preface

St Mary's Church takes its Safe Guarding responsibilities very seriously. The Standing Committee and Parochial Church Council (PCC) take responsibility for the contents of this document. It is reviewed every 12 months as a minimum and in the interim as required.

This policy is based upon Safeguarding policy and practice issued from The House of Bishops, which states that *"all authorised clergy, bishops, archdeacons, licensed readers and lay workers, churchwardens and PCCs must have '[due regard](#)' to safeguarding guidance issued by the House of Bishops (this will include both policy and practice guidance).*

This policy details the responsibilities St Mary's Clergy, PCC and congregation have in terms of ensuring our church is safe for anyone who wishes to come in, particularly children and anyone who is considered to be vulnerable.

Our current Safeguarding Officer is **Mrs Claire Munoz**. She can be contacted by email - clmunoz@hotmail.co.uk

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There may be occasions when a child attends church on their own either for a specific children's activity or service, or attends church for another reason. There may also be occasions when a child is not collected by a parent(s) or carer(s). This guidance outlines what needs to 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 (AIF), a form to be completed by a parent if the child is under 16. If aged over 16, this form may be completed by the child themselves. The form will have medical information, contact numbers, and travel arrangements to and from church. These should be filed in a secure place in the church where ministers, Parish Safeguarding Officer(s) (PSOs), relevant activity leaders or Churchwardens 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 a parent(s)/carer(s).

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

Children arriving at a church activity or on church premises unaccompanied

On occasion, a child may attend church or church activities unaccompanied and without their parent(s)/carer(s) 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 a parent/carers has not consented to them to attend alone, the activity leader/Minister/Parish Safeguarding Officer(s) 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, formal safeguarding procedures should be followed. A copy of the Parish Safeguarding policy can be found on the notice board at the back of church and in the Parish Room. A copy can also be obtained from the church website <https://stmarysfishponds.org.uk/information/policies/>.

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

All adult leaders should be alerted before and after services when children do not always stay in the presence of their parent(s) 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 and attends a service/activity the following steps should be taken.

1. To make the child feel welcome and ensure that they are looked after by a 'safer recruited' adult leader,
2. If there are any safeguarding concerns follow the Safeguarding Policy and Procedure.
3. To try to find out who the parent(s)/carer(s) are and their contact details.
4. To contact the parent(s)/carer(s) and:
 - explain that the child is wanting to take part in an identified 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 they know what time the activity finishes. Try to encourage the parent(s)/carer(s) 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(s)/carer(s) to get in touch with the activity leader.

In the event you cannot contact the parent(s)/carer(s)

1. Try to discover from the child if his/her parent(s)/carer(s) 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 parent(s)/carer(s) can be contacted.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. If there are any safeguarding concerns follow the Safeguarding Policy and Procedure. A copy of the Parish Safeguarding policy can be found on the notice board at the back of church and in the Parish Room. A copy can also be obtained from the church website <https://stmarysfishponds.org.uk/information/policies/>.

Uncollected children

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

1. Telephone the parent(s)/carer(s) and ask them to collect their child as soon as possible.
2. If contact cannot be made, two leaders must wait with the child until this is possible.
3. A child should not be escorted home, except in exceptional circumstances.
4. 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**.

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5. 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(s).

If there is a risk that the child may run away before the parent(s)/carer(s) arrive, then, as appropriate, do not share with the child that parent(s)/carer(s) has been contacted. Make a note of what they are wearing in case a search needs to be undertaken. Additionally, consider moving to a place in the building which is less open and not so easy 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(s)/carer(s) 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(s)/carer(s) 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 parent(s)/carer(s) are not contactable. Continue to try to contact the parent(s)/carer(s).

If the child leaves the building then:

- if possible immediately contact the parent(s)/carer(s);
- if contact has not been able to be made with parent(s)/carer(s), the Police are to be contacted and child reported as missing;
- Generally the child should not 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 a parent(s)/carer(s) is on their way 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 a non-emergency safeguarding concern contact the Local authority or the police (101)

Always follow the Safeguarding Policy and Procedures. A copy of the Parish Safeguarding policy can be found on the notice board at the back of church and in the Parish Room. A copy can also be obtained from the church website <https://stmarysfishponds.org.uk/information/policies/>