First Garvagh Presbyterian Church

Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct

(2025)

Safeguarding Policy

Creating a safe environment for children, young people, leaders and staff

First Garvagh Presbyterian Church exists as a congregation within the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland reaching out to children and young people within the local community. First Garvagh Presbyterian Church welcomes all from the local community, including those who have no denominational connection with the Presbyterian Church. This welcome involves activities[1] designed for young people such as Crèche, Tot's & Co., Girls' Brigade, Boys' Brigade, Saturday Night Live, SonSeekers, CY, Youth Fellowship and Holiday Bible Club. We take seriously our legal and moral obligation to create a safe environment for all children who come under our care, doing all we can to look after them.

Parents / carers expect the church to have and enforce a child protection policy. This policy is aimed at creating an environment where children and young people may enjoy social contact, personal and spiritual development and where they and the leaders and helpers working with them will be kept safe.

Adoption of Presbyterian Church in Ireland Child Protection Guidelines

The Kirk Session of **FIRST GARVAGH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH** has adopted the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's child protection guidelines, **TAKING CARE**, approved by the General Assembly and revised in 2011. All organisations must adhere to these guidelines as agreed by the General Assembly in 2008. The Kirk Session will review[i2]the policy every three years and keep Taking Care on the agenda of Kirk Session Meetings.

1.Leadership

The Kirk Session believes that the recruitment and appointment process[3] outlined in the taking care guidelines greatly assist the assessment of a person's suitability to work with children and young people. Because of implementing such procedures, leaders and helpers within this congregation will be more assured of their position and of the confidence placed in them by the Kirk Session.

The following procedures must be followed for the appointment of leaders who are 18 years and over: All leaders seeking to work with children and young people in regulated positions (i.e. an adult working, either as a volunteer on in a paid position, four or more times a year, in direct contact with children), will be required to complete an application form for leaders which can be obtained on the Taking Care website.[4]

The application form includes the vetting process according to legislation and good practice.

The Kirk Session will appoint up to two interviewers to meet informally with the applicant. At the interview the child protection policy will be provided and explained. 'We Care 4 U Too!' will also be provided.

Applicants will be required to provide two references by persons who are not relatives.

A letter of approval will be sent to the Designated Person from the Taking Care Office.

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[1] See Appendix 1 for a list of all activities for children and young people in First Garvagh Presbyterian church
[2] See Appendix 2 for child protection review record
[3] Section 5 of the taking care manual Taking-Care-Two-Section-05.pdf.aspx (presbyterianireland.org)

[4] Access NI and Garda Vetting Forms - Presbyterian Church Ireland (presbyterianireland.org)

2. Training

Leaders and helpers who work with children and young people should attend Taking Care training at least every three years. Even those who have a good knowledge of child protection issues in another field should attend as taking care training is the only training available that is specific to the policy of the Presbyterian church.

3. Reporting of Concerns

The leaders of each of our organisations will be fully conversant with the reporting procedure[5] where there is a concern about the welfare of the child, as outlined in the Taking Care guidelines. Leaders must not hesitate to report a concern about a child if they are at any time worried about their welfare. Section twoTaking-Care-Two-Section-02.pdf.aspx (presbyterianireland.org) of the taking care guidelines lists the different areas of abuse.

If any allegation is made about a leader of an organisation, or a complaint is made or restraint is used, the reporting structure will then immediately notify the designated person and the minister. If a complaint is made against either the designated person or minister the clerk of session will be notified. If it is not resolved and needs follow up the matter must be reported to the Taking Care Office 028 9041 7290 and advice taken.

If there is any immediate concern about the safety or wellbeing of a child, the Designated Person should be informed and contact the Out of Hours Social Services no 0800 1979995. If it is an emergency the Leader in charge can make that call. Clear records should be kept at all times – Who was contacted, When, and the outcome signed off by the DP and the Minister.

4. Designated Person

The Kirk Session has appointed a safeguarding team.

The Designated Person is:

Elaine Donald (07752342241) elainem_donald@btinternet.com

supported by:

Louise Gilmore (07748187507) louisegilmore1@btinternet.com

Alan Galbraith (07810638714) culcreuch20@gmail.com

The Minister Reverend Mark Donald (Tel: 02829558220 Mob: 07764580086)

The Designated Person will give advice and support to organisations and to the Kirk Session on matters concerning the welfare of children and young people. The Kirk Session will keep organisational leaders updated with the name of the Designated Person. Any matter brought to the attention of the safeguarding team will be treated in the strictest confidence. Information will be divulged only where there is a legitimate need to know.

5. Parental Consent Forms

Organisational leaders must ensure they have home contact numbers, parental consent and medical information regarding the children in the organisations which they are working with. Special consent forms will be issued for any exceptional activity and residential programmes: Forms Policies and Fact Sheets - Presbyterian Church Ireland (presbyterianireland.org)

[5] Taking-Care-Two-Section-03.pdf.aspx (presbyterianireland.org)

Role of the Parent

Parents / Guardians are asked to supply the leader in charge of the organisation names of all persons permitted to pick children up at home time. Parents must provide details of any change to this routine: Taking-Care-Two-Section-06.pdf.aspx (presbyterianireland.org)

6. Good Standards of Practice

Each organisation will be expected to comply with good standards of practice as outlined in the Taking Care guidelines. This includes physical contact, recommended ratios, transport, residential programmes and outings, church sleepovers, photographs and working with children who have special needs.

7. Working together

It is important that all leaders know the boundaries and rules of an organisation and that these are explained to the children and parents. A code of conduct[6] for children and young people will be drawn up at the commencement of the year's activities in each organisation. A code of conduct will help to create a safe, secure environment and an atmosphere where children will feel that they can relate to the leaders and helpers. **All leaders must abide by the discipline guidelines as set out in Taking Care.**

8. Technology

Leaders should limit the direct internet communication they have with individual children and young people in the organisation of which they are leaders. All such communication with children and young people should, as far as possible, be within an open forum; to protect the young people and leaders. Leaders should be wise as how they use this form of communication.

Leaders should not post photographs of young people from the organisations in which they are leaders, on a social networking site or anywhere on the internet, unless they have written parental consent.

Leaders involved in youth and children's work should ideally not have the personal phone numbers of any young people/children as all arrangements should be done through the parents. This is to avoid any possibility of misunderstanding. If the nature of their involvement requires them to phone or text children contacting children using mobile phones should only be done in line with the Taking Care guidelines.[7]

9. Health and Safety

The Kirk Session expects organisations to adhere to the guidance on health and safety matters outlined in the Taking Care guidelines. A risk assessment form should be completed for each organisation as well as for any outings or occasional events. The church insurance company should also be informed. Leaders will be informed of fire and first aid procedures.

Introduction

We are very grateful at First Garvagh Presbyterian Church for the time, effort and commitment you as a leader, provide to our young people. The information below is provided to assist you with your role in First Garvagh Presbyterian Church.

Good practice

Ask God for wisdom, discernment and understanding as a leader, and set a good example.

Pray for all involved with the organisation.

[6] Appendix 3
[7] See First Garvagh Social Media Policy

Be encouraging and inclusive to all children but respect that some may not feel ready to participate in all activities.

Difficult circumstances

Avoid being on your own with a child; if a child wishes to talk confidentially, you both should remain visible to other adults.

Never let allegations go unclarified, unrecorded or unexplored with the leader in charge and the designated person.

If restraint is needed to protect a child from harming him/herself or others, or seriously damaging property, the minimum force necessary to prevent injury or damage should be applied. Another leader must be present to act as an assistant or as a witness. If this scenario occurs, a report should be inserted in an incident report form and the individual's parents/guardians notified.

Blank incident report forms can be found in the Church Office and the Taking Care Folder. After the incident is reported, and the completed form given to the leader in charge, the details and follow up should be recorded in a confidential file, and this should then be given to the designated person to be stored in a locked filing cabinet.

Ratios

For any organisation there should always be a minimum of at least 2 leaders/helpers present.

Ratios for indoor activities

0 to 2 years: - 1 leader to 3 children
2 to 3 years: - 1 leader to 4 children
3 to 7 years: - 1 leader to 8 children
8 years and over: - 1 leader to 10 children/young people

Ratios for outdoor activities

0 to 2 years: - 1 leader to 3 children
2 to 3 years: - 1 leader to 4 children
3 to 7 years: - 1 leader to 6 children
8 to 13 years: - 2 leaders to 15 children and one additional leader for every 8 extra children, or part thereof.
13 years and over: - 2 leaders to 20 children (preferably one of each gender) and one additional leader for every 10-young people, or part thereof.

Toileting and Intimate Care

First Garvagh Presbyterian Church does not provide toileting or intimate care that involves changing nappies, clothing, or cleaning a child after a toileting accident. In such circumstances, the parent or carer will be contacted to attend to the child. For very young children, or when a child needs to be accompanied, two approved adults should escort the child to the toilet area and provide appropriate supervision. Wherever possible, toilet visits should be planned to avoid one-to-one situations. All staff and volunteers should remain alert to any signs of distress, and any concerns about a child's welfare during toileting must be reported immediately in accordance with the church's safeguarding procedures.

Drivers

Leaders should avoid transporting a child or young person on their own, it is good practice to have another leader or other children in the car. However, if a situation does occur when a leader must

transport a child alone, they should ensure that other leaders know this is happening and that the child is in the back seat.

If possible, parents should be made aware that their child will be in the car on their own with a leader, affording them the opportunity to make alternative arrangements.

Residential activities

Any person aged 18 years or over who is present on a children's residential trip and is staying overnight must have completed an application form and undergone the Access NI check.

The centre must have adequate insurance cover for your group and the activities it hopes to engage in.

The centre should provide access to first aid/GP in the event of an emergency.

The centre should also provide separate sleeping accommodation for males and females.

A risk assessment form should be completed for each outing, residential or community/outreach event e.g. church auction or Sunday school picnic.

Photographs

Permission (written) should be obtained for everyone who will appear in a photograph, video or webcam image before the photograph is taken or footage recorded.

It should be made clear why that person's image is being used, what use will be made of it, and who might want to look at the pictures.

Children and young people should not be identified by name or other personal details. These details include email, phone number, school, or postal addresses.

Young people should be encouraged not to post or tag photographs of friends without their permission.

Anti-bullying policy

All kinds of bullying are wrong and should not be tolerated within First Garvagh Presbyterian Church. Our organisations should be safe and welcoming for all children and young people.

What is bullying?

The government defines bullying as; "deliberately hurtful behaviour repeated often over a period of time."

What forms does it take?

Bullying can be name calling or teasing.

Bullying is often physical; victims may be pushed, punched, kicked and/or hit.

Victims can be forced to do things they don't want to do, or may be left out of games or ignored by others.

Cyber bullying is when bullies contact their victims via text message or the internet.

Why do we have an anti- bullying policy?

All leaders, parents and children who attend this organisation should have an understanding of what bullying is and know that it is not tolerated.

All leaders should know what to do if bullying arises.

As an organisation we take bullying seriously, children and parents should be assured that they will be supported if bullying is identified.

Why is it important to respond to bullying?

Bullying hurts.

Everyone has the right to be treated with respect.

Individuals who are bullying need to learn to stop.

This organisation has a responsibility to respond effectively to bullying issues.

Preventative Measures

Leaders should encourage children to befriend others who are alone in the group.

Bullying should be discussed openly within the group, perhaps through activities such as circle time.

Young people should regularly be encouraged to talk to leaders about anything that is bothering them.

What will happen if bullying occurs?

An attempt will be made for reconciliation by getting the parties together to talk, it may be that a genuine apology solves the problem.

If bullying continues, leaders should meet with the parent and child(ren) who is/are being bullied.

Leaders should also meet with the child(ren) who is bullying and their parent/s.

If serious, bullying should be reported to the designated person as a child protection issue.

Leaders should consider appropriate consequences for the bully and make sure these are carried through, this can include permanent removal from the organisation.

The situation must be kept under review. All reports of bullying will be kept in the locked child protection cupboard.

Social Networking Policy for Leaders

Background

Such has been the explosion of social media over the last 10 years that for young people today it has become the primary method of communication and interaction. Indeed, for many they have grown up using social media and therefore to send a private message, to update a status or tweet is as natural as making a phone call.

Comments made on the internet should be considered the same as if they were made in a public space. If a child discloses something to a leader via a social networking site, a chat room or any other public domain publishing method, then the disclosure must be dealt with by following the normal reporting process, in conjunction with First Garvagh's Designated Person.

Social media such as Facebook and Instagram, or more commonly among young people snapchat and WhatsApp are used as a way of interacting with a wider group of acquaintances. In each of these applications friend requests are sent and received on the basis of a passing knowledge of another person. In other words, friends on a social network can very often be friends of friends, or even friends of friends of friends and so the very concept of a social network friend has to some extent redefined what it is to have a friend.

Despite the dangers of social media, it is a useful and convenient way for adults maintaining contact with distant friends, and young people feeling part of a community and interacting within that community. Social media is also probably the most efficient way of communicating important information to our young people, but because of its dangers we should be clear in how we use it in order to protect both the leader and the young person.

Principles

When posting any material on social media the user should always remember that this is the equivalent to any publication such as a newspaper, magazine or journal. A status update, tweet or comment is in the public domain and has the potential to go viral and so reach a worldwide audience of many millions.

The same rules apply with conversations online as they do in 'real life'. The same rules of appropriateness apply and the same rules regarding disclosure of sensitive information regarding child protection still apply.

In all aspects of our online profile, we as Christians are still to be Christ-like, we are to present his image and grace just as in our real lives.

Guidance

Any child protection issues disclosed online must be treated in the same manner as disclosures made in real life. The minister or child protection officer must be notified and a screen grab of any posts, comments or private messages taken. These should be given to the child protection officer or minister and advice taken then as to whether they should be deleted.

Social media should be used as a means of communication not conversation, that is, use social media to make announcements, remind groups of upcoming activities, but not for a conversation. Conversation should be as per the taking care guidelines as far as possible in a public place.

When a social media group is established, the Elders should be made aware of its existence. If the group involves young people, it should be administered by at least two adult leaders and the minister should be either invited to join the group or given access to the group's content.

Photographs of young people should not be put on social media without the express consent of parents as provided on consent forms. Any posting of photographs at church run events should only be in the kirk session approved social media groups through the leader(s) in charge.

Where a leader is a member of an anonymous social media network, they should not accept friend requests from young people, nor should they encourage young people be part of such social networks. The principle of this being that we do all we can to minimise the threat of stranger danger and grooming.

Young people should be made aware of the report abuse button on sites and on the CEOP website listed below.

In all things always think how my actions and words online are impacting young people and how my actions and words can be perceived by others.

In First Garvagh we believe in a model of progressive and engaging worship and youth work. The Kirk Session is keen to support organisation leaders in finding new ways of connecting with young people and understand that embracing technology will become increasingly important.

This document will deal with technology such as Social Networking Sites (SNS) and email accounts as a means of communicating and interacting with young people. It aims to help understand the implications of using this type of technology and help avoid some of the pitfalls. We would encourage use of social media as a positive move in our mission.

SNS can be utilized in many different and exciting ways in Christian Youth Work:

- an environment in which young people can get support and guidance
- a marketing tool for promoting youth work opportunities and activities
- a communications tool for interacting with young people
- a youth work tool for promoting young people's creative expression, wider personal and social development
- a starting point to work from in helping young people develop their skills, interests and capacities across a range of issues and areas
- a platform for new forms of online youth work.

Advice on your own personal sites

If you have your own personal Social Network Site (SNS) profile you should make sure that young people cannot access any content, media or information from that profile that

(a) you are not happy for young people to have access to; and

(b) which would undermine your position as a trusted and responsible adult working with young people.

You should consider **changing the privacy settings on your SNS profile** so that only people you have accepted as friends can see your content.

Check your privacy settings carefully and ask a friend to help check your settings (by trying to access your profile when they are not logged into the network in question, or when they are logged in, but not set as your friend).

Review who is on your 'friends list' on your personal SNS profile. Leaders should ideally not be personal friends on social media with young people attending church groups and should only accept friend requests from young people if it there is a justifiable reason to do so. An exception might only be for a member of your family, or a close family friend. Where a leader is a member of an anonymous social media network they should not accept friend requests from young people, nor should they encourage young people be part of such social networks. The principle of this being that we do all we can to minimise the threat of stranger danger and grooming.

Do not rely on 'security by obscurity' (hoping that the content you post won't be found because you've used a nick name for example) – as it will always be possible for the content you share publicly online to be found and linked back to you.

As a basic rule: If you are not happy for the young people you work with to see particular comments, media or information simply do not post it in a public forum online – and when you are posting content in a SNS space check carefully to make sure you know who can, and who can't, see content you post.

Of course – remember that you are still human. You do not have to disappear from the Internet – and there is, providing you are careful, nothing wrong with there being photos, videos or writing online that shows you are a real person who has friends, has fun and has interests outside your youth work. **Do remove any compromising photos from your site, un-tag any photos which may raise uncomfortable questions from the young people.**

Rules for Group Sites for an organisation or event

You need to think carefully about the level of engagement with Social Network Sites you will have, and if unsure discuss with a member of the Kirk Session or Minister.

If you are using SNS for your group, you should always have a group profile separate from your personal sign-up and profile on a site.

Promoting your organisation and events through SNS

You can use pages, groups, media content, widgets and online advertising to promote your project, organisation or events to young people through SNS.

Using SNS to enhance your face-to-face work with young people

You can use the messaging features of SNS to keep in touch with young people you work with – either one-to-one messages (similar to e-mail) or by using groups and events features to easily keep a group up to date with activities. Creating a group on a SNS can also provide a way for young people you work with to carry on discussions between themselves.

Most profiles and groups on SNS allow you to control who can be associated with them (as a friend or a member) so you can limit access to only those young people you have existing contact with.

If you have an organisation / group profile on a SNS make sure the profile clearly explains who you are, who you represent, how young people can verify your identity, and offers links to accessible summaries of any relevant policies and information young people should be aware of (such as who to contact if they have any concerns/complaints about your activities on the site). You should also be honest about any limits to your engagement with the SNS (e.g. 'I can't offer one-to-one advice here, but you can contact XYZ if you want someone to talk to').

If you create a group, host discussions or encourage media-sharing then you must adhere to the moderation[8] policy and the guidelines or rules for young people engaging with this. You may find it useful to create a group agreement and the sorts of language and discussions allowed – and the media sharing allowed. Make sure these guidelines are created with young people and are accessible (e.g. you might create a short video that explains them and post this to your group).

If you create a profile, group or other space within SNS for your project, ensure it is welcoming and fun. Use different media, including photos[9] and videos to communicate. Involve young people in creating the space – being clear in the process about what you want to achieve through the space.

Notes on the implications of posting any material or comments online.

Remember the law views anything you share online as being in the public domain. Sharing your thoughts and reflections with friends using social media or email might feel personal and private; but if more than one person can access what you have written it is highly likely that the law would class it as "published," and therefore subject to numerous laws around libel, slander, copyright, Freedom of.

It can be easy to say something in the heat of the moment that you will come to regret, but it could remain permanently online for all to see.

Information and data protection.

If you wouldn't say something in the local newspapers, or in front of a meeting, you certainly shouldn't say it online.

Assume that what you say is permanent. Even if you delete a comment you have made on a website, it could still have already been seen by other people and/or re-published on other, unconnected sites. It can be easy to say something in the heat of the moment that you will come to regret, but it could remain permanently online for all to see. **So always think carefully and never make personal comments about someone that you wouldn't also say in public or to them in person**.

Do not assume anything electronic is secure. You might be able to delete or recall an email but there's no guarantee the recipient will. Equally, your privacy settings on your social media tools might mean only your accepted "friends" or "followers" can see the things you say, but there is no guarantee that they will not pass them on outside your trusted circles.

Be mindful of your own security. Be careful about the personal details you share online - again, **assume anything you share about yourself is in the public domain**.

Useful Sites

www.ceop.police.uk
www.ceopeducation.co.uk
www.webwise.ie
https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

[8] Appendix 4
[9] Appendix 5 Photo and Video Policy

10.Implementation and review

The Kirk Session is responsible for overseeing the implementation of this policy and will review it every three years.

Signed (Minister) Date 25 November 2025

Signed (Clerk of Session) Date 25 November 2025

Signed (Designated Person)

Date 25 November 2025

Appendix 1

Organisations organised by First Garvagh Presbyterian church for Young People

1. Crèche
2. Tot's & Co.
3. Children's Church
4. Girls' Brigade
5. Boys' Brigade
6. Saturday Night Live
7. SonSeekers
8. CY
9. Youth Fellowship
10. Holiday Bible Club

Appendix 2

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY REVIEW

1.What developments has the congregation made in the following areas?
2. What issues have come up in the following areas?
3. What action needs to be taking in the following areas?

1. Leadership
2. Training
3. Reporting of Concerns
4. The Designated Persons
5. Parental Consent Forms
6. Good Standards of Practice
-physical contact
-ratios
-transport
-residential programmes and outings
-Church sleepovers
-photographs
-working with children who have special needs

7. Working Together
8. Technology
9. Health and Safety
10. Implementation and Review

Appendix 3 Code of conduct

As members of this organisation we will:
Respect our leaders and helpers.
Respect the views and feelings of other members.
Respect the right of every member to express their views.
Respect the right of every member to be heard/listened to.
Respect leaders' and helpers' and other members' personal privacy and property.
Take care of equipment and property.
Not engage in any of the following activities or behaviour:

1. Consumption of alcohol, the use of drugs and smoking during organisation activities, whether within the confines of the organisation building or otherwise.
2. Physical abuse of other members, leaders and helpers.
3. Verbal abuse including "put-downs" of other club members and leaders and helpers, either directly or electronically e.g. mobile phones, chat rooms etc.
4. Destruction or damage of property or equipment.

I agree to keep to the contract.

Signed.....(Child)
I have read through this agreement with my child and agree to the points noted above.

Signed.....(Parent/guardian)

Appendix 4

Moderation Policy & Rules for Engagement with Sites

Bad language will not be tolerated.

Personal abuse of any kind will not be tolerated.

Personal messages between individuals should not be conducted on a group site.

Communications should be courteous and considerate.

Do not type full sentences in capital letters…it is considered shouting.

Treat all communication in same form as you would face to face.

Sites should not be used for marketing purposes.

Each site will have a Site Moderator. Moderators will ban individuals who misuse the site in any way.

Appendix 5

First Presbyterian Church Photo and Video Policy

Permission (written) should be obtained for all children who will appear in a photograph, video or webcam image before the photograph is taken or footage recorded. Verbal permission should be sought for adults in the same circumstances.

It should be made clear why that person's image is being used, what use you will make of it, and who might want to look at the pictures.

Children and young people should not be identified by name or other personal details. These details include email, phone number or postal addresses.

Young people should be encouraged to let their friends know if their intention is to post photographs online, giving them the opportunity to object.