

Woodlands Church Safeguarding Policy

Kirk session

It is an honour and privilege to protect and safeguard to the best of our ability, all the children, young people and adults who attend Woodlands Presbyterian Church and to promote, with confidence, that it is a safe place for all. We will proactively work to prevent harm from occurring and have adopted a zero-tolerance approach towards abuse, exploitation and neglect. While safeguarding in Woodlands is the overall responsibility of the Kirk Session, we believe that everyone has an important part to play in keeping Woodlands a safe place for all. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

Our belief

The Kirk Session believes that the Bible is God's inspired word which provides a reference to instruction and guidance on how to safeguard others – not just because of a legal and ethical duty, but because it is the heart of our Father and therefore our ministry, to:

- love our neighbour as ourselves (Lev 19:18 / Luke 10:27 / Gal 5:13-15)
- seek justice and correct oppression (Psalm 89:14 / Isaiah 1:17 / Micah 6:8)
- protect the weak and those in need (Psalm 82:3-4/ Matt 18:10)

Our Commitment to making Woodlands Presbyterian Church a Safe Place

As a church family, we recognise 'Safeguarding' to be an integral part of the life and witness of our church fellowship. We believe that - as a safe-fellowship, we are shaped by the love and compassion of Jesus Christ and called to honour the dignity of each person. We will strive to protect and promote the wellbeing of all children, young people and adults at risk under our care and we will seek to make Woodlands a place where people are listened to, taken seriously and kept safe in all church ministries, whether on-site, off-site or when visiting adults in their own home. If a person with a past criminal record wishes to attend Woodlands, Kirk Session may discuss the process of support and monitoring and when necessary implement a Safeguarding Agreement with appropriate mentor support to safeguard everyone involved in the life of our church fellowship.

Our Leaders, Organisations and Codes of Conduct

The Kirk Session will actively promote and integrate a safeguarding culture within each church organisation and ministry. Kirk Session recognise that the welfare of children is paramount and will therefore accept responsibility to assess risk and put in place policies, procedures and practices to manage identified risk. Risk assessment will include both general health and safety risks and also safeguarding risks. Kirk session will ensure risks assessments are reviewed and will take action if there is a failure to comply with risk management.

The Kirk Session believes that the recruitment, interviewing and appointment process in place will greatly assist the assessment and appropriateness of a person's suitability to work with children, young people and adults at risk. **As part of the interview process we will seek references and ask direct questions to satisfy ourselves there are no underlying reasons that may make an appointment unsafe, especially those from other jurisdictions for whom an NIECR check may not be possible. As a result, no one will be appointed to a leadership role until this process, and basic training is fully completed,** so that everyone appointed will be more assured of their position and of the confidence placed in them by the Kirk Session. It is the decision of

Kirk Session that all new leaders and leaders in charge must be communicant members and that no-one will be considered for a leadership role until they have attended church for a year, or at least 4 months if transferring from another congregation with appropriate references, one of which should be from the minister. Best practice advises that new leaders should be given a trial period of 12 weeks.

All leaders from 16 years and older who work in children's ministry, will only be appointed on successful completion of the NI Enhanced Criminal Records Check process (NIECRC), which must be repeated on a three-yearly cycle. **(Parental consent for NIECRC is required for those under 18)**. 16-17 year olds may be counted in leader ratios but must never be left in sole charge. All new leaders will be made aware of the requirements for their role, receive a copy of this policy and the Leaders Code of Acceptable Behaviour and will be made aware of how to access both PCI and Woodlands policies, procedures and risk assessments and will be required to attend the next available mandatory training programme.

Leaders of our organisations will support their teams by organising an induction for new leaders and, by providing opportunity for all their staff to discuss concerns, identify training needs and talk about their experiences at their leaders meetings throughout the year. Leaders will also set boundaries and rules for the ministry they are involved with and ensure these are explained to parents/carers children and young people in a **Code of Acceptable Behaviour**, designed to create a safe, secure environment and to reduce the risk of bullying and harm associated with it. Our desire is to provide an atmosphere where children, young people and adults at risk can feel comfortable and able to express their thoughts and feelings and know they will be heard and, have a safe space to share with leaders they have confidence in. We will ensure Codes of Acceptable Behaviour include details of physical contact, and, that **procedures** include guidelines for recommended ratios, consent forms, supervision, mentoring, support of junior leaders and safe photography and mobile phone usage. Procedures will also include guidance for residential programmes, outings, church sleepovers, Holiday Bible Clubs, working with those with additional needs and also children from other countries. As leaders, we will all act wisely and follow procedures about how we communicate with each other, with parents and with those attending our organisations. We recognise the risks associated with online activity and have put additional safeguards in place. Our watch-words when using technology will be **transparency, sensibility and sensitivity!**

Our commitment to Training

We understand that training is mandatory but also recognise that it is not simply about compliance but a demonstration of our deep love and care for those we are ministering to.

Recognising the importance of their role in early intervention to prevent harm from occurring our Minister, Elders, Designated Persons and all our appointed leaders will attend mandatory 'Safeguarding' training on a 3-yearly basis to enable them to recognise the signs and indicators of abuse, assess and mitigate safeguarding risks, and to respond to and report abuse.

Kirk Session will maintain overall responsibility for training but everyone has a responsibility to seek clarity if there is any information they do not understand and the Designated Persons are available for advice and, will also maintain an Active Leaders Register with vetting and training

dates recorded. **Any lapse in excess of 6 weeks in complying with training requirements will involve the leader standing down until training is updated.**

Further training courses in First Aid, Online Safety and other relevant topics will be arranged to maximise the safety of our children, youth and adults at risk.

No leader will be permitted to commence their role until basic safeguarding training has been completed.

Our Procedure for Reporting of Concerns

We will ensure that leaders in each of our church organisations are conversant with procedures for reporting a concern about a child or young person or indeed, any persons' welfare. **There will be no hesitation** in reporting it to the Designated Person or to any member of the Woodlands Safeguarding Team regardless of whether it is a **recent concern or longstanding**. If the Woodlands Safeguarding Team has identified a risk of harm, it may make contact with an external statutory service for advice and guidance and if necessary referral. While the Kirk Session are totally committed to the sovereignty, teaching and upholding of God's word we will ensure that no one is discouraged from making a disclosure and we will not delay appropriate action, or minimise harm, or replace good safeguarding processes with "spiritual solutions" of any form.

Our Church Family and Parental Consent

Family and Parents/Carers play an essential role in helping us to work collectively in keeping safe our children, young people and adults at risk by supporting and keeping our organisational leaders informed and updated on important information for our registers, and by giving consent for actions and activities to take place. We promise as a church body to hold information about children, young people and adults at risk according to GDPR regulations.

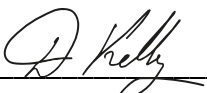

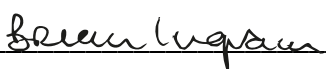
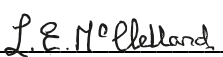
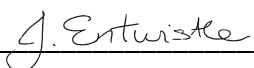
Our Designated Persons and Safeguarding Champion (Team)

The Designated Person and Adult Safeguarding Champion roles will be combined into one role. This role together with the Minister, Clerk Of Session and Safeguarding Elder will be the immediate Woodlands Safeguarding Team and will be a visible and recognisable presence to report concerns to. They will act on concerns raised, give advice and support to the Kirk Session and to organisational leaders on matters concerning the welfare of children, young people or adults at risk. They will oversee vetting and referral processes and organise training, whilst maintaining effective communication and maintenance of records confidentially. They will be available to address any questions raised by the congregation and to respond to any concerns raised.

Policies, procedures, role descriptions, codes of behaviour and risk assessments can be viewed on our website: www.woodlandschurch.co.uk/safeguarding

Implementation and Review

We will review this policy every **two** years and ensure Safeguarding is on the Agenda at every Kirk Session meeting. The Designated 'Safeguarding' Elder on behalf of the Woodlands Safeguarding Team will present safeguarding business at Kirk Session meetings.

Signed:  (Minister)
Signed:  (Clerk of Session)
Signed:  (Safeguarding Elder)
Signed:  (Designated Person)
Signed:  (Deputy Designated Person)

Date: 24:06:2026 Review Date: 24:06:2028

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) Safeguarding Policies and Suite of Procedures based on current legislation and best practice guidelines, for both Children, Young People and Adults at risk.

Woodlands Policy Statement and Policies for : Online safety (Children/Young People and Adults at Risk), Anti-bullying Policy including child friendly anti-bullying policy.

Safeguarding Risk Assessments for : Children/Young People, for Adults at Risk, for Online safety(children, young people and adults at risk).

Codes of Behaviour for: Leaders in children's ministry and ministry with adults at risk. Code of Behaviour for Children/Young People and Online Code of Behaviour for Leaders.

Role Descriptions for: Leaders in charge, for Leaders/helpers assisting in Children's ministry, for Leaders/helpers assisting in Adult Ministries and for Pastoral Care Visitors.

Guidance for: young helpers in ministry, and for Pastoral Care Visitors in respect to handling/receiving money, confidentiality and record keeping.

Woodlands Safeguarding Team are here to listen, and promise to respond to any concerns raised in regard to Safeguarding. Speak to us in person or contact us at:

safeguarding@woodlandschurch.co.uk (Monitored only by Safeguarding Team)