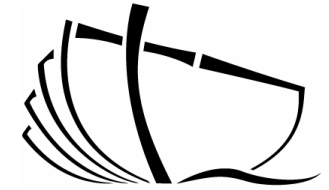


*"I have come that they may have life,  
and have it to the full."  
John 10:10*



**Diocese of Liverpool**  
**Church and Society**  
*Promoting Justice, Inclusion and Partnerships*

# Vulnerable Adults

## A Short Guide for the Church

CHURCH HOUSE, 1 HANOVER ST, LIVERPOOL L1 3DW  
TEL: 0151 705 2130 FAX: 0151 705 2215  
Email: [churchandsociety@liverpool.anglican.org](mailto:churchandsociety@liverpool.anglican.org)

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THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND

### **WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE DISCLOSES ABUSE TO YOU:**

- Stay calm and try not to show shock
- Listen carefully rather than question directly
- Be sympathetic
- Be aware of the possibility that medical evidence might be needed

### **DO TELL THE PERSON:**

- That they did right to tell you
- That you are treating this information seriously
- That it was not their fault

### **DO NOT:**

- Press the person for more details
- Stop someone who is freely recalling significant events as they may not tell you again
- Promise to keep secrets: explain that the information will be kept confidential, i.e. information will only be passed to those people who have “a need to know”
- Make promises that you cannot keep (such as “This will not happen to you again”)
- Contact the alleged abuser
- Be judgemental (e.g. “Why didn’t you run away?”)
- Pass on information to anyone who doesn’t have a “need to know” i.e. do not gossip

## HOW CAN PARISHES RESPOND TO ADULT PROTECTION ISSUES?

Implement the Diocese of Liverpool Vulnerable Adults Policy which is based on the Government's policy *Safe from Harm* which identifies three specific roles: alerters, investigators and managers - parish clergy and lay people should act as alerters to potential abuse.

Implement CRB checks on people who have contact with Vulnerable Adults as listed in the policy, to enable people in the parish to understand issues at practical level, and promote good practise for all involved, to guard against false accusations.

### LAY PEOPLE AND CLERGY ACT AS ALERTERS.

Their duty is:

- To report suspected acts of abuse: Lay people should inform the parish priest, the Parish Priest will inform the Protection for All Adviser who will inform the Bishop
- To be alert to what abuse means and take seriously what they are told
- To think about what they see and ask if it is acceptable practice
- To work strictly in accordance with anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-ageist and anti-disability practices
- To ensure the safety of the person you suspect is being mistreated as well as your own safety
- To contact the emergency services first, e.g. police, ambulance, if in a life-threatening situation.

To be alert to hints, signals and non-verbal communication that could indicate abuse, which is being denied or deliberately hidden.

## TERMINOLOGY

The broad definition of a 'vulnerable adult', referred to in the 1997 Consultation Paper *Who decides?* issued by the Lord Chancellor's Department, is a person:

*"Who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness; and*

*Who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation"*.

In other words the people who are most likely to be the subject of mistreatment, are those people who:

- Are very frail
- Are older people
- Have a mental illness including dementia
- Have a physical or sensory disability
- Have a learning disability
- Have a serious physical illness

### WHAT IS MEANT BY ABUSE

Abuse is any behaviour towards a person that deliberately, or unknowingly, causes him or her harm, endangers life, or violates rights.

Abuse may be physical, sexual, psychological, and financial or may arise through neglect.

Abuse may be perpetrated by an individual, a group or an organisation.

Abuse concerns the misuse of power, control and/or authority and can manifest itself as:

- Domestic violence, sexual assault or sexual harassment
- Racially or religiously motivated assault
- Discrimination and oppression
- Institutional abuse

## WHERE DOES ABUSE TAKE PLACE?

People can be abused in:

- Their own homes
- The family home
- Residential/nursing homes
- Day centres, at work, college
- Hospitals and in public places including churches and ancillary buildings

## ISSUES OF SPIRITUALITY

Within faith communities harm may be caused to vulnerable adults by the inappropriate use of religious belief or practice. This can include:

- The misuse of the authority of leadership or penitential discipline
- Oppressive teaching
- Obtrusive healing and deliverance ministries
- The denial of the rights to faith and religious practice

## WHO ARE THE ABUSERS?

- An individual, a group or an organisation may perpetrate abuse
- Anyone can be an abuser - a neighbour, friend, relative, partner, paid carers and volunteers.
- Institutions can be abusive if the care they provide is poor.

## FACTORS WHICH MAY LEAD TO ABUSE

Abuse is more likely to occur if the vulnerable person:

- Rejects help
- Has a communication difficulty
- Is aggressive
- Behaves in an unusual way
- Is not helpful or cooperative
- Is behaviourally disturbed or there are major changes in personality behaviour

## MISTREATMENT IS MORE LIKELY TO OCCUR IF CARERS:

- Feel lonely or isolated and have no one to talk to
- Are under stress due to poor income or housing conditions
- Have other responsibilities i.e. work, family
- Are showing signs of physical or mental illness
- Are becoming dependant on alcohol or drugs
- Family relationships over the years have been poor
- Live where family violence is the norm

## OTHER FACTORS TO LOOK FOR INCLUDE:

- Carer has their own problems
- Carers perceive the dependant adult being deliberately awkward
- Vulnerable adult has few/no social contacts
- Vulnerable person cannot converse normally