



Unacceptable behaviour

From time to time, children and adults who are vulnerable may present behaviour which is challenging both for individuals and for other members of the congregation or the group concerned.

This may include behaviour affected by mental health issues and learning disabilities. In such circumstances, behaviour perceived as disruptive may be the person's attempt to communicate. In every such situation, we have to make a judgement about what behaviour can safely be tolerated, and what behaviour must be managed, restricted or prevented for the safety of all concerned.

It sometimes helps to have worked out and publicised some 'ground rules' for acceptable behaviour in any setting, and for church or group leaders to have worked out how they will enforce such ground rules.

What always constitutes unacceptable behaviour?

We each have different thresholds of what counts as unacceptable behaviour from another person. The following behaviours, however, are never acceptable and should always be challenged and addressed, whatever a person's age, ability or mental health:

- Abusive or threatening behaviour,
- Violence or risk of violence
- Misuse of drugs or alcohol on premises
- Someone under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Harassment
- Racist behaviour.
- Sexual behaviour

Who are particularly at risk from unacceptable behaviour?

The following list is not exhaustive; but these groups of people should think through how any of the behaviours above would be responded to, and how their situation can be made as safe as possible:

- Clergy at home or on their own – and their families
- Members of the congregation in church (especially in small groups)
- Leaders of activities
- Workers in church.

What precautions can you take?

Build in some of the following as ground rules for how you run things in order to help to minimise risk:

- Don't allow anyone who you think may pose a risk into your home or any environment where you are alone
- Keep doors locked if you are inside church alone or in a small group (KIV the task you are undertaking and how you will be accessed in a emergency situation)
- Always aim to have at least 2 adults present in any place
- Always have access to a phone with a signal
- Have readily available contact details for emergency services
- Do regular risk assessments of activities
- Set ground rules for belonging/joining activities or groups – and stick with them
- If challenging behaviour is becoming part of a group's culture, leaders should meet to plan how to address it
- When challenging behaviour arises, leaders should meet to debrief after the meeting, in order to learn from mistakes, make a record, decide what needs to be done, and how leaders will be supported
- For vulnerable people you know, develop contact with family, carers and support agencies, and take advice on how to handle their behaviour
- Gain an understanding of particular disabilities or mental health issues in order to understand the behaviour better
- Learn how best to communicate with adults with specific vulnerabilities
- If the behaviour of a child or vulnerable adult is known to be erratic or challenging, work out with them, and in association with their primary carer, an agreement on how their behaviour will be managed, and what sanctions applied if necessary
- If you have received threats of violence or intimidating behaviour, inform the Parish Safeguarding Officer, who will give guidance on referring to the local police, and ensure you have a plan for how you will respond if an incident occurs.

Guidelines on managing violence and aggression

The context of these guidelines is managing violence and aggression within a church situation and amongst a group of people who are there voluntarily with leaders/helpers who are also for the most part volunteers.

There can be no justification for knowingly involving church volunteers in situations which put them at personal risk, either physically or emotionally. Verbal abuse can be as hurtful, and indeed traumatic, as a physical attack. It should be safe to assume that the carers of a

potentially violent individual would not consider it appropriate for that person to participate in social or other activities if he or she was known to pose a risk to other people.

However, violence and aggressive behaviour is, by nature, often unpredictable so some guidelines for dealing with emergency situations are suggested below.

Always remember that de-escalation of a situation can resolve it – confrontation just makes it worse. Our body language is very important and often communicates far stronger messages than those we articulate verbally so adopt:

- a relaxed and non-aggressive stance, with feet apart for balance
- relaxed but attentive facial expression
- appropriate eye contact (neither avoiding nor staring)
- relaxed jaw (unclench your teeth)
- relaxed hands (not clenched fists) hanging by your side.

DO

- always treat the person with respect
- name yourself (if the person doesn't know your name)
- address the person by name
- speak loudly enough to be heard by the individual concerned but not necessarily by everyone else in the room
- try to manoeuvre into a place of safety: move slowly away from stairs and glass windows to somewhere with an exit, where the person won't feel cornered or trapped, and where there are other people around who are aware of what is happening
- stand more than an arm's length away from the person, partly so that they can't grab hold of you but also so you aren't invading their personal space. (But a characteristic of aggressive behaviour is invasion of another person's personal space so keeping your distance also protects your own space.)
- avoid physical contact
- stand at an angle, not face to face, so reducing eye contact
- keep yourself calm by taking a few deep breaths to slow your heart rate
- be aware that the person has feelings they are trying to express and that they may be frightened by the situation they have created and not know how to get out of it..

Working with disruptive children

At the start of each academic year the team should

- Consider the mix and needs of the groups they look after and plan accordingly.
- Increase ratios if there are children in the group who are known to be disruptive or with needs
- Consider defusing techniques
 - Signposting- Leader explaining we are going to be doing a, then B. Carry out A then signpost to B
- Each group to set its own set of behavior rules suggested by and agreed to by the children.
- Have an agreed escalation plan that all helpers understand.
- Have an agreed exclusion plan that all helpers understand.

If a child is being disruptive:

- Ask him or her to stop
- Speak to the child to establish the cause(s) of upset
- Consider at every stage calling the child's parent or carer
- Inform the child that s/he will be asked to leave if the behaviour continues
- Warn the child that if s/he continues to be disruptive, this may result in longer term exclusion from the group or activity
- Where possible, have a team strategy for handling disruption, such as engaging leaders of other groups taking place at the same time and location in management of situations
- If a child is harming him/herself, another person or property, then escort other children away from the area where the disruption is occurring
- At the same time, another worker should ask the child to stop
- If the request is ignored, warn him/her that you may call for additional help (e.g. Parents, Incumbent, the police) if they do not stop
- If they do not stop, call upon the support of parents, the incumbent, the police or other appropriate professional help
- In exceptional circumstances, you may need to restrain the child to prevent them harming themselves, others or the property whilst you wait for help
- Ensure that the parent/carer of both the child, and any other child affected by the disruption (especially a victim) are informed of the incident, as soon as possible after it has taken place
- Record the event as soon as possible after the incident, and inform the Parish Safeguarding Officer and the incumbent
- After the incident, consider what longer term sanctions are appropriate regarding this child, and what safeguarding steps are needed. If necessary take advice from the Parish Safeguarding Officer