Safeguarding and Young People

**Topic:** Good Practice  
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**Biography:**

Becky Wills is an Archdeaconry Youth Missioner for Peterborough Diocese, supporting parishes to grow and develop work with young people. She has been doing Church-based Youth and Children’s work for over 25 years in churches around the country from Cheshire to Durham, Birmingham and Kettering. She loves inspiring churches to engage with and deeply involve young people in the life of the church, bringing fun, freshness and riskiness into the heart of their community! She is married to a vicar, with two teenage boys, enjoys quality drama; films, tv and novels, is a fan of LFC & cricket, good food and travel.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Protecting the young people we work with should be at the core of what we do; giving them a place of safety, love and justice, for all but especially for those who do not find it elsewhere. It is vital that we are safe to work with young people, protecting them and ourselves as youth leaders. Safeguarding procedures, policies and guidelines should give a safety net that frees us to work with young people with openness, integrity, love and trust, whilst acknowledging that risk is an integral part of good youth work.

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**THEOLOGY**

References: CCPAS A Theology of Safeguarding  
[http://www.ccpas.co.uk/about/theology](http://www.ccpas.co.uk/about/theology)  
Jim McManus Towards a Theology of Safeguarding  
[http://www.academia.edu/6003951/towards_a_theology_of_safeguarding](http://www.academia.edu/6003951/towards_a_theology_of_safeguarding)  
Cof E commissioned theological resource for parishes, “The Gospel, Sexual Abuse and the Church”  
[https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2535755/theologicalresourcefaocweb.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2535755/theologicalresourcefaocweb.pdf)

Love, Protection and Justice are three Biblical strands that demonstrate a theological basis for the heart of our safeguarding of young people.

God as Trinity is in community. He is personal and in relationship with us, through his love as the perfect Father. He wants the best for His children.

In the Psalms God is often described as a haven, we are under his protective wings, He is a safe harbour for all who live in fear, and especially for the vulnerable in our society.

Throughout the Bible we see God with a passion for Justice; raising up the humble, freeing the
captive and oppressed, giving voice to the voiceless.

Jesus gave a special and counter cultural voice to protecting, raising up and recognising the joys, gifts and preciousness of children (and by extension young and vulnerable people), and dire warnings to those who abused them. He challenged those in authority, in favour of the lowly, the humble and the disenfranchised.

Safeguarding has to balance this protection of the innocent, with one of the Church’s core values of forgiveness for all, unconditional love and hospitality open to all. This tenuous balance, when tipped one way, can give opportunity for predators and abuse, when tipped the other becomes exclusive, dogmatic and legally rule-bound.

**PRACTICALITIES**

Before any work with young people in churches begins, there needs to be procedures in place to ensure the safest possible recruitment, with checks, safety nets and accountability built into everything that you do. Having a trusted and independent person in charge of safeguarding, accountable to the wider church and ensuring that all activities follow guidelines and policy.

Training in safeguarding for all who work with young people should be regular and up to date. All volunteers, paid workers and ministers should know how to react in a wide range of safeguarding situations; keeping alert to risks, dealing professionally and sensitively with disclosure, managing others’ unsafe behaviour.

Key to good safeguarding is being able to refer on to the right people, knowing who is the best person to get help from. (in many cases a Diocesan Safeguarding Officer, or equivalent, but perhaps Police or Social services).

When you are running a youth group, the most vital piece of safeguarding advice is keep everything public. Always be observable by others when you’re with young people/children whether in a youth group or online.

Many people fear that safeguarding procedures are shackles that prevent anything being done, or they use it as an excuse not to do youth work at all, but the best safeguarding is done simply, thoroughly, with systems that need not be onerous or time consuming in the right hands. Often practitioners are creatives, spontaneous people for whom forms etc are a big frustration, but it is the duty of churches to make sure that others more suited take on the burden to make it as straightforward as possible without cutting corners, to free up safe youth workers to do the crucial work.

Make sure your church prominently displays notices that proclaim that you take safeguarding seriously; be public about your priorities in keeping vulnerable people safe.

**REFLECTION & LEARNING**

In reading, praying and discussing with fellow practitioners and experts in safeguarding, keep up to date with current thinking, to ensure that your work with young people is prepared and proactive
not reactive.

Find out if you are up to date with Safeguarding Training and where you can access it near to you. When did you last check your church’s policies?

Learn from young people themselves. This generation have been brought up to be aware of risk and to know what they should do. Talk with them about looking out for each other and keeping safe. Do it in a safe environment and be prepared for disclosure or accusation. Do you know what to do?

**DEVELOPING PRACTICE**

Think about Online and Social Media safety. Does your church (wider church body) have a policy or guidelines? A number of Dioceses in the church of England and the Methodist Church have guidelines available online.

In a fast changing world the imperative to keep moving and up to date is even more vital. Keep abreast of news stories, current research, cultural trends and educational practices to continue to be relevant and professional, whilst constantly testing against the theology of Jesus and his love, justice and protection.

**FURTHER INFORMATION**

CCPAS are a leading safeguarding charity. [http://www.ccpas.co.uk](http://www.ccpas.co.uk)

Some further reading/watching in reference to online safety:

[https://yfcresources.co.uk/ethos/ethos](https://yfcresources.co.uk/ethos/ethos) is a short video on Youth for Christ Resources’ website and is a useful discussion starter, raising a number of important issues.

“Online Church? First Steps Towards Virtual Incarnation” Mark Howe Grove Booklets P112


Dr Bex Lewis from CODEC, [http://www.amazon.co.uk/Raising-Children-Digital-Age-Enjoying/dp/0745956041/ref=asap_bc](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Raising-Children-Digital-Age-Enjoying/dp/0745956041/ref=asap_bc)

“Black Mirror” Channel 4 series by Charlie Brooker raises some pertinent issues on technology and modern culture.

“Cyberbully” Channel 4 one-off drama on the dangers of social media

Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre’s website for children, young people, parents, teachers and youth workers [https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/](https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/)

Peterborough Diocese are currently working on a Social Media policy, due to be published in the next few months.