



Bullying, Harassment and Safeguarding Policy

Safeguarding Policy, Procedures and Guidance for the Methodist Church in Britain

6.3.4 BULLYING, HARASSMENT AND SAFEGUARDING

The Methodist Church offers a warm welcome to everyone and strives to be a safer place for all where all forms of bullying and harassment will not be tolerated.

Policy Statement

Bullying and harassment are unacceptable and never excusable. The Methodist Church holds that all forms of bullying and harassment are unacceptable, inconsistent and incompatible with the Christian faith and a Christian way of living. The Methodist Church is committed to being a safer space for all. This means ensuring that members of the Methodist Church have an understanding and awareness of harassment and bullying and know how to respond appropriately, and that there are processes in place to enable the issues to be addressed. Victims of bullying or harassment can expect to be listened to, taken seriously and supported when they disclose that they are subject to bullying or harassment. Local Churches can receive advice and support from their Church/Circuit Safeguarding Officer and the District Safeguarding Officer.

Definition of Bullying and Harassment

There is no single definition of bullying. The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) state that bullying may be characterised as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.

Bullying or harassment may be carried out by an individual against an individual (perhaps by someone in a position of authority) or involve groups of people. It may be obvious, or it may be insidious. Whatever form it takes, it is unwarranted and unwelcome to the individual.

The Methodist Church offers this definition as follows:

Any behaviour, always involving a misuse of power, which an individual or group knows, or ought reasonably to know, could have the potential effect of offending, humiliating, intimidating or isolating an individual or group should be regarded as unacceptable.

‘Unacceptable behaviour’ changes its label to ‘bullying’ or ‘harassing behaviour’ when it causes actual harm or distress to the target(s), normally, but not exclusively, after a series of incidents over a prolonged period of time. Lack of intent does not diminish, excuse or negate the impact on the target or the distress caused. The degree of intent is only relevant in terms of how the behaviour should be challenged and the issues subsequently resolved. (Positive Working Together - A Short Guide 2015)

Harassment refers to poor treatment related to a protected characteristic (ACAS 2020). These are as follows:

- age
- sex
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sexual orientation

While bullying itself is not against the law, harassment is. It is against the law to discriminate against someone on any of the above grounds under the Equality Act (2010). You are also protected from discrimination if:

- you are associated with someone who has a protected characteristic, for example a family member or friend
- you have complained about discrimination or supported someone else’s claim

Bullying and harassment is behaviour that makes someone feel intimidated or offended (Workplace bullying and harassment - GOV.UK 2020). These terms are often used interchangeably and some definitions include bullying as a form

of harassment.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is the action the Methodist Church takes to promote a safer culture. This means we will:

- promote the welfare of children, young people and adults
- work to prevent abuse from occurring
- seek to protect and respond well to those that have been abused

The aim of the Methodist Church's Safeguarding Policy, Procedures and Guidance is to 'create Christian communities of love and care, where good practice to promote the welfare of children, young people and adults becomes a way of life.'

Types of Bullying

There are different types of bullying and some can be covert and therefore more difficult to spot, but others more obvious and therefore easier to identify. It is helpful to split these in to different categories:

Physical Bullying

This can include hitting, kicking, tripping, pinching, pushing or damaging property.

Verbal Bullying

This can include name-calling, insults, snide remarks, teasing, intimidation, homophobic or racist remarks, or verbal abuse.

Social Bullying

This form of bullying can take many forms such as the following:

- Lying and spreading rumours
- Negative facial or physical gestures, menacing or contemptuous looks
- Playing nasty jokes to embarrass and humiliate
- Mimicking unkindly
- Encouraging others to social exclude someone
- Damaging someone's social reputation or social acceptance.

Cyber Bullying

This can happen at any time and be in public or in private and consist of the following:

- abusive or hurtful texts, emails or posts, images or videos
- deliberately excluding others online
- nasty gossip or rumours
- imitating others online or using their log-in.

Bullying and harassment can happen:

- face-to-face
- via a third party instigating by the 'primary' bully
- by letter
- by email
- via any digital platform
- by phone (mobile or landline).

What is not bullying:

- single episodes of social rejection or dislike
- single episode acts of nastiness or spite
- random acts of aggression or intimidation
- mutual arguments, disagreements or fights.

These actions can cause great distress, but do not fit the definition of bullying unless someone is deliberately and repeatedly doing them (National Centre for Bullying 2020). The Methodist Church does have systems in place to deal with those within the church who are perpetrators of bullying or harassment. The Complaints and Discipline process is one route, but this does not apply to those who are not members of the Methodist Church. To help ensure any allegations of bullying or harassment are dealt with in a timely, sensitive and comprehensive manner and that pastoral care for the victim is prioritized the procedures for any allegation or complaint are detailed in the flow chart (see appendix X).

SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

Bullying UK <https://www.bullying.co.uk> (A leading charity providing advice and support to anyone affected by bullying).

Support and advice for anyone who needs help: National Bullying Helpline
0845 22 55 787
<https://www.nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk/>

6.3.4.1 Peer on peer abuse and contextual safeguarding

The Methodist Church recognises that as children move towards their teenage years, their circles of influence change. Peers and other external influences in the community and online may become more significant. The contextual safeguarding approach highlights the interaction between these different spheres and the potential for positive and negative outcomes. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and therefore all those engaging with the Church, should remain vigilant for indicators of abuse and commit to working with community and statutory partners to create a safer environment. No individual agency or party is likely to have a full view of a particular situation. The Church can play a significant role in supporting young people who are at risk of peer on peer abuse, gang membership and sexual exploitation by sharing information and engaging with the community.

Further information about peer on peer abuse and contextual safeguarding developed by the University of Bedfordshire may be found via the following link: <https://contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/assets/documents/Contextual-Safeguarding-Briefing.pdf>