

Handling Complaints and Grievances in Parish Churches or Cathedral

You may from time to time be the direct recipients of complaints, grievances or allegations. These may be made directly from a victim, or you may receive second or third hand information from members of the congregation.

A complaint is a written or verbal expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet about an action, or lack of action by a person acting on behalf of the church, or about the policies and procedures of the church. When the complaint is made by someone who is deployed within the parish, whether paid (for instance, paid youth workers and administrators) or holding unremunerated office (for instance, Sunday School leaders, servers), it is usually referred to as a **grievance**. A complaint or a grievance may include **an allegation** that a person has behaved in an unacceptable way. If the behaviour or concern relates to the safety of children or vulnerable adults, the approach from the outset must be as follows:

Safeguarding issues

Always contact the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA) with regard to any safeguarding concern. If a complaint or grievance relates to or includes an allegation that a child or adult who may be vulnerable has been harmed or is at risk of harm, or that an adult or another child may have caused harm to a child or adult who may be vulnerable, you must respond using the Diocesan safeguarding procedures for handling such allegations. You should make contact with the DSA without delay, and before taking action. The DSA will then implement the Church of England procedure for allegations.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-news-and-releases/new-guidance-reporting-serious-incidents-approved>

The aim should be to resolve informally, complaints or grievances which do not relate to children or adults who may be vulnerable. Every effort should be made to resolve them speedily and fairly by discussion, problem solving, mediation and negotiation. Problems should therefore be brought directly to the person(s) deemed responsible for the area of dissatisfaction or disquiet, and will hopefully be resolved in this way. If, however, after this problem-solving stage, complaints or grievances remain unresolved, more formal action may be needed.

Complaints and Grievances against ordained clergy or licensed lay ministers (e.g. Readers) are not handled by the parish, and should be addressed to the Archdeacon or the Bishop.

Complaints and Grievances concerning church officers who are not clergy or lay ministers may need to be addressed more formally by the parish.

Guidelines for handling complaints, grievances and allegations

- Treat seriously all complaints, grievances and allegations
- Don't delay in making a response – but stay calm
- Ask yourself if anyone may have been harmed or be at risk of harm, on the information you have been given – and if so, follow safeguarding procedures
- Dig out your policy and procedures – refer to and follow the appropriate sections
- Decide who you need to tell – for instance your incumbent, the Parish Safeguarding Officer, the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, your Archdeacon.
- Follow advice

- If the matter is serious, don't undertake your own investigation – take advice first
- Consider oversight of managing risks – could you make organisational or structural changes to reduce risks?
- Keep well-documented records of all conversations, correspondence, phone calls etc.
- Don't make assumptions, take sides, gossip or pass information to anyone who doesn't need to know or shouldn't know (this may include at this stage the alleged perpetrator, and also your spouse or partner)
- Do your best to remain publicly objective and impartial in all your conversations and dealings with the matter – whatever you may be feeling inside
- Don't talk to the press! Contact the Diocesan Communications Officer to find out how to handle press enquiries.

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