

Hornsea United Reformed Church Online Safety Policy

Online Safety Coordinator: *Ilena Williams*

Deputy Online Safety Coordinator: *Julia Clifton*



Introduction

This Online Safety Policy aligns with Good Practice 6 and complements our Safeguarding Policy and Data Protection Policy. Its purpose is to guide safe online interactions within Hornsea United Reformed Church, especially when ministering through the internet, social media, and mobile devices. Our goal is to protect children and adults at risk, providing clear guidelines for online safety.

1. Who This Policy Applies To

This policy applies to:

- Church staff and volunteers working with children and adults at risk
- Those involved in managing IT systems within the church
- Anyone involved in online ministry, including group activities

All individuals working with children and/or adults at risk will be given the relevant Codes of Conduct, including specific guidance on safe online practices. Signing the Code of Conduct confirms their understanding and agreement.

2. Scope of the Policy

This policy covers:

- IT systems and resources
- Electronic communications and social media
- Video conferencing
- Livestreaming and recorded video use
- Appropriate use of online images
- Responses to online safety concerns

3. Definition of Online Abuse

Online abuse involves harm facilitated through technology such as computers, tablets, and mobile phones and other internet-enabled devices. Forms of online abuse include:

- Bullying/cyberbullying
- Sexting
- Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse and exploitation
- Financial exploitation
- Scamming, grooming, and harassment

The impact can be serious, potentially causing victims to feel isolated and fearful. Often, victims may not fully recognise that they are being abused.

4. Safeguarding IT Resources

Our IT resources, both hardware and software, will support safe practices. This includes:

- Regularly reviewing and updating IT security
- Assessing new technologies for potential risks before use
- Installing filtering software on church-owned devices as appropriate
- Ensuring secure login and password practices for staff and volunteers

Should there be a need to use church-owned devices in activities involving children or adults at risk, participants will be briefed on acceptable use and agree to avoid:

- Accessing offensive or illegal websites
- Sharing obscene or offensive materials
- Violating copyright laws or accessing others' files
- Using devices for harassment or unauthorised activities

For church projections, only church laptops will be used. If an external organisation needs laptop projection access, checks will be made to ensure our online safeguarding protocols are adhered to. Any content shown is the hirer's responsibility, as outlined in the church booking form.

5. Promoting Safe Use of Electronic Communications and Social Media

To support safe electronic communications, we will:

- Use clear, unambiguous language to avoid misinterpretation
- Keep records of all messages
- Obtain parental consent for email or text communication with children
- Avoid communication between the hours of 9 p.m. - 7 a.m.
- Use church accounts rather than personal ones for all ministry interactions
- Ensure all participants meet age requirements for social media platforms
- Advise workers to manage social media privacy settings to limit exposure of personal information

6. Creating Safe Online Spaces for Video Conferencing and Calls

For video conferencing:

- Use subscription-based platforms with enhanced security features
- End meetings immediately if uninvited visitors join; report risks to the safeguarding officer if needed
- Ensure at least three people per breakout group
- For youth activities, require two leaders per breakout room and prevent private chats between participants

For one-to-one calls with children or adults at risk:

- Arrange for a parent or carer to be present
- Record details of meeting times, duration, and frequency for accountability

For group video calls:

- Communicate expectations around appropriate behaviour
- Ensure at least two adults are present before participants join
- Use church profiles and devices rather than personal accounts
- Only record sessions if there is a specific, justifiable reason

7. Livestreaming and Recorded Video Safeguards

In line with Good Practice 6 (section 3.9), we will:

- Obtain consent from anyone appearing in livestreams or recorded videos
- Inform people if an event is being recorded and provide an option to stay out of camera range
- Focus on group shots, avoiding individual close-ups
- For church projections, only church laptops will be used.

8. Using Images Online

When sharing images online, we will:

- Obtain consent before posting images
- Avoid identifying children or adults at risk through personal details
- Discuss appropriate image use with parents and children, especially if children take photos of each other

9. Responding to Online Safety Concerns

In line with Good Practice 6, we will respond to online safety concerns with sensitivity and care.

- **Immediate Danger:** Report to the police or appropriate statutory services immediately.
- **Other Concerns:** Report to the Church Safeguarding Co-ordinators (CSCs) or, if unavailable, to the Synod Safeguarding Officer (SSO).

Support for affected individuals will be coordinated with the SSO or other relevant support services.

10. Key contacts

Church Safeguarding (Children) Co-ordinator	Ilena Williams	07590 377300
Church Safeguarding (Adults) Co-ordinator	Julia Clifton	07811 537622
Church Safeguarding email	urchornseasafeguarding@gmail.com	

Synod Safeguarding Officer
Email: safeguarding1and4@urc.org.uk

Carrie Kaunda 07432 886158

URC Safeguarding Office (This should only be used if you are unable to contact the Synod Safeguarding Officer) Email: safeguarding@urc.org.uk

Local statutory services: Children 01482 395500
out of hours number: 01964 393939

Local statutory services: Adults 01482 396940
out of hours number: 01377 241273

10. Review

This policy will be reviewed annually, updated as required and adopted by the church meeting.

This policy ensures that Hornsea United Reformed Church provides a safe and supportive online environment for all participants, prioritising the protection of children and adults at risk in every aspect of our digital ministry.

Signed (Church Elders):

J. Johns

J. B. B.

ANN BOSWORTH

V. Pearson

R. M. Knapp

Kathleen Maxwell

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A. Jordan

M. A. Chubley

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