

National Safeguarding Adults Week 2020

Safeguarding in Your Community



[Learn more](#) about how you can keep yourself safe when receiving voluntary support?

[Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility](#). Learn how to spot the signs and raise a concern if you are worried about someone in your community.

Sports and activity clubs are at the centre of communities. To learn more about safeguarding in sport [watch this video](#).

Language Creates Reality: [Learn how](#) Becca's community project is revolutionising language use in health and social care.

[End the Awkward](#)- It can be difficult to know how to talk about disability. Explore these free resources that offer support and advice to help end the awkward!

Safer Faith, Safer Followers – An Introduction to Spiritual Abuse

What is Spiritual Abuse?

Spiritual abuse takes place when an individual or group engages in coercive and controlling behaviour of others in a faith context. It means using religious beliefs and practices to justify behaviour and actions that are harmful to others. The victim of the abuse may not be aware they are being abused.

One of the problems of spiritual abuse is that it usually happens gradually and incrementally, so that the person at risk of abuse does not realise at first that there is anything wrong.

Spiritual abuse may start with a pastoral conversation that feels helpful. It may start with a suggested course of action that makes sense, or an offer of practical support. But over time, the temperature of the relationship is raised to the point where it causes serious harm, or even death.

Another definition of spiritual abuse is “abuse linked to faith or belief.” For examples of this, think of scenarios involving accusations of witchcraft or spirit possession. The focus is not on promoting a particular definition but rather to ensure people in faith communities are safe.

The St Philip’s Centre is assisting to tackle this problem is to develop a discussion guide, *Safer Faith, Safer Followers*. Stakeholders from a range of different faith communities and professional organisations are working together. The aim is to produce a scenario-focused, accessible booklet that faith communities and groups can use to begin the conversation about how to make themselves and those they work with safer.

A Healthy Culture

Safeguarding is not primarily an issue of policy, but one of organisational culture. The single most important practical steps any faith community can take in order to become safer is to develop a healthier culture.

Places of worship and faith communities face exactly the same cultural challenge. We’re often too quick to defer to the spiritual authority of a single leader. Those leaders do not always have the maturity or objectivity to recognise the potential for spiritual abuse to take place. So ask yourself, what would a healthy culture look like in your place of worship?

Key Points to Consider

- Who is responsible for safeguarding people in your place of worship?
- Do you have safeguarding policies, and do regular attendees know you have them?
- Do people know who they can discuss safeguarding concerns with?
- Are people able to challenge inappropriate behaviour, regardless of who it involves?
- Do your leaders receive regular supervision and accountability sessions?
- Are those who work with vulnerable people trained in safeguarding?
- Is safeguarding on the agenda of all relevant committees and management meetings?
- Do you have a process in place to support victims of abuse?
- Do leaders recognise the potential for spiritual abuse to occur in your place of worship?
- What are leaders doing to prevent abuse from happening?

It’s not easy to deal with problems so complex. Tackling spiritual abuse requires individuals and groups from many walks of life to work together towards a shared outcome.