



# Prayer Spaces in Schools and Protecting Vulnerable Groups in Scotland



One of our stated values for Prayer Spaces in Schools is this:

## **Safe**

Prayer Spaces ensure that children and young people feel safe and are effectively protected from harm.

In running a prayer space you are creating an environment where children or young people have the potential to be vulnerable, either because of the thoughts or feelings they may be processing or because of the access that unsuitable team members could have to them.

It is your legal responsibility to ensure that the children or young people in the prayer space you are running are effectively protected from harm. Abuse is generally divided into four different types of harm; physical, emotional, sexual and neglect. The Church also specifically recognises spiritual abuse; control, domination or manipulation by someone or a group who has authority within a spiritual setting. A child may be subject to one type of abuse, or a combination of all of them.

You will also want to ensure that you and your team are protected from allegations of abuse or of inappropriate behaviour.

**This document is not a substitute for full child protection training for yourself or your team and we recommend that you cover this in greater detail in your team training prior to running the prayer space.**



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## PVG Disclosure

The lead person in the team should be PVG accredited.  
(<http://www.disclosurescotland.co.uk>)

It is recommended that other team members are also PVG accredited, but most Head Teachers would be of the opinion that it is impractical to insist that every volunteer working in a school is PVG checked.

The PVG can be applied for through the authority or local church or another volunteer group.

## Supervising the Prayer Space

- ◆ The lead person should always be present when a class/ pupils are in the room.
- ◆ Non-PVG registered volunteers should never be left with pupils unless the team leader/ classroom teacher is present.
- ◆ Most Head Teachers would consider it essential that a teacher remains with the class at all times. Any other arrangement would be made only with the agreement of the Senior Management Team (SMT).
- ◆ Ideally, the team should consist of both males and females.

## Team Guidelines

- ◆ The team leader(s) will have discussed with the SMT what Prayer Activities are appropriate and how pupil concerns are to be handled.
- ◆ Team members should not be alone with individual pupils nor groups of pupils.
- ◆ Team members should not accept or give contact details to a pupil and should not connect with them through social media.
- ◆ No secrets. Team members must not agree to keep information confidential. If a child or a young person offers to share with a team member and asks that it be kept confidential, the team member should make it clear that they will at least perhaps need to tell another team member and, depending on what they want to tell, it may be that for the young person's safety and wellbeing they would need to pass it on to member of the Guidance Team or to the Head Teacher.

**Any allegation or suspicion of child abuse must immediately be reported to the Head Teacher if there are grounds for concern about the possibility of abuse. Any concerns about a pupil's welfare should be reported to the Head Teacher immediately. Each Local Authority will have a Standard Circular on Child Protection.**

## **Other things**

- ◆ You may wish to check with the insurer of your church or organisation that they cover legal expense in the case of an allegation of abuse.
- ◆ We recommend that you keep a record of all those who have helped to run the prayer space and their PVG reference details and that you get them to sign a simple document to say they have read the safeguarding policies for the prayer space and the school and will abide by them.

## **Sample prayer space child protection document**

The following sample document has been used in many schools and should be read as part of this document as it contains additional child protection advice. It aims to condense the essential information into a single side of A4 that can easily be understood by volunteers.

You may use this sample document as a guide in creating your own but please note the following:

- ◆ It contains information specific to the school which you should find out in advance.
- ◆ It should be read in conjunction with the school policy on protecting vulnerable groups or the child protection advice leaflet for visitors.



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## Guidelines

These are brief guidelines for all adults working with children and young people (all under 18s) in a prayer space in a school. They exist for your own protection and that of the young people you are working with.

### Summary statement

As organisers and adults working with young people we all have a duty of care towards the young people who attend. This means that you are responsible for taking action to prevent harm in any situation where you become aware of a risk or hazard to young people.

### In School

We are visitors to the school and work with the permission of the Head Teacher/Principal and senior management, and under their authority.

The project line manager for the Prayer Space is **[ name of organiser ]**

Within the school we are responsible to **[ name of teacher ]**

Always sign in when you arrive and sign out when you leave. Wear your visitors badge at all times where it can be seen.

Use only staff toilets, which are located *[ insert instructions on where the toilets are ]*

- **Work in pairs** — there should be a minimum of two adults, ideally at least one of each gender, in the Prayer Space whenever there are young people present. If this is not possible the room must be closed. Never be on your own with a young person where you can't be observed.
- **Work appropriately** — Avoid any contact with young people which is, *or could be interpreted as being*, inappropriate, sexual or violent (words, threats, jokes, actions).
- **Do not take secrets out of the school** — if you are told about a situation of abuse, anything illegal or potentially harmful, you must pass this information immediately to **[ name of school child protection co-ordinator ]** who is the designated member of staff for safeguarding. You should also make your own notes about the conversation as soon as possible and before leaving the school (the school may have a specific referral form for this). A copy of these notes should be left with **[ name of school child protection co-ordinator ]**.
- **Disclosure of abuse** – Don't promise confidentiality. If a young person wants to talk to you about abuse - listen, don't investigate. Don't ask leading questions. Let the child know that you will need to tell a senior member of staff that the conversation has taken place. Assure them they are not to blame and that they have done the right thing by telling you. You should also make your own notes about the conversation as soon as possible and before leaving the school. A copy of these notes should be left with **[ name of school child protection co-ordinator ]**.

- **Contact details** – Do not accept or give contact details to any student or make contact through social media.
- **Violent or threatening behaviour** – Always try to defuse the situation but do not put yourself or others in a dangerous situation. If in doubt, back off. Call for help as a first priority.
- **First Aid** – send for a member of staff. Administer First Aid only if you have a current qualification. As part of your initial planning, ascertain who are the designated First Aiders and the school policy/ guidelines for contacting them. Call for help if you are unsure about anything. Do not administer any medication.
- **Reporting incidents or injuries** – Inform a member of staff as soon as possible. You will also be required to complete an incident report form.