

Practice guide



Safeguarding and
overseas mission

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Christianity and mission

The Christian church, right from its birth recorded in the book of Acts, is about mission. Christians have always been driven to share the good news in wider and wider circles, crossing whatever boundaries that geography, nationality, culture or language have placed in their way. Missionary agencies based in the UK have been doing valuable missionary work overseas for many generations and widespread immigration has brought into the UK many Christians from all parts of the world.

In recent years, faster and easier travel together with new technologies opening up ways of communicating across the globe at the touch of a button, has caused the world to shrink as society has become more global and international. This trend towards globalisation and diversity can be seen very clearly in the church in the UK. Individuals and small

groups like local churches are now able to forge direct links, often bypassing established international organisations, with individuals and local churches anywhere in the world. This global communication, whether mediated by international organisations or direct, individual to individual and local church to local church, presents new challenges, one of the most significant of which is safeguarding children and vulnerable people.

Churches sending or receiving people on mission trips usually report enormous benefits to the local church. When churches look inwards they can find growth is stunted, but when a team gets involved in mission, this can bring new energy and enthusiasm to the whole church. When the church looks out to a world in need, faith is put in action and the whole body grows together. Equally, an individual can benefit from a mission experience, with the

opportunity to experience God at work in a totally new environment, stretching their faith and leading to spiritual growth. Mission teams raise the profile of mission within the church which tends, in turn, to raise prayer and financial support for mission.

This booklet gives advice about safeguarding within the context of overseas mission and applies both to churches and organisations sending teams overseas on mission trips and to churches hosting mission teams from abroad.

Accountability

Any mission trip in which church members are involved should have clear lines of accountability. Mission trips may be organised by local churches themselves or by churches in partnership with other organisations such as international mission agencies or NGOs. If another agency is involved then there should be a partnership agreement, in writing, between the two organisations. This partnership agreement should, among other things, spell out which organisation's safeguarding policy is operational for the mission trip. There should be a named person to contact in the event of any safeguarding concerns arising and an agreed process for reporting

concerns to the statutory authorities. Participants should be recruited by the organisation responsible in line with its safeguarding policy and good practice in safer recruitment.

Planning and preparation

Planning and preparation is vital for any mission trip and thinking about safeguarding should be an integral part of this planning process. Mission volunteers should be recruited through a safer recruitment process and DBS checks and/or self disclosures should be applied for where appropriate. We would advise that participating individuals need to be known to the church for at least six months and references should be taken. There should be a written code of conduct, to which volunteers give their signed consent and preparation/induction training should include safeguarding.

In the build up to the trip, perhaps one month beforehand, a provisional itinerary should be drawn up. The plan will be subject to change due to local circumstances and conditions, but it will give everyone an idea of what to expect and also give everyone the opportunity to pray intelligently for the mission team. A basic risk assessment should then be undertaken looking at the risks involved in the trip, including

safeguarding risks, and how they will be managed by the responsible organisation.

Some questions to ask

1. Has there been preparation for the visit including application forms, waivers, references, insurance, police checks and other paperwork as and where appropriate?
2. Churches and teams need to remember where legal responsibilities lie if anything goes wrong: with the sending organisation and with the receiving organisation or individual. It is important to remember that the name and reputation of the church or organisation should be protected.
3. Discuss and agree expectations. What are the expectations of the various parties? Share information regarding the giftings/abilities of visitors. Pass on any important information that the visitors or hosts may need to know.
4. Set an itinerary. Perhaps one month before the arrival of the visitor/team, agree and distribute an itinerary for the visit. The plan will be subject to change due to local

circumstances and conditions, but it will give everyone an idea of what to expect and also give everyone the opportunity to pray intelligently for the individuals/teams.

5. Have a simple risk assessment for the activities. The visiting person/organisation should undertake a risk assessment which could be shared by all parties. Risks could include:
 - Travel methods (tickets booked, licences in place etc)
 - Travel requirements (medical matters, appropriate documentation to hand)
 - Climate/Weather (appropriate clothing/supplies)
 - Crime/Security (precautions against theft/harm)
 - Residential (suitability of venue, checks to ensure personal safety of all parties)
 - Loss of information (what to do if documents etc go missing)
 - Emergencies (procedures in place how to deal with any emergency)

In the field

It's important that mission volunteers are respectful towards local people and agencies, acknowledging cultural differences and deferring to local leaders' knowledge of, and relationships with, the local community. Whereas there may be differences in cultural practice, the abuse of vulnerable people is never acceptable; practices such as female genital mutilation, domestic violence or abuse of children in the context of beliefs about witchcraft and spirit possession can never be justified. Church members on a mission trip are ultimately accountable to the organisation that has sent them and are expected to conform to the same standards of child safety and good practice that obtain in the UK.

From a safeguarding point of view overseas mission is high risk and unsupervised contact between mission volunteers and children or adults at risk would not usually be safe or appropriate. Issues around contact with children or vulnerable adults need to be thought through in advance of the mission trip and, where the context involves close contact such as helping at an orphanage or school, mission team members and local leaders need to work closely together. In this context, roles, responsibilities and boundaries

between local leaders and team members need to be agreed in advance and written into the code of conduct signed by team members.

Responding to concerns

Each mission trip needs to have a designated safeguarding coordinator who is the point of contact between the mission team and the home base. There also needs to be a contact point at the home base for emergencies. Whereas safeguarding concerns are usually reported directly to the statutory safeguarding authorities here in the UK, this may not always be a viable or safe option when on a mission trip. If the concern relates to someone in the local community, good practice would be for the safeguarding coordinator for the mission team to discuss this with the local responsible person or agency (unless they are implicated). Depending on what local services are available it may be possible to involve local welfare services or police. If there are concerns about local leaders or agencies then the safeguarding coordinator should discuss this with the home base with a view to initiating the agency's whistle blowing policy.

If allegations or concerns are made about a team member these need to be immediately reported to the home

base. Dependant on the seriousness of the concerns and other factors to do with context and location, the team member may be relocated for the duration of the trip or, in some instances, immediately repatriated. Consideration will need to be given about how best to follow up the concerns after this and CCPAS will be able to advise on international implications.

Specific issues when hosting teams from abroad

When churches are hosting teams from abroad the same principles apply. The receiving church needs to have a partnership agreement with the sending church/agency and there should be clear lines of accountability and communication between the two. The hosting agency needs to be involved in the planning and preparation for the visit and can help in creating an itinerary that is practical and meets the local needs. The church safeguarding officer can help the mission team leader decide what needs to go in the code of conduct for team members and in drawing up the risk assessment for the trip. The host church can be involved in orientation training for the team on their arrival as well as helping with practicalities around transport and accommodation.

Child sponsorship

Many NGOs and mission organisations run child sponsorship programmes some of which have been operating successfully for many years. The benefit for the sponsor is that they can see very practically how they are helping to make a difference in the life of the child or children they support. Very often the sponsored child will send letters and photographs, and friendships develop.

Although sponsorship programmes are focused on child welfare and poverty reduction, the underlying priority must always be to safeguard the children involved particularly as the children can be a target for people wanting to abuse children. In order to ensure harmful relationships aren't allowed to develop the following safeguards should be put in place by the organisation and they must be prepared to decline sponsorship for any reason including safeguarding concerns. It is good practice for child sponsorship programmes to:

- Ensure organisations have a sound safeguarding policy as a basis for safeguarding the children involved in any child sponsorship programmes and have a formal procedure

for all direct contact with the sponsored child.

- Consult with external bodies, including the police if there are serious doubts about an individual sponsor - for example, if they are in prison.
- Ensure any correspondence between the sponsor and the person sponsored should be sent via the organisation to ensure it does not contain the sponsor's contact details and check for inappropriate written or visual material that might raise safeguarding concerns, or contains political /religious comment that may cause offence or be illegal
- Ensure sponsors agree not to share any information about the person they have sponsored over the internet enabling sponsors to remain in contact after the sponsorship has ended should be facilitated by the organisation and only if the sponsored person and/or their parents/ carers agree.

Further information about organisations working overseas and partnerships between churches and mission agencies can be found in Standard 10: 'Working in Partnership' in the CCPAS Safeguarding Standards manual.

Useful contacts

Global Connections

www.globalconnections.org.uk
01926 487755

World Vision UK

www.worldvision.org.uk
01908 841000

Compassion UK

www.compassionuk.org
01932 836490

Baptist Missionary Society

www.bmsworldmission.org
01235 517700

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