THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

Safeguarding: Reporting Online Safeguarding Concerns, DSO or Police?

Low-level online concerns

'Low-level' concerns might include behaviour that is worrying or unwise, but does not appear to be an obvious safeguarding incident in itself. 'Low-level' describes the severity, not the importance of the concern.

- Occasional unkind comments between young people that are quickly resolved.
- A young person repeatedly staying up very late online and arriving exhausted to church activities.
- Emerging boundary issues in online communication between adults and young people (for example frequent private messaging, over-sharing personal details).

Low-level does not mean 'ignore'. These concerns should still be recognised, responded to, recorded and referred for advice where appropriate. Keeping a record may help identify patterns that change the threshold for action over time.

Use this quick reference guide to decide whether to consult your Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (DSO), contact the police, or both, when you become aware of an online safeguarding concern. The same behaviour can move from Yellow to Amber to Red over time, depending on patterns, impact and any new information.

Do not wait for certainty before sharing your concerns, involve the DSO early so that risk can be assessed properly.

Level	Examples of online / social media concerns	Who to contact / what to do
YELLOW – Low-level concern / monitor	• Single unkind or sarcastic comment in a group chat that stops when challenged	• Record on the parish safeguarding log • Inform the Parish

	• Teasing or "banter" that may be hurtful but is not persistent • Accidental exposure to upsetting but non-illegal content • A young person following or "liking" worrying accounts, but no direct contact or threats disclosed	Safeguarding Officer (PSO) or relevant leader • Monitor the situation and agree whether to seek advice from the DSO if concerns repeat or escalate
AMBER – Significant concern / seek advice quickly	• Repeated online bullying or harassment • Sharing humiliating images or videos, or threats to do so • Persistent contact from an unknown adult, or an adult moving conversations to private messaging • Sexualised messages between young people where one appears pressured or much younger • A young person discloses they have sent, or been asked to send, semi-nude images • Self-harm content or suicidal thoughts shared online, without an immediate plan disclosed	• Make a careful written record of what you know • Contact your DSO as soon as possible • Follow DSO advice on referrals to children's social care, adult social care and/or the police • If you believe someone may be at risk of significant harm, follow local procedures to contact statutory services
RED – Urgent / emergency	• Any sexual image or video of a child being created, shared or requested online • An adult asking for or receiving sexual images from a	• If there is an immediate risk to life or of serious harm, call 999 without delay • Otherwise, contact the

	child or young person • Threats to share a child's sexual images ("sextortion" or blackmail) • Explicit online threats of serious violence or sexual assault • Direct threats of suicide or self-harm where a plan, means or intent is indicated • Online contact from a known sex offender or someone subject to a safeguarding agreement with a child or young person	police urgently via 101 or the local non-emergency route and follow their advice • Inform your DSO as soon as possible • Do not download, copy or forward illegal images – follow police and DSO instructions about preserving evidence

This table is a prompt, not a substitute for professional judgment. Always follow national and local safeguarding policies and seek advice from your DSO whenever you are unsure.

Concerns about church officers

If the concern relates to a church officer (for example clergy, licensed ministers, employees or volunteers), you must follow the Church of England guidance on responding to allegations against church officers, as set out in the safeguarding e-manual. Contact the DSO without delay and agree next steps, including whether a formal allegations process is needed.

Linking back to Church of England guidance

This sheet is intended as a quick reference tool. Always follow your diocese's safeguarding procedures and the Church of England safeguarding e-manual. The standard approach can be summarised as the '4 Rs':

- **Recognise:** Notice signs, disclosures or patterns that may indicate harm or risk.
- **Respond:** Listen, reassure and take action to ensure immediate safety.
- **Record:** write down what has happened, as factually and promptly as possible.
- **Refer:** share the concern with the parish safeguarding officer / DSO and, where appropriate, statutory services.

Further information, guidance & reporting

Church of England resources:

- Safeguarding e-manual: Definitive guidance on responding to concerns, thresholds and allegations against church officers
- Safeguarding policy and practice guidance overview : Parish Safeguarding Handbook and other key documents
- How to deal with difficult situations online | The Church of England

External Resources:

- CEOP Safety Centre (National Crime Agency) : Report online sexual abuse or grooming of children
- Ofcom: Information about complaining when platforms do not act on harmful content

- Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) : Report and removing child sexual abuse images or videos
- Report Harmful Content: UK centre for reporting legal but harmful content online (for example bullying, threats and harassment)
- NSPCC Helpline and online reporting guidance: Advice for professionals or adults worried about a child, including online harms.

