

Safeguarding Children & Adults at Risk of Abuse Policy Document 2025



*(for friars of the Franciscan Province of Ireland,
based in England and Scotland)*

FOREWORD

I am pleased to introduce this Safeguarding Policy and Procedure Policy Document for the friars of the Franciscan Province of Ireland in England and Scotland.

Over the past number of years, there have been significant developments in child safeguarding: the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency, (CSSA) was set up in November, 2020 by Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, in response to the recommendations of an independent review of the Catholic Church's safeguarding structures and practices; this is a new professional standards body with regulatory powers; the Scottish Catholic Standards Agency (SCSSA) was also established as an independent agency to promote and assure compliance with national Safeguarding standards across all Catholic Church jurisdiction in Scotland.

The Religious Life Safeguarding Service, (RLSS) was commissioned in February 2020: this comprises an independent team of safeguarding professionals offering specialist advise safeguarding services to the religious of the Catholic Church in England and Wales.

As our understanding of child safeguarding develops, it becomes clear that the implications of best practice reach far beyond our direct interactions with children. Ministry with children and adults at risk of abuse is a vital aspect of the life and ministry of the Church and should not be neglected

A quick glance at the index provides an understanding of what the Policy document contains and where to locate information on relevant specific topics. I strongly encourage you to become familiar with the Policy Document and to engage in the follow-up implementation plans in conjunction with the duly delegated Safeguarding Lead/Safeguarding Office of the Province.

This Policy and Procedure document which details clear guidance and instructions in accordance with best practice, civil and canon law, will provide us with a sense of assurance so that we can continue our mission into the future with our focus and priority on the spreading of the Gospel whilst ensuring that as we do so, all children, young people and adults at risk of abuse are safe and welcomed in our ministries.



Fr Aidan McGrath, ofm
Minister Provincial

MESSAGE FROM POPE FRANCIS

“The crimes of sexual abuse offend Our Lord, cause physical, psychological and spiritual damage to the victims and harm the community of the faithful. In order that these phenomena, in all their forms, never happen again, a continuous and profound conversion of hearts is needed, attested by concrete and effective actions that involve everyone in the Church, so that personal sanctity and moral commitment can contribute to promoting the full credibility of the Gospel message and the effectiveness of the Church’s mission. This becomes possible only with the grace of the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts, as we must always keep in mind the words of Jesus: “Apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). Even if so much has already been accomplished, we must continue to learn from the bitter lessons of the past, looking with hope towards the future”. ***Vos estis lux mundi, 2023 Pope Francis***

Figure 1 Woodford Green, Essex



Table of Contents

FOREWORD	3
MESSAGE FROM POPE FRANCIS	4
1. INTRODUCTION	6
2. POLICY OVERVIEW	7
3. SCOPE.....	8
4. GLOSSARY AND DEFINITONS	9
5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES	12
6. PRACTICE GUIDANCE	14
8. CARE AND SUPPORT OF THE COMPLAINANT	22
9. TRAINING	25
<i>APPENDIX 1</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>APPENDIX 2</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>APPENDIX 3</i>	<i>28</i>

1. INTRODUCTION

For the purpose of this document, *“The Order of Friars Minor”* and thereafter *“the Order”* relates to those Franciscan Friars of the Province of Ireland who are resident in England and Scotland.

Welcome to The Order of Friars Minor’s Safeguarding Policy in the Episcopal Conferences in England & Wales and Scotland. In all our work/ministry with children, young people and adults at risk, the Order recognises and promotes the fundamental rights of every child, young person and adult at risk to a safe environment in which he/she will be free from any form of abuse.

This policy is approved by the Provincial Minister and Board of Trustees of the Order of Friars Minor in England and Scotland and will be subject to an annual review and also when there is a significant change to civil and canonical developments, or Church policy and practice changes.

Figure 2 Church of Blessed John Duns Scotus, Glasgow



2. POLICY OVERVIEW

The Order is committed to safeguarding all children, young people and adults at risk. For the Order this commitment directly relates to the fact that we are all made in the image of God and the Church's common belief in the preciousness, dignity and uniqueness of every human life. We begin from the principle that each person has a right to expect the highest level of protection, care, love, encouragement and respect. Hence the Order pledges to safeguarding children, young people and adults at risk from harm, and to support them in their development as valued and integral members of the Catholic Church in England and Scotland.

Following on from the acceptance by the bishops of England and Wales of the recommendations of the *Safeguarding Review* carried out in 2020 by Ian Elliott, the *In God's Image* of the Scottish bishops in 2023 and Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter: *Vos estis lux mundi* of 2023, we are committed to the "One Church Approach" to safeguarding by implementing the changes needed and ensuring we respond to victim/survivors promptly and compassionately.



3. SCOPE

This policy is applicable to all friars who belong to the Franciscan Province of Ireland and are based in England or Scotland and also to employees and volunteers employed and/or working on behalf of the Order with children, young people and adults at risk.

It is the responsibility of all friars, employees and volunteers to prevent abuse, whether by action or omission. Abuse in this policy refers to: physical; sexual; emotional; spiritual; neglect; self-neglect; organisational; material; psychological; financial; domestic or verbal; by bullying or harassment. Additionally, behaviour which effectively results in modern day slavery or where there is evidence of discrimination or radicalisation, needs to be *recognised and addressed as a safeguarding issue, in accordance with the procedures.*

4. GLOSSARY AND DEFINITIONS

1. **Age of Consent** (England and Scotland)
In both jurisdictions the age of consent is 16. Any sexual activity below this age is illegal. It is illegal for anyone under 18 to engage in sex with someone in a position of trust. In England & Wales a child under 13 is incapable of giving consent.
2. **A child** in both jurisdictions is a person under 18.
3. **Church Personnel:** refers to Franciscan friars, employees and volunteers.
4. **Complainant:** this is a term used to describe a person who has made an allegation of abuse.
5. **DBS** In England & Wales: Disclosure and Barring Service: a certificate authorising access to minors and adults at risk.
6. **Definition of abuse:** - a violation of an individual's human and civil rights by any other person or persons which may result in significant harm. Four typical forms of child abuse are: Physical, Sexual, Emotional, Neglect. These and further types of abuse are forms to which adults may be susceptible. (see section 3 above)
7. **Elliott Review** - sets out 8 Standards, the implementation of which was committed by the bishops of England & Wales to two new agencies thus:
 - a) **CSSA** Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency
 - b) **RLSS** Religious Life Safeguarding Service
8. **IICSA** The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, (final version 2023)
9. **In God's Image** in 2023 sets out similar standards and procedures through Scottish Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency, (SCSSA).
10. **OFM** Order of Friars Minor
11. **Order** In this policy document, it refers to the Order of Friars Minor in England and Scotland.
12. **PVG** In Scotland this certificate is designated as PVG: Protection of vulnerable groups
13. **Respondent:** This is the term used for the person about whom child protection suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations have been made
14. **Vos estis lux mundi** – an Apostolic letter by Pope Francis in 2023 giving directions for clergy and the whole church.

Statutory Services

- 1. Police** – It is the responsibility of the police to investigate if a crime has been committed.
- 2. Social Services** – It is the responsibility of Social Services to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care and protection.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES



5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

5.1 The Trustees are the Governing Board of the charity.

The Minister Provincial of the Franciscan Province of Ireland and the Board of Trustees in England and Scotland have a duty to maintain appropriate governance and oversight of safeguarding in accordance with this policy and guidelines, national legislation and the safeguarding policy and procedures of the Catholic Church in England & Wales and Scotland. This includes compliance with Canon Law, Charity Law, Charity Commission guidance, Standards, policies and practice of CSSA RLSS and SCSSA.

Certain functions of the Board will be delegated to friar's resident in England and Scotland.

5.2 The Minister Provincial

The Minister Provincial of the Franciscan Province of Ireland is responsible for all safeguarding matters. This includes ensuring that appropriate policy, procedures and best practice are in place for the effective delivery of safeguarding, including any related due-diligence checks. The Minister Provincial can delegate parts of his functions to a friar resident in England and Scotland.

5.3 The Safeguarding Lead

The Minister Provincial shall appoint a Safeguarding Lead based in England and Scotland, delegating direct oversight of the Order's safeguarding policy and guidance, including management and oversight of documentation, case progression / management and the secure, legally compliant storage of safeguarding reports and related material. The Safeguarding Lead will also have oversight of the relationship with and input in the work of the RLSS. To ensure local accessibility another friar living in Scotland shall be appointed to work in conjunction with the Safeguarding Lead.

The Safeguarding Lead may delegate some of this responsibility to the RLSS by referring a case to them. However, he will remain as key contact for the case duration unless another individual is identified to assume responsibility.

All other roles

All friars, employees and volunteers working with the Order have an obligation to ensure they are familiar with the content of the Order's Safeguarding Policy and know the reporting procedures and any other associated policies and procedures.

5.5 General

Everyone involved in the Order's work has a duty to report to the Safeguarding Lead or Minister Provincial any safeguarding suspicions, concerns or allegations they have observed or that have been brought to their attention.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE



6. PRACTICE GUIDANCE

6.1 Practice Policy

It is the policy of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, as agreed by the Bishops Conference, April 2020, and of the Catholic Church in Scotland through their document *In God's Name* of 2023, to report to the Statutory Authorities all allegations of abuse made against those working in the name of the Church, regardless of whether the allegations or concerns relate to a person's behaviour in relation to their role within the Church or another setting. This policy must be applied in all situations where it is alleged, or there are reasonable grounds to believe, that a member of the Religious Community, lay persons, or associated volunteer or employee, has acted in one of the following ways:

- Has behaved in a way that has harmed or is likely to have caused harm to a child or an adult at risk. This would include any adult who is vulnerable irrespective of the cause of that vulnerability or whether the vulnerability is temporary or permanent.
- Has or is suspected to have committed a criminal offence against or related to a child or an adult at risk.
- Has behaved towards a child or adult at risk in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children or such adults.
- Has behaved in a way or made statements indicating that they may not be suitable to work with children or adults at risk.
- Has behaved in such a way that, by actions or omissions, their conduct has been intended to interfere with, prejudice, undermine or avoid a criminal, civil or canonical investigation, against any person associated with or who is a member of a contracting congregation.

6.2 Behaviours

These behaviours are to be considered within the context of the different categories of abuse outlined above. Further detailed guidance is specifically provided by the respective Church agencies in relation to sexual offences against children, including both recent and non-recent offences, and possession and distribution of indecent images of children. For England & Wales additional guidance is provided by the CSSA in relation to the sexual and criminal exploitation of children by organised criminal networks.

6.3 Additional guidance

Additional guidance is also provided in relation to adults disclosing abuse outside the context of the Church. If a competent adult explicitly refuses the making of a referral about abuse that occurred outside of the Church, consideration must be given to whether the accused person should have access to children or adults at risk. In these circumstances, the name of the accused and details of the allegation

must always be referred to the Statutory Authorities. This can be done without disclosing the name of the victim / survivor where they have refused consent to do so, or where it is not possible to obtain consent.

6.4 Catholic church policy

It is the policy of the Catholic Church in England & Wales and Scotland to report to Statutory Authorities where a child or an adult is at immediate risk of harm, or there is concern that a child or adult is suffering or is likely to be suffering from significant harm or abuse, from somebody who does not hold a role within the Church.

6.5 Safer recruitment practice guidance

The Order will ensure that friars, employees and volunteers are subject to the appropriate Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks (including enhanced DBS), in Scotland PVG, in line with both Statutory and Catholic Church requirements.

Appointments will be based on the person's experience, skills and ability to meet the set criteria and job specification for the specific role. It is essential to ensure that all documentation relating to the applicant is stored in a secure place and remains confidential.

Appointment to a role will not be confirmed until a satisfactory DBS Disclosure (in Scotland PVG) check has been received and previous employment references confirmed as being acceptable.

On appointment, all new employees must be provided with and sign to say they have received a copy of the Safeguarding Policy document and understand all relevant policy and procedures and their responsibilities within it highlighted.

All persons seeking to work with children or adults whether in a paid or unpaid capacity must be provided with the opportunity to self-disclose relevant conviction information. This is a DBS (in Scotland PVG) Code of Practice requirement and applies to anyone being asked to have an Enhanced Disclosure.

REPORTING PROCEDURE



7. REPORTING PROCEDURE

7.1 The initial concern

If a friar, employee or volunteer working with the Order becomes aware of a safeguarding issue they should contact the relevant Safeguarding Lead in England or Scotland. Any concern or documentation should be sent to them immediately.

To ensure that all actions are fair and proportionate the welfare of both complainant and the respondent should be borne in mind since both are liable to be vulnerable.

7.2 The complainant

The reporting can be a sensitive encounter. Any allegation or disclosure of abuse must be handled compassionately, effectively and professionally. The one receiving the information should assure the complainant that all information will be passed immediately to the Order's Safeguarding Lead who will be the one to implement the mandatory practice. In addition, some brief information should be supplied about the next steps he will take; the availability of support and counselling; and anything that seems immediately relevant. The listener should be supportive of the one making the disclosure but should not seek more information than is necessary.

7.3 Limits of confidentiality

When the concern needs to be communicated to a Statutory Agency the individual reporting the issue must be informed that the information will not be kept confidential, and that the details will be passed on to the police and any other appropriate authority.

7.4 The respondent

It is important that the procedure in the management and investigation of allegations is fair, and care is an important element at every stage as people who have an allegation made against them are recognised as being vulnerable also.

The Safeguarding Lead is responsible for managing the case in liaison with the RLSS. The respondent will receive the help of a compatible support person and legal aid when required.

7.5 Action required on receipt of a concern

On receipt of the allegation or concern the friar, employee or volunteer working with the Order should contact the Safeguarding Lead or the friar appointed to facilitate availability in Scotland, or the Minister Provincial. The concern and all associated documentation should be sent to him immediately.

The Safeguarding Lead should

- Inform the Minister Provincial that there has been a new safeguarding referral.
- Contact the relevant statutory bodies.
- Liaise with RLSS.
- Ensure the victim/survivor or individual has been informed of the next steps.
- Explain what will happen providing details of some support available.
- Complete the safeguarding paperwork and ensure appropriate record keeping of all communications including phone calls, meetings and discussions in relation to the case.
- All referrals/reports should be made within 24 hours of receiving the information, unless there are exceptional circumstances to postpone making this referral / report.

7.6 Contact with statutory agencies

When the concern needs to be communicated to a statutory agency, the individual reporting the issue must be informed that the information will not be kept confidential, and that the details will be passed on to the police and any other appropriate statutory body. All friars, employees and volunteers should be supportive of the individual making the disclosure but should not seek more details than necessary for an initial statutory referral.

7.7 When to report, Suspicions/allegations or safeguarding concerns

When abuse is suspected, witnessed or a disclosure of abuse is received by the Order there is a requirement to report these allegations of abuse, and other relevant safeguarding concerns to the appropriate Statutory Authority including Social Services/the Police within 24 hours. If the person whom the allegation is made against is deceased, the Police must be notified but it is not necessary to notify Social Services.

In case of emergency

If a child or adult is in immediate danger, at imminent risk or requires medical attention, the relevant emergency service must be contacted via 999. Local Social Services should also be contacted at the earliest opportunity in the case of a child or adult at risk.

7.8 Making a referral to the Statutory Authorities:

In the case of a child

Referrals should be made to the Children's Social Service team for the area where the child is resident or is found. If a crime has also been committed, the police for that area should also be contacted. The referrer should confirm any verbal and telephone referrals in writing, within 48 hours, and obtain social service /police report reference details for inclusion on the relevant case file.

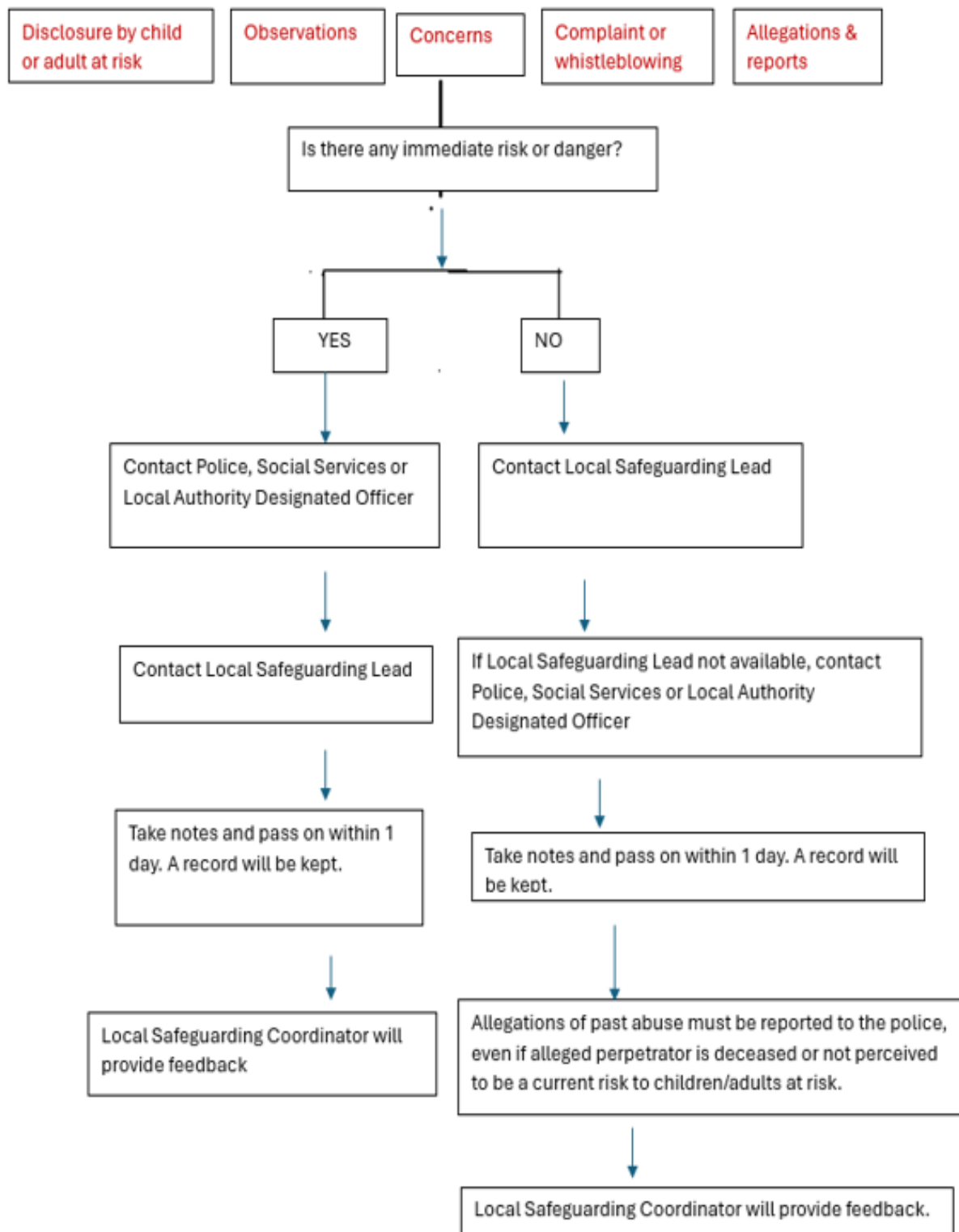
In the case of an adult - a person over 18

Referrals should be made to the relevant body. If a crime has also been committed, the police in that area and if applicable the Local Authority Designated Officer, (LADO), should also be contacted. The referrer should confirm any verbal and telephone referrals in writing, within 48 hours and obtain any report references for inclusion on relevant case file.

When a person's conduct towards a child or an adult may impact on their suitability to work with or continue to work with children or adults, the allegation must be referred to the Safeguarding Lead within 24 hours. Additionally, restrictions may need to be placed on the person's role and remit while the matter is investigated. For example, they may be 'stepped down' from ministry or other conditions may be imposed pending the outcome of an investigation

Where it is believed that a criminal offence may have taken place, regardless of whether the accused person is living or deceased, the allegation should be referred to the police within 24 hours.

Responding to allegations of abuse or concern about children & adults at risk.



CARE & SUPPORT OF THE COMPLAINANT



8. CARE AND SUPPORT OF THE COMPLAINANT

Those who have alleged child abuse should receive a compassionate response from all Franciscan personnel and be offered access to appropriate care, advice, and support.

Complainants need to be listened to and heard to ensure that any allegation or disclosure of abuse is handled compassionately, effectively, and professionally. Disclosing abuse takes enormous courage and calls for a high level of trust. Child abuse by its very nature can damage trust. It is therefore imperative that when a complainant is ready to tell their story, the listener responds with great sensitivity and compassion.

The Franciscan leadership and safeguarding personnel will engage in ongoing reflection to identify who is best placed to offer pastoral care to complainants, recognising that providing pastoral care may not be the sole responsibility of any one person. Pastoral care may be offered and provided by the Safeguarding Lead managing the case, RLSS, the support person, if the offer of a support person is taken up by the complainant, the Minister Provincial at an appropriate time, or indeed another identified representative, if there is something specific, they can offer.

How support is offered

1. On receipt of an allegation the Safeguarding Lead can arrange a face-to-face meeting with the complainant, in a manner that respects the wishes of the person. The complainant may choose to be accompanied to the meeting.
2. If the threshold for reporting has been reached, the Safeguarding Lead will help the complainant to understand the necessity to refer the matter to the statutory authorities.
3. Every complainant will be offered access to a support person. The role of the support person is to ensure that the complainant is appropriately supported throughout the process of disclosure and thereafter. It is the prerogative of the complainant whether they wish to accept the assistance of a support person.
4. The complainant is given details of support or counselling services, for example Safe Spaces.
5. At an appropriate time in the process, the complainant will be invited to meet with the Minister Provincial and/or another representative of the Franciscans, if this is their wish. This meeting is not to determine the outcome of any investigations, but for the Minister Provincial to hear and acknowledge the experience of the complainant.

6. At the end of this meeting, the support provided to the complainant can be reviewed. Some complainants may wish to remain engaged with their Church despite the effect that the abuse may have had on their relationship with it, and, perhaps, with God. By meeting with and listening to complainants, the response from the Church that might best meet their spiritual needs can be identified with them.
7. Further information is available from RLSS, (religioussafeguarding.org) to support people making allegations and/or complaints detailing support / counselling services.

TRAINING



9. TRAINING

All friars, employees and volunteers are required to attend safeguarding training relevant to their role in relation to their ministry/role with children and adults. The list below outlines the minimum standards for training in each role:

Franciscan Personnel	Training Required
Community Members who work with public	Advance Safeguarding Training (equivalent to Level 2)
Community members who do not work with public	Basic Safeguarding Training (equivalent to Level 1)
For all roles the relevant training indicated by the CSSA and SCSSA	Training provided for all levels on-line by CSSA/SCSSA/RLSS
Board members – Trustee Training	Equivalent to Level 1
Safeguarding Lead	Safeguarding Lead Training (equivalent to Level 3)
All friars will undertake yearly refresher training.	Training provided for all levels on-line by CSSA/SCSSA/RLSS

APPENDIX 1

RECORDING AND STORAGE OF SAFEGUARDING INFORMATION

Primary responsibility for the management of documents and safeguarding case files lies with the Safeguarding Lead who will ensure an accurate, auditable, and secure record of any safeguarding concerns or allegations referred to The Order are maintained.

This record will include:

- Relevant contact details
- Details of how/when the concern or allegation was received.
- Details of the concern itself
- Relevant historical information
- Identified past and present risk factors
- Any actions or investigation undertaken including those by the Order, RLSS and/or statutory agencies.
- Rationale for actions and/or outcome of case

All records are potential evidence in a criminal proceeding, civil case or a statutory/public inquiry and must be stored in a suitable and retrievable format with an auditable record of provenance and integrity.

APPENDIX 2

WHISTLEBLOWING

The Order will encourage and enable anyone with a serious concern to raise that issue without fear of victimisation, or disadvantage.

If that concern is regarding malpractice, illegal acts, or omissions at the Order's premises or other religious institution relating to safeguarding, then the RLSS should be made aware.

The action taken by the RLSS will depend upon the nature of the concern referred. However, an investigation will be undertaken if appropriate, followed by appropriate action and written feedback will be provided, including a rationale documenting the reasons why identified actions have been taken.

APPENDIX 3

LIST OF SAFEGUARDING ORGANISATIONS (PLEASE NOTE THIS LIST NOT EXHAUSTIVE)

- Local Authority Safeguarding team – Adults
- Local Authority Safeguarding team – Children
- Police 999
- Police 101
- Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)
- RLSS - Out of Hours Team
- Charity Commission
- CSSA -www.catholicsafeguarding.org.uk
- Crisis Team to provide child or adult in urgent need of mental health care.
- Diocesan Safeguarding Commission
- NSPCC – www.nspcc.org.uk
-
- DBS and PVG (*vetting services*)

Figure 3 Church of Immaculate Conception, Clevedon



Figure 4 Church of St Francis of Assisi, Stratford





Safeguarding Children & Adults at Risk of Abuse Policy Document, 2025

Franciscan Province of Ireland,

(for friars of the Franciscan Province of Ireland, based in England and Scotland)