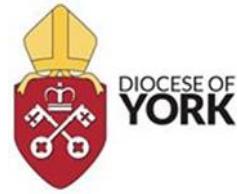


## Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults



During the COVID-19 crisis, it is particularly important to safeguard adults who may be vulnerable. A number of adults within our communities and our congregations may be at greater risk of abuse and neglect as others may seek to exploit disadvantages due to age, disability, mental or physical impairment or illness.

These groups may be targeted due to a number of factors - they may need assistance with some tasks, be less comfortable with technology, more welcoming of new contacts, more trusting and in some cases they may have access to large sums of money. There is evidence that social isolation increases the likelihood of abuse. Many older and disabled people spend long periods at home alone, and now as the whole nation is being asked to stay at home the same groups are more likely to be alone rather than in a family group.

### Who do we need to safeguard?

Statistics show high incidents of abuse where the abuser is a family member, a family friend or the paid care provider. Those living alone in the community, now isolated to an even greater degree, may be a particular target for scammers and fraudsters.

Previous research by SCIE and the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau found that those most at risk to financial scams and fraud were **older people who had mental capacity and did not yet need any care and support**. This group was typically more isolated and social contact of any kind was often welcomed without sufficient caution.

At this time, those who are particularly vulnerable may accept help from those who seek to exploit them.

Potentially anyone, adult or child, friend, family or stranger can be the abuser of a vulnerable person.

### Types of abuse

The UK central government document 'Care and Support Statutory Guidance' categorises and defines adult abuse in terms of:

- **Physical abuse** including hitting, slapping, pushing, kicking, misuse of medication, restraint or inappropriate sanctions.
- **Sexual abuse** including rape and sexual assault or sexual acts to which the vulnerable adult has not consented or could not consent or was pressurised into consenting.
- **Psychological abuse** including emotional abuse, threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, isolation or withdrawal from services or supportive networks.
- **Financial or material abuse** including theft, fraud, exploitation, pressure in connection with wills, property or inheritance or financial transactions, or the misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits.

- **Neglect** or acts of omission including ignoring medical or physical care needs, failure to provide access to appropriate health, social care or educational services, the withholding of the necessities of life, such as medication, adequate nutrition and heating.
- **Discriminatory abuse** including racist, sexist, based on a person's disability, and other forms of harassment, slurs or similar treatment.
- **Domestic abuse** that is usually a systematic, repeated and escalating pattern of behaviour, by which the abuser seeks to control, limit and humiliate, often behind closed doors.
- **Organisational abuse** including neglect and poor care practice within an institution or specific care setting such as a hospital or care home. This may range from one-off incidents to ongoing ill-treatment. It can be through neglect or poor professional practice as a result of the structure, policies, processes and practices within an organisation.
- **Modern slavery** including human trafficking forced labour and domestic servitude; and traffickers and slave masters using whatever means they have at their disposal to coerce, deceive and force individuals into a life of abuse, servitude and inhumane treatment

We can assume that the greatest opportunity for abuse during the COVID-19 crisis is financial. With additional pressures on services, normal service reductions, fear and isolation, the window is open to those who may seek to exploit those who may be vulnerable. There are already reports of a 400 per cent increase in fraud reporting in March relating to the COVID-19 crisis.

Other types of abuse may escalate during this time. For example, those living with an abusive partner or family member may now face an escalation in abuse due to the added tensions and frustration caused by the whole family having to stay indoors.

Vulnerable people may be approached by a range of people who they may or may not know already, who may make requests for financial support given the current economic climate. The opportunity to exploit the vulnerable for financial gain is potentially higher now than because of the COVID-19 crisis than in recent years.

People who are experiencing abuse may be less likely to ask for help as they know that emergency services are experiencing such high demand. Fewer visitors to the household may mean that evidence of physical, emotional or financial abuse goes unnoticed.

### **What can you do to help?**

If you have concerns that you or somebody you know is **at risk of, or is experiencing abuse**, then report it to your Parish Safeguarding Representative or your incumbent who can report concerns to the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA)

**If you are worried that someone is in immediate danger then contact the Police or Social Care for your area.**

Further guidance is available via the Parish Safeguarding Handbook:  
<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/ParishSafeGuardingHandBookAugust2019Web.pdf>

And via *Responding to Safeguarding Concerns or Allegations that relate to Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults Practice Guidance* : <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/Responding%20to%20Safeguarding%20Concerns%20or%20Allegations%20that%20relate%20to%20Children%2C%20Young%20People%20and%20Vulnerable%20Adults.pdf>

Sources:

Church of England Safeguarding resources <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/promoting-safer-church/policy-practice-guidance>

SCIE Safeguarding adults during the COVID-19 crisis <https://www.scie.org.uk/care-providers/coronavirus-covid-19/safeguarding-adults>