Safeguarding
for Spiritual Accompaniment or Direction

Approved at Exec 2 October 2026 and added to Policy Folder

> Safeguarding refers to the actions we take to promote the welfare of children and adults in vulnerable circumstances and to protect any of us from harm.

Policy Recommendations:

1. All members of The Association of Christian Spiritual Directors (ACSD) are required to have foundation safeguarding training within the last 4 years, before being admitted to full membership of ACSD. *This is widely available and not necessarily spiritual direction-specific*.

2. All members are expected to undertake updated training in safeguarding awareness; as a minimum, every 4 years. *(see also Portfolio policy)*

3. That ACSD work with the local TE planning group to offer such a workshop in person during the Training Event, at least every 4 years. ACSD funds are put towards any costs to affirm our commitment to Safeguarding.

4. Police checks are mandatory at entry to ACSD membership and every 4 years thereafter or when asked, a police check or Ministry of Justice Check is needed.

Definitions

A child is a person under the age of 18 years. We all have a responsibility to protect children and a duty to report the fact that we know or believe that a child is being abused or is at risk of being abused.

An adult in vulnerable circumstances [previously referred to as a vulnerable adult] is a person over the age of 18 years who is [or who may be at times] unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation. Unlike children, anyone over the age of 18 who has mental capacity should consent to action being taken.

Abuse can take many forms, including physical, emotional, sexual, financial, spiritual, neglect and bullying. It may be current, recent or something which

happened in the past that the affected person decides to speak about now. The inappropriate use of power and abuse of trust is almost always a key element.

Safeguarding training engages in depth with:

- issues of power, trust and vulnerability;
- the nature and impact of spiritual abuse;
- dealing with disclosures of abuse in the past and their effect;
- responding to current harm or threat of harm, in a victim, or by a perpetrator, in front of us;
- updated legal aspects and contacts for reporting and support.

BACKGROUND

A Safeguarding and Spiritual Direction

Spiritual directors accompany adults (people 18 years and over) individually, in retreat settings, in institutions such as hospitals, workplaces, prisons, in churches, cafes and parks, in our homes and offices, one-to-one and in groups, online and in person.

> ***Keeping safe ourselves, and holding safe hospitable spaces for our pilgrims is central to our task.***

The findings of the Abuse in Care - Royal Commission of Inquiry (June 2024) places responsibility upon an Association such as ours to ensure that our members are well-trained, vetted, supervised and supported in a healthy practice that minimises the risk of abuse in our ministry (and in wider society.)

As Spiritual Directors we can be perpetrators or victims of abuse; we may be told, by those we accompany, about past or present or future abuse - harm to themselves or to others. ***We have legal obligations; we need support.***

Although Spiritual Directors do not usually provide services to children, we may ourselves be the adults in vulnerable circumstances or be with others who are in vulnerable circumstances in their homes, schools, workplaces, streets.

Spiritual Directors hold a position of trust. Those seeking spiritual direction will open themselves up to another, and in doing so put themselves in a potentially vulnerable position.

> ***It is important that we remain cognisant of the dangers and risks inherent within this and can take steps to respect that vulnerability and trust.***

B Basic Guidance For Spiritual Direction

- At the commencement of any relationship, reference should be made that whilst confidentiality is a commitment we make, disclosure of safeguarding concerns cannot necessarily be kept confidential.
- Seek information early on about any special needs that potential directees/retreatants may have.
- It is not recommended for a Spiritual Director to have another role in relation to the pilgrim, such as friend or relative, pastor/vicar/priest, supervisor, manager, or leader, team colleague, … for example.
- Spiritual Directors are made aware in any basic training course (through church denominations, workplaces, charities) of how issues of abuse may present themselves and what action they should take. If safeguarding concerns come to light which indicate that a child or an adult in vulnerable circumstances is at risk, or has been harmed, immediate action should be taken. Initial advice can be sought from your local church and denominational safeguarding officer. Otherwise, advice can be sought from the Police.
- **Legal Obligations of Safeguarding in Aotearoa New Zealand** can be found through an Ecosia or Google Search
- **Personal Safety :** When operating alone, sometimes Spiritual Directors meet in either their own home or an isolated office or church room. However, this should only happen after a first meeting in a public place (e.g. a cafe, public space). When meetings subsequently take place in isolated spaces,it is important to ensure that someone else knows when and where those meetings are due.
- **Remember: Abuse is very common in our society:**
  a. There are considerable numbers of older adults who have suffered some form of abuse as children and for whom this issue has had an ongoing impact, never sharing until late in life. They may want to finally be heard and then simply let it be, seeking their own healing.
  b. Where abuse is more recent, the person disclosing may need help and encouragement to report what happened.
  c. Where abuse is happening now and there is a current risk, the person we are with should be encouraged very strongly to report the situation to the appropriate authorities. Anyone hearing this type of information should seek advice immediately.
  d. Listening to the stories of others may remind directors of their own difficult material, which can be taken to direction or supervision.

e. Companions themselves can be both victims and perpetrators of abuse. Safeguarding training enables awareness and management of risk.

C A Workshop For Spiritual Companions And Directors

Safeguarding awareness: a key component of quality assurance for ACSD members.

The purpose of mandatory and regular safeguarding awareness training is to ensure spiritual direction (SD) is offered by members who are committed to high standards of care and accountability and are competent to deal with related matters of trauma and disclosure.

Safeguarding awareness workshops for members help us share knowledge and experience, alert us to best practice, and foster among us a culture of care, transparency, and safe hospitality. They build on the basic training given in formation courses, churches, or workplaces and regular participation, at least every 4 years, refreshes awareness for the spiritual direction context.

Topics to be addressed are –

- Definitions and practices around confidentiality
- Power, trust and vulnerability in spiritual direction
- The nature of spiritual abuse, recognising it and its impact
- Other types of abuse, including child, elder abuse, and domestic violence - and their impact
- Dealing with disclosure and legal aspects
- Our personal safety
- Contacts for advice and support (local, national, ACSD, other);

N.B. This document is available to everyone who is a member of ACSD (Associate or Full). It forms a part of our Policy Documentation, on the website and in our files.