



**Safeguarding Young People:  
guidance on the use of private  
dwellings in church youth work**

## Introduction

For many in people in our churches youth work within homes and gardens is a well-established pattern. It is seen as a valuable way of engaging with young people (School Years 7-13) from the church and wider community. For other people their church buildings may not be suitable for youth work to take place, or the church may not have a building at all.

In 2023 the National Youth Agency (NYA) published [“Youth work in Private Dwellings, Safety First, no Compromise”](#). This report sets out the concerns held by the NYA about the use of private dwellings for both group and individual youth work. In the introduction to this guidance they state:

*“The NYA believes that youth work and youth sector activity delivered in private dwellings is fundamentally unsafe and should not take place.” (NYA 2023 P4)*

As this statement from the National Youth Agency demonstrates, it has become ever clearer that many young people have not been safe in situations where the home of a leader has been used for groups. Rather than supporting the view that youth work should never take place in private dwellings we have considered what steps churches can take to mitigate the inherent risks identified by the National Youth Agency.

This document seeks to support those churches who do not have the practical resources to stop meeting in homes or, having looked into the matter in detail, have assessed that there is too great a benefit to young people by meeting in the home to lose; by providing some practical ways they can reduce the risk to the precious young people in their care.

The NYA guidance identifies private dwellings as:

“Any part of any structure that is occupied as a residence, or any part of any structure of outdoor living that is accessory to and used wholly for the purposes of residence. These may include, for example,

- gardens
- garden rooms
- garages
- houses

These include two contexts:

1. A private dwelling that is the home of the youth worker, organisation or other adult.
2. A private dwelling that is the home of the young person receiving a service.” (NYA 2023 P4)

The information set out below is intended to help you identify the best place for youth work to take place for your church and ensure that appropriate steps can be taken to ensure the safety and well-being of the young people you support.

## Choosing your location:

We advise that in general church buildings are safer locations than private dwellings for youth work. The question to be considered is what is the benefit to the young people of meeting

in a home, private garden or other private space rather than a church building? The decision making around this should be incorporated into your risk assessment.

Your risk assessment should also consider whether there are other public spaces (e.g. a park, local café or youth centre) that could be used for youth activities rather than considering a private dwelling as the only alternative to meeting in a church building. Your [Regional Safeguarding Lead](#) can help you to work through this risk assessment process.

### Making a home location safer for young people:

If, you feel that it is necessary and beneficial for youth work to take place in private dwellings then you will need to consider the following points:

1. Be aware that these situations have been and are misused by people to abuse young people and there is a real need to safeguard these home meetings. Make sure a risk assessment is in place.

2. Couples or related adults would have a clear conflict of interest in a safeguarding allegation situation and therefore only count as one person in terms of safeguarding. Therefore, if a group is held at a leader's home, an unrelated adult needs to be present at all times.

3. Consider the logistics of having an unrelated adult present at all times – they need to be there earlier and leave later than the young people every single time. You need to have a safe contingency plan if a young person arrives early, and it isn't safe to let them stand outside.

4. Although these events are being held in the home, they are events being held in the name of the church. Therefore, the church has a responsibility to ensure there is some kind of supervision structure in place. **So:**

*Does the youth leader AND the DPS know about all the groups taking place that week?*

- *Does every leader know what to do if they are worried about a young person/a young person discloses in the session? Or even what to do if they are worried about another leader's approach or actions? Do they have the DPS phone number/other members of the safeguarding team if DPS is not available?*
- *How is the church monitoring the young people's experience of this group? Groups in the home can become invisible to the church so you may need to put in some extra thought around actively searching out feedback from the young people as to how they are benefitting (or otherwise) from these home-based sessions. It's also advisable to be proactive in creating space for young people to talk about anything that is worrying them about these sessions.*
- *Does your public liability insurance cover events carried out in personal homes?*

5. The safeguarding principles of safer recruitment as set out in the Baptist Union Model Safeguarding Policy are more important than ever before in this situation. Further details to be found in Section 2.2 of the template policy. If other adults are present, then this should form part of the risk assessment.

6. The principles of safer behaviour as outlined in the Baptist Union Model Safeguarding Policy in section 2.3 should be known by the leaders and adhered to. [A code of conduct or behaviour](#) for leaders is an invaluable tool for churches holding youth events in homes.

7. The church safeguarding policy needs to be adapted to include how you are going to safeguard these sessions in the home and the people running the sessions need to be trained in following the policy!

### Inviting individual young people to attend a youth leader's home for mentoring or social interactions.

Whilst a risk assessment might identify ways to mitigate risk for a youth activity within a leader's home it is never appropriate for youth work to be conducted 1 to 1, for example mentoring meetings within the leader's home environment.

It is also not appropriate for a youth leader to invite young people to their house outside of an organised church activity, even if their spouse or house mates will be present. Doing so creates a blurring of boundaries and makes it easier for those seeking to harm others to replicate these invitations for the purposes of grooming.

We recognise that boundaries within the relationship between a youth leader and young person can be complicated by other connections in the church. For example a young person might know their youth leader as a friend of their parents or have known them as a former member of the youth group. It is important to recognise that there may need to be some changes in the way that the now youth leader communicates, interacts and meets with the young person. It is the youth leader's responsibility to adapt their approach to that young person so it reflects the Position of Trust<sup>1</sup> that they are now in.

Within the context of this document where our focus is on meeting in private dwellings, this point will need some consideration. It might mean that whilst a young person had previously visited the now youth leader on their own as a family friend this needs to change, particularly if they are engaged in one-to-one mentoring or pastoral support.

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<sup>1</sup> Youth workers, both paid and volunteer are now included in the legal definition of [Position of Trust](#).

## What should a youth leader do if a young person comes to their home uninvited?

If a young person comes to the youth leader's house unexpectedly then it is the responsibility of the youth leader to manage that situation and set clear boundaries. The following questions would be appropriate to discuss in your youth team meetings or supervision sessions:

How might you clarify the purpose of their visit? Things to consider could be:

- Is it a social visit?
- Are they in danger?
- Are they seeking pastoral support?

Think about how you would explain to the young person that it isn't appropriate for you to invite them into your home. Could you suggest appropriate pastoral alternatives – is there somewhere you could go together? Who do you need to tell?

If someone is in danger, what steps do you need to take to help them to be safe? This needs to be in line with your church safeguarding policy, including calling the police on 999 if the danger is imminent.

If a young person is seeking pastoral support, how soon do you need to meet them and where might be appropriate? Can you arrange this with the young person now so they know when the support will be coming?

If a young person is making a social visit, how will you explain to them that a youth group setting is the appropriate place for you to talk or catch up with them.

As soon as possible contact your church DPS to advise them of the visit and the actions that you have taken, including any disclosures or concerns that you may have.

If a young person makes repeated visits to a youth leader's home, then it may be necessary for the youth leader, along with the DPS to meet with them and their parents (if appropriate). During this meeting talk about the boundaries that need to be in place and why. You might also think about an alternative pastoral response to the young person's needs.

## Conclusion

We hope that the information within this document is helpful for churches as they consider how best to engage with young people. We recognise that churches come in many different forms and that there is no one size fits all approach to where youth work should take place. We encourage each church to consider the guidance we offer as they conduct their risk assessment process.

Safeguarding Team, Baptist Union of Great Britain, Baptist House, PO Box 44, 129 Broadway, Didcot OX11 8RT  
Tel: 01235 517700 Email: [Safeguarding@baptist.org.uk](mailto:Safeguarding@baptist.org.uk) Website: [www.baptist.org.uk](http://www.baptist.org.uk)  
BUGB operates as a CIO with registered charity number 11813