

Gloucester & Bristol Diocesan Association of Church Bell Ringers

Child Protection Policy

Background

We have drawn up this Policy in the knowledge that ringing has always been an extremely safe activity for young people, and that adult ringers have always been punctilious in the care, supervision and protection of young ringers. They have always exercised the **informed vigilance** that is the foundation of good practice, and this Policy in no way changes that. Nevertheless, it is important for the peace of mind of parents and the public generally - as well as for the protection of our adult members - that we have a published Policy.

We add that in addition to being a very safe activity for young people, ringing has always been very beneficial for them in that they take part on an equal basis with adults of all ages. This social contact and respect between ringers of all backgrounds and ages is something of considerable value, which we will vigorously support and protect.

We well understand that some ringers find the whole idea of being checked and cleared, objectionable. They feel tainted by the very suggestion that they should receive clearance in respect of something which they find totally abhorrent. Nevertheless, in the present climate, we see no alternative to this checking, and we strongly urge members to comply with a minimum of fuss. Ringing in the Association can then continue in the same sensible and caring way that it always has.

Scope

This Policy applies to all activities organised by the Association and its Branches, including practices, meetings, training events, competitions and outings. **It does not apply to activities organised by individual members or by their towers**, although we strongly recommend that they follow the same principles. A "young person" is someone under the age of 18.

In General

It is the responsibility of all adult ringers to behave sensibly and appropriately at all times. They must always be mindful of the welfare of any young person present.

Association and Branch Officers

It is the responsibility of the Association Officer(s) or Branch Officer(s) running an event, to exercise **informed vigilance** as regards the welfare of all young people present. Two cleared members - preferably Officers - see 8, 9 and 10 in the *Additional Notes* below - should, whenever possible, be present throughout any event. Basic common sense and a positive intention to ensure the well-being of the young people at all times, are the prime requirements, but the following specific points will help.

1. The parent or carer of any young person joining the Association should be given or sent a copy of this Policy together with an Annual Report. They should be invited to telephone or write to an Association or Branch Officer at any time if they want more information or are concerned about anything.
2. The Association or Branch Officer organising an event should endeavour to establish whether any young person taking part has a known medical condition of which they should be aware. They should record that information and pass it to the other Branch and Association Officers and their successors. If they feel that a particular medical condition makes it unsafe for the young person to ring, they should - politely and kindly - prevent them from ringing.

3. The Association or Branch Officer organising an event does not have the responsibility of ensuring that the parent or carer of any young person taking part is content with the arrangements for them travelling to and from the event. Nevertheless, in exercising their informed vigilance, the Officer should consider the appropriateness of any arrangements that come to his or her attention. In particular, he or she should ensure that no young person is left unaccompanied whilst waiting to be collected.
4. The Association or Branch Officer organising an event should ensure that any young person is properly and safely supervised in their ringing to the extent that that is necessary. If they take the view it is not safe for a particular young person to ring at all, they should - politely and kindly - prevent them from ringing.
5. The Association or Branch Officer organising an event should not allow any young person to ring if any clothing, earrings or other items that they are wearing, are dangerous or unsuitable to ring in.
6. The Association does not act *in loco parentis* as regards young persons attending Association events, nor do any Association or Branch Officers act *in loco parentis* by virtue of their positions. Young persons are never handed into the care of the Association. It is the responsibility of the young person's parent or carer to personally accompany the young person or to arrange for another suitable adult to accompany them. The Association or Branch Officer running the event does not have responsibility of checking that the accompanying adult is acting with the parent's authority.
7. If a young person attends an Association event unaccompanied by an adult, the Association or Branch Officer organising the event should not turn them away but should accept them and exercise informed vigilance in accordance with this policy. Afterwards, though, they should endeavour to contact the young person's parent or carer and draw their attention to the fact that, whilst young persons are extremely welcome at all Association events, neither the Association nor its Officers act *in loco parentis*.
8. If, exceptionally, an event - such as a Training Day - includes transport arrangements **specifically organised by the Association**, these should be arranged so that young people do not travel in a car with just one adult. In the event - exceptionally - of this being necessary, the young person should sit in the back.
9. An attendance record must be kept for all Association and Branch events and must include the names and towers of all members and visitors present.
10. Young people must not be allowed into a potentially hazardous situation unaccompanied.
11. Normal Health and Safety issues should always be taken into consideration, a first aid kit should be available, a mobile phone should be available and an accident logbook should be kept.
12. A copy of this Policy should be handed to all young ringers attending an Association event for the first time or to their parent or carer. A copy should also be available for reading at any time.
13. Anyone who has concerns about, or under, this Policy should contact the Association Chairman.

Additional Notes

For the purposes of clarification, we believe the following background notes may help.

1. The Church of England House of Bishops has its own Policy on Child Protection, *Protecting All God's Children*, which can be viewed on the Internet at www.cofe.anglican.org/info/papers/protectingchildren.pdf.
2. Most PCCs have their own Child Protection Policy.

3. The Home Office publication, *Safe from Harm*, also relates to this area, and can be viewed at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs/harm.html.

The link here cannot be followed as it no longer exists. As of January 2006, All searches of the Home Office web site have failed to find the original reference. Interested parties should petition the Home Office!

4. The *Central Council of Church Bell Ringers* has also issued guidance - very similar to our own but which relates to individual towers and bands - and this can be viewed at www.cccbr.org.uk.
5. **Allegations of abuse will affect not just those claiming they have been abused, but those who are accused. Ringers all need to protect themselves and each other from such accusations by following good practice.**
6. To protect young people and adults who work with them it is necessary to create an open environment where the possibility of abuse or a false allegation cannot occur.
7. Abuse can be emotional, verbal, physical or sexual. We offer the following guidance for those having contact with young people under 18 years of age:

You should always:

- Uphold the spirit and specific provisions of the G&B DA Child Protection Policy and these Guidelines.
In so far as possible, avoid situations in which you are alone with children or similarly vulnerable people (this may include people with a physical or learning disability). If necessary, move to a place where you can both be seen by colleagues or other adults.
- Do your best to behave in an open and friendly manner, but avoid being over-familiar in word or action.
If a child is hurt or distressed, do your best to comfort and reassure them without compromising their dignity or doing anything to discredit your own behaviour.
- Try to avoid any physical contact or behaviour that could be unwelcome or misconstrued. Physical touch should only be in response to a child's need and should respect their age and individual stage of development. We recognise that some physical contact is unavoidable while teaching a child to handle a bell.
- It may be appropriate to hold a child's hand, to put a comforting arm around their shoulder or to carry them - for instance, if they have fallen. However, you should first explain what you have in mind and ask directly if that is what they want. Otherwise, it may be unwelcome or misinterpreted. This is unlikely to be an issue in children large enough to learn to handle a bell, but may occur if smaller children accompany an adult into the rope circle for another reason.
- Where you have to rely on your own judgement always treat the child's welfare as paramount - but again be aware of how your actions may be interpreted by others.
- **You have a strict duty never to subject any child to any form of harm or abuse. Failure to honour this will be treated as gross misconduct. This means that it is unacceptable, for example:**
 - To distress a child by shouting at them or calling them derogatory names;
 - To slap a child;
 - To hold a child in such a way that it causes pain, or to shake them;
 - To physically restrain a child except to protect them from harming themselves or others (this may include physically removing a child from the path of a rope, or to prevent a non-ringing child from handling a rope);
 - To take part in horseplay or rough games;
 - To allow or engage in inappropriate touching of any kind;
 - To do things of a personal nature for children that they can do for themselves or an accompanying adult can do for them; this includes going to the toilet with a child unless another adult is present. Many ringing chambers do not have easy access to a toilet - two adults should accompany any child out of the building and to the nearest toilet, but should wait outside until the child is ready to return to the ringing chamber.

This advice should apply to any other reason for a child going outside the ringing chamber, for example to wait at a bus stop;

- To allow or engage in sexually suggestive behaviour within a child's sight or hearing, or make suggestive comments to or within earshot of a child;
- To give or show to a child anything which could be construed as being pornographic;
- To seek or agree to meet children anywhere outside normal ringing times and outside the tower without the full prior knowledge and agreement of their parents or guardians and your ringing master;
- To give personal details (e.g. your address or phone-number) to a child; There may be very valid reasons for the child to have these details, but it is advisable to give the details straight to a parent.

8. The PCC is responsible for appointing all those involved in church activities who have responsibility for young people. Among ringers this is likely to mean the Tower Captain and others who are likely to be in charge of ringing at any time. Each person will need to be "cleared" by completing a confidential form and having the information checked by the Criminal Records Bureau, an executive agency of the Home Office. Being cleared does not imply any criticism whatsoever of those asked. Indeed, we recommend that at least two members of every band be cleared, and we encourage other band members to be cleared as well. The process is free and you can find out more information at www.disclosure.gov.uk.
9. In the Gloucester Diocese a ringer can become a cleared person - either through a PCC or through the Diocese - and will then be a cleared person as regards any tower in the Diocese. They can obtain a CRB Disclosure Form either from their PCC, the Diocese or the Association Chairman. We encourage all members to apply whether or not in a position of responsibility.
10. In the Bristol Diocese the current position is that a ringer can only be cleared through a PCC, although that clearance will then apply for them to ring at any tower in the Diocese. The particular arrangements for clearance may vary from one PCC to another. At present, though, we are not content that the Bristol Diocesan arrangements provide a sufficient guarantee of confidentiality.
11. It may be that a young person will confide in you or you may suspect that a young person is being ill-treated or abused. It is the Association's view that we all have a moral responsibility to help the most vulnerable members of our communities, our children. If you have reason to suspect a child is being ill treated our view is that you should contact your local Social Services office or the police giving as much information about the child and about your concerns as you can. If you need details of exactly who to contact, the Chairman will be able to supply them.

G&B Association Officers
January 2006