



Central Council of Church Bell Ringers
"Registered Charity number 270036"

Tower Stewardship Committee

Guidance Note No.3

CHILD PROTECTION IN TOWERS

This guidance note gives guidance to ringers, parochial church councils and clergy regarding child protection in towers.

As most of the ringing towers in the world come under the jurisdiction of the Church of England, it has been produced with this in mind. However, most of the principles addressed will apply to Churches of other denominations and also those outside the UK. It is recommended that, if needed, more specific local advice should be sought.

Child Protection in Towers

The Incumbent, Churchwardens and PCC of any Parish have a legal and primary responsibility to maintain a safe environment for all people in the Tower and elsewhere on Church premises and this entails particular actions in the case of children and young people. In practice, where ringing is concerned, this responsibility is discharged through the Tower Captain whose appointment should be agreed by the Incumbent and PCC. It is important therefore that there is a good working relationship between Tower Captains and Church Officials.

The leaflet 'Protecting Young Ringers' issued by the Central Council outlines the actions necessary for maintaining that safe environment. It should be agreed with the PCC and be on display in every Tower. Following these guidelines will ensure that young people can be fully and safely involved with ringing activities and that must be a priority for us all. The Tower Captain should also be aware of, and work in accordance with, his/her Parish Child Protection Policy. The Tower Captain should not arrange for any ringer who has not been previously notified to and accepted by the Incumbent and PCC to run the practice or teach young ringers.

However, occasionally, questions or concerns arise where some additional information may help.

What if – a child by his/her behaviour or conversation indicates or raises concerns that some sort of abuse may be taking place – somewhere. What will be the most helpful response to the child?

Here are some practical tips which will hopefully ensure that common pitfalls are avoided.

1. If a child discloses abuse some action *must* be taken.
 - Listen to the child and do not disbelieve (this is not the same as believing)
 - Do not ask leading questions such as *who did it*
 - Give the child your attention but do not over-react or show shock or distaste. Try to listen calmly and try not to show strong emotions about what is being said
 - Say that you understand what they are saying and that you take it seriously but be careful not to say much more at this stage.
 - There might be elements of fancy or imagination in what children say but there will be a reason for having said it
 - When children speak to someone outside the family they are generally looking for some help but they will probably be ambivalent and uncertain about precisely what
 - Disclosures may be direct but are sometimes very indirect
 - Do not make any promises such as *it will be alright* - It might not be or *of course I won't tell anybody* - you may have to
 - Seek immediate advice from your Parish Child Protection Adviser and if appropriate, the Diocesan Child Protection Adviser

2. If it is the child's behaviour which is giving you cause for concern such as
 - Bruises or other injuries, especially when regularly seen or of an unusual nature
 - A child who is nervous or wary of adults as though expecting chastisement
 - Withdrawn, solitary ways of behaviour that go beyond an occasional bad mood
 - Extreme aggression or bullying
 - Sexualised behaviour, especially in younger children

then talk to colleagues to see if they share your concerns and then speak to your Vicar. Again, it will probably be helpful to consult your Child Protection representative and, if concerns are substantiated, the Diocesan Child Protection Adviser.

What if – the behaviour or activity of another ringer gives cause for concern where children in the Tower are concerned because the behaviour is inappropriate

- Make sure that the 'Protecting Young Ringers' guidelines are followed, especially No's 9, 11 and 12 which recommend that two adults are always present, that the Tower Captain may not delegate responsibilities, and keeping a register. Ensuring that two adults (preferably one of each sex) are present at all times when children are in the Tower is your first and most important principle. If there is only

one adult present when an unaccompanied child arrives for the practice/service ringing etc then the adult should wait for a second to arrive before ringing can start.

- Keeping a register will ensure that you are aware of who has attended and when
- Talking to colleagues may help in discovering if your concerns are shared but care must be taken to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. Unfounded allegations can be devastating for the individual concerned
- Seek advice from your Vicar initially, to ascertain whether your concerns are sufficiently well based to justify further action. It may well be that further observation and vigilance is called for but not formal action
- However, if there is a reason to believe that abuse is occurring or has occurred then more formal action will almost certainly be necessary and you will be advised and supported in this regard by your Diocesan Child Protection Adviser

Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) Checks

One of the recommendations of the House of Bishops "Protecting All of God's Children" Policy Document was that all those working with children and young people within the Church of England should undergo a CRB check. This recommendation has been taken on board to a greater or lesser extent by Dioceses and Parishes and the Central Council in its Guidelines has recommended that any Tower Captain or other ringer with responsibility for the teaching and care of young ringers should undergo a CRB check.

So what are these checks?

A Disclosure Application Form is issued by the CRB and will be available from your Parish Child Protection Representative or your Incumbent. On it you fill in your personal details and then make a declaration as to whether you have any unspent convictions. The check may ask for an 'enhanced disclosure'. This will mean that even spent convictions will be revealed together with police cautions. There are notes for guidance and do not worry about asking for help in filling it in. There is normally no fee payable.

The checks are **confidential**. The form is sent via the Diocesan Office (where there will be a designated person who will deal with all CRB checks) to the Criminal Records Bureau who checks the information against the relevant national data bases. The Diocesan Office is, in due course, informed of the result with a copy to the applicant, who has therefore a chance to correct any errors. This check protects the child, the individual and the church and is in no way required because the individual concerned is not trusted. If there are any concerns raised by information disclosed, the Diocesan Child Protection Adviser will be contacted. He/she will advise the relevant Incumbent who will contact the individual concerned. Any relevant facts disclosed will be considered and a risk assessment undertaken.

No one else will have access to the information disclosed on the form. If information is revealed by the CRB which has not been disclosed, then the individual concerned is always contacted before any further steps are taken to ensure that the correct identification has been made.

The purpose of the checks is to identify serious risk to children or vulnerable adults (usually meaning those with learning difficulties who haven't adult comprehension). Any other facts which emerge from the check are not considered relevant. If serious facts are disclosed which are still not relevant to the safety of children then each case will be considered in context.

The vast majority of the forms have nothing disclosed and that is that. A few may contain information which may be more or less embarrassing and refer to events that perhaps happened in younger days. These are of no interest to anyone and do not have any influence on the outcome of any checks.

An important note is that a CRB check on its own is obviously of very limited value as a protection measure. The only thing it does do is to identify anyone who is known to be a danger to children. Although that of itself is surely worth putting ourselves out for, we must never forget the golden rule that no one adult should ever work with a child on his/her own. This is the single most important action we can take to keep our young ringers safe from harm and if we take that principle seriously the rest falls into place.

The Sex Offenders Register.

What is this?

Anyone who has been convicted of a serious offence against a child will be placed on the Sex Offenders Register and this will be revealed by a CRB check. This may result in restrictions being placed on that individual's freedom to take part in activities involving children.

What if – a ringer who is known to have a conviction of abuse against a child and is therefore on the Sex Offenders Register moves into a Guild/Association's area and wishes to take part in ringing activities where children are present?

- Again, making sure that the 'Protecting Young Ringers' Guidelines are followed will ensure that children are safeguarded but a concerned Tower Captain may wish to take further precautions both to further safeguard children and reassure parents
- It will be prudent and helpful to inform the Incumbent and also to inform the Diocesan Child Protection Adviser and follow their advice
- The Incumbent may refuse entry to the tower to any person he/she considers to be a risk to individuals present. The Tower Captain should work closely with his/her Incumbent here
- Any Guild/Association may, in its constitution, deny membership to any individual who it considers will bring the Exercise into disrepute. This is not an action which should be undertaken lightly and in this instance only where there is clear evidence, because of past criminal conviction

for relevant offences, that the individual in question would pose a threat to children and young people

- Churches in the Diocese concerned may be informed by the Diocesan authorities of the presence of this individual in the area, so that Parishes with a ring of bells but no active band can guard against such an individual offering to teach a band which might include children. The Guild/Association would be the body to alert the Diocese if this was felt to be appropriate. There is no agreed procedure at present which would permit sharing this information between Guilds.

What if - a CRB check on a ringer reveals a previous conviction of an offence against a child and this ringer is now on the sex offenders register.

- The Diocesan Child Protection Adviser would be involved and discussions would take place with the Incumbent and the ringer in question. In this instance it is extremely unlikely that the ringer would be permitted to be present when children/young people were in the tower. In practice this would probably mean total exclusion. Depending on the circumstances, where the offence was minor, ringing might be permitted with close supervision after an appropriate risk assessment. Decisions would depend on the outcome of the discussions mentioned above.

What if – a tower captain or a ringer who is involved in teaching children/young people refuses to undergo a CRB check?

- Here the position is clear. It is necessary for all these ringers to be checked for all the reasons outlined above. Holding such a position is not compatible with a refusal. It would be hoped that discussions could resolve any concerns and that this situation will be rare.
- Although very undesirable, it is possible that a decision might be taken that no children should be allowed in the tower if there have been no CRB checks undertaken by those in charge of the ringing or vice versa that no ringers may attend who have not undergone a CRB check. The ultimate responsibility for taking this stance would rest with the Incumbent.
- It is crucial that if these type of problems are likely to arise that discussions take place at an early stage between all parties with the objective of resolving the conflict before such destructive decisions are reached

It must be stressed that all these worrying situations are rare. In the vast majority of towers there are few problems and good relationships between ringers and the church authorities are maintained which ensure that sensible decisions are taken thereby encouraging the involvement of young people in all ringing activities to the benefit of all.

In all situations the wellbeing of the child or children must always be the paramount concern and form the basis for all decision making.

For further information, contact the Chairman of the CCCBR Tower Stewardship Committee:

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Other **Guidance Notes** produced by the Tower Stewardship Committee are:-

- GN1 - Insurance**
- GN2 - Tower Management**
- GN3 - Child Protection In Towers**
- GN4 - Health and Safety**
- GN5 - Church Law**
- GN6 - Fire Assessment and Protection**

These Guidance Notes can be downloaded free of charge from the Tower Stewardship Committee section of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers website:

www.cccb.org.uk/towerstewardship