



Sexual Offenders Policy

River Church upholds the uncompromising message of the gospel to open its doors to all. In doing so we are aware that a number of sexual offenders living in the community may also attend church.

All safeguarding practices will have at the forefront the protection of children and vulnerable adults. However, the sex offender also needs protection. River Church will endeavour not to place offenders in a position where they may be tempted to reoffend. We also want to protect offenders from any false allegations.

A sexual offender is someone who has committed sexual offences against another person. Here we are primarily referring to people who have offended against children or vulnerable adults. Sexual offences include rape, indecent assault and indecent exposure, exposing children to pornography, and encouraging children to perform sexual acts on themselves, other children or the offender. They also include looking at images of children being abused or photographed in provocative poses.

Sex offenders may have:

- downloaded child abuse images, made these images, distributed them to others as well as possessing them or gathered large collections of images on their computer. These offences are often described as 'child pornography' but this is inaccurate as every image captures an actual situation where a child has been abused, therefore a more appropriate term is 'child abuse images'. They may have gone on to 'hands-on' offending
- targeted children at a specific stage of sexual development.
- also targeted vulnerable adults. Most target children of a particular gender, but some target both.
- Most offenders "groom" children by forming a friendship with them, giving gifts, praise etc. so that the child is comfortable in their presence and trusts them. They also groom parents and carers to gain their confidence that it is alright for them to be around their family. This grooming is very subtle and is usually more recognisable by outsiders than by those being groomed. Single parent families, as well as "loner" children who have not received good nurture, are often targeted.

Most people think of a sexual offender as a lone adult male because this is the image frequently portrayed by the media. Such offenders actually represent between a third and a half of the total. A significant number of allegations of sexual crimes are against other children and young people (between a quarter and a third). Allegations against lone women account for up to a quarter and groups of offenders a similar amount also.

It needs to be borne in mind that most offences are not reported.

If a known offender attends River Church:

We will encourage the setting up of a Support and Accountability Group, particularly for high-risk offenders, which can provide a group of people not only to share any necessary chaperoning and monitoring of the offender in church, but also provide a context in which they can address and be supported through the issues they face in life. They will be held to account for their thinking and behaviour, develop a range of close relationships with adults and be disciplined, all of which are key to maintaining an offence-free lifestyle and not giving into temptation.

A Contract:

Contracts are a commitment between the offender to observe their boundaries, and the church to offer pastoral support and accountability. This will allow an offender to move forward more positively, keeping the risk to children and vulnerable adults to a minimum. It will also keep the offender safer from possible false accusations – which could put them at risk of other repeat convictions.

Sex offenders in particular are often manipulative. They may not have developed an understanding of the importance of personal boundaries or even accept what they have done is wrong. This contract should involve the person's partner and other members of the family. Most importantly, these boundaries will serve to protect children and young people who attend church activities.

The contract could begin by setting out the pastoral support and care that is being offered but it will need to be personalised to the individual concerned, local circumstances and the risk they may pose to others.

In looking at the appropriate supervision of an individual considered a risk, the organisation should:

- Arrange a frank discussion between the leaders (more than one) and the person concerned. This may include the probation officer or other agencies involved.
- Make efforts to sustain open communication with the statutory and voluntary agencies involved with the offender
- Establish clear boundaries of behaviour in relationships. These boundaries may vary depending upon the nature of the offence(s) they have committed
- Draw up a contract between leadership and offender based upon an open discussion. Such a contract may well form part of MAPP (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements) that is agreed for an individual in advance of their release from prison
- Ensure the contract is signed and dated by the offender and by leaders of the organisation
- Understand that a contract may be associated with but not solely follow a criminal prosecution. Similarly, the ending of a period when an offender's name has been on the sex offenders register should not indicate the ending of the contract drawn up between the offender and the leadership.

NB this list is NOT conclusive.

Sample contract:

- I will never allow myself to be in a situation where I am alone with children, young people or vulnerable adults
- I will attend meetings and activities as directed by the leadership
- I will sit where directed at activities (e.g., religious meetings, social gatherings) and will not place myself near children, young people and vulnerable adults
- I will not enter certain parts of the building designated by the leadership, nor any area where activities for children, young people and vulnerable adults are in progress
- I will decline invitations of hospitality where there are children, young people or vulnerable adults in the home
- I accept that "x" and "y" will sit with me during activities (e.g., religious meetings, social gatherings) and accompany me when I need to use other facilities. They will know I am a sex offender.
- I accept there are certain people who will need to be told of my circumstances in order for them to protect the children, young people or vulnerable adults for whom they care
- I accept that contact will need to be made with my probation officer, who will meet with leaders as and when necessary (where appropriate)
- I accept that "z" will provide me with pastoral care.
- I understand that if I do not keep to these conditions, I may be barred from attending activities. In such circumstances the leadership may choose to inform the statutory agencies (e.g., police, probation, Adult Services, Children's Social Services), and any other relevant organisations, as well as members of the faith community or organisation.
- I understand that any other concerns will be taken seriously and reported
- I understand that this contract will be reviewed regularly every _____ months and will remain for an indefinite period.

Pastoral care

As well as outlining the boundaries a sex offender would be expected to keep, it is also helpful to outline the types of pastoral care and support River Church are able to offer.

'X' and 'Y' and 'Z' have agreed to provide you with pastoral care and support; as part of that undertaking, they and the leadership of the organisation agree to:

- Work closely with any statutory authorities with responsibility for you, such as probation officer, police public protection team or children's social services, cooperating with them in helping and supporting you.
- Challenge unhealthy behavioural patterns.
- Provide pastoral care and support for anyone you are living with, Spouse, partner, children.
- Support you in practical areas such as finding accommodation or suitable employment, seeking specialist help, rehabilitation or counselling or joining support groups.
- Be there for you and will support you.

The help and pastoral support available in the church needs to run alongside the monitoring of the individual by police and probation. Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) exist in all areas. MAPPA places a duty on the police, the probation service and the prison authorities to assess and manage risks posed by offenders in every community in England and Wales. Similar arrangements apply elsewhere in the UK. They do this work in partnership with other agencies including health services, housing, social services etc. **Where an offender is subject to a supervision plan it will be vital for churches to work closely with these agencies both in order to reduce risk and also to understand how the church can positively contribute to the supervision plan as well as the offender's relapse prevention or "better life" plan.**

MAPPA guidance issued in 2009 by National Offender Management Service (NOMS) Public Protection Unit, Section 6.5, 'Offenders and Worship', stresses that MAPPA should work in partnership with places of worship and "that religious leaders should be provided with sufficient information to protect their congregation".