



Keeping Young People Safe in Private Dwellings

Advice and guidance for the use of private dwellings for Christian youth work/ministry

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Foreword

This document¹ should be read alongside the safeguarding policy and practice of the church, churches or Christian agency responsible for this activity and national government guidance on youth work in private dwellings².

The aims of this document are:

- a) to establish a robust case for the value and effectiveness of youth work in private dwellings,**
- b) to capture and promote good practice for Christian youth work/ministry in private dwellings, and**
- c) to encourage the careful, and safe use of private dwellings for youth work generally.**

Christian faith-based youth work and ministry has rich and diverse traditions of work with children and young people in private dwellings. It has been normal practice in many churches across the denominations for some organised activities to take place in private dwellings. More generally, the range of activity, interactions and interventions can include fostering, therapy, mission projects, developmental group work, Bible studies, hospitality, mentoring and pastoral care.

The Christian community have long recognised the value in children and young people experiencing positive care and support both in their own homes and in the homes of others, where those who live there role model relationships and life. English social services recognise the value of looked-after children living private dwellings and for the strong and healthy development of those children through experiencing stable homes. Many youth workers recognise this through their own work with young people, where working with them in their homes can enable awareness of issues and provide the young person the opportunities to realise that they matter to the youth worker and others. Those who plan and deliver such activities need to be aware of the specific risks inherent in these spaces and to take these into account when preparing for such work.

The purposes of this paper are two-fold. Firstly to recognise the importance and value of the “home” in the personal, social, spiritual and educational development of young people (NOS, 2020), and secondly, to encourage the practice of safe youth work within homes – whether they be those of the young people, the homes of the youth workers committed to serving and living their faith in the local area, or those of faith community members who open their homes as part of their commitment to the spiritual development of young people.

¹ This report was developed from a paper delivered at the 4th Commonwealth Youth Conference held at Reading University In July 2025. Safer Systems and Safer Practice for Youth Work in Private Dwellings <https://cte.org.uk/app/uploads/2025/07/Commonwealth-Conference-Paper.pdf>

² In England this would be the Department for Education (DfE 2025) After-school clubs, community activities, and tuition; Safeguarding guidance for providers; September 2025 currently available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-out-of-school-settings-code-of-practice#full-publication-update-history>. Please consult the appropriate body in other countries/nations.



Executive Summary

Christian youth work and ministry is committed to the personal, social, spiritual and educational development of young people (NOS, 2020) and to enabling faith development within the context of the gathered community of faith – the church. These communities meet in purpose-built spaces, ancient chapels, leased buildings, school halls and within homes. It is in the final category that we recognise particular risks which need to be addressed and practices which need to be in place in order that young people and youth workers are kept safe.

This paper focuses on the principles which must underpin such work, and the essential working practices which will enable safer activity with young people in these settings.

Principles underpinning this work

- Relationships of trust between the young person and the youth worker/minister can be enabled more effectively through work in homes and private dwellings
- The 'home' environment offers a uniquely welcoming space which can enable the nurture and growth of young people. When managed and overseen carefully, homes can be a powerful place in which to engage with young people at a deeper level
- Homes and private dwellings are often places where community life takes place and it is important to enable young people to participate in the life of the community, especially when the community has a mutual faith commitment
- Private dwelling can provide an important space for young people in areas of social and economic deprivation or where public transport to and from 'centres' is poor or non-existent

Essential Safer Working Practices

Commit to safeguarding as an absolute first priority.

- It is essential, and a statutory requirement in England⁵, that all Christian youth work/ministry should be accountable to trustees, church leaders or organisations which have a safeguarding policy and practice in place. It is essential that everyone understands their safeguarding responsibilities. All work in homes must be subject to rigorous checks and there must be a commitment to keeping young people safe.

Manage risk

- The principle risk of working with children and young people in private dwellings is the real and perceived increase in closeness and familiarity between the worker and the young person. This is primarily affected by the intentional act of giving and receiving hospitality, which includes a warm welcome, an openness of relationship, and encountering the personal life of the host(s). The increase in closeness and vulnerability produced in this exchange is both the greatest strength (developing a relationship of trust) and the greatest risk to working with children and young people in private dwellings. Practices must be in place to mitigate all risks.

Establish appropriate boundaries

- One of the key needs of youth work generally and of work which involves the home, is the setting of appropriate boundaries. Because the home is a place of safety and vulnerability, it is all the more important to ensure that any work which takes place there provides for the safety of the young person and the worker, and enables human flourishing.

Seek informed consent

- Youth work is built on voluntary participation. The use of private dwellings requires additional care to ensure the high standards of informed consent are maintained, for children and young people, for their parents, and for the staff, volunteers and those living in the home.

Ensure Suitability

- It is important to ensure the suitability of the venue and spaces within it, as well as the workers themselves, for the practice that will be undertaken.

Create support structures for young people

- For all youth and children's work undertaken in faith-based settings, it is important to enable the children and young people to have ways in which they can share what may be happening to them. All of them should be aware of

the trusted adults who are there to listen and provide the appropriate support to them and, where necessary, the legal duty to pass on concerns.

Create support structures for staff and volunteers

- In Christian settings as in youth work generally, organisations delivering youth or children's work in private dwellings should ensure that there is appropriate support, supervision and training for those undertaking the work.

Manage the very different environmental risks of a home

- The private dwelling presents a different profile of risks from that of a local authority youth centre, community space or church building. In many ways, due to its nature, the private dwelling is 'untamed' and 'lived-in' which makes it ideal for relational work. However, this presents additional risks for those attending and a lack of privacy for the resident(s) that require consideration.

Ensure privacy and security

- Opening up a private dwelling for work in the community has the potential to attract unwanted and undesirable activity that may cause upset, harm or disturbance to the owner/ resident and their neighbours. These risks must primarily be managed through building trust with guests and neighbours and establishing ground rules with the young people.

Manage transitions

- It will be important for the provider to have a procedure in place for managing transitions, when leaders move on, when the group moves to a new venue, or when young people become young adults as they reach 18 years of age, including what the role of the young adult will be, if at all.

3. Working Together to Safeguard Children (DfE 2022) – outlines that every voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE), faith-based organisation and private sector organisation or agency should have policies in place to safeguard and protect children from harm. They should be aware of how to work together with the safeguarding partners in a local area to safeguard and promote the welfare of local children, including identifying and responding to their needs.



Introduction

1.1 Youth work

At its heart, 'Youth work is a distinct educational process adapted across a variety of settings to support a young person's personal, social and educational development' (NYA, 2023). It exists to enable young people:

- To explore their values, beliefs, ideas and issues
- To enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society
- To acquire a set of practical or technical skills and competencies, to realise their full potential (NYA, 2023)

Those in the faith communities would add 'spiritual development' as found in the National Occupational Standards for Youth Work (NOS), section B1:

'Facilitate the personal, social, spiritual and educational development of young people (CLD, 2019)

1.2 The government's approach to youth work in private dwellings

The locations being considered by this paper are 'private dwellings'. This refers to any house, garden, land or outbuildings which are owned privately and are thus normally closed to public access. In addition to 'private dwellings' we will be using the term 'home', to represent the place where a young person, a youth worker, or a member of a faith-community lives.

The issue of Youth Work in Private Dwellings was highlighted through the National Youth Agency's (NYA) Guidance for Youth Work through the season of Covid. In light of the English government's decision to lockdown in March 2020, the NYA's guide stated that no youth work could take place in private dwellings. When the restrictions were finally lifted by the government, the NYA retained the text in their guidance. Following representations by the Christian youth work community and other faith-based youth work, the NYA established a consultation and has produced a document which has been published (NYA 2023/b) after consulting with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) where youth work is currently located in the English government system.

Within Youth Work in Private Dwellings – Safety first, no compromise it states

The NYA believes that youth work and youth sector activity delivered in private dwellings (within the current context of no support, guidance or legislative framework) is fundamentally unsafe. (NYA 2023b, p5)

On the same page it states

We believe there are aspects that can be put in place... that can make youth work in private dwellings safer. (NYA 2023b, p5)

It is the contention of the authors of this paper that the aspects which we recommended here are those very things that many churches and Christian agencies currently have in place, and which will enable us to establish safer youth work in homes.

1.3 After-school clubs, community activities, and tuition - Safeguarding guidance for providers (DfE, 2023)

The Department for Education in England has recently revised its safeguarding guidance for providers of activities in out-of-school settings. This is non-statutory guidance, not legally binding, for those who work in out-of-school settings (OOSS). It specifically refers to and includes places of worship, and 'religious settings offering education in their own faith, culture, or religious texts or preparation for rites of passage.' (DfE, 2023 p7)

It notes that providers, staff and volunteers have a legal duty of care toward the children who attend. This means that by law you must take reasonable steps to ensure the safety of the children and to protect them from harm. (DfE, 2023 p8)

The document provides detailed guidance on Safeguarding and child protection, suitability of staff and volunteers, health and safety and governance. We recommend that churches and Christian agencies delivering any form of youth work should refer to this document and ensure that, as much as possible, they follow this important guidance. The only mention it makes of private dwellings is on page 7 where it re-states the NYA guidance

line and refers readers to that site.

With regards to safeguarding it lists legal requirements which includes a reference to an Act of Parliament...

Working Together to Safeguard Children – outlines that every voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE), faith-based organisation and private sector organisation or agency should have policies in place to safeguard and protect children from harm. They should be aware of how to work together with the safeguarding partners in a local area to safeguard and promote the welfare of local children, including identifying and responding to their needs. (DfE, 2023 p23)

In addition the document highlights the four levels of DBS checks and the need for providers to ensure that they apply for the right level for the work involved and the document provides a link to the website offering advice on which check is right (page 29)

1.4 The value of the "home"

Across the world, as expressed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) there is a presumption that "home", within a family, should be the safest and most important place for human development and flourishing. The preamble to the 'Rights' states that the parties to the Convention are:

'Convinced that the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community, (UNICEF, 1989, p3)

In addition the parties to the Convention stated:

'Recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding, (UNICEF (1989) p3).

As well as the fully recognised benefits of working with young people within homes, for example in fostering and adoption, we have reflected additionally on potential risks, as highlighted by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) which has been reporting to the UK government (IICSA, 2022).

The Christian youth work community in the UK, both churches and Christian agencies - sometimes referred to as 'para-church organisations' - has worked together to formulate these guidelines for policy and practice. This work is being supported by Churches Together in England and will seek to ensure that young people are kept safe and gain the most in their personal, social and spiritual development as a result of youth work in homes (private dwellings).



A volunteer youth worker wrote that

'There was nothing warm or inviting about the village hall and church basement for young people, and opening up our living room to a dozen teens was quite simply a game changer. [Their own] home was not a safe and positive environment for some, and you could see visible signs of them relaxing and being themselves.'

1.5 UK perspective of youth work

This paper is written from the UK perspective where youth work refers to the process of informal education which values and recognises voluntary participation of and empowerment of young people, together with the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion.

Within the UK there are different approaches across the four nations to this work. In the English context, open youth work provided by the state (the 'Youth Service'), where young people can meet socially and without an agenda has declined, due to reduced funding by local government authorities. The decline has been a direct result of the government's austerity measures from 2008/09 onwards which have resulted in reduced monies going out to local authorities from central government.

The use of private dwellings has been brought into sharper relief in England following the years of austerity measures that have decimated youth services, in particular, removing bespoke youth work buildings from communities around the country. The trade

union, Unison, drawing on returns from 180 of 210 authorities, reported that by 2016 over 600 youth centres had closed, 139,000 places for young people had been lost, and over 3,600 youth worker jobs had been cut, and there has not been political motivation to reverse this since (Unison, August 2016; Davies, 2019, p73).

However, 'the relative political independence that Christian youth work enjoys continues to harbour many of youth work's core values from the policy initiatives that have attempted to erode the profession's traditional practices, which are founded on relational principles that seek to promote learning, democracy, justice and action' (Bright, 2015, p145).

As a result of the decline of local authority youth work, it is generally accepted that the majority of work with young people is now undertaken by the voluntary/community sector rather than by the local authority. The Christian church and Christian faith-based organisations are, together, a significant provider of youth work across the UK.

Youth Work undertaken generally, especially by local authorities, has always worked on the basis of relating directly to and with the young person (within safeguarding boundaries). This voluntary participation has recognised the young person's growth towards adulthood as an individual and has generally kept the worker's relationship with parents/carers at arms-length. This has meant that the majority of the work has taken place away from the private dwellings of the children and young people and more often in local halls and youth centres, prior to the austerity measures.



1.6 Churches, Christian agencies and youth work/ministry

Within the faith-based sectors there has generally been a different approach due to the greater and more complex relationships between all of those who belong to faith communities. In these settings there are often pre-existing friendships between workers and parents, with many parents being active leaders within the youth and children's work. In many cases, youth workers have known young people and their parents/carers for many years.

At the same time there are occasions within the faith-based sector when youth work takes place in homes (private dwellings) as a result of the belief systems of the faith communities and the strong place of hospitality in many of the major world religions. For the Judeo-Christian faith-based sector this had been normal through the years before Christ, and has been a key element of the Christian church since the Christ event. One purpose of this paper is to explore this difference from local authority work, and to affirm the value of appropriate and safe working in the homes of young people, youth workers and/or faith community members.

Since the time of Christ, the ministry of the Christian faith community has included private dwellings. Jesus would meet people in their own homes (Matthew 25:35), often eating meals with them (Luke 4:38), and encouraged followers to practice hospitality by inviting people into their own homes (Matthew 25:35, Romans 12:13). The early church met in homes (Acts 2:46, 5:24) and the Apostle Paul's ministry was supported through his stays in people's homes (Acts 18:7). Preaching took place in homes (Acts 20:20) and the early Christians were encouraged to open their homes to each other (1 Peter 4:9). Churches met in homes then and many still do so today.

Down through history homes have been important places for Christian faith to be lived out and safe spaces into which the lost, the least and the lonely can be invited. Alongside this, the home has been seen as a place of learning. In the English setting monastic houses became colleges and were the commencement of what have become universities.

1.7 Safeguarding

The authors of this paper, and those contributing, all of whom are practitioners within churches or Christian agencies, are committed to the principles and practice of keeping children safe. We totally support the statement of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse that A child protection policy is the basic foundation on which organisations working with children should build their practices to keep children safe (IICSA 2021 pVI), and encourage all the organisations that we work with to have established and implemented their Safeguarding Policy, in line with government advice.

It is with immense sadness that we note that there have been occasions when children have been abused and, sadly, this awful practice continues across many settings to this day. For those within the Christian faith community it is especially abhorrent due to the high value that our faith gives to humanity through being made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) and the special position of children which was emphasised through the teaching and actions of Jesus Christ (Luke 18:15-17). The work with church denominations and Christian agencies on developing and enhancing safer practice is underpinned by a commitment to safeguarding and driven by the importance of, and value of each child and young person, whom we see as created by God.



Mapping and Context

The context and circumstances of youth work in private dwellings is varied and diverse. Drawing on our shared experience of direct work in private dwellings we have sought to identify the common purposes and practices of youth work in these settings.

2.1 Definitions

Legally, within the UK, the term used for those who are under 18 years of age is 'children'. For those of us committed to youth work, in the English context we generally regard young people as those who have moved from primary to secondary education, normally when they have reached 11 years of age, and concluding when they reach legal adulthood, and the end of formal education, at 18 years of age.

The NYA suggest that Youth work predominantly works with young people of secondary school age between 11 and 19 years, but is designed to support young people through adolescence, typically from ages 8 to 25 (NYA, 2022).

For the purposes of this paper we will be using the term 'child' to mean those up to 11 years of age and the term 'young people' for those aged 11 to 18 years of age, and occasionally, especially when dealing with legal statements and statutes, referring to all those up to 18 years of age as 'children'.

This paper seeks to consider all youth work activity with a young person or group of young people which takes place in a private dwelling/home, including that of:

- a church/organisation leader, staff member or volunteer
- a child, young person or young adult
- a faith community member

2.2 The experience

Young people themselves are aware of the fact that a home setting can afford benefits to their personal, social and spiritual development. Writing of her experience of youth work in a Leeds church, one young person said:

'I think for me the general ease and comfort is what I appreciate; being able to relax on a sofa, the environment being less influential (such as a church building), perhaps encouraging more care in what's being said- which can be a good thing. I think all this contributes to a more open and intimate discussion which works well for our group.'

The youth worker leading the small group was also aware of the value of the home:

'As a leader of a small youth group, I really appreciate the benefits of being able to meet in my home. We partly meet at my house for practical reasons - our church doesn't own its own building. I also enjoy being able to host the young people and I think it helps them to feel part of the church family. We enjoy catching up and having discussions about a range of issues, in a comfortable, warm, safe environment. We always ensure safety, for example by having two leaders present, by sharing the location and meeting details with parents, by keeping a record of who was present, and by regularly attending safeguarding training.'

The Youthscape Centre for Research conducted a survey in 2021 on the value of three Relational Hubs – after-school drop-in venues run by Christian churches and agencies in the South East of England. Their resulting report was titled 'Feels Like Home' (Youthscape, 2021) and captured the value of the home to the young people:

'Across all three locations, the youth hubs were described as places with a warm and positive atmosphere that made young people feel welcome. ... fun places to socialise and meet new people; well-equipped with things to do and attractive environments that feel homely. each drop-in was a 'safe place', where youth workers maintained boundaries that protected this positive atmosphere. Young people valued the freedom to engage as much or as little as they wanted in the drop-in and contrasted this with the structure of school life. They appreciated youth workers being accessible every day after school, which meant they could chat to them as and when they wanted.' (Youthscape, 2021)

One 16yr old male commented on his local Relational Hub (The Bell Tower) in this way:

'...wherever the Bell Tower goes, it still feels like home. Like, we had to relocate, but it still feels like a home.' (Youthscape, 2021)

2.3 Purposes and scope

The purpose of youth and community work in a private dwelling echoes the reasons and purposes of youth and community work across the sector. This is work primarily within the NOS framework of Informal Education, Participation, Empowerment and Equality (CLD, 2019). Within the Christian faith sector we have intentionally and thoughtfully developed approaches to working with young people that are built on safe, positive, and mutual relationships. Although we are not alone in this approach, we have a distinctive understanding and set of experiences of youth work that include the process of 'journeying with' young people (Green, 1998). This approach places the core principles of youth and community work in the lens of mutuality and journey, inevitably increasing the development of practice grounded in safe, genuine 'friend-like' (Richards, 2014) relationships and the 'real-lives' of volunteers and practitioners. Our aim is to see the personal, social and spiritual development of all young people through this work.

For this reason, the Christian faith sector (among others) have developed safe practices for working with young people in private dwellings. The scope of this work includes:

- Relational youth work
- Group Work
- Learning & Personal Development
- Mentoring
- Support Work
- Community Participation (i.e. planning, governance, etc)
- Volunteer (or Employment) Supervision
- Involvement in family or community life (of host and/or of guest)
- Increasing trust and understanding.
- Celebrations and Life Events

- Role modelling
- Accompanying and Journeying together with young people

Working with young people in their home, or the homes of other young people, or of members of a faith-community can come about through a number of reasons:

- A charity that has volunteers or staff who have moved to a particular neighbourhood to be involved in youth and community work.
- A youth work project that offers mentoring and support in the home of young people through home-visits.
- Youth work which seeks to accommodate the particular needs of a young person (e.g. additional needs, issues relating to adoption, mental health, etc), who could only attend the youth group or participate in mentoring if it occurred in their own home.
- A youth work project where teams of young people and leaders serve residents in their local community by doing/ helping with manual tasks (e.g. painting/decorating, clearing gardens, helping a neighbour move house, etc.).
- Opportunities for exploring spirituality (seen as a common element of existence of all children and young people).

For faith communities this could be seen through:

- A faith community that has no suitable venue so meet in a suitable house or garden of a volunteer or faith community member.
- A faith community that hold planning meetings in the houses of members and want to include young people in decision making.
- Events for faith-development for young people, which, within the Christian faith community could include bible-study, prayer, worship, discussions and food!

2.4 Other settings and practices

The Christian faith sector is not alone in working in private dwellings or similar 'home-like' spaces as a venue that is safe and nurturing for work with young people. In some cases the 'home' is a preferred venue to a community centre or organisation's building.

Examples of other forms of work with young people which takes place in homes can include:

- Education for those experiencing school-phobia or those unable to access school
- Fostering and Adoption
- Supported Lodgings
- Respite Care
- Private Academic Tutoring
- Music Lessons – either in the child's home or a tutor's home
- Care assessments

Some of the examples listed above already have extensive policy and principles in place in order to ensure the health, safety and safeguarding of the children and young people.

2.5 Government and NYA 'Guidance'

As a result of the Covid pandemic and also the reports of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, the government has produced new guidance for those who deliver youth work in Out of School Settings (DfE 2023). The settings where such activity may now take place include a place of worship and a person's home, and the activities now include Christian Sunday Schools. (DfE 2023, 6 & 7).

Christian churches and agencies must be aware that:

'As a provider, you and your staff and volunteers have a duty of care toward the children who attend. This means that by law you must take reasonable steps to ensure the safety of the children and to protect them from harm.' (DfE 2023, 8)

The National Youth Agency, which is independent of government and seeks to represent youth work across England, have published a report on Youth Work in Private Dwellings (NYA 2023/b) where they state that

The NYA believes that you work and youth sector activity delivered in private dwellings is fundamentally unsafe and should not take place. (NYA 2023/b, 4)

It is the contention of the Christian youth work constituency and this report, that such a belief is fundamentally flawed and that it does not recognise the nature of Christian faith-based work set within the community and 'families' which form a local church/ congregation.

We do recognise that some people have used a whole variety of settings to abuse children and young people, and we would stress that these are practices which we abhor. However, at the same time we recognise that the vast majority of work in private dwellings over the centuries has been carried out in ways which honour those children and young people, and are led by a belief that all of those children and young people are incredibly special because each one has been created in the image of God and must be kept as safe as is humanly possible.

It is worth stressing that the use of private dwellings for youth and children's work was not included in any of the IICSA recommendations. Whilst the report recognises that abuse took place in a whole variety of in sports clubs, schools, uniformed groups and children's homes, there are no recommendations that these should be banned, but rather that they be made safer to ensure young people continue to have the opportunities that such locations offer for enriching their lives.



Principles and Approach

In order to develop this set of safer working practices within the Christian faith-based youth work community an open invitation was made to practitioners and managers across the sector to bring together the learning and practice which will benefit the sector and the children and young people.

From that learning we have developed these key principles and approaches to enable such work to be safer and to enable the development of each and every young person.

The church and Christian faith sector has a rich tradition of working with children, young people and communities in homes and private dwellings. The purposes and methods of this approach are wide and varied. In this section we outline the leading reasons why practitioners and community groups may opt for an approach to working with children and young people situated in private dwellings – and why in some situations it is considered preferential. This includes both activities in the houses of children and young people, and activities in the houses of workers, volunteers, and community group members.

Our key principles and approaches include:

- **Establishing relationships of trust**
- **Enabling nurture and growth**
- **Participating in the life of the community**
- **Engaging with young people**
- **Monitoring the availability/access of spaces**

3.1 Relationships of trust

The principles and practices of youth and community work, outlined within the National Occupational Standards of the sector, establish a framework for quality youth work practice on the basis of informal education, voluntary participation, empowerment and equality (CLD, 2019).

Across the sector there is consensus in approach that these principles are delivered primarily through building positive relationships of trust with young people. In the history of youth work, the Christian faith sector has played a key role in establishing these principles as the building blocks of quality work with children and young people in the community.

In the Christian faith sector we have developed a distinctive tradition of 'relational youth work' where we journey with young people, with safe working practices that are constructed around positive, mutual relationships, where the youth work process is most effective when shaped around a mutual-relationship between the practitioner and a young person (Ward, 1997).

Within this frame of reference, hospitality and vulnerability, within appropriate boundaries, are key components in building strong positive relationships. This includes a willingness to welcome others into your spaces, an openness and vulnerability of relationship, and the opportunity to be aware of aspects of each other's personal life. The use of private dwellings increases and deepens these opportunities for quality relationships that facilitate the core discipline of youth work, enabling the young person to develop personally, socially, spiritually and educationally.

An intern has reported that

'We went around the room, asking what they loved about the group. A 15 year old boy said, 'This is the only place where people don't make fun of me.' A 15 year old girl said, 'Wednesday nights are what get me through the week.' It started to dawn on me just how much young people needed this – it was so much more to them than the card games, the bible study, the cooking competitions.'

3.2 Nurture and development

The space of the private dwelling is uniquely welcoming and has a distinctive nurturing potential. This is why so many community spaces are fitted-out like living rooms – but they seldom compare. It is also one of the key reasons that residential experiences are so effective. Other than the quality extended time, the 'living-together' and creating a home-space offer an opportunity for the whole group to get an insight into each other's lives, including that of the adults/workers. It creates deeper relationships and opens up important conversations. The nurturing environment of the private dwelling is a key reason for opening these spaces for work with children and young people.

As a society our most vulnerable children and young people, those with no safe family of their own, are placed with safe adults in nurturing private dwellings (homes) through fostering and adoption. The welcoming, small-scale 'normal life' setting of the home fosters an aspect of informal education around care, inclusion and valuing individuals. The opportunity to role-model

safe and supportive home/family life is unparalleled, especially for those children and young people who have poor experiences of their own home/family.

A church-based youth worker recounts

‘The mentoring group that met at the home of a church member was fantastic. The developmental work through open and honest conversations as we sat around a log burner was second to none. We achieved in a year what might take a decade in institutionalised settings.’

3.3 Participation in the life of a community

Homes and private dwellings are often the space of community life, of a neighbourhood and also of faith communities. Participating in the life of the community can often include meetings, events and groups in the private dwellings of community members. These are spaces where the community engages in decision-making and in marking important life stages and celebratory events.

Homes are also fertile contexts for serving the practical needs of young people and their families, and encouraging their peers to grow in their personal development by undertaking community service. Community work practice must engage with the culture and context of the community it is working with. Many civil society groups meet in homes including planning committees, micro-grant panels, book clubs and political groups.

Furthermore, our faith communities have rich histories of hospitality and service within the home. In the church we treasure stories of how Jesus met and ate with people in their homes, and of the first Christians who valued the practice of hospitality by inviting people into their own homes. Throughout history, homes have been important places for the Christian faith to be lived out practically, and safe spaces into which the most vulnerable can be invited and cared for. Many faith communities, including churches, still regularly meet in homes, either as small churches or in smaller subsets of larger communities (often called ‘home groups’). In many churches this includes work with children and young people, who may be part of a mixed ‘home group’ or a dedicated youth group. We believe that youth work principles and practices can, and should, be found within the faith traditions of our communities. This means identifying safe practices to adapt these valued traditions in ways that work for communities generally and communities of faith in particular.

3.4 Engaging with young people

The use of the private dwelling can be a particularly powerful tool for engagement. Speaking at the Youthscape/St Mellitus Annual Lecture in May 2023, Chloe Combi presented the challenging fact that young people have 50% fewer ‘in-real-life’ experiences now than they did in 2020 (Youthscape, 2023). She spoke about the fact that young people today are statistically less likely to roam as far from home as they did, less likely to spend time socially out of doors and in public spaces, preferring instead to occupy online spaces from their homes. Many previously public spaces such as shopping centres are now ‘out of bounds’ (Youthscape, 2023). These factors combine to make provision in private dwellings more important to young people. This is particularly true when visiting young people in their own homes.

At the same time engagement can be more effective in homes where the young people feel safer than a public community or church building. This is an increasingly important part of accessible provision that responds to the needs of young people in a generation with record levels of loneliness and poor well-being (See Batsleer and Duggan, 2020).

Furthermore, when workers/volunteers/members share the lived-experience of a hard-to-reach neighbourhood they are working with (or move into a neighbourhood in order to share), they can build a unique and distinctive form of trust. In doing so, they use the same local services, live in the same kind of housing, face the same local geography, and share the experiences of any local disruption. This opens avenues for conversation and collaboration, and moves the relationship akin to neighbour.

Using home based settings can also be an important way to engage with those whose culture is much more hospitality-driven than traditionally has been the case among existing communities in the UK. Those involved in youth work have found that an essential part of building trust and a sense of belonging with those from Middle Eastern, Asian and African cultures involves allowing them to host activities and eat together in their home environment.

3.5 Availability and access

In a number of communities, particularly within more deprived areas, where young people do not have easy access to appropriate free venues for activities, the use of private dwellings helps to ensure youth work is available to those young people. In some rural communities, the cost and unreliability of public transport has been prohibitive to hosting youth events in public places and/or spaces such as community centres. In these situations, meeting locally in young people’s houses has been the only viable way to ensure regular and sustained youth work provision.



Safer Working Practices

Having established the values of working with young people in homes, we recognise that this work presents a unique set of benefits, but also risks and challenges, which this section seeks to address. Out of the experience of youth workers across the Christian faith-based sector, we are bringing together a number of principles for safer practice when working with children and young people in private dwellings. These are:

- **Seeing safeguarding as a first priority**
- **Safely managing vulnerability**
- **Establishing appropriate boundaries**
- **Seeking informed consent**
- **Ensuring the suitability of venues and workers**
- **Managing the different environmental risks of a home**
- **Ensuring privacy and security**
- **Being a good neighbour**

It is presumed that, as a matter of course, full records will be kept of who attend, both young people and staff/leaders, together with records of any incidents which may have taken place.

The following should be read, alongside the government guidance (England) on After-school clubs, community activities, and tuition Safeguarding guidance for providers (DfE 2023).

With regards to all of the following guidance, and to ensure compliance with legal requirement, a risk assessment will need to be undertaken by the body responsible for the work and mitigations put in place. This will need to be reviewed annually.

The NYA's report, Youth Work in Private Dwellings, stresses that

Whatever their role, every adult is responsible for creating the systemic conditions for the safe delivery of activities. While training and background checks are critical and bound by legal frameworks... it is equally important to consider elements such as power-dynamics, personal and professional boundaries, individual values and the cultural context to reduce areas of potential risk. (NYA 2023 p16)

4.1 Safeguarding

All work with children and young people must be undertaken within the safeguarding policy and practice of the body or organisation that has oversight of and responsibility for the activity. This includes all work in private dwellings and the guidance in this section is intended to complement and inform that safeguarding practice. It is the responsibility of the organisation's management to consider this guidance in the light of the needs and demands of their context, practice and safeguarding framework. Essential safeguarding practice will always include:

- Safer Recruitment of all adults working with children, young people and vulnerable adults, including references, interview, application form and a DBS Enhanced-Level check
- Induction and training for all staff, workers and volunteers
- Clear definitions of abuse and safe practice
- A clear process of recording and reporting disclosures and concerns
- A code of conduct for staff, workers and volunteers
- Clear minimum ratios of adults to children based on age/setting
- Day-to-day record keeping and registers

The high standards of safeguarding that we expect across the range of venues and locations used by the sector apply equally to activity in all settings, including private dwellings.

Sadly, the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse noted that some occasions of abuse took place in the home setting (IICSA, 2021; IICSA, 2022; EECSA 2021,2). It is the expectation of the writers of this report that raising the awareness of safeguarding through trained workers, and the required 'safety' of the home settings will enable young people to voice their concerns and for perpetrators to be brought to justice.

The high standards of safeguarding that we expect across the sector applies in all settings, including private dwellings. For safeguarding advice contact your local safeguarding board, denominational body, and/or thirtyone:eight safeguarding advice service.

When establishing youth work in private dwellings, the body or organisation responsible for the work must ensure that all those undertaking the youth work are safely recruited and fully DBS checked. At the same time, where there are people who pose a risk, and are living in the home, then activities will not be permitted to take place there. It will be important for the DBS check to include answering question X66 to indicate that the work is "home-based" (Disclosure & Barring Service, 2021).

Where potential participants pose a risk due to criminal history, they may be prevented from accessing certain home groups and this will be detailed in their own personal agreement (URC, 2022).

4.2 Managed Vulnerability

The principle risk of working with children and young people in private dwellings is the real and perceived increase in closeness and familiarity between the worker and the young person. This is primarily affected by the intentional act of giving and receiving hospitality, which includes a warm welcome, an openness of relationship, and encountering the personal life of the host. The increase in closeness and vulnerability produced in this exchange is both the greatest strength (developing a relationship of trust) and the greatest risk to working with children and young people in private dwellings.

Workers must maintain appropriate boundaries in relationships between adults and young people, avoiding access to personal items and spaces that are usually private (i.e., underwear drying on radiators or seeing inside bedrooms) and recognising the increased vulnerability to, and opportunity for, emotional abuse and coercion, radicalisation and indoctrination, grooming and favouritism and physical and sexual abuse.

At the same time hosts need to ensure that young people are not exposed to conflict within the home. The young people should not be seen as an audience before which to play out tensions within relationships. Those visiting the home should not enter the private or personal spaces of those who live there (bedrooms, en-suite bathrooms, family-only lounges, etc.).

Hosts and workers will need to ensure that safeguarding disclosures are effectively and consistently reported, and ensure that the safeguarding policy is in place, understood and followed.

They will also need to ensure that a suitable supervision structure is in place for work and that they never work alone with young people (neither hosting, nor leading, nor visiting). Those managing the safer recruitment should ensure that the DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) application form has the option for work in the home ticked.

4.3 Appropriate boundaries

One of the key needs of youth work generally and of work which involves the home, is the setting of appropriate boundaries. Because the home is a place of safety and vulnerability, it is all the more important to ensure that any work which takes place there provides for the safety of the young person and the worker, and enables human flourishing. This means establishing and maintaining boundaries regarding

- ratios of young people and youth workers
- access to private areas of a home
- activities together
- appropriate conduct and behaviour

It should also be noted that, with effect from August 2022, the government has extended the “position of trust” offences within sections 16 – 19 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. The law now prevents adults from engaging in sexual relationships with 16 or 17-year-olds, to include adults who work in religious settings.

Following numerous high-profile child sexual abuse cases in religious settings as reported by IICSA, concerns were raised in Parliament and across wider society. Following the IICSA recommendation, the government has created Section 22A of the Act, where the term ‘positions of trust offences’ are extended to include an adult who is:

- coaching
- teaching
- training
- supervising, or
- instructing in a religious context to a 16 or 17-year-old on a regular basis.

For the churches and Christian agencies, this extension acknowledges that adults who supervise or instruct in these environments are particularly influential over a young person’s development. This change in the law recognises that young people in religious settings can be subject to manipulation and grooming and aims to reduce this. It is important to note that an adult will not be in a position of trust where they are participating in the activity with a child infrequently or on one occasion, or where the adult is unaware that they are carrying out an activity that has regular connection with children (Gov.uk, 2022)

All those involved in youth work in church, churches or Christian agencies will need to adhere to the organisation’s Code of Conduct. There will need to be paragraphs which reflect the need to dress appropriately, for example, avoiding night wear in private dwellings. Workers should understand and honour the culture and faith position of the young people, the community and the organisations that they serve.

Lone working must be prohibited, even if the safeguarding policy allows it in other contexts (such as a mentoring meeting at a local coffee shop). There should be a minimum of two team members present. Where practical they should not be closely related to each other and one, at least, should not own or rent the dwelling. If the group is a mixed-sex group, it is preferable to have mixed-sex team members present. (NYA 2023, p19).

Alcohol and medication must be removed from any room accessible to young people and kept locked away securely (NYA 2023, p20).

4.4 Informed consent

Youth work is built on voluntary participation. The use of private dwellings requires additional care to ensure the high standards of informed consent are maintained, for children and young people, for their parents, and for our staff, volunteers and those living in the home. As informed consent needs to be given by the parent,

carer or guardian of the young person, the inclusion of the details of the location and address of the work, regardless of where it takes place, is an important element of the transparency of activity required for those with responsibility for the children/young people.

The informed consent form will need to be accompanied by explanatory notes which enable the parent/carer/guardian to understand how to raise any concerns at any stage.

All young people under 18 years of age must have a consent form signed by a parent/carer/guardian to give permission to visit a private dwelling unaccompanied, and this form will need to be updated annually. At the same time those young people who stay in the group beyond their 18th birthday will need to understand their responsibility as an adult within the group.

4.5 Suitability

When establishing work with young people, it is always important to consider the ‘when and where’ of the project. By necessity this consideration always balances the needs of the young people with the availability, affordability and appropriateness of space. There are times when the use of a private dwelling is ideal for the planned work, but there are also considerations that make the private dwelling inappropriate for a particular piece of work. Depending upon the size of the group the room available may be too small or the design of the house does not allow other members of the family/household to have their own space when the youth work is taking place.

Suitability is also important to consider in order to ensure that the venue can be accessed by all young people regardless of any disability. This could include a suitable downstairs bathroom, or the young people may not be able to access the venue due to distance, lack of public transport, or no step-free access.

4.6 Support structures for children and young people

For all youth and children’s work undertaken in faith-based settings, it is important to enable the children and young people to have ways in which they can share what may be happening to them. All of them should be made aware of the policy and practice of the organisation running the activity, which will enable them to pass on to a trusted adult any information which could be a form of abuse. It should be noted that the IICSA recommendation 1 in their report Child protection in religious organisations and settings (IICSA 2021):

All religious organisations should have a child-protection policy and supporting procedures, which should include guidance on responding to reports of abuse and the needs of victims and survivors.

4.7 Support structures for those who work with children and/or young people

Organisations delivering youth or children's work in private dwellings should ensure that there is appropriate support, supervision and training for those undertaking the work. This should include regular (such as termly) supervision meetings with those undertaking the work and an annual report and review by the organisation of the work taking place.

Safeguarding training by the organisation should include specific training based around this guidance, for those undertaking youth work in private dwellings.

We would also encourage a peer support system where those involved in this work could meet with others from around their area, and reflect on the work and the way in which it can continue to be made safer.

4.8 Environmental risk

The private dwelling presents a different profile of risks from that of a local authority youth centre, community space or church building. In many ways, due to its nature, the private dwelling is 'untamed' and 'lived-in' which makes it ideal for relational work. The sanitised or institutionalised nature of some community spaces can make the private dwelling preferable for some circumstances. Nevertheless, this presents additional risks of injury and to lack of privacy for the resident(s) that require consideration and, in some cases, a dynamic and bespoke approach to risk assessment.

The key risks presented by the environment could be injury caused by an unsafe environment including buildings, garden, ponds, uneven floors, steps, furniture, and untidy spaces, or injury caused by access to dangerous equipment and materials found in the private dwelling that are not secured (i.e. kitchen knives, toolboxes, drills, bleach, razors). There are the usual risks of injury from activities (i.e. games, cooking) but with the additional risks presented by the setting (e.g. games in an open plan kitchen), or food poisoning from food served in an unregulated 'home' kitchen, or BBQ in the garden.

It will be important to ensure appropriate access to clean, private toilet and bathroom facilities is available.

4.9 Privacy and security

Opening up a private dwelling for work in the community has the potential to attract unwanted and undesirable activity that may cause upset, harm or disturbance to the owner/resident and their neighbours. These risks must primarily be managed through building trust with guests and neighbours.

Some of the risks to privacy and security could be callers to the house at anti-social hours that disturb personal/family life, hosts feeling unable to maintain boundaries, or keeping time to rest or for family life, or unable to refuse visitors. It will also be important

to assess the risk of injury or assault from visitors to the house, damage to the property caused by guests, potentially attracting unwanted guests, damage or antisocial behaviour to the house or street.

It will be essential that the host takes responsibility for ensuring that restricted data and documents (including access to computers) are kept out of sight, ideally locked or password protected (in line with all GDPR requirements). Also that suitable insurance is in place for the property and the activities being undertaken

The church or agency responsible for the activity should contact their insurance provider to find out what their public liability insurance covers. If the person concerned is employed by the church/agency then there needs to be an Employer's Liability policy in place to cover employees (some policies would regard volunteers as employees also, for the purpose of insurance cover).

For gatherings that take place in private dwellings, it will be important for hosts to check if their home insurance would cover this or if their insurance would need to be extended. Some home insurance policies may exclude functions held for business purposes in homes. If that is the case, the church/agency should find out if their public liability insurance would cover meetings for business purposes held away from Church dwellings.

It will be important, both for the safety of the young people and for the awareness and support of the neighbours, that they are aware of any groups of young people who may be meeting at a property. (The summer months especially seem to bring out more noise from our young people when they leave the house. Fortunately it is just after 9pm and thus not too late to disturb!)

Neighbours also need to know that there are safeguards in place, both for the young people and the local residents and hosts will need to have established good relationships with those who live locally.

4.10 Managing transitions

It will be important for the provider to have a procedure in place for managing transitions, when leaders move on, when the group moves to a new venue, or when young people become young adults as they reach 18 years of age, including what the role of the young adult will be, if at all.

The Code of Conduct policy for leaders and volunteers should have in place the procedure for the departure of a group leader or team member which will need to include the removal of the data of the child/young person from their devices and an understanding of the new relationship between the former leader and the children/young people should the leader stay in the vicinity or in the faith community.

Those commencing as leaders for work which involves private dwellings will need to be inducted into the policies and practices agreed by the provider.

Recommended Practice

The following recommendations must be read in the light of the legal requirements which can be found on the UK Government website [Working together to safeguard children \(PDF\)](#) (Department for Education, 2018)

5.1 Safeguarding

Policy and practice should include:

- safer recruitment of all adults working with children, young people and vulnerable adults, including references, interview, application form and a DBS Enhanced-Level check.
- DBS check box for working from home to be ticked for those undertaking youth work in private dwellings.
- induction and training for all staff and volunteers.
- definitions of abuse and safe practice.
- a clear process of recording and reporting disclosures and concerns.
- a code of conduct for staff and volunteers.
- clear minimum ratios of adults to children based on age/setting.
- day-to-day record keeping and registers.
- a designated person to handle all confidential material.
- where the church/agency is a registered charity, the trustees to be aware of their responsibility according to law.

5.2 Managed vulnerability

Safeguarding policy and practice should include:

- a code of conduct for staff/volunteers.
- clear minimum ratios of adults to children based on age/setting.
- suitable supervision and support structures in place for work in private dwellings.
- promoting the nature of the work to visitors in order that they understand the context.
- children and/or young people are never to enter the private spaces of those who live in the private dwellings.
- children and/or young people are never to be asked or expected to take on chores which would normally be undertaken by those who live there.
- Lone working must never take place in private dwellings. Door-step meetings in public view should be undertaken only when the risks have been assessed to be low.
- If working alone in public areas, then a lone working policy must be in place.

In addition:

- Consider whether staff/volunteers should undertake additional training (i.e. Prevent, Domestic Violence, Spiritual Abuse).
- Establish a specific code of conduct for work in private dwellings, to include: tidying away intimate, valuable, medical and/or personal items before visitors arrive, especially knives.
- Cleaning/tidying before guests arrive.
- Wearing suitable clothing.
- Consider developing local networks that increase transparency and information sharing (i.e. with school, police).

5.3 Informed consent

- All children/young people under 18 must have a consent form signed by a parent or carer to give permission to visit a private dwelling unaccompanied. This consent should be updated annually. The address of the property, the times of events and an external point of contact if they have concerns must be issued to the parent.
- Regularly promote the nature of the work to visitors and their parents in order that they understand their right to refuse an invitation/leave, and know how to make a complaint or raise a concern.
- Ensure your organisation has a clear complaints and whistle-blowing procedure and it is promoted to guests and their parents.

In addition:

- A written agreement between organisation and staff/volunteers about the use of their private dwelling, and their rights to refuse use.
- Ensure suitable supervision structure is in place for work in private dwellings to enable the welfare of volunteers and their families.
- Ensure a suitable space is available for family members who need/want privacy.
- Consider how parents can contact the organisation or team.
- If children, young people and/or parents are refusing invitations, it's time to review the suitability of the space for this piece of work.

5.4 Suitability

The primary risk to suitability is that insufficient mitigations are in place to effectively implement all of the safer working practices outlined in this guidance. It is important to remember that the

particular needs of the children and young people involved in the planned work will impact the suitability of the space.

- All youth work in home contexts, except for pastoral visits or responding to emergency situations, should occur in homes where there is already a good relationship with the owner/ occupier.
- Suitability is reviewed regularly (at least annually) and other suitable spaces found if the private dwelling is deemed unsuitable.
- Safety plan is made when staff/volunteers visit an unknown dwelling, and other suitable meeting space is arranged if the dwelling is deemed at high risk.

In addition:

- Restrict invitations/visits to those who are already known and trusted via other provision.
- Risk Assessment for space includes a maximum number based on the size/nature of the private dwelling.

5.5 Environmental risk

- Every private dwelling used as part of the work has a bespoke and comprehensive risk assessment in place (including for common activities) and is updated annually.
- A clean toilet with a lock is available to all users without access via a bedroom.

In addition:

- Keep a first aid kit in the private dwelling. Ensure at least one adult is first aid trained.
- The risk assessment should include key areas:
 - dangerous equipment and materials,
 - building/environment safety
 - fire hazards and escape
 - common activities
- Issue Code of Conduct that includes cleaning the bathroom before guests arrive.
- Guidance for Food Preparation in a 'home' kitchen is issued
- Staff/Volunteers complete Food Hygiene training.
- Risk assessments from other settings (i.e. activities from the youth centre) are reviewed for the context before being adopted in the private dwelling.
- Ensure your organisation has a clear complaints and whistle-

blowing procedure and it is promoted to guests and their parents.

5.6 Privacy and security

- The host takes responsibility for ensuring that restricted data and documents (including access to computers) are kept out of sight, ideally locked or password protected (in line with all GDPR requirements).
- Ensure suitable insurance is in place for the property and the work (see appendix below).
- The host's address is not included on any external publicity.

In addition:

- The organisation concerned should issue guidance on security for team/volunteers, including:
 - insurance
 - data protection
 - security
- A written agreement between organisation and staff/volunteers about the use of their private dwelling, and their rights to refuse use.
- Ensure suitable supervision structure is in place for work in private dwellings to enable the welfare of volunteers and their families.
- Consider developing local networks that increase localised support (i.e. with school, police, other youth workers).
- Consider limiting use of private dwellings to activities for pre-registered young people (i.e. no "open access" events).

5.7 Contextual awareness

- Ensure organisation has a clear complaints and whistle-blowing policy in place and is promoted regularly.
- Publish vision, approaches, policies, risk assessments, team details, contact details online and disseminate to all parents, and other key stakeholders.

In addition

- Develop local networks that increase localised support (i.e. police, schools, other youth workers).
- Key person in the organisation completes media training, and develops a crisis communications plan in the event of media attention.



Conclusion

We trust we have established the importance of the home for youth work. The purposes of this paper have been two-fold. First to recognise the importance and value of the home in the personal, social, spiritual and educational development of young people, and second, to encourage the practice of safe youth work within homes – those of the young people, those of the youth workers committed to serving and living their faith in the local area and those of faith community members who open their homes as part of their commitment to the spiritual development of young people. We call on every faith provider which works in private dwellings to revise their Safeguarding Policy and Procedures in the light of changes to the law and the guidance detailed in this document.

The implementation of the guidance around safe practice contained in this document will enable both providers and workers to be confident in their delivery within private dwellings, and provide assurance to parents, young people and external agencies that risks have been identified, treated seriously, and mitigated in order to provide a safe location for all young people involved.

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