



Romford Baptist Church:  
The Meeting Place  
Collier Row and Romford Foodbank

Keeping Staff Safe: Disrespectful Behaviour and Abuse of Staff, Including Aggression and Violence and Appropriate Response

1. Policy Statement

This policy shows how the church exercises its duty of care to keep its staff and volunteers safe from any abusive behaviour and risks of being harmed by individuals who may use the services provided from time to time. There is a separate policy incorporated into the church's Staff Handbook for addressing abuse to or from a colleague, which is treated as misconduct and addressed through the church's disciplinary procedures.

The church's default position is that its staff and volunteers should always be treated courteously and with respect for the work they are doing on any of the church's premises, including car-parks of properties where related activities take place, or away from church the building but whilst undertaking church business. They should not be subject to abusive behaviour in any form, which includes:

- Rude, disrespectful and offensive behaviour, including derogatory remarks and disruptive acts amounting to verbal and emotional abuse,
- Sexist or sexually inappropriate comments and behaviour
- Racist and discriminatory abuse
- Threats of physical violence
- Aggressive and violent behaviour

The church considers that its staff and volunteers should be safe at work and should not be exposed to undue or unreasonable risk. It believes that staff and volunteers must work safely, free from the threat of injury or distress from the abusive behaviour of others. It will not tolerate abuse in any shape or form and will investigate and deal with all reported or observed incidents of staff or volunteers being subject to disrespectful behaviour or abuse.

Physical attacks on staff or volunteers at work are, fortunately, very rare and the church does all it can to minimise this risk to ensure that staff and volunteers are as safe as possible. Verbal abuse is more common and can cause considerable emotional distress. The church recognises that its staff and volunteers could be subject to some form of abuse at any time and recognises its duty to ensure that staff and volunteers are properly trained and supported to deal with any incident. Staff or volunteers should also not put themselves at any risk if it can be avoided.

The church also recognises that, from time to time, office holders or staff may be required to work alone and referral should be made to the church's Lone Working policy in this respect.

## 2. The Church's Approach to Keeping its Staff Safe

The church expects everyone in contact with its staff and volunteers to treat them politely and respectfully and not to subject them to any form of abuse. It has a zero-tolerance approach to any form of abuse, which applies to its staff and volunteers as to the individuals that use the services that the church provides.

Staff and volunteers should report to their line manager (usually, but not limited to, the Minister – Team Leader, The Meeting Place and Outreach Leader or Foodbank and Social Action Co-Ordinator) any incident in which they or colleagues have been subject to disrespectful or abusive behaviour from individuals that use its services. They should also record the incident with full factual information in terms of what was said or done and with as much supporting evidence as possible from witnesses, including photographic / video evidence if that has been obtained.

Line managers will discuss the harm caused by and risks of further harm to those subject to such behaviour and decide the actions to be taken, which will depend on the form and seriousness of the disrespectful or abusive behaviour. They will then act proportionately to and in line with their assessment.

The church may enter into constructive discussions to avoid recurrence, issue verbal or written warnings, or take action to prevent the person from being in a position of being able to continue their abusive behaviour. Any action will be recorded, and a full explanation always given to the perpetrator.

People who act in an abusive manner towards staff or volunteers may be asked to leave the premises so that staff or volunteers can complete their responsibilities "in a safe space". They might be asked not to be present again in the future if their behaviour or attitude does not alter.

As part of their assessments, line managers may seek information from other agencies about any risks to their staff from abusive or violent behaviour, including racial abuse etc.

Line managers may avoid the need for lone working where there are identified threats to staff or volunteers' personal safety from the abusive behaviour of individuals using its services.

Staff and volunteers will always work to minimise the risk of and prevent abusive, aggressive and violent behaviour. They are encouraged to adopt a confident, calm, professional, dignified approach in response to any disrespectful, impolite or overtly abusive behaviour.

They are expected to avoid retaliating to others' abusive behaviour in kind other than to protect their own safety, for example, where being physically attacked. This is important to allow for constructive solutions to be found, to avoid escalations and counter charges, which could make them subject to disciplinary procedures.

### 3. Procedures

#### Responding to Verbal Abuse and Disrespectful Behaviour

The issues concerning individuals who use the services provided by the church and who are persistently disrespectful to staff or volunteers, including racist abuse, will be addressed to them directly. The church accepts that any abuse will not be tolerated, it also recognises that there are often underlying factors behind individual's behaviour and will always seek constructive solutions.

Staff or volunteers who are subject to abuse from individuals using the church's services should refrain from being abusive in retaliation but are entitled to say how they feel about being the recipient of abuse such as "I am hurt by what you are saying or your manner", "I do not think you should talk to me like that", "I find what you are calling or saying to me offensive".

When staff or volunteers feel they are subject to such abuse they should state that they will report it and indicate that the matter will be followed up. They might also direct the person to address any concerns about an individual's behaviour that might have triggered an abusive outburst to management or file a complaint.

A line manager will consider any report and decide on the appropriate action to be taken, which might involve:

- Discussions with the individual to ask for more respect from them
- Directing any concerns through the church's complaints procedure
- A verbal followed by a written warning for persistent abusive conduct
- A written agreement to stop being abusive
- A proportionate and appropriate sanction expressed put down in writing that provides suitable safeguards for staff and volunteers, but which do not penalise unfairly any innocent individual with whom the perpetrator might be associated.
- All actions will be fully recorded and subject to regular review.

#### Responding to Violent Situations

In the event of a violent or aggressive incident, staff and volunteers should adhere to the following procedure.

1. The priority of staff and volunteers must be for their own safety and for the safety of other staff, volunteers and individuals using the services which the church provides.
2. Staff or volunteers should immediately try to summon help, preferably from their manager; in most cases by using a mobile phone or using any panic alarms.
3. Staff and volunteers should try to calm the situation wherever possible, talking to the potential aggressor calmly, trying to find out what is wrong and pointing out how their behaviour is affecting people – staff and volunteers should try not to get angry and should never shout back.
4. Where the level of threat continues to increase and staff or volunteers feel they are in imminent danger then they should try to escape (with other people who also could be in danger) and get help.
5. Staff or volunteers who are being assaulted may defend themselves, but they must use only the "minimum reasonable force" to do this.
6. In the event of an actual physical assault, or if the incident involves an intruder to the premises, then the police should be called using '999' as soon as possible.

## Physical Intervention

Staff and volunteers must always deal with behaviour that challenges them calmly and professionally. Physical and verbal aggression by an individual should be understood by staff and volunteers and dealt with appropriately.

In the event of an aggressive incident, staff and volunteers should summon help or call the police immediately. They should try to de-escalate incidents, wherever possible, and their priority should be for their own safety and the safety of other people present. Physical interventions should be used only as a last resort by trained staff, and in line with best practice guidance to protect the rights and best interests of the individual, and which are the minimum consistent with safety of all concerned.

If a member of staff or a volunteer is attacked, they are permitted to use “minimum reasonable force” to defend themselves. Care should therefore be taken to ensure that minimum force is indeed used and that individuals who are acting in an aggressive or threatening manner are not subject to undue restraint.

The law gives protection to people from being abused or attacked and, if a member of staff or volunteer is attacked, they can use “minimum reasonable force” to defend themselves. However, staff and volunteers should remember they if they restrain a violent person and injure them because of the force they use, they could be charged for assault. Because of this risk, staff and volunteers should always follow the established procedure.

## Reporting and Support

Any verbally abusive or violent behaviour towards staff or volunteers, no matter how minor, must be reported at once to their line manager who should make a record of this. This unwanted behaviour may have been in any of the church's or Foodbank's premises or car-parks or whilst a member of staff or volunteer is undertaking duties on behalf of the church or Foodbank in other premises.

Staff or volunteers involved should complete and submit an incident form (see appendix 1).

Appropriate support will be offered by the line manager to staff and volunteers who are subject to abuse and who are emotionally distressed as a result and to any staff member or volunteer involved in violent or aggressive incidents.

Violent or aggressive incidents, even if they just amount to being shouted at, can be very upsetting for a member of staff or volunteer and, in extreme cases, can lead them to suffering psychological trauma or illness- staff and volunteers should therefore be given the opportunity to discuss their experiences.

In extreme cases, the church understands that there may be a need for ongoing support and referral to occupational health services or professional counselling.

Where absence from work arises from a violent or aggressive incident, any such absence will be treated as special leave rather than sickness absence.

The church might need to notify the Health and Safety Executive under RIDDOR reporting procedures if the injuries meet their criteria, i.e., any injury from a physical assault that results

in “death, major injury or incapacity for normal work for three or more consecutive days”.

The Team Leader will always seek the approval and consent of the member of staff or volunteer attacked before making any decision about reporting the incident to the police or other authorities. However, it will report the matter without the victim’s consent where it deems this is the correct action to take in the public interest or to protect other people from possible abuse.

### Monitoring

The Team Leader will review all reports of aggression and violence or potential aggression and violence and look for any trends or patterns of lessons to be learned.

The Team Leader will carefully monitor all incident reports relating to violence or the use of restraint to ensure that both staff and volunteers are being appropriately protected. Any suspicion of abuse by staff or by others, or any whistleblowing by other staff or volunteers, will be investigated and acted upon in accordance with the church’s Safeguarding policy.

This policy is regularly reviewed. If all policies and procedures are working adequately and are being correctly applied, the church would expect abusive behaviour and violent incidents to be rare and the appropriate use of restraint to be a last resort used only in exceptional circumstances.

### Training

The church ensures that all staff and volunteers are regularly trained to show respect for others and to expect the same from others as described in this policy. How to respond appropriately to verbal abuse, aggressive or potentially violent behaviour is included in the induction training for all new staff.

All staff are trained to recognise the early warning signs of potential aggression and how and where to seek support if needed, including in high-risk situations the use of panic alarms.

Regular In-house training sessions and reminders are carried out and all relevant staff and volunteers will be requested to attend.

Training will include guidance in the use of physical interventions and restraint in providing the services for the local community. Where required, staff and volunteers are trained in a range of intervention strategies that have developed in respect of socially inappropriate behaviour.

This training includes:

- De-escalation techniques
- The concept and use of “minimum force”
- Approved and acceptable breakaway techniques
- Inappropriate or unacceptable techniques

Line managers are trained in the management of abusive behaviour, violent or emergency situations and in appropriate post-incident follow-up.

Signed: Revd Ian Bunce (electronically)

Dated: 11 December 2023

Policy review date: December 2025

## Version Control

1 – new policy, November 2023.



APPENDIX 1 – INCIDENT FORM

NATURE OF INCIDENT:

Date of Incident	
Time of Incident	
Location of Incident	
Date reported	
Reported by	
Reported to	
Manager informed	
Details	

Action taken	
Crime Number (if applicable)	
Signed Date	





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### Zero Tolerance Policy

Romford Baptist Church and Collier Row & Romford Foodbank is committed to providing good customer service. To achieve this, the safety and wellbeing of our staff and volunteers is of paramount importance.

Our staff and volunteers have the right to be treated with dignity and respect and work in a safe environment free from bullying and harassment. We therefore operate a strict no tolerance policy to swearing, shouting, verbal and physical abuse in any of the premises, including car-parks, or other premises whilst undertaking church or foodbank business.

We reserve the right to decline serving a customer who fails to meet these standards.

We also have a zero tolerance policy towards abusive language.

What counts as abusive language?

- Hateful, obscene, offensive, profane, racist, sexist, sexual, defamatory or violent language
- Any swearing and shouting that our staff or volunteers judge to be unreasonable
- Any threat of harm against yourself, our staff or others

We reserve the right to contact the relevant authorities as necessary if a person is using threats or is repeatedly being abusive. If you would like to discuss anything in this policy further, then please contact the church office via email: [office@romfordbaptist.org.uk](mailto:office@romfordbaptist.org.uk).

Thank you.