



Armed Forces Christian Union

AFCU Safeguarding Thresholds, Recording and Escalation Guidance

AFCU Safeguarding Thresholds, Recording and Escalation Guidance

Purpose

This matrix is designed to help AFCU members, employees, trustees, volunteers, event leaders, Summer Camp teams, mentors and pastoral workers identify, record, share and respond appropriately to concerns arising in connection with AFCU activities.

It applies to both children and adults and should be used alongside the:

- AFCU Safeguarding Policy
- Safeguarding Procedures
- Safeguarding Code of Conduct
- Safer Inclusion Policy
- Any safeguarding agreements, risk-management plans or support plans

This matrix is intended to support decision-making and promote consistent safeguarding practice. It is not a substitute for professional judgement.

If in doubt, record the concern and seek advice from the Safeguarding Lead (SL).

Quick Guide

Level	Meaning	Action
Level 1	Low-Level Concern	Address, monitor and consider recording
Level 2	Low-Level Safeguarding Concern	Record and share with SL
Level 3	Medium Concern	Formal safeguarding review and risk assessment
Level 4	High Concern	Immediate safeguarding response and SL involvement

Helpful Rule of Thumb

- One poorly judged incident = often Level 1.

- Repeated incidents = usually Level 2.
- A pattern of behaviour = often Level 3.
- Abuse, exploitation, criminal behaviour or immediate risk = Level 4.

Where there is uncertainty, seek advice from the Safeguarding Lead.

Expected Response

Level 1 – Low-Level Concern

Behaviour that falls below AFCU's expected standards but does not, of itself, indicate abuse or present a safeguarding risk. Concerns like these are often best handled using other welfare or conduct policies or processes.

Action

- Address appropriately.
- Provide guidance or correction where necessary.
- Consider recording locally.
- Monitor for repetition or patterns.
- Seek advice if uncertain.

Level 2 – Low-Level Safeguarding Concern

Behaviour that may not amount to abuse but raises concerns regarding boundaries, vulnerability, power imbalances, wellbeing, suitability for role, inappropriate relationships or emerging safeguarding risk.

Action

- Record the concern.
- Share it with the Safeguarding Lead.
- Consider whether further monitoring or a risk assessment is required.
- Watch for patterns, escalation or repeated concerns.

All Level 2 concerns should be shared with the Safeguarding Lead.

Level 3 – Medium Concern

Behaviour indicating a clear safeguarding concern, repeated concerning behaviour, significant boundary violations, emerging abuse or increasing risk of harm.

Action

- Submit a safeguarding concern.
- Refer to the Safeguarding Lead without delay.

- Undertake safeguarding review and risk assessment.
- Consider interim safeguarding measures where necessary.

Level 4 – High Concern

Actual or suspected abuse, exploitation, criminal behaviour, significant harm or immediate risk.

Action

- Report immediately to the Safeguarding Lead.
- Take immediate steps to protect those at risk.
- Contact emergency services where required.
- Refer to statutory agencies, the Police, Children's Social Care, Adult Social Care or the LADO/Designated Officer, as advised by the Safeguarding Lead or where immediate action is required.

Physical Abuse	Level 1 – Low-Level Concern • During a Summer Camp activity, a volunteer grips an attendee's arm more firmly than necessary while guiding them away from danger, causing brief discomfort. • A leader uses poor manual-handling techniques when supporting someone with mobility needs. • During a team game, one participant accidentally knocks another over, causing no injury. • An enthusiastic hug continues after someone has indicated they do not want physical contact.
	Level 2 – Low-Level Safeguarding Concern • A volunteer repeatedly uses unnecessary force when directing participants. • Several attendees raise concerns about being handled roughly by the same volunteer. • A leader regularly ignores personal space or physical boundaries despite feedback.
	Level 3 – Medium Concern • An attendee deliberately pushes another participant, causing bruising that requires first aid. • A leader uses inappropriate restraint to stop someone leaving a session. • A participant is denied food, water or access to basic needs as punishment. • Repeated incidents indicate a developing pattern of physical intimidation. • Behaviour causes concern when considered alongside an existing safeguarding agreement or risk management plan.
	Level 4 – High Concern

	• A volunteer or attendee deliberately assaults another person. • A physical altercation results in hospital treatment. • Deliberate violence causes serious injury or risk to life. • Any assault requiring Police involvement. • Strangulation, suffocation.
Sexual Harassment = unwanted sexualised behaviour, comments, attention, messages, hostile environment. Unwanted or unwelcome sexual behaviour (may be harassment but not criminal). These behaviours may constitute criminal sexual harassment under the Equality Act 2010 if they create a humiliating, degrading, hostile, or offensive environment.	Level 1 – Low-Level Concern • During refreshments after a service, an attendee makes an inappropriate comment about someone's appearance but apologises when challenged. • At an event, a participant tells a sexually suggestive joke that causes discomfort but is not repeated. • A volunteer gives an overly personal compliment but respects boundaries when made aware. • A participant sends an over-familiar message after an event but does not continue after receiving no response.
	Level 2 – Low-Level Safeguarding Concern • A participant repeatedly comments on another person's appearance despite being asked to stop. • An attendee repeatedly sends flirtatious messages to someone they met through AFCU activities. • A volunteer repeatedly seeks one-to-one contact that appears unnecessary. • More than one person raises similar concerns about the same individual's behaviour. • Behaviour causes concern because of a significant age gap, vulnerability or power imbalance.
	Level 3 – Medium Concern • During a Summer Camp or regional event, an attendee repeatedly makes sexual comments despite being asked to stop. • An attendee repeatedly invades another person's personal space in a sexualised manner. • Sexualised behaviour at an AFCU event causes distress or concern amongst others present. • A participant shares sexually suggestive material with another attendee without consent. • Repeated behaviour creates a hostile or intimidating environment.
	Level 4 – High Concern • Persistent unwanted sexual attention causes someone to feel fearful or unable to participate in AFCU activities. • Sexual harassment continues despite previous intervention or safeguarding action. • The behaviour includes stalking, threats or intimidation. • The behaviour may constitute a criminal offence.
Sexual Abuse	Level 1 – Low-Level Concern

= grooming, exploitation, abuse of trust, coercion, sexual offending, and behaviour presenting a significant safeguarding risk.	• A volunteer spends noticeably more time with one participant than others, but there is no evidence of inappropriate behaviour. • An attendee seeks an unusually exclusive friendship with another participant, causing mild concern but no evidence of grooming or exploitation. • A volunteer shares personal information about their relationships or intimate life with a participant in a way that feels inappropriate but not sexual. • A leader regularly gives lifts to the same participant without following agreed AFCU procedures, creating concerns about boundaries and accountability. • A participant's behaviour causes others to feel uncomfortable due to a lack of awareness of personal boundaries, but there is no evidence of sexual intent. Level 2 – Low-Level Safeguarding Concern • A leader encourages a participant to keep conversations secret. • A volunteer repeatedly seeks private contact outside agreed AFCU communication channels. • A leader develops an unusually exclusive relationship with a participant. • Emerging grooming indicators are identified. • Boundary-testing behaviour causes concern. Level 3 – Medium Concern • A participant secretly photographs or records another person in sleeping, changing or bathroom facilities. • Repeated concerns arise regarding inappropriate boundaries between a leader and participant. • A volunteer, leader or attendee is alleged to have engaged in sexualised behaviour towards someone they support. • Behaviour suggests a developing risk of grooming or exploitation. Level 4 – High Concern • A leader, mentor or volunteer engages in a sexual relationship with someone under their pastoral or supervisory responsibility. • Any allegation of sexual assault, rape or attempted rape. • Unwanted sexual touching. • Grooming of a child or adult at risk. • Sharing, creating, requesting or possessing indecent images of a child. • Sending sexually explicit messages or images to a child or adult at risk. • Sexual exploitation or abuse of a position of trust. • Coercing someone into sexual activity or sharing sexual images. • Voyeurism or recording intimate images without consent. • Deliberate exposure causing alarm or distress. • Any criminal sexual offence.
Psychological/Emotional Abuse =behaviour that undermines a person's	Level 1 – Low-Level Concern • During a team meeting, a volunteer speaks abruptly or dismissively to another volunteer but apologises when challenged.

dignity, confidence, wellbeing, independence or emotional safety	• A participant is talked over during a workshop, Bible study or discussion group, but there is no ongoing pattern. • Two friends or a married couple have a disagreement involving raised voices but quickly de-escalate. • An attendee makes a sarcastic or insensitive comment that causes temporary upset but acknowledges the impact when challenged. • A leader gives overly critical feedback in a way that could have been communicated more sensitively.
	Level 2 – Low-Level Safeguarding Concern • A volunteer repeatedly belittles another person's ideas or contributions during meetings or activities. • A husband, wife or partner regularly criticises the other person in public at AFCU events. • An attendee repeatedly excludes another participant from conversations, meals or social activities. • A leader appears to favour one participant while routinely ignoring or dismissing others. • A volunteer uses guilt, pressure or emotional manipulation to persuade others to take part in activities or responsibilities. • Multiple people raise concerns about a leader's communication style leaving attendees feeling intimidated or diminished.
	Level 3 – Medium Concern • A participant is repeatedly humiliated, isolated or undermined during AFCU activities, causing noticeable distress. • A volunteer or leader repeatedly uses intimidation, threats or manipulation to influence another person's decisions. • A spouse, partner or friend consistently attempts to control another person's friendships, participation or involvement in AFCU activities. • An attendee becomes fearful of attending activities because of another person's controlling or emotionally harmful behaviour. • A leader repeatedly withholds important information to isolate, disadvantage or control another person. • Repeated emotional abuse is affecting an individual's confidence, wellbeing or ability to participate safely in AFCU activities.
	Level 4 – High Concern • A leader, mentor or pastoral worker uses threats, intimidation or manipulation to control an attendee's choices, relationships or participation. • An adult is subjected to sustained humiliation, coercive control or isolation by a spouse, partner, friend or person in authority. • An attendee reports being controlled through fear, intimidation, emotional blackmail or threats. • A person is intentionally isolated from friends, family, support networks or safeguarding support. • Repeated monitoring of an individual's communications, movements, relationships or finances forms part of a pattern of coercive control.

	- Emotional abuse causes significant fear, psychological distress or loss of independence. - Any behaviour that denies an adult's ability to make informed choices, particularly where the individual is vulnerable or at risk.
Spiritual Abuse =the misuse of religious belief, spiritual authority, scripture, prayer, prophecy or pastoral influence to control, manipulate, coerce, intimidate or harm another person.	Level 1 – Low-Level Concern - During a Bible study, a participant dismisses another person's theological view as "wrong" without engaging respectfully in discussion. - A leader expresses a strong personal opinion on a spiritual matter that others find uncomfortable. - Someone presents a personal theological position as the only acceptable Christian view without acknowledging that faithful Christians may hold differing perspectives. - A participant criticises another person's church tradition, denomination or worship style in a way that causes offence but stops when concerns are raised. - Someone uses spiritual language carelessly, suggesting that those who disagree with them are "not listening to God", but is receptive to feedback and clarification.
	Level 2 – Low-Level Safeguarding Concern - A leader regularly implies that disagreement with them is disagreement with God. - Someone uses spiritual language to pressure another person into serving, volunteering or attending events. - An individual repeatedly claims special spiritual insight or authority that discourages others from expressing different views or asking legitimate questions. - A leader or mentor develops an unhealthy dependency by encouraging a participant to rely primarily on their spiritual guidance rather than seeking advice from family, church leaders or other trusted Christians.
	Level 3 – Medium Concern - A leader repeatedly uses scripture, prophecy or spiritual authority to control decision-making. - A participant is excluded or shamed for questioning a spiritual leader. - A leader repeatedly uses Scripture, prayer, prophecy or spiritual authority to influence personal decisions (e.g. relationships, employment, study choices or ministry involvement) in a way that reduces an individual's freedom to make their own decisions. - An attendee reports feeling unable to disagree with a leader or mentor because they have been repeatedly told that doing so would be resisting God's will or spiritual authority.
	Level 4 – High Concern - Spiritual authority is used to manipulate, exploit or control an individual. - A person is coerced into compliance through fear of spiritual consequences.

	- Spiritual beliefs are used to facilitate abuse or conceal safeguarding concerns. - An individual is threatened with spiritual consequences, exclusion from Christian fellowship, loss of God's favour or similar fears in order to secure compliance with a leader's wishes.
Financial Abuse = the misuse, control, theft or improper exploitation of a person's money, property, assets or financial resources for another person's benefit.	Level 1 – Low-Level Concern - A participant repeatedly asks others for small loans during a Summer Camp or event. - An attendee makes others feel uncomfortable through persistent requests for financial help (including for AFCU). - A volunteer promotes a personal fundraising initiative at an AFCU event without prior agreement. - A participant pressures others to contribute to a collection after they have declined
	Level 2 – Low-Level Safeguarding Concern - An attendee regularly borrows money from different people at AFCU events and does not repay it. - A mentor or leader appears to be developing an inappropriate financial dependency on an attendee. - Concerns are raised that a vulnerable attendee is being repeatedly asked for gifts, loans or financial support. - A participant uses their friendship or position within AFCU to place pressure on others to provide money or resources.
	Level 3 – Medium Concern - A vulnerable attendee appears to be under pressure to make donations, purchases or financial commitments they do not fully understand. - An individual repeatedly seeks money, accommodation or financial support from multiple AFCU attendees despite previous intervention. - A leader or volunteer encourages a participant to provide financial support in circumstances that appear inappropriate. - Concerns arise that a participant is being financially controlled or exploited by a spouse, family member or another attendee.
	Level 4 – High Concern - A person is coerced, manipulated or pressured into giving money, gifts or financial assistance. - Theft of money, property or belongings occurs during an AFCU activity. - A vulnerable attendee is financially exploited by someone in a position of trust. - Fraud, financial deception or misuse of another person's bank account, benefits or assets is disclosed or suspected.
Neglect / Acts of Omission = the failure to provide appropriate care, support, supervision or access to basic needs,	Level 1 – Low-Level Concern - A volunteer forgets to check a participant's dietary requirement but corrects the issue as soon as it is identified. - An attendee is accidentally left out of an activity briefing but receives the information shortly afterwards.

resulting in actual or potential harm to an individual's wellbeing, safety or welfare.	• A leader overlooks a support need during a busy event but responds appropriately once reminded. Level 2 – Low-Level Safeguarding Concern • A participant's support needs are repeatedly overlooked during AFCU activities despite reminders. • Concerns are raised that an attendee is regularly isolated or unsupported during events. • Event leaders not providing regular access to drinks/toilets. • Ignoring a participants request for first aid when they feel unwell/have a minor injury. • Undertaking a task outside without adequate protection in heat/rain especially for children and elderly participants Level 3 – Medium Concern • A leader consistently fails to check on the wellbeing of a participant known to require additional support. • A child is left without appropriate supervision during a camp or event. • A volunteer repeatedly fails to follow agreed care, transport or supervision arrangements. • Repeated failures to meet an attendee's dietary, medical or accessibility needs place them at risk. • A vulnerable attendee's welfare concerns are raised several times but are not acted upon appropriately. • A leader knowingly ignores concerns about an individual's wellbeing or safety. Level 4 – High Concern • A child, young person or adult at risk is left without necessary care, supervision or support, resulting in significant harm or serious risk. • A participant is denied access to essential medication, medical treatment, food, water or appropriate accommodation. • Serious welfare concerns are deliberately ignored despite known risks. • Neglect or failure to supervise contributes to significant injury, abuse, exploitation or an emergency safeguarding situation.
Online/Digital Safety = the inappropriate, unsafe or harmful use of digital technology, social media, messaging platforms, email, gaming platforms or other online communication in connection with AFCU activities.	Level 1 – Low-Level Concern • A volunteer accidentally contacts a Summer Camper using a personal social media account rather than an approved AFCU communication channel. • A participant shares a photograph from an AFCU event online without first checking whether everyone pictured is happy for it to be posted. • An attendee repeatedly tags another participant on social media after being asked not to but stops when reminded. Level 2 – Low-Level Safeguarding Concern • A volunteer repeatedly communicates with a camper through personal messaging platforms rather than agreed AFCU channels. • A leader or participant seeks unnecessary/unwelcome one-to-one online contact with an attendee.

	- A participant reports feeling uncomfortable about the volume or nature of messages being received from another attendee. - Concerns arise regarding online behaviour that blurs appropriate boundaries between leaders and participants. - Multiple people raise concerns about an individual's online interactions or messaging behaviour.
	Level 3 – Medium Concern - A leader or attendee repeatedly contacts another person online after being asked to stop. - A leader shares conversation/images that are not sexual but compromise 'professional' boundaries (images of their bedroom etc) - An AFCU participant is targeted with unwanted, intimidating or distressing online messages connected to AFCU activities. - A volunteer creates private online groups or conversations for AFCU activities that exclude agreed safeguarding oversight. - Online behaviour suggests the development of an inappropriate dependency, relationship or grooming process. - Personal information, images or confidential details are shared online without consent, causing distress or risk.
	Level 4 – High Concern - An adult uses online communication to groom a child, young person or adult at risk. - Sexually explicit messages, images or content are sent to a child or adult at risk. - Intimate images are shared, requested, threatened or distributed without consent. - Online stalking, harassment or threatening behaviour causes a person to fear for their safety. - A participant is coerced, manipulated or blackmailed using online communications or images. - A camper shares naked images of themselves or other campers with others. - Any online behaviour that may constitute a criminal offence or presents an immediate safeguarding risk.
Discriminatory Abuse / Hate Crime = Behaviour that discriminates against, excludes, intimidates, harasses or victimises a person because of a protected characteristic, including age, disability, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity,	Level 1 – Low-Level Concern - During a social event, an attendee makes an insensitive joke or stereotypical comment but apologises when challenged. - A volunteer uses outdated language without intending to offend and accepts guidance when corrected. - An attendee makes assumptions about another person's culture, disability or background that cause discomfort but are addressed appropriately. - An accessibility need is overlooked during an event but is quickly resolved once identified.
	Level 2 – Low-Level Safeguarding Concern A participant repeatedly makes jokes or derogatory comments about another person's protected characteristic.

or marriage and civil partnership.	• An attendee is repeatedly excluded from conversations, activities or social opportunities because they are perceived as different. • Multiple people raise concerns about discriminatory behaviour by the same individual. • A volunteer repeatedly fails to make reasonable adjustments after concerns have been raised. • A participant appears increasingly isolated because of discriminatory comments or behaviour from others.
	Level 3 – Medium Concern • An attendee is deliberately excluded from volunteering, leadership opportunities or participation because of a protected characteristic. • Repeated discriminatory behaviour creates a hostile or intimidating environment at a camp, retreat or AFCU event. • A leader dismisses a concern because of a person's disability, age or other protected characteristic. • An attendee receives abusive messages linked to a protected characteristic in connection with AFCU activities. • A participant is targeted repeatedly by a group of people because of a protected characteristic.
	Level 4 – High Concern • An attendee is threatened, intimidated or made to fear for their safety because of a protected characteristic. • Hate-related harassment continues despite intervention. • A participant is assaulted because of a protected characteristic. • Honour-based abuse or violence is disclosed or suspected. • Criminal damage, harassment or threatening behaviour appears motivated by hostility towards a protected characteristic. • Any suspected hate crime or hate-motivated violence. • Any incident requiring immediate Police involvement.