

Pastoral visiting policy *Hearsall Baptist Church*

Please read this policy in conjunction with our safeguarding, GDPR & confidentiality policies.

Recognition

A member of the pastoral team offers support on behalf of the church. Although it would be artificial to mention this point on every occasion, the pastoral team member should take reasonable steps to ensure that the supported person is aware that they are acting on behalf of the church and that safeguarding and confidentiality policies apply. This is different from the mutual support shared by two friends.

Values

Team members offer support in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore high standards of integrity should be adhered to. We recognise that team members express their personal spirituality in a variety of ways, but everything they do should be consistent with a general Christian message. It is sometimes, but not always, fitting to share scripture or prayer with the person supported. It is often appropriate to encourage the supported person on their journey of faith.

Focus

The team member should ensure that the focus of the visit is on the supported person. It is good practice to give the supported person an early opportunity to express what they would like to discuss and not to assume that we already know. Well-chosen open questions are very powerful tools. Although some conversation about the team member's own situation may be appropriate by way of example or sympathy, the majority of any interaction should be about the concerns of the supported person. If any third parties are discussed, it is the responsibility of the visitor to exemplify and encourage a positive and kind consideration of others and to avoid anything that could be regarded as idle gossip. If we must talk about a third party, we should talk as if that third party might be able to overhear what we are saying about them.

Channels

Support may be offered through visits, letters, cards, prayers, phone calls, text messages and, where appropriate, social media.

Record keeping

A team member may keep brief **anonymised** notes to enable continuity of support. These must be stored securely and destroyed after a period of two years, unless safeguarding issues mean a longer period is required. These notes should only be shared with appropriate pastoral authorities. In writing any notes, the team member should remember that notes could be read by the person they concern if they requested this. All such notes should be factual, respectful and avoid opinion and hearsay.

Home visits in pairs

Ideally, two visitors would visit together. All visits would take place between the hours of 10am and 9pm (apart from in an emergency situation). If there seems a slight possibility that the nature of the visit may be misconstrued as personal, romantic, sexual or otherwise inappropriate, the team member should certainly take another team member along.

Solo home visits

Sometimes it seems heavy-handed and insensitive to go as a pair, and often a second team member is not available; therefore solo visits are acceptable. A solo visitor should make another team member aware of the timing, place and general purpose of the visit and should confirm with that team member when the visit is concluded. Again, all visits would take place between the hours of 10am and 9pm (apart from in an emergency situation).

Personal safety on visits to well-known people

The vast majority of visits will be to people quite well-known to the church. In the light of this knowledge, team members need only undertake a simple mental risk-assessment before every visit. Things to consider include the physical and mental health of the person; the condition and general safety of their home; and the presence of any third parties. Lighting, animals, trip hazards and any other dangers should all be considered. If they do have any doubts about their own safety team members should not go alone, and a written risk assessment should be done and this should be shared with the pastor.

Personal safety on visits to people not well-known to the church

In addition to the above considerations two team members will visit a new person together.

Meeting in public venues

If a one-to-one visit seems helpful, a meeting can be arranged in a public place such as a cafe or pub or a visit could take the form of a walk in a park. In such circumstances the team member should make another team member aware of the timing, place and general purpose of the meeting and should confirm with that team member when it is concluded. Reasonable expenses for drinks may be claimed. Team members should also be aware that, in some circumstances, such a meeting may risk feeling like a 'date' to the supported person, so then it becomes especially important to indicate that the team member is supporting on behalf of the church.

Letters, emails and private messages

All team members should write any messages imagining how they would seem if the supported person chose to make them public. No communications should seek to foster dependence or inappropriate intimacy. Views which are homophobic, sexist, racist, intolerant of other denominations or religions or of transgender people, or otherwise unfitting with the inclusive call of our church, should not be even hinted at, let alone openly expressed.

Practical or financial assistance

Team members may perform simple tasks if requested, such as posting a letter or changing a light bulb. Bigger jobs should be avoided as it would be more fitting to explore with the supported person how else they might access the help they need. For example, if a person is having difficulty cooking, it is far more helpful to explore how this problem can be solved generally than it is to cook one meal for them. If asked for financial help, the request should be referred to the deacons.