

Safeguarding Blog – March 2025

All change and spot the difference

All change on the world stage this week, with live, televised bullying, belittling and humiliation. An extraordinary event that has created turmoil, bewilderment and in the UK, just prior to this happening, a stark shift in government spending priorities that our own Church will have concerns about, no doubt.

What made this different was that it took place in the public gaze, in front of cameras. It wasn't secret, hidden away before the forced smiles of the ritual press conference. It was in your face fury, and in the minds of some, pre-planned.

Whilst church meetings can sometimes feel a bit brutal, with people feeling aggrieved by the way they have not been heard, their views overridden or their firmly held convictions rubbished, most of the time bullying, making threats and humiliation are carried out in private. They can be part of a culture of coercive control, where one party seeks to dominate the other in every aspect of their life so that the former can achieve total control. This is harmful, abusive behaviour and yet, as observers, we may not always see it for what it is as we encounter, say a couple, in everyday life, including at church, who to all intents and purposes present happy and contented personas.

The Foundation Module has a case study that helps us to recognise what may be happening behind the scenes in a church family relationship and how we should respond. Spotting small, subtle changes in demeanour and appearance, noticing a switch from regular routines to unexpected and unexplained absences and perhaps changes to spending and giving patterns, and listening with care to the words that are spoken, are all ways that can help us to remain alert to identifying the possible development of an unhealthy relationship.

It seems that we can no longer take for granted the certainties that have secured our defence for the last 80 years. So, in our church life, we can't afford to take for granted that all is well in ostensibly harmonious relationships. But this is not about snooping or asking the wrong questions. It's more about being ready to spot the small changes that worry us.

Grahame Snelling

Independent Chair of the Lincolnshire Methodist District Safeguarding Group

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