

Safeguarding Blog – October 2025

Miss Marple the safeguarder

Recently I've been enjoying watching re-runs of the BBC Agatha Christie's Miss Marple series starring Joan Hickson as the eponymous sleuth. It's hard to believe they were first shown around 40 years ago, but their 1950s setting at least prevented us from the sight of huge shoulder pads, brick-like mobile phones, and Ford Sierras. Instead, we could watch Morris Minors, Bakelite phones and men in trilbies and drab coloured raincoats. Honey-coloured country cottages framed with flowers and a cast of generally gentle locals, often including a rather unworldly vicar in a straw hat and cream blazer if it was summer – which it invariably was - made for cosy viewing. As someone born in that period, I have some hazy memories of a simpler, gentler, and slower way of life that made me feel quite nostalgic as I watched.

But of course, in every episode there was a malevolent force. A ruthless murderer whose identity was only uncovered by Miss Marple's amazing powers of detection. The opening credits, comprising hand drawn vignettes from village life, always suggested that despite the village's charming appearance, furtiveness was always present from the shop doorway gossips and the watcher behind the curtain to the stooping figure creeping into church seemingly hoping not to be seen.

Miss Marple's skill relied on her remaining unobtrusive and being observant. She slotted into the background whilst her ever alert social antennae and capacity for nuanced deception to advance her own inquiries meant that she was able to succeed where police investigations had hit a brick wall.

Good safeguarding practice is also built around being observant, listening with care to conversations and trying to make connections when we feel concerned about something. A message from someone explaining that they can't get to church might contain a phrase that makes you wonder what is going on for them. It may not be a safeguarding matter, but instead a pastoral concern that might need addressing. Our training reinforces our need to recognise what we see, hear or feel, and then respond. But unlike Miss Marple, who seems to keep things to herself at first but then in fairness does generally engage the police before the episode's denouement, we must share promptly any worries we have with our minister or safeguarding lead, enabling them to join the dots and take responsibility to act.

Miss Marple's village world is not always the idyllic place it might seem. Below the surface strong currents can flow. Churches, too, are not exempt from these. We do well to look, listen and learn.

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