

Churches for Tunbridge Wells

Tunbridge Wells Churches' Winter Shelter



An Ecumenical Christian Charity
www.twchurches.org.uk

Violence Policy

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Guidelines for the Prevention of Violence

Over the years many churches across the country have successfully operated Winter Shelters. This guidance is informed by their experience and that of Tunbridge Wells Street Teams. Violent incidents are few and far between. With that in mind however, it is important to recognise that actual or potential violence **may** be a problem in working with this vulnerable client group. The following guidelines were issued by the London Rough Sleepers Unit, are used by Shelter, Crisis and CARIS Islington Churches Winter Shelter, and are intended to offer direction on the most effective ways of preventing violent behaviour and protection from its consequences.

The Health and Safety Statement included in this pack acknowledges the responsibility of the TWCWS Management Committee and various churches to provide training, direction and support to volunteers; in addition, all volunteers have an individual responsibility never to put themselves, their colleagues, guests or members of the public at unnecessary risk. These procedures should be viewed within the context of that shared responsibility.

Defining violence and aggression

Although these guidelines focus on the extreme end of violent behaviour, this does not mean to imply that only physical assault is of concern. Threats and verbal abuse, for example, are also recognised for their intimidating and undermining impact and, where appropriate, these guidelines should apply to all forms of aggressive behaviour.

General guidelines for managing violence and aggression

It is natural to be frightened of violence, and this needs to be taken into account in the expectations of oneself or others when dealing with actual or potential violence or threatening behaviour. At the same time, volunteers should recognise that they have skills that can help to calm or diffuse a situation, such as speaking softly; asking open questions to try to find out what the individual is angry about; using active listening techniques to show the person that you are listening and trying to help; using open body language and hand gestures to indicate that you are not scared (even if you are!); ignoring insults and swearing; allowing people to let off steam and trying to do something about the problem, coming up with a solution if you can.

In responding to violence or potential violence, one's own safety and that of colleagues and the guests must be seen as the first consideration.

Guidelines can never cover every eventuality. Volunteers must also draw on their experience, skills and common sense when faced with aggressive situations.

All volunteers should co-operate in taking a consistent approach to confronting guests about unacceptable behaviour and in banning or excluding guests from the building. As far as possible, one volunteer should not be identified as the instigator of a ban – these should be presented as team decisions, and all volunteers must actively support the decision even if they have a different opinion.

Managing a violent incident

Anticipate! Volunteers should be sensitive to a 'bad atmosphere' and/or to a guest whose body language spells trouble and either be particularly conciliatory or allow the guest space to calm down.

It is the responsibility of all volunteers to alert colleagues at the first sign of aggression and to

act co-operatively to diffuse the situation.

In case of an incident developing, one or two volunteers should talk to the guest/s concerned, remaining calm, but firm, and trying to create opportunities for the guest/s to back down without feeling humiliated. Where possible, the guest/s should be taken aside.

Other volunteers should remain at a reasonable distance but pay attention in case the situation escalates. Volunteers who are not directly involved with the main protagonists should attempt to keep other guests calm, and prevent them from becoming involved unless they are friends who can assist positively.

In particular, one volunteer should ensure that any vulnerable people are removed from the area and if possible, potential weapons such as plates, cutlery, etc should be removed from the area.

Space should be created to ensure that people are not crowded into a confined area. All those present should be mindful of their own and others "escape route" should it be necessary to get out of the way fast.

One worker should be in a position to 'phone for police assistance should this become necessary. It is useful to identify in advance (at the briefing session) which volunteer on your shift would have this responsibility should a situation arise.

If an incident escalates and the guest/s cannot be calmed, then volunteers should be prepared to vacate the area. Personal safety must be put before the protection of property. The police should be summoned immediately.

In exceptional circumstances, if retreat is not possible, volunteers should take appropriate measures to defend themselves. In the extremely unlikely event of an attack, only force sufficient to stop the attacker and prevent injury to self, colleagues or other guests should be used: reasonable restraint is acceptable.

After an incident has occurred

If an incident does occur, it is likely to be very unsettling for everyone involved in the project, whether volunteer or guest. Some things that can be done include:

- Promote first aid where necessary

- Providing reassurance and helping everyone to calm down

- Recording details of the incident as quickly and thoroughly as possible in the log book (try to include date; location; time; who was involved; description of the incident; whether police/ambulance called; any crime number).

- Arranging for any volunteer that has been scared or hurt to leave the shift

- Arranging longer term support where necessary

- Discuss the incident and try and draw out constructive lessons for avoiding a similar incident in the future

- Consider providing other guests with brief details of what happened and how it was dealt with; this is to prevent rumours and provide reassurance that incidents are dealt with effectively.

Violence Policy

Purpose

It is the intent of the Management Committee to provide a safe, secure and non-threatening environment for all involved in the winter shelter by establishing preventative measures and providing assistance and support to victims.

Principles

Every effort will be made to diffuse any potentially violent situation.

Physical violence will not be tolerated amongst guests or volunteers.

Implied violence and threatening behaviour will not be tolerated.

The use or threatened use of any weapon will not be tolerated.

General Guidelines

Please note that a guest can be excluded from the remainder of that night's shelter at the discretion of the Team Leader, or banned permanently from the shelter in consultation with and agreement between the Team Leader and Project Manager & Management Committee.

Any guest hitting a volunteer or member of staff may be excluded immediately.

Any volunteer hitting a guest (unless in self defence) may be excluded immediately.

Anyone who consistently causes fights may be banned.

Anyone who causes fights unprovoked may be excluded immediately.

Anyone who consistently threatens or implies violence may be banned.

Please note that exclusion and banning is a last resort for guests who exhibit continuous violent or harmful behaviour but must be considered in the context of the safety of other guests and volunteers.

If a violent incident has taken place

The Team Leader will log the incident and if required call the Project Manager or Management Committee emergency number for support.

If the incident is deemed unmanageable and cause for concern the Team Leader will decide whether or not a person is to be excluded for that night.

Details of the incident will be recorded on an incident form with any action taken.

Details of individuals who have been excluded will be circulated by the Project Manager to the next shift team and Church Co-ordinators.

The Team Leader and Project Manager will discuss the incident and decide if a permanent ban from the shelter is appropriate. If so, the Project Manager will communicate this decision to all other Team Leaders and Co-ordinators and manage the message back to the referring agencies.

The Team Leader will be initially responsible for talking to any volunteers involved in a violent incident. Longer term support will be arranged where necessary.

The incident will be discussed in order to try and draw out constructive lessons for avoiding a similar incident in the future.

The police may be called in the following instances

If anyone is being threatening/violent with a weapon.

If there is a multiple fight which cannot be contained.

If anyone has failed to accept an exclusion, refuses to leave when asked and/or is consistently coming back to a shelter.

Role of volunteers

It is the responsibility of all volunteers to alert colleagues at the first sign of aggression and to act co-operatively to diffuse the situation.

However, volunteers are not expected to become involved in violent incidents unless they feel confident to do so or are given instructions by their Team Leader.

Volunteers may assist by dispersing a crowd, comforting or distracting on-lookers and, where instructed by a Team Leader, phoning the police.

Counselling

This may be offered to members of staff or volunteers after any incident.

Weapons

If a volunteer sees a weapon at any time on a guest (whether at the entrance or inside the shelter) they should inform the Team Leader immediately.

Any weapon found will be confiscated.