



Catholic
**Safeguarding
Standards**
Agency

Religious Life Groups Baseline Audit Programme

Overview Report 2025
At-a-Glance

What this report is about

This report brings together learning from safeguarding audits of religious life groups (RLGs) in England and Wales.

The Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA) carries out audits to:

- Understand how well safeguarding is working
- Check arrangements against the National Safeguarding Standards
- Support improvement across the Church

This report is based on:

- 67 audit reports published between December 2024 and December 2025

It shares what we have learned from those audits.

What happens in a safeguarding audit

A safeguarding audit looks at how a religious life group keeps people safe in practice.

This includes:

- Reviewing safeguarding policies and documents
- Speaking with leaders, members, staff and volunteers
- Visiting places where the group lives or works
- Looking at how concerns would be managed

Audits are based on the eight National Safeguarding Standards, which set out what is expected across the Church.

These standards cover areas such as:

- Leadership and culture
 - Responding to concerns
 - Training and communication
 - Quality assurance and improvement
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Key messages from the audits

This report brings together learning from safeguarding audits of religious life groups (RLGs) in England and Wales.

The Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA) carries out audits to:

- Most groups have basic safeguarding arrangements in place
 - There is a strong commitment to safeguarding across religious life
 - Safeguarding is often seen as part of the group's values and mission
 - Practice is not always consistent, even where policies exist
 - Some areas, such as training, communication and oversight, need strengthening
 - Most groups showed a clear willingness to learn and improve
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What we found under each safeguarding standard

Standard 1: Leadership, governance and culture

What is working well:

- Most groups have trustees or leaders who take responsibility for safeguarding
- Safeguarding is often discussed in meetings
- Leaders usually show clear commitment

Where improvement is needed:

- Trustees are not always actively overseeing safeguarding
- Decisions and discussions are not always clearly recorded
- Safeguarding planning (for example action plans and risk registers) is often limited

What this means:

Strong leadership is in place, but more structured oversight and planning is needed.

Standard 2: Communicating the safeguarding message

What is working well:

- Safeguarding information is usually shared within communities
- Contact details for safeguarding leads are often available

Where improvement is needed:

- Information is not always easy for the public or survivors to access
- Websites and other communication tools are not fully used
- Communication is not always planned or reviewed

What this means:

Communication needs to be clearer, more consistent and accessible to everyone.

Standard 3: Responding to people who report harm

What is working well:

- Most people understand how to respond to a disclosure
- There is a compassionate and supportive approach
- People know how to report concerns and signpost support

Where improvement is needed:

- Practical experience and knowledge of working with survivors is limited
- Training and preparation could be strengthened

- Learning from others' experiences is not always used

What this means:

There is a strong foundation, but more preparation and learning would strengthen responses.

Standard 4: Managing allegations and concerns

What is working well:

- Policies and procedures are usually in place
- People understand when to report concerns
- Awareness of statutory responsibilities is generally good

Where improvement is needed:

- Recording of concerns is not always consistent
- Decision-making is not always clearly documented
- Trustee oversight is sometimes informal

What this means:

Groups know what should happen, but need to strengthen how this is applied in practice.

Standard 5: Supporting people who are the subject of concerns

What is working well:

- Strong understanding of the need to provide support
- Good balance between care and risk management
- Practical arrangements are often considered in advance

Where improvement is needed:

- Arrangements are not always clearly documented
- Support roles are not always well defined or independent

- Oversight of long-term arrangements can be limited

What this means:

This is a relative strength, but more structure and clarity would improve consistency.

Standard 6: Safer recruitment and people management

What is working well:

- Safer recruitment processes are usually in place
- DBS checks are widely used
- Good practice is often seen for staff roles

Where improvement is needed:

- Processes for volunteers are less consistent
- Records are not always centrally maintained
- Trustee oversight of recruitment processes is limited

What this means:

Core processes are in place, but monitoring and oversight need to be strengthened.

Standard 7: Training and support

What is working well:

- Most people complete safeguarding training
- Training is often relevant to Church settings
- There is a general commitment to learning

Where improvement is needed:

- Training is often general rather than role-specific
- Training needs are not always assessed

- The impact of training is rarely evaluated

What this means:

Training is widely delivered but could be more targeted and effective.

Standard 8: Quality assurance and improvement

What is working well:

- Many groups are open to learning and improvement
- Some groups carry out internal reviews or audits
- External support is sometimes used

Where improvement is needed:

- Quality assurance processes are not always in place
- Learning is not always captured and shared
- Safeguarding reports and action plans are often limited

What this means:

This is the least developed area and a key priority for future improvement.

Overall picture

Across all eight standards, the audits show that:

- Safeguarding foundations are generally in place
 - There is a positive safeguarding culture in many groups
 - The main challenge is consistency and follow-through in practice
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What this means for religious life groups

To strengthen safeguarding, groups should focus on:

- Ensuring policies are applied consistently in practice There is a positive safeguarding culture in many groups

- Strengthening trustee oversight and governance
- Improving training, communication and planning
- Learning from experience and reviewing what works

Leaders and trustees may wish to ask:

- How do we know our safeguarding arrangements are working?
- Are we confident in how we would respond to a concern?
- Is safeguarding clearly overseen and recorded?
- Are we learning and improving over time

Looking ahead

The CSSA will continue to audit religious life groups and share learning.

This work will:

- Support improvement across the Church
- Build a clearer understanding of safeguarding in religious life
- Help ensure consistent standards are applied

The CSSA recognises that:

- Religious life groups are diverse
- Safeguarding arrangements vary depending on context
- Learning is ongoing

The approach to audits will continue to develop as more is learned, ensuring that safeguarding remains:

- Effective
 - Proportionate
 - Responsive
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In summary

Safeguarding in religious life groups shows:

- Strong commitment and clear foundations
- Good understanding of safeguarding responsibilities
- Opportunities to improve consistency, oversight and learning

There is a clear willingness across religious life to continue improving safeguarding practice.