



## **Principles for 121 meetings and code of conduct - adults**

### **Some background to the policy**

Reading the Bible, encouraging and praying one-to-one is a key way in which we fulfil the biblical “one another” commands. Indeed, how we speak to one another is an identifying mark of God’s people (e.g. Malachi 3:16). We will meet with people 1-to-1 in the course of our encouragement and training of other staff and leaders as well as in our pastoral care. 1-to-1s with non-Christians will also be a normal part of our personal evangelism. Some of the people we meet with will be vulnerable adults.

### **What is the context?**

It is important that we are above reproach in all of our ministry. We occupy a position of trust. Personal work can become “over-intense” and is potentially open to being misunderstood. “Emotional abuse in a spiritual context” is a form of psychological and emotional abuse which can occur within churches and is characterised by coercive and controlling behaviour – in all forms of 1-to-1 meetings (including discipling relationships and staff reviews) and misuse of the Bible can be features of this form of abuse. So, knowing our own weakness and out of love for others, especially the most vulnerable, we are committed to the following basic principles in our personal work. If in exceptional circumstances we set aside one of the following principles, it is appropriate to keep a written record and to inform our line manager or, if relevant, the Church Safeguarding Officer.

### **Who is responsible?**

The line managers of CityGates employees are the Lead pastor and Associate Pastor who in turn report to the Trustees. Any volunteer worker will be line managed by the lead Pastor, Associate Pastor or a named member of church staff who in turn will report to the lead Pastor

## Implementation

### **A. Work in a responsible, transparent and accountable way**

- Basic records (which we could produce on request) should be kept of who we met, when and where (e.g. a diary entry) and why we met (e.g. “counselling” or “to read 2 Timothy”). This should be kept by the person and a central document needs to be kept updated by lead pastor or designated staff member tracking who is meeting with whom. The youth and children’s worker needs to keep a record of who is meeting with whom for 1-2-1 meetings. Both documents should be available for audit by the Trustees
- It is usually not appropriate to meet regularly 1-to-1 with someone of the opposite sex. One exception to this general principle is when we “line manage” a staff member of the opposite sex. In that case, it will be appropriate to meet 1-to-1, though we will work to be “above reproach”, e.g. considering carefully where we meet and what we discuss. This carefulness should be balanced by a willingness, in particular, to train and support female members of staff – maintaining reasonable, godly standards is not to become an excuse for neglecting to properly manage female colleagues (e.g. a male line manager refusing to meet with a woman regularly when he would with a man doing the same job).
- 1-to-1s should not be secret. We should discuss with our line manager/others in our team on a regular basis who we are meeting with and how things are going (not least so we can be praying). Avoid meeting alone in the church building and where possible try and maintain an element of visibility. Private or unobserved meetings should be avoided. It is good practice for someone to know where you are.
- We shall take steps to maintain our own safety. If feeling threatened, we will leave the situation sooner rather than later. If concerned about the possibility of aggressive behaviour, avoid the meeting in the first place.

### **B. Avoid behaviour that could be perceived as harassment or abuse.**

- We recognize that personal work can lead to the development of an unhealthy dependence or a controlling relationship, especially where one person has a position of “spiritual authority”. As such, we will carefully consider both the topics we address (e.g. not developing an unhealthy focus on sexuality or a “pushy” attitude to financial giving) and the character of any advice we give (carefully distinguishing God’s commands from our opinions by ensuring that the Bible is visibly the authority and not us). We will work hard to get the Bible right and will not misinterpret it or selectively quote from it to get our own way. We will consider carefully how our actions may be understood by others (e.g. as controlling or “favouritism”) and will take all reasonable steps to avoid misunderstanding. We will be aware that others may perceive us as having “authority” (“putting us on a pedestal”), even if we don’t feel authoritative.

### **C. Be prepared to challenge unacceptable behaviour and to be challenged.**

- Where we have a concern about a particular pastoral relationship, whether with us or between two other people, we will report that immediately to our line manager and the Safeguarding Officer. We will train leaders who conduct 1-to-1s as part of

their ministry to be aware of these principles and the danger of manipulative or coercive patterns forming. We will provide oversight and accountability to leaders and work hard to prevent unhealthy relationships from forming (and will respond to that and report it if they do).

- In ordinary circumstances, regular (e.g. weekly) meetings with a person 1-to-1 will be for a limited period (if possible, defined in advance) – the longer we meet for, the more likely the relationship is to become “over- intense” spiritually or emotionally. If someone needs ongoing 1-to-1 support, it may be appropriate that someone else or a Christian counsellor “take over” from us. Ultimately, we are not indispensable to anyone. Clarity about expectations when we start meeting greatly helps, not least because we do not want people to feel “dropped” by us (relatedly, continuing to meet more occasionally may well be a good idea – people are not just short-term projects!). In some cases, e.g. with members of a small group we lead, we will plan to meet with people occasionally over a longer period.

#### **D. Seek advice from someone with greater experience where necessary**

- We are aware that some people need or would benefit from specialist help that we cannot provide (e.g. with addiction, mental illness or an eating disorder), perhaps alongside continued pastoral care by us. In these cases, it is appropriate to recommend that someone see a GP or counsellor. We are, however, aware that adults have a right to confidentiality and to make their own decisions and we will not discuss them with others without their permission unless there is an overriding reason to do so (e.g. with a line manager).
- If someone expresses suicidal thoughts and we have an immediate concern for their safety (e.g. they have stated definite plans or sound particularly set), we will ring 999. In all cases, we will endeavour to get anyone expressing suicidal thoughts the help they need, putting them in touch with their GP or Samaritans (116 123). If we have any concerns or are uncertain how to respond, Philip Macdonald can offer advice. Confidentiality is not an absolute bar on seeking advice and it is good practice to speak to someone, e.g. a line manager or the Safeguarding Officer, whenever someone expresses suicidal thinking to you.

#### **E. Follow policies, procedures, guidelines and reporting requirements**

- We will abide by our policies including our online safety policy and our safeguarding policy. If we are concerned that someone may harm themselves or someone else in any way or be harmed by someone else, we may have a duty to disclose this to the relevant authorities (e.g. if someone discloses or we suspect domestic violence or controlling behavior). If the danger is immediate, ring 999; otherwise, Philip Macdonald can advise on the next steps.
- Do not make inappropriate promises of confidentiality
- Do explain to the individual what you intend to do and do not delay taking action
- Do not delay in reporting concerns

#### **Under-18s (i.e. Children)**

- It is not appropriate to meet 1-to-1 unless it is in compliance with the safeguarding policy and you are an approved helper or worker who has undergone a DBS check. The meeting should be in a public place and parental consent must have been obtained.

## **F. Breaching the code of conduct**

If you behave inappropriately, you may be subject to disciplinary procedures under the terms of your contract of employment or inline with the provisions of the church constitution and handbook. CityGates Church will cooperate fully with statutory agencies and refer to them where appropriate.

Should you become aware of a breach of this code, you should escalate your concerns to the safeguarding coordinator or line manager.

This document should be read in conjunction with our safeguarding policy.

This was reviewed by CMT and Safeguarding Team in April 2023 and again both by the Church Operations Team and the Elders in October 2025

**Next review: Autumn 2027**