

Crisis Communications

While a crisis can occur suddenly, it is possible to plan your communications response to ensure your church/school can convey empathy, preserve trust, protect your reputation and recover.

Communicating difficult news will of course feel uncomfortable but maintaining a calm approach and an transparent stance, will help mitigate a challenging situation.

Proverbs 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

What is a crisis?

- An event, accusation, allegation or perception that seriously threatens the reputation or even the viability of an organisation.

Your Communications Plan

Identify your crisis team



- In advance, convene a small and trusted group to lead a crisis response
- Ensure you have the group's best contact details so they can be reached out of work hours if needed.
- Assign clear roles and responsibilities e.g.- Who is the media spokesperson, who is updating the social media posts/mailers, who will notify other key stakeholders or external partners.



Identify your risks

- Map out the key issues that could pose the most reputational risk. E.g. Church closure, safeguarding incident, criminal behaviour of someone in your church.
- With your crisis team, 'game-plan' the different scenarios and identify where you may need extra resource or media training.
- Keep your risk register up to date- Your risk will change depending on your changing community context, changes in your congregation, issues in the National Church that may impact the situation locally.



Identify your stakeholders

- Have a list and contacts of the various people and groups you will need to communicate with in the event of a crisis (Your congregation, people who hire your church hall, parents and teachers etc).
- These contacts will vary depending on the nature of the crisis and how contained or widespread it is.
- Identify your key communications channels and how you will get a message out (social media channels, via your church newsletter, a broadcast interview etc)



Draft holding statements

- Once you have worked out the risks and scenarios, it will be possible to draft holding statement to get across your key messages and the action you will take. See below for an example statement.
- Test your draft statements with a trusted group of people to check if the statement is clear and the tone is appropriate.
- Think about the questions you may get from those impacted by the crisis as well as possible questions from the media. For example, if your crisis relates to safeguarding, you may get questions about your hiring policies or whether you correctly followed safeguarding processes.

Your message

Be transparent



- Own the facts and be upfront about what has gone wrong and how you will respond. By being upfront and honest, it will help reduce speculation and mis/disinformation.

Be clear



- Use plain and clear English in all communications. If your statement is intended for the wider public, avoid use of religious terminology and concepts that may be unfamiliar to non-churchgoers.
- Be clear in your objectives- Are you conveying an apology? Do you need people to take action or come forward with more information?

Show care and empathy



- Recognise that people may feel angry and distrustful.
- Avoid a blame game.
- Demonstrate that you are sorry to those who have been affected and you value them.
- Communicate how you will 'put things right'.
- Highlight any follow-up care or support services that people can access where appropriate.



Template statement (In the event of a safeguarding incident)

This below statement is purely illustrative to give you an example of the sort of tone you may want to communicate, but please adapt to your own context.

A spokesperson/vicar/ from (insert church or school) said: "We are aware of deeply concerning allegations of abuse that have been made.

"We take our safeguarding responsibilities extremely seriously and we will of course cooperate fully with (insert relevant body) as further investigations are carried out.

"Our priority is to protect vulnerable people in our church and community, and we will always listen to the concerns' of victims. To echo the appeal from the police, we urge anyone who has further information about these allegations to come forward,"



For further advice, support and training on crisis communications, please get in touch with the [Diocesan Communications Team](#)