

## [Blog No. 1 from Grahame Snelling, District Safeguarding Group Independent Chair](#)

### **Should I say or do something?**

A safeguarding blog? What's that I can almost hear you say. Well, it's a way to tell stories about safeguarding in its widest sense and reinforce the key messages the Methodist Church publishes about it. When I accepted the position of independent chair of the District Safeguarding Group in the summer, I agreed to write a monthly blog for sending out to as many people as possible who are involved with safeguarding activity and concerned with promoting a safe culture throughout our churches. This October 2024 blog is actually double-length as I aimed to write one in September, but from now on, they will be monthly – promise!

It's always a bit of a challenge to know where to start, and then how to finish. Thinking about what's topical you can't avoid the recent revelations about Mohammed Al Fayed, which allegedly describe how he abused his power and prestige to sexually harass and assault young women, and then seemingly involved others to create an environment that allowed his behaviour to carry on unchecked for years. Our safeguarding training reminds us that it's so important to establish and maintain a safe culture in our churches, where this type of behaviour would be quickly spotted, called out and the perpetrator held to account. Hopefully, the attention given in the training to promoting a culture of safeguarding should mean that potential abusers are actively discouraged from even thinking about misusing their position to abuse others, whether children or adults. We should never be blind to the, hopefully slim, possibility that those within our Church who wield power and influence, may misuse it in harmful ways.

When I wrote a weekly blog for London District, I also wrote about those small everyday events that can make you think about safeguarding. Something trivial or quickly forgotten can reveal an important message. Like sitting on a busy bus and being concerned about the person sitting next to you.

I don't yet know much about buses in Lincolnshire. I suspect in some rural parts they are a rare sighting. But where I live in South London, they are everywhere all red and shiny. Travelling home from the local station to my house is a 25-minute walk, or I have the option of catching one of four different buses. As you know it's been a bit wet of late, so the other day I plumped for the K1, a single decker with as much standing capacity as seating. I jostled my way to a vacant seat wondering why it was vacant before realising why. The man alongside was forming a pistol shape with his fingers and making 'bang bang' sounds as he aimed his imaginary gun at other passengers. I thought, it's only seven stops, but after sitting down, the man directed his attention to my trainers and started asking me about their comfort and price before asking me to raise my big toes so he could see if the fabric was soft or firm. He then touched my toes through the trainer, declaring that was a man of a certain age, 'know what I mean' before resuming his finger firing. Five stops to go.

Again, with little experience of Lincolnshire buses, nor knowledge of local speed limits, in my London borough the speed limit throughout apart from couple of main roads is 20mph. That's enough for another blog in itself, but bus drivers seem either to ignore it completely and rattle on their way making standees hold on for dear life or follow the speed limit religiously. Guess how my driver was driving? You got it, about 15mph I reckon. He also stopped for a minute at stop four as he had been asked to 'regulate the service'. Would this journey ever end, I thought, and might the man start on a new tack as he sprawled across his seat? Thankfully no further incidents and I hopped off at stop seven.

Others on the bus seemed to study their phones with a surprising intensity, and of course the driver was oblivious as he solemnly kept to the speed limit, no doubt watching his dials with studious care. The man had briefly touched my toe through my trainer, so it could have been construed as an assault, but nothing more serious happened, and he seemed, in many ways, to be in a totally different world.

So where is the link to safeguarding? There were probably 30 or so people on the bus, bystanders to a small incident that could have been risky but wasn't really in the end. If you travel on the tube in London there are prompts on posters that give you advice about what you should do if someone is experiencing unwanted attention. As we continue to develop our thinking about what we need to do to keep our spaces safe, we will probably need to turn our attention to 'bystander training' which enables us to spot discomfort or a developing situation that might place someone at risk and know with confidence what to do about it.

A postscript written late on Saturday afternoon when Crystal Palace have just lost to Liverpool, at home, and remain winless after 7 games this season. I was there. Am I concerned? You bet I am! Expect the odd comment about their progress as we go along. I didn't see the safeguarding steward today when they were really needed!

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