

# STANDING IN THE GAP

Staying safe and managing  
boundaries in challenging  
social action contexts



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### A Prayer for the Tired, Angry Ones by Laura Jean Truman

God, We're so tired.

We want to do justice, but the work feels endless,  
and the results look so small in our exhausted hands.

We want to love mercy, but our enemies are relentless,  
and it feels like foolishness to prioritize gentleness in this unbelievably  
cruel world.

We want to walk humbly, but self-promotion is seductive,  
and we are afraid that if we don't look after ourselves,  
no one else will.

We want to be kind, but our anger feels insatiable.

Jesus, in this never-ending wilderness,  
come to us and grant us grace.

Grant us the courage to keep showing up to impossible battles,  
trusting that it is our commitment to faithfulness,  
and not our obsession with results, that will bring in Your peace.

Grant us the vulnerability to risk loving our difficult and complicated  
neighbour, rejecting the lie that some people  
are made more in the image of God than others.

Grant us the humility of a decentred but Beloved self.

As we continue to take the single step that is in front of us, Jesus, keep  
us from becoming what we are called to transform.

Protect us from using the empire's violence—in our words,  
in our theology, in our activism, and in our politics—  
for Your kingdom of peace.

Keep our anger from becoming meanness.

Keep our sorrow from collapsing into self-pity.

Keep our hearts soft enough to keep breaking.

Keep our outrage turned towards justice, not cruelty.

Remind us that all of this, every bit of it, is for love.

Keep us fiercely kind.

Amen.

*A Rhythm of Prayer: A Collections of Meditations for Renewal by Laura Jean Truman (edited by Sarah Bessey), © 2021 by SPCK Publishing*



# WELCOME TO STANDING IN THE GAP

As needs grow and services shrink, churches step into the gap - providing presence, hope and practical care for those most at risk.

**How can we stay safe whilst doing so?**



**The training content will focus on the key themes of:**

- o Staying emotionally healthy & avoiding burnout
- o Maintaining healthy boundaries & managing expectations
- o Recognising complex needs & signposting
- o Dealing with challenging behaviours & de-escalating
- o Staying safe

The case studies will deal with themes of mental health crisis, poverty, homelessness and food insecurity. We're aware that these topics may be difficult for some people. Please feel free to take breaks when you need to.

There will be a large discussion component to the training. We want this to be a safe space for you to share as you feel comfortable. We will be using the Chatham House Rule which states **“participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed”**. Please speak to the training facilitator or a member of staff if you have any questions.

## OPENING DISCUSSION

Bearing in mind the UK's recent socio-economic history (the 2008 financial crash, austerity, COVID-19, the cost-of-living crisis), discuss how your / your church's experiences of compassion ministries has changed over recent years.

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## CASE STUDY 1

### Themes:

- Dealing with challenging behaviours & de-escalating
- Staying safe



## 1. SHOWER BOX

### Hygiene support for rough sleepers and the precariously housed at St. Giles-in-the-Fields

The church hosts partner NGO, ShowerBox, and their mobile showers to facilitate access to bathrooms, hygiene products, and other basic services for people who are rough sleeping and precariously housed. When the service opened, it had about 40 users – now the ShowerBox team see 300 users on a Saturday.

#### Consider and Discuss:

Based on the ministry description and your own experiences, what are the potential challenges that ministry staff and volunteers may encounter, relating to:

- Dealing with challenging behaviours and de-escalating?
- Staying safe?

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**WATCH THE VIDEO PART 1  
(MINISTRY INTRODUCTION, POTENTIAL CHALLENGES)**



*Note down the challenges as you watch*

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**II CONSIDER AND DISCUSS**

**1. What measures might the ministry take to address challenging behaviours and de-escalate tense situations?**

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**2. What might they do to ensure the safety of staff & volunteers?**

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**▶ WATCH THE VIDEO PART 2 (MITIGATIONS)**



*Note down the mitigations as you watch*

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**■ CONSIDER AND DISCUSS**

**3. From the case study, what risks and challenges do you see reflected in your own social action ministry?**

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**4. How do you mitigate those risks / challenges?**

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**5. What learning will you take from this case study and / or your group's discussion?**

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**FEEDBACK TO ROOM**

## CASE STUDY 2

### Themes:

- Maintaining healthy boundaries & managing expectations
- Staying emotionally healthy & avoiding burnout



## 2. LIGHTHOUSE

### A community meal and support service at SAINT Church

The Lighthouse ministry provides a hot meal for vulnerable community members (including those who are experiencing homelessness) alongside other key services – a food pantry, energy and debt advice, hairdressing, hygiene products, and social prescribers.

#### Consider and Discuss:

Based on the ministry description and your own experiences, what are the potential challenges that ministry staff and volunteers may encounter, relating to:

- Maintaining healthy boundaries & managing expectations?
- Staying emotionally healthy & avoiding burnout?

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**WATCH THE VIDEO PART 1  
(MINISTRY INTRODUCTION, POTENTIAL CHALLENGES)**



*Note down the challenges as you watch*

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**II** CONSIDER AND DISCUSS

1. How might the ministry maintain healthy boundaries & manage expectations?

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2. What might they do to help staff / volunteers stay emotionally healthy & avoid burnout?

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**▶** WATCH THE VIDEO PART 2 (MITIGATIONS)



*Note down the mitigations as you watch*

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**■** CONSIDER AND DISCUSS

3. From the case study, what risks and challenges do you see reflected in your own social action ministry?

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4. How do you mitigate those risks / challenges?

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5. What learning will you take from this case study and / or your group's discussion?

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**FEEDBACK TO ROOM**

## CASE STUDY 3

### Themes:

- Recognising complex needs & signposting to appropriate services
- Dealing with challenging behaviours & de-escalating



## 3. THE HIVE

A foodbank supporting those facing food insecurity at St Mary Hornsey Rise

St Mary's works in partnership with The Hive food bank to support people facing food insecurity in Islington. Every Wednesday evening volunteers provide guests with groceries and refer them on to additional support where this is needed.

### Consider and Discuss:

Based on the ministry description and your own experiences, what are the potential challenges that ministry staff and volunteers may encounter, relating to:

- Recognising complex needs & signposting to appropriate services?
- Dealing with challenging behaviours & de-escalating?

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**WATCH THE VIDEO PART 1  
(MINISTRY INTRODUCTION, POTENTIAL CHALLENGES)**



*Note down the challenges as you watch*

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**II CONSIDER AND DISCUSS**

**1. How might the ministry recognise complex needs & signpost to appropriate services?**

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**2. What might they do to address challenging behaviours & de-escalate tense situations?**

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**▶ WATCH THE VIDEO PART 2 (MITIGATIONS)**



*Note down the mitigations as you watch*

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**■ CONSIDER AND DISCUSS**

**3. From the case study, what risks and challenges do you see reflected in your own social action ministry?**

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**4. How do you mitigate those risks / challenges?**

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**5. What learning will you take from this case study and / or your group's discussion?**

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**FEEDBACK TO ROOM**

# FINAL REFLECTIONS

Recall what you've learned during the training. Reflect on the existing strengths of your project. Renew your practices as appropriate to *Stand in the Gap* with confidence.

*You may wish to share these reflections with your social action team when you return to your ministry context.*

**RECALL**

Something I've learned from the case study videos

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Something I've learned from someone else in the room

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**REFLECT**

Something my project is already doing well

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**RENEW**

Something I will integrate / refresh / remove / share with others

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We hope you have enjoyed this training session. This is the first time we are running the session as a pilot, so before you leave **please fill out one of the feedback forms** so we know how to improve next time.

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**CLOSING PRAYER**

# CASE STUDY RESOURCES

## Understanding the difference between irritable and threatening behaviour

As volunteers, it's important to distinguish between irritable and threatening language or behaviour to ensure appropriate safeguarding responses.

- **Irritable Behaviour** may include:
  - raised voices
  - frustration
  - abruptness
  - impatience
- **Threatening Behaviour** includes language or actions that make others feel unsafe or intimidated. This may involve:
  - aggressive gestures
  - verbal abuse
  - threats of violence
  - actions that suggest the potential for harm to oneself or others.

All threatening incidents should be reported to the shift leader. When in doubt, prioritise safety - yours and others - and seek support from your volunteer buddy and/or shift leader. Be assured that we're committed to making sure that everybody involved with Showerbox is protected and supported.

If you're ever worried about the safety or wellbeing of a guest, volunteer or staff member during a session, please remember to follow our safeguarding process: **Recognise, Respond, Report.**

### • Dealing with irritable behaviour

Irritable behaviour is often a reflection of a guest's personal circumstances and is not necessarily directed at anyone in particular. While it may feel uncomfortable, irritable behaviour does not typically pose a direct risk and can often be de-escalated with calm, empathetic communication. If you do feel uncomfortable, please let your shift leader know.

### • Dealing with threatening or aggressive behaviour

Occasionally, guests might arrive experiencing a crisis, but by remaining calm and treating them with respect, we can often help create a sense of safety. Most of our guests are courteous and grateful; however, there may be rare instances where a guest acts in an aggressive or intimidating way.

# SHOWERBOX

ShowerBox have kindly provided this extract from their Volunteer Handbook on “Understanding the difference between irritable and threatening behaviour.” Please do not copy or reuse this resource without prior permission.

You can read more about ShowerBox on their website (<https://showerbox.org/>).

The following information is extracted from Conflict Management training provided to ShowerBox shift leaders and volunteers during training in April 2025.

## Recognising aggressive or threatening behaviour

Be aware of behaviours that may indicate rising aggression, such as:

- Raised voices, shouting or swearing
- Aggressive body language (e.g. clenched fists, pacing, invading personal space)
- Verbal threats or intimidation
- Appearing confused, paranoid or unpredictable – possibly linked to mental illness or substance use
- These signs may escalate quickly, so early recognition is key



## Responding to aggression

Stay calm and non-confrontational:

- Keep your voice calm, even and low
- Maintain non-threatening body language – open posture, hands visible, avoid sudden movements
- Avoid arguing, correcting or contradicting – this may escalate the situation. Use strong, simple verbal commands. For example: “Wait”



## What to do if a situation escalates

- Volunteers should never be alone when dealing with a potentially volatile situation
- Report the incident to the on-site shift leader - they are trained to manage incidents and can decide whether to engage or call emergency services.
- Call 999 if there is an immediate threat to the safety of the shift leader (e.g. violence, weapons, extreme aggression).



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## After the incident

The shift leader is responsible for reporting all safeguarding incidents or concerns to ShowerBox’s safeguarding team.

If you have any further concerns about the incident and/or the shift leader’s response, please complete the following volunteer safeguarding report form: [volunteer safeguarding report form](#)

- We will always check-in with the team – debriefing helps process the experience and identify ways to improve safety.
- If you’re feeling distressed, please contact ShowerBox’s safeguarding officer by emailing [safeguarding@showerbox.org](mailto:safeguarding@showerbox.org). They will contact you asap to discuss the incident and any further support you may require.
- ShowerBox’s safeguarding officer will always review safety protocols and discuss any lessons learned from incidents to continually improve each service delivery.



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# LIGHTHOUSE



Lighthouse have kindly provided this extract from their Volunteer Handbook which includes their “Five Golden Rules” and top tips for healthy conversations. Please do not copy or reuse this resource without their prior permission.

You can read more about Lighthouse on their website (<https://saintlighthouse.org/>).

## Safeguarding

### Five Golden Rules

1. Never give any money to guests or other volunteers
2. Never give any personal details to guests or volunteers
3. Never arrange to meet guests outside of the Lighthouse Project
4. Never be alone in a room with a guest
5. Never force any beliefs or opinions on guests

Guests are vulnerable adults and should be treated with utmost respect and care.

1. If any interaction with other guests or volunteers causes you to feel uncomfortable, stop the interaction immediately and speak to a team leader.
2. Please do not agree to keep anything confidential. If a guest tells you anything that might affect their, your or anyone else’s welfare or safety you have a duty to report it.
3. If you are concerned about the conduct of anyone and you do not feel you can share it with the team leader you should email
4. We expect all volunteers to sign the [form](#) & stick to the code of conduct.

Please do read all of this with reference to our safeguarding handbook and guidance on our website

## Top tips: Healthy Conversations

One of the best things about Lighthouse is that we get to sit down with our guests and have conversations with them. We ask that you be open, and gracious and carry the culture of hope we mentioned before. It is normally joy filled and we get to listen and hear their stories.

Sometimes, conversations can be more difficult and our priority is your wellbeing as well as our guests so here are some top tips.

Regardless, a team leader will always be on site and there to help you with anything.

1. Ask open ended questions, such as “tell me about..” use eye contact and be active within the conversation.
2. You don’t have to deal and solve everyone’s current problems. Set your own expectations and boundaries.
3. Be aware of topics of conversations that are your personal “pinch points” and try and steer clear of these. (Avoid things that create an unnecessary barrier between you and the other person).
4. If you are uncomfortable please act, walk away from the conversation and talk to the team leader - we extend grace but also have our own boundaries.

# THE HIVE


St Mary Hornsey Rise have kindly provided this extract from their policy document "Helping People in Need."

Please do not copy or reuse this resource without their prior permission.

You can read more about The Hive Food Bank on their website (<https://thehivefoodbank.com/>).

## St Mary Hornsey Rise

CONFIDENT COMPASSIONATE CREATIVE



**DRAFT HELPING PEOPLE IN NEED POLICY**

**Supporting Those in Need with Safety, Consistency, and Compassion**

**1. Purpose of This Policy**

St Mary's is committed to offering a safe, compassionate, and consistent response to anyone seeking help. This policy ensures that all volunteers and staff respond appropriately, protecting both those who seek help and those who serve.

**2. Guiding Principles**

**2.1 Welcome and Dignity**

We aim to treat every person with kindness, dignity, and respect.

**2.2 Safety for All**

Our approach must protect vulnerable individuals, volunteers, and church resources.

**2.3 Fairness and Consistency**

A clear, shared policy ensures that everyone receives the same compassionate response.

**3. Policy on Giving Cash**

**3.1 No Cash Giving by the Church**

St Mary's does **not give cash** to individuals who come to the church seeking help. This is to:

- Reduce risk
- Avoid enabling harmful patterns
- Ensure people are connected with appropriate professional support

**3.2 Volunteers Must Not Give Cash**

Volunteers are **asked not to give cash personally** to anyone they meet through church, including those entering the building or approaching during services or events. This protects volunteers from pressure and ensures boundaries remain healthy. If someone asks for cash, volunteers may kindly respond with: "I'm really sorry, but we aren't allowed to give out money. However, we can help you find the right support."

**4. How Volunteers Should Respond**

1. **Listen briefly and kindly.**
2. **Do not promise anything the church cannot provide.**
3. **Offer signposting to local services (see section 5).**

St Mary Hornsey Rise, Ashley Road, London, N19 3AD. 020 7916 2710 [contact@smhr.org.uk](mailto:contact@smhr.org.uk)  
Registered Charity 1150821

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## ARTICLES/DOCUMENTS

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**Boundaries** - Mind & Soul Foundation

**Guide on Challenging Conversations** - Robes

## ORGANISATIONS

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**Join the Dots** - Equipping faith organisations and their teams to become trauma informed

**Alliance for Dignified Food Support** - especially 'Dignity Principles & Recommendations'

**Church Urban Fund** - guide to working well with volunteers including editable templates for risk assessment, expectations and problem solving.

**Mind** - especially 'Guide to mental health issues' and 'Guide to addictions and how drug and alcohol affects you'



## TRAINING

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**Suicide Awareness Training** - Zero Suicide Alliance

**Level 2 Certificate in Mental Health First Aid** - Free Courses in England (online)

**Trauma-informed Practice Training** - Thrive LDN

**Mental Health First Aid** MHFA England

**Methodist Church** - God Welcomes All: How faith informs safeguarding

**Professional Boundaries (training)** - SHELTER

**Housing Justice** - Trauma Informed Practice in Night Shelters including a short video

## PODCASTS

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**Sunday School for Misfits with Dr Selina Stone** - Series 7 Ep 8: Trauma Theology and Remaking the Self

**The Living Church Podcast** - Radical Welcome, Good Boundaries with Lis Goddard

## VIDEOS

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**'Hunger Trauma' in Food Banks & Other Community Food Projects** - Compassionate Communities YouTube channel

**Calming & De-escalation Strategies** - Dartmouth Trauma Intervention Research Centre

**De-escalation** - NHS Hampshire CAMHS

## BOOKS

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**Douglas, J. N. (2023).** Trauma: Building a Trauma-Informed Worshipping Community. Cambridge: Grove Books (Grove Pastoral Series, P175).

**Knight, G. & Knight, J. (2009).** Disturbed by Mind and Spirit: Mental Health and Healing in Parish Ministry. London: Mowbray

**McClintock, K. A. (2020).** Trauma-Informed Pastoral Care: How to Respond When Things Fall Apart. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

**Grosch-Miller, C. A. (2004).** Trauma and Pastoral Care. London: SPCK.

**Cook, C. C. H. & Hamley, I. (2020).** The Bible and Mental Health: Towards a Biblical Theology of Mental Health. London: SCM Press.

**Kolber, A. (2020).** Try Softer: A Fresh Approach to Move Us Out of Anxiety, Stress, and Survival Mode—and into a Life of Connection and Joy. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum.



Scan for further information on the resources including links to specific resources



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