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Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults policy

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1 Purpose

- 1.1 We are committed to safeguarding the welfare of children and vulnerable adults with whom we come into contact in the course of our activities. In addition to preventing risk, this policy makes everyone aware of the procedure to follow should they feel a child or vulnerable adult is being abused or is at risk of being abused.
- 1.2 The key objectives of this policy are:
- to ensure children and vulnerable adults are given our highest priority
 - to identify, recognise and respond to possible indicators of abuse, neglect or situations where extra support to prevent abuse may be implemented
 - to support our staff to ensure that they know how to report and deal with any allegation of abuse or neglect.
- 1.3 Whilst it is impossible to ensure that a child or vulnerable adult would never come to any harm, this policy and associated guidelines aim to help us to protect such individuals.
- 1.4 Each person will be regarded as an individual, listened to, have their feelings respected and opinions valued. Where we suspect any areas of risk, we will endeavour to offer early intervention, referral and a strong network of support.
- 1.5 This policy is not contractual, but aims to set out how we normally deal with such issues.

2 Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to anyone working for us in any capacity, ie employed, agency, voluntary or sessional.
- 2.2 are given a copy of this policy and must deal with any concerns reported to them by contacting the designated person responsible for safeguarding within our business.

3 Definitions

- 3.1 In this document, a child is any person aged under 18; an adult is someone aged 18 or over.
- 3.2 A **vulnerable child** may:
- have a disability

- suffer from a mental health problem
- be defenceless
- be non-assertive
- have learning difficulties
- have sensory impairments
- be physically ill
- be in care
- have parents who are drug or substance dependant, or are themselves suffering from illness or have disabilities.

3.3 A **vulnerable adult** may be unable to take care of themselves, or protect themselves from harm or from being exploited. This may be because they:

- have a mental health problem
- have a disability
- are old or frail
- have learning difficulties
- have a sensory impairment
- have an illness
- are homeless

3.4 They may be in residential accommodation, sheltered housing, receiving domiciliary care, or receiving any form of health care.

3.5 **Abuse** may consist of a single act or repeated acts. It may be an act of neglect or a failure to act. It may occur when a child or vulnerable person is persuaded to enter into a financial or sexual transaction to which they have not consented, or cannot consent. Abuse can occur in any relationship and may result in significant harm to, or exploitation of, the person subjected to it.

3.6 Many types of abuse can be inflicted, some may be due to negligence, ignorance, or lack of understanding. The person inflicting the abuse is often known to the person being abused, they may be:

- a family member, friend or neighbour
- a paid carer or volunteer
- a health worker, social care or other worker
- another resident or service user
- an occasional visitor or someone who is providing a service who deliberately exploits vulnerable people
- a stranger.

3.7 Types of abuse include:

- **Physical abuse** - includes hitting, slapping, pushing, kicking, biting, shaking, burning or scalding, misuse of medication, restraint or inappropriate sanctions, deliberately underfeeding, being given alcohol or a substance that is known to cause harm.
- **Sexual abuse** – includes rape and sexual assault or sexual acts to which the vulnerable person has not consented, or could not consent or was pressured into consenting, being subjected to sexual innuendos and harassment, unwanted touching or being forced to touch another person in a sexual manner.
- **Physiological or emotional abuse** - threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, isolation or withdrawal from services or support networks, being ignored, not given a choice of who to live or spend time with.
- **Financial and material abuse** - theft or misuse of money or personal possessions, including money being withdrawn or stolen, goods or services purchased in someone's name without their consent, being deliberately overcharged for goods or services, misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits, money being borrowed by someone who is providing a service to the vulnerable person.
- **Neglect and acts of omission** - includes ignoring medical or physical care needs, failure to provide access to appropriate health, social care or educational services, withholding medication, adequate hygiene, nutrition, housing or heating, preventing someone from interacting with others.
- **Discriminatory abuse** - repeated, ongoing or widespread discrimination on the grounds of age, race, disability, religion, sexual preference or gender, slurs, harassment, name-calling, breaches of civil liberties, unequal access to health or social care.

4 Criminal record checks

- 4.1 Processes are in place to check the suitability of staff or individuals working or coming into regular contact with any child or vulnerable adult. All such staff must have a satisfactory Disclosure and Barring Service check (DBS check) and satisfactory references before employment will commence. Where this is not practical, such staff must be supervised at all times until the appropriate checks are received.

- 4.2 Those who are involved in work where they have sustained or prolonged unsupervised access to children or vulnerable adults are exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders legislation. This means that prospective employees, self-employed contractors and volunteers must declare all criminal convictions, however long ago; and these will be taken into account when deciding on their suitability for working with children or vulnerable adults.
- 4.3 However, a criminal record may not prevent a person from working for us in any other capacity: if that person is then asked to undertake tasks which will bring him/her into unsupervised contact with children or vulnerable adults, such as work experience placements, any record must be declared to your manager, who will take appropriate advice where necessary and will decide whether this task should be allocated to another member of staff.

5 Planning and supervision

- 5.1 All activities or work involving children or vulnerable adults should be planned to ensure that the age and ability of the participant(s) is considered. Employees, volunteers or freelancers supervising activities or work should be competent and trained to do so. Supervision should take account of the age, gender, nature of the activity and any special needs of the individual(s). Where appropriate, a risk assessment will be undertaken and documented.
- 5.2 All workers should avoid working alone with a child or vulnerable adult wherever possible. If it is not avoidable, they should plan their work so that at least two adults are present at any time, where possible including a further employee. The worker should preferably use a workstation where they can both be seen by other colleagues or other adults. This guidance applies also to transport in vehicles - workers should not offer to transport a child or vulnerable adult anywhere unless accompanied by a further person or as part of a formal, authorised arrangement.

6 Physical contact

- 6.1 On no account should any employee, worker or volunteer have any physical contact with a child or vulnerable adult unless this is to prevent accident or injury to themselves or anyone else (eg to prevent a fall), or in the case of medical assistance being needed (eg to administer first aid), or to provide nursing or other general care, in which case the prior consent of the affected person should be requested where possible. Where appropriate, consent from parents or those with parental or caring responsibility should be obtained.

- 6.2 If a child or vulnerable adult is hurt or distressed, the worker should do their best to comfort or reassure the affected person without compromising their dignity, or doing anything to discredit the person's own behaviour.
- 6.3 To protect both themselves and our business, staff should avoid the following:
- being alone with children or vulnerable adults out of public view
 - kissing or hugging them or any unnecessary physical contact
 - engaging in rough or sexually provocative games
 - making sexual comments
 - inviting or allowing children or vulnerable adults into their home
 - taking a child or vulnerable adult alone in a vehicle on journeys, however short
 - unless circumstances make it impossible to comply, taking a child or vulnerable adult to the toilet unless either (a) another adult is present or (b) another adult is aware (this may include a parent)
 - letting allegations made by anyone go unacknowledged, unresolved or not acted upon.
- 6.4 All staff, workers and volunteers working with children or vulnerable adults, whether acting in a paid or unpaid capacity, should:
- exercise caution when discussing sensitive issues
 - challenge all unacceptable behaviour and report allegations or suspicions of abuse
 - if the recipient of any complaint or accusation from a child or vulnerable adult, listen without making or implying any judgement as to the truth of the complaint or accusation
 - keep parents/relatives informed of all anticipated activities
 - remember that those who abuse children and vulnerable adults can be of any age, gender, ethnic background or class, and it is important not to allow personal preconceptions about people to prevent appropriate action taking place
 - ensure risk assessments are completed on each activity.

7 Communication

- 7.1 Communication is vital in establishing relationships built on trust and understanding. Those working with children or vulnerable adults should listen to what they are saying and respond appropriately. Such people are entitled to the same respect as any employees, workers and volunteers. It should also be made clear to them what standards of behaviour and mutual respect are expected from them.

- 7.2 Those working with children/vulnerable adults should behave appropriately, ensure that language is moderated in their presence and should refrain from adult jokes or comments which are clearly unsuitable. Workers should also note that what may be acceptable language to their friends may not be regarded as such by those of an older generation.

8 Behaviour and abuse

- 8.1 We will not tolerate anti-social behaviour but aim to ensure good working relationships.

- 8.2 All our employees, workers and volunteers have a strict duty never to subject any child or vulnerable adult to any form of harm or abuse. This means that it is unacceptable, for example, to treat a child or vulnerable adult in any of the following ways:

- to cause distress by shouting or calling them derogatory names
- to slap them
- to hold them in such a way that it causes pain, or to shake them
- to physically restrain them (except to protect them from harming themselves or others)
- to take part in horseplay or rough games
- to allow or engage in inappropriate touching of any kind
- to do things of a personal nature for the person that they can do for themselves (this includes changing clothing)
- to allow or engage in sexually suggestive behaviour within a person's sight or hearing, or make suggestive remarks to or within earshot of the child or vulnerable adult
- to give or show anything which could be construed as pornographic
- to seek or agree to meet them anywhere outside of our normal workplace without the full prior knowledge and agreement of the parent, guardian or carer
- to engage with them online in an unacceptable manner.

9 Contact outside of work

- 9.1 Contact should not be made with any of the children or vulnerable adults with whom we are working for any reason unrelated to the particular work. In particular, our employees, workers and volunteers are required to maintain our reputation for integrity and responsibility in dealing with such people, and should not enter into any social or other non-work-related arrangements with them.

10 Gifts and inducements

- 10.1 On no account should any of our employees, workers or volunteers give a child or vulnerable adult a gift, or buy refreshments etc, which could in any way be considered a bribe or inducement to enter into a relationship with that person or give rise to any false allegations of improper conduct against the individual.
- 10.2 Nor should any of our employees, workers or volunteers accept any gift or favour from a child or vulnerable adult unless this is of nominal value and is declared to their manager..

11 Safety

- 11.1 The safety of the people we work with is paramount and we are committed to providing a safe environment within which to work. Those working with children or vulnerable adults should ensure all appropriate risk assessments and security checks have been carried out prior to any assignment. This could include first aid cover and accident reporting.
- 11.2 If transporting children or vulnerable adults, the transport should be checked to ensure it is roadworthy and adequate for the purpose. Any equipment used must be safe and only used for the purpose for which it is intended. Users should be adequately trained. Appropriate insurance should be up to date and adequate to cover such assignments.

12 Confidentiality

- 12.1 All personal information regarding children or vulnerable adults is highly confidential and should only be shared with appropriate people on a need-to-know basis. Information will be stored in ORBS, access limited to the Manager and will only be kept for as long as is needed.
- 12.2 Anyone who is likely to have access to confidential material regarding children or vulnerable adults, or any of the bodies on behalf of whom we are working, will be required to sign a non-disclosure agreement. The requirement for confidentiality is emphasised.

13 General principles regarding suspected abuse

- 13.1 It is not our responsibility to investigate abuse. However, we do have a duty to act if there is a cause for concern and to notify the appropriate authorities via the nominated person so that they can investigate and take any action necessary.

13.2 All employees, workers and volunteers should be aware of our Child/Vulnerable Adult Protection Procedures. All our staff will undergo training to ensure they understand their responsibilities and reporting procedures; new staff will undergo training during their induction.

13.3 The welfare of the child or vulnerable adult is paramount and all practical steps must be taken to protect them from harm. Any concerns raised by a child or vulnerable adult must be acted upon.

14 Reporting of suspicions of abuse

14.1 Under no circumstances should any employee, workers or volunteer try to deal with alleged abuse by themselves as it is not our responsibility to decide whether abuse has taken place.

14.2 Anyone who witnesses or suspects abusive behaviour towards a child or vulnerable adult, or who has any concerns about the welfare of a child or vulnerable adult, should record the details and report this immediately to the designated Child/Adult Protection Officer, clarifying the grounds for suspicion.

14.3 If anyone has suspicions, they must act on these and not ignore a potentially very serious situation. It is NOT the individual's responsibility to decide how serious the matter might be nor to investigate their suspicions - this requires expertise they are not expected to have.

14.4 Any allegations of abuse made against anyone working for us will be thoroughly investigated and dealt with through our disciplinary procedure. Serious breaches may lead to dismissal.

14.5 The Operations Manager will make a record of all allegations or reported incidents and assess whether any allegation or concern warrants any further action. They will:

- refer any suspicion of abuse to the social services, giving any other relevant information, including details of work with the family and whether parents or relatives are aware of the referral. This will be done verbally in the first instance and a written referral made within 24 hours of the initial telephone call.
- record fully (within 24 hours) all relevant information about the incident or concern, including details of any comments or explanations given by the parents/carers etc.

14.6 We will aim to maintain any request for witness anonymity, where appropriate and possible, and to provide support if required.

15 Disclosure of abuse by a child/vulnerable adult

15.1 If a child or vulnerable adult alleges abuse, it is important to respond appropriately. This means giving them the opportunity to talk without asking probing questions. Staff should:

- stay calm
- acknowledge that they have heard the person
- listen carefully to what is being said
- find an appropriate opportunity to explain that the information will probably have to be shared with others – never promise to keep secrets
- allow the person to talk at their own pace
- not ask direct questions – allow the person to say as much as they want to, by using active listening skills such as mirroring, neutral responses and active body language
- reassure the person that they have done the right thing in telling someone
- tell them what steps will be taken next and with whom the information will be shared
- never promise to keep the disclosure a secret
- record in writing what was said as soon as possible and in any event within 24 hours.

15.2 The report should include:

- the child's or vulnerable adult's known details including name, date of birth, address and contact telephone numbers
- whether the person making the report is expressing their own concerns or those of someone else
- the nature of the allegation, including dates, times, specific factors and any other relevant information, making a clear distinction between what is fact, opinion or hearsay
- a description of any visible bruising or other injuries, also any indirect signs such as behavioural changes
- details of witnesses to the incidents
- the account, if it can be given, of what has happened and how any bruising or other injuries occurred
- accounts from others, including colleagues and parents.

15.3 Staff may have to make a judgement about how much of the story they allow the child or vulnerable adult to disclose. This is dependent on the individual circumstances and the decision should reflect:

- that they are likely to have to repeat what is said to a social worker and/or the police. Therefore, it may be appropriate to stop them so that they do not have to tell their experiences several times.

- that it may be traumatic for them to disclose the details and, if distressed, they may need to continue to tell of their experiences.
 - that any attempt to stop them telling should be done very sensitively so that they do not think that we do not want to hear, are disgusted, angry or disbelieving.
- 15.4 Whilst waiting for Social Services and/or the police, the member of staff should:
- reassure the child/vulnerable adult and make sure that they are safe, but don't make promises we cannot keep
 - listen to them and tell them what is being done
 - maintain confidentiality at all times
 - usually inform the child's parent(s), carer(s) or relatives, unless to do so would put them at risk. If uncertain, discuss with Social Services.
- 15.5 We recognise our duty to work with other agencies in safeguarding children and vulnerable adults and in responding to abuse. All members of staff have a responsibility to be mindful of issues related to their safety and welfare and a duty to report and refer any concerns however minor they appear.

16 Information sharing

- 16.1 Sharing of information in cases of concern about a child's or vulnerable adult's welfare will enable professionals to consider jointly how to proceed in the best interests of the individual and to safeguard such people generally. Effective information sharing is a vital element of both early intervention and safeguarding. Often, it is only when information from a number of sources has been shared and is then put together that it becomes clear that a child or vulnerable adult is at risk or suffering harm.
- 16.2 The person's best interests must be the overriding consideration in making any decision to share information. The member of staff must weigh up what might happen if the information is shared, against what might happen if it is not, and make a decision based on a reasonable judgement.
- 16.3 There may be situations when they are unsure whether to share information. In such cases, they should speak with their manager or the lead professional for child protection..

- 16.4 Whenever information is shared, especially when there is a need to share without consent, the member of staff should document what they have shared and with whom and for what purpose. As at a later point in time they may need to justify the reasons for disclosure. In addition, if they make a decision not to disclose information following a request to do so, they should document the reasons for not making a disclosure.

17 Communicating this policy and concerns

- 17.1 All of our employees, workers and volunteers will be made aware of this policy and a copy will be available on Shared Drive.
- 17.2 A copy of this policy will also be given to all relevant bodies with whom we work and will be made available to parents and carers/family of the children or vulnerable adults with whom we plan to work.
- 17.3 Any concerns about the assignment or people involved should be addressed with a manager or Operations Manager.

18 Breach of this policy

- 18.1 Failure to follow the guidelines in this policy is considered a serious offence and will be investigated thoroughly and dealt with through our disciplinary procedure. Serious breaches may lead to dismissal (for employees) and termination of any agreement (for workers or volunteers).

19 Monitoring and review

- 19.1 will monitor and review this policy and procedures on an annual basis, or at an earlier opportunity should the need arise. The information gained via completed report forms and feedback from relevant external bodies will also form the basis for any necessary changes in policy or procedure.

20 Related policies and documents

- Business ethics and integrity policy
- Disciplinary policy
- Equal opportunity policy
- Health and safety policy
- Managing difficult and violent situations policy
- Personal relationships at work policy
- Whistleblowing policy
- Work experience policy

The above list is not exhaustive.

21 **Further information**

Any queries or comments about this policy should be addressed to your line manager.

22 **Policy owner**

This policy is owned and maintained by Operations Manager.

23 Policy review date

Date last reviewed: 05/08/2023.