



stopcheck

a step-by-step guide for organisations to safeguard children

NSPCC 
Cruelty to children must stop. **FULL STOP.**

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A safeguarding culture – what does this mean?

Children have a right to be safe and happy in the activities that they, or their parents and carers, choose. Parents have a right to believe that the organisations to which they entrust their children are safe. Organisations' like yours have a duty to care for the children for whom they provide activities or services and most make every effort to do so. Sometimes however, there are people who work or volunteer to help in local or community groups who pose a risk to children and may harm them. Sometimes you or someone in the organisation may suspect that a child is being harmed at home. This booklet is written to help you to run a safe organisation and help your staff or volunteers respond appropriately to concerns they may have about children in their care.

Good child protection practice protects not only children but also the staff and volunteers who have responsibility for them. This is called a safeguarding culture. By reading this booklet and following the advice offered you can reassure yourself, the parents and carers of the children and young people² who use your project and the community you serve, that you are taking all reasonable precautions to safeguard the welfare of these children.

There are a number of possible reasons for using this booklet. You may:

- have been advised that you have to develop a child protection policy in order to apply for funding to run your group or project
- be applying for charitable status and the Charity Commission has asked for sight of your child protection policy
- have experienced an incident of child abuse – or suspicion of abuse – and you want to make sure it doesn't happen again
- have read in the papers or heard in the media about a case of abuse in an organisation like yours
- simply want to ensure that your organisation is as safe as possible for children.

¹ The term 'organisations' covers voluntary, commercial, private or independent agencies or organisations. It is used interchangeably with the term 'project'.

² The terms 'children' and 'young people' are used interchangeably. The spirit of the information and advice also applies to young adults who may be vulnerable by the nature of an impairment or disability.

What is a risky project?

Sometimes it is easy to spot what might be called a risky organisation – maybe a project has a poor reputation locally and is not very popular.

Here are some features of organisations where abuse might be more likely to happen:

- minimal supervision of children, staff or volunteers
- unsafe buildings or activity areas
- no information for children about who to tell if they are worried or upset
- no welcome or encouragement for parents or carers becoming involved in activities, for example as a helper or accompanying adult
- new volunteers or staff taken on without any checks
- no guidelines or procedures for dealing with worries or concerns about children – or about the behaviour of other volunteers or staff
- a child protection policy that is gathering dust on top of a cupboard
- no supervision of staff or volunteers.

While most organisations are run by well-intentioned, honest and reliable people, we know that the few who are determined to harm children, deliberately seek out groups or organisations where they can meet children. Sometimes these people are charismatic leaders with great charm and who seem very good with children. A safeguarding culture will discourage them from becoming involved and make it harder for them to harm or abuse children.

For example, one sex offender played the electronic organ in his local working men's club. He encouraged children to 'have a go' on the instrument and offered to give lessons to one or two. Unbeknown to the parents who were pleased that their son/s evidently showed some talent, he was taking them out individually for rides in his car to the local park and abusing them there, telling them not to tell their parents or they would be "in trouble".

An organisational health check

It is far better to prevent things going wrong in your project by putting safeguards in place in advance of any incident or suspected abuse – in exactly the same way that you consider fire, health and safety hazards – and take steps to minimise the possibility of this occurring.

Begin by answering the following organisational health check questions:

Does your organisation have the following?

- A **child protection policy** and a **procedure** for what to do if there are concerns about a child's welfare.
- A **named person** for dealing with concerns or allegations of abuse and step by step guidance on what action to take.
- A rigorous **recruitment and selection** process for paid staff and for volunteers who work with children.
- A **written code of behaviour** which outlines good practice when working with children.
- A **training** plan and regular opportunities for all those in contact with children to learn about child protection and about health and safety.
- A **'whistleblowing'** policy. That is, an open and well-publicised way in which adults and young people can voice concerns about abusive or unethical conduct.
- **Information** for young people and for parents or carers about the child protection policy and where to go for help.
- A **protective culture** that puts children's interests first – children must feel confident that if they have concerns someone will listen and take them seriously.
- Guidance on **taking children away on trips** and on **internet use: new technology safety, guidance on use of photographs, video, digital equipment and websites.**
- Policies on **bullying** and on **health and safety**. You will need processes for dealing with **complaints** and for taking **disciplinary action** where necessary.

If the answer to any of these is “no” – then read on.

Respect!

This booklet is about respecting children and having a child-centred perspective. It basically means that children should be:

- listened to and heard
- valued and treated as individuals
- respected for their identity and uniqueness
- encouraged and praised
- involved in decisions, as appropriate.

How will children know that this is important to your group too?

It is important to establish open and honest discussion with the young people themselves, about all kinds of issues that will affect them while they are attending your project. This will convey the message that they matter and that you care about how they feel about the organisation.

One of the sad facts about child abuse is that it silences children and young people and stops them telling even known and trusted adults about what is happening to them. There are many reasons for this, mostly to do with the fact that adults can use threats or fear to stop children

speaking out. This means that if you truly want your organisation to promote a safe culture and environment then you have to positively encourage children to speak out. You can convey this in a number of ways but don't forget that for some children who are very young or who are disabled, you may need to make extra effort to ensure that they understand. These are some steps you could take:

- encourage the involvement of children in the activities by setting up management committees that include them
- really listen and take account of what they say
- make sure you include children whose communication methods are different or for whom English is not their first language
- display posters and leaflets about the club or organisation that talk openly about the need for young people to feel safe
- make sure that each child knows a named person to go to should they have any concerns
- make sure that your publicity materials make it clear that certain behaviours are totally unacceptable, such as racism or bullying
- conduct short questionnaires or reviews from time to time to check how things are going.

Recruiting safely

Whatever activities your group or project is providing for children, you will want to make sure that you have the best people for the job. Selecting an unsuitable person can have grave consequences for the children themselves and for your organisation and its reputation. A sad fact is that some people who harm children have very good social skills and may hold prominent positions in the community. You should not take anything on trust or make assumptions based on someone's job or position.

Here are some tips to help you recruit safely. These apply to people who are **not** paid as well as to those who are paid:

- **define the role** – consider the tasks and skills necessary for the job and what kind of person is most suited to the position
- **selection criteria** – develop a list of essential and desirable qualifications, skills and experience and shortlist against this
- **recruitment publicity** – wide circulation of all vacancies
- **written application form** – this should include personal details, past and current work/volunteering experience

- **written declaration** – stating that they have no past convictions, cautions or bind-overs and no pending cases affecting why they might be considered unsuitable to work with children
- **identification** – ask for photographic documentation to confirm identity, such as a passport or driving licence
- **qualifications** – ask for documentation
- **interview** – preferably at least two representatives from the organisation should meet with an applicant to explore information contained in their form and to explore their attitudes towards working with children. This also provides an opportunity to discuss your child protection policy and to ensure that the applicant has the ability and commitment to meet the standards required. Highlight any points to raise in interview.

These should include:

- areas you want to explore in more detail
- gaps in employment history
- vague statements or unsubstantiated qualifications
- frequent changes of employment.

- it is helpful to use methods other than an interview to test suitability and help with decision making, such as an exercise, role play or presentation
- **references** – ask for written references from at least two people who are not family members and ideally, who have first-hand knowledge of the applicant's experience of work or contact with children. If there are doubts, follow up with a telephone call.
- sometimes **young people** who have taken part in activities are encouraged to become **volunteers**. The same principles should apply regarding their suitability to work with children.
- **Criminal Records Bureau (England and Wales)**
This gives employers and voluntary organisations access to information about criminal records and other relevant information about people they intend to appoint in paid or unpaid posts working with children and young people under 18. It provides a one-stop-shop service across England and Wales (see below for Northern Ireland and Scotland). Access to the Bureau's services

is available to all organisations working with children either directly as registered bodies or through umbrella organisations. It is recommended that you seek information directly from the CRB Disclosure website or helpline for the specific needs of your organisation.

You will need to consider the lower age limit to check volunteers – currently recommended at 14. You will also need to consider new employees from abroad and whether checks are likely to be obtained. Checks will need to be repeated periodically and once every three years is currently recommended.

When you have selected an applicant, ensure that they obtain the appropriate criminal record certificate (ECRC) from the Criminal Records Bureau.

For Northern Ireland please check with the **Pre-employment Consultancy Service** or with **Our Duty to Care**, and for Scotland, check with **Disclosure Scotland**.

Some questions and answers

Can I be confident that a check will ensure safety?

No. It is important to realise that these services are there to provide **additional** safeguards to the recruitment of staff or volunteers. Of itself, a check cannot be relied upon to screen out all abusers. Many abusers are never convicted nor come to the notice of the authorities. The services overleaf merely provide a means of accessing any information that might be held by the police, the Department of Health or Department for Education and Skills (or similar), or children's service authorities.

Which organisations can access these services?

They are available for any statutory, voluntary, community or private sector organisation working with children. Anyone wishing to use the service must first apply to do so. There are Registered Bodies for some organisations and you may be able to apply through them. A Code of Practice for Registered Bodies is available from the CRB and should be used as guidance for storage of records and confidentiality. It is a good idea to contact the service through their helpdesks or websites (see resources section).

Can all posts be checked?

No. It will depend on whether the applicant has actual access to children and whether this is supervised or not. Good childcare practice within your organisation should mean that if possible, substantial, unsupervised access to children should be limited or non-existent. You will need to check the levels of contact with the service criteria.

What about checks on existing staff?

Checks on existing members of staff who fit the criteria for vetting and who have not previously been checked should be made. If an individual takes up new duties that bring him or her into regular contact with children, or if new information comes to light about an individual, then a check should be made.

How can I spot an abuser?

People who pose a threat of sexual abuse to children can be skilled at avoiding detection. Here are some possible indicators that might alert you to a possibility of sexual abuse – someone who:

- pays an unusual amount of attention to individual or groups of children and provides them with presents, money or favours
- seeks out vulnerable children, for example, disabled children
- seeks out opportunities to spend time with single children or a small group on a regular basis
- takes a child or a small group of children to his/her own home
- is vague about previous employment or gaps in employment history
- avoids co-working or supervision of his/her work
- encourages secretiveness about his/her activities with children
- talks or behaves inappropriately towards children.

Reducing risk: increasing safety

If you look back at the organisational health check you will see that the first item is policy and procedures. Maybe your funding source or insurance company has asked you to prepare these documents and you are unsure how to go about it. Your umbrella organisation (if you have one) or your funders, may well be able to help you with this – so do ask for help. Someone there may have firstcheck (prawfycyntaf – Welsh version), from which this information is drawn (see resources) and will be pleased to help you. The following information may help you to begin to think about what you need to do.

A policy statement sets out:

- what the organisation wishes to convey regarding child protection
- why the organisation is undertaking this action
- how, in broad terms, the organisation is going to fulfil this responsibility
- who it applies and relates to, ie, all staff, definition of 'child', principles and ethos to apply to vulnerable young people above the age of 18 years
- application of policy with cross-reference to other relevant policies and procedure

It should be no longer than one or two sides of A4.

The policy statement should also:

- identify the organisation, its purpose and function
- recognise the needs of children from minority ethnic groups and children who are disabled
- briefly state the main legislation and guidance that supports the policy (see resources).

Your organisation will also require an action plan stating how you propose to ensure everyone, including children, is aware of and understands your safeguards.

Child protection procedures

It is very important that there are procedures to ensure that there is a speedy and effective response for dealing with concerns about a child or young person. Take account of the ways that concerns may be raised. These include:

- a child might tell about their own or another child's abuse
- someone else might report that a child has told them or that they strongly believe that a child has been or is being abused
- a child might show some signs of physical injury for which there appears to be no satisfactory explanation

- a child's behaviour may indicate that it is likely that she or he is being abused
- something in the behaviour of one of the workers or a young person, or in the way the worker or young person relates to a child, alerts them or makes them feel uncomfortable in some way
- observing one child abusing another (peer abuse).

The procedures should, at a minimum, include:

- purpose and aim of the procedures. Do they apply to everyone in the organisation? For example, they should include all those in contact with children.
- definition of different categories of abuse – physical, emotional, sexual abuse or neglect
- recognition of abuse – brief examples of signs and indicators which might give rise to concerns
- responding to signs or suspicions of abuse
 - lines of responsibility
 - named person role
 - actions to be taken, including contact numbers
- responding to allegations of abuse against a member of staff, other worker or volunteer
 - lines of responsibility
 - actions to be taken, including contact numbers
- responding to a child disclosing abuse – what to do and say
- responding to allegations of abuse against someone not working in the organisation – this may be a parent or carer, another child or anybody else
- recording information
 - what information should be recorded and by whom
 - time-scales for passing on information
- confidentiality policy
 - the legal principle that the “welfare of the child is paramount” means that the considerations of confidentiality which might apply to other situations in the organisation, should not be allowed to over-ride the right of children to be protected from harm. However, every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned when an allegation has been made and is being investigated.

Why don't children tell about abuse?

Many people commonly believe that a child or young person would resist abuse at all costs and if unable to do so would tell another grown-up at the earliest opportunity. This assumption is wrong and is based on ignorance about the power relationships between adults and children as well as an underestimation about the deliberate and skilled targeting of victims by offenders.

A number of common barriers exist that prevent children from telling or, if they do, often lead to them retracting their statement. Children often don't tell because they:

- are scared because they have been threatened
- believe they will be taken away from home
- believe they are to blame
- think it is what happens to all children
- feel embarrassed or guilty
- don't want the abuser to get into trouble
- have communication or learning difficulties
- may not have the vocabulary for what happened
- are afraid they won't be believed.

Remember child abuse thrives on secrecy.

Why don't adults report their suspicions?

All of us have a natural revulsion upon hearing that someone has deliberately harmed a child. Sometimes we:

- find it hard to believe what we are hearing
- cannot believe the suspicion that may be about someone we know
- fear we might get it wrong or make it worse
- fear the consequences of getting it wrong – for the child, family and for ourselves
- simply don't want to be involved
- do not have the information on what to do and who to contact.

These are normal reactions. However, it is more serious if they prevent us listening to a child and responding appropriately.

A fear of retribution can also be a powerful silencer. It is therefore very important that staff or volunteers have the opportunity and permission to speak out.

A named person

It is good practice for all organisations, however small, to identify at least one person to be responsible for dealing with allegations or suspicions of abuse. Everyone in the organisation should know who this is and how to contact them. In many smaller organisations this person is often the leader, manager or officer-in-charge.

The role of the named person is to:

- receive information from staff, volunteers, children or parents and carers who have child protection concerns and record it
- assess the information promptly and carefully, clarifying or obtaining more information about the matter as appropriate
- consult initially with a statutory child protection agency such as the local children's service authorities or health board, or the NSPCC Helpline, to test out any doubts or uncertainty about the concerns
- make a formal referral to a statutory child protection agency or the police.

It is NOT their role to decide whether a child has been abused or not.

This is the task of the children's service authorities who have the legal responsibility, or of the NSPCC which also has powers to investigate child protection concerns. It is however everybody's responsibility to ensure that concerns are shared and appropriate action taken.

The named person should be aware of the local statutory child protection network, the role of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, (Child Protection Committee, Scotland) and the existence of local child protection procedures.

The named person needs to be aware of the relevant contact numbers and addresses of the statutory agencies in their locality. If concerns arise, for example when away on a trip, contact should be made with local agencies whose details will be in the phone directory. Social services departments have an out-of-hours duty team so can be contacted at any time.

Dealing with concerns

Maybe a member of staff or a volunteer has told you about concerns they have about a child or about the behaviour of someone in the organisation. Sometimes these concerns are vague.

What should you do? It is important that you listen and take them seriously. Make sure that you:

- make a written record of the observations or the information received. This should be done with the named person after discussion
- sign and date the record
- seek advice from social services
- follow your procedures.

Maybe a child is telling you something themselves. It is really important that you:

- stay calm
- listen carefully to what is said
- find an appropriate early opportunity to explain that it is likely that the information will need to be shared with others – do not promise to keep secrets
- allow the child to continue at her/his own pace
- ask questions for clarification only and at all times avoid asking questions that suggest a particular answer
- reassure the child that they have done the right thing in telling you
- tell them what you will do next and with whom the information will be shared
- record in writing what was said using the child's own words, as soon as possible – note date, time, any names mentioned, to whom the information was given and ensure the record is signed and dated.

A code of behaviour for everyone

It is a good idea to think about how you expect everyone to behave in your organisation. This includes staff, volunteers, parents and the children themselves. It is important that a code of behaviour reflects the child centred principles of the organisation. It should be made known to all children and young people and workers and, where possible, it should be prominently displayed, perhaps by a poster.

Children should be given every opportunity to learn that no-one has the right to do anything to them that makes them feel uncomfortable. They should be taught and encouraged not to put up with any behaviour from adults or children within the organisation which makes them feel threatened.

Some suggestions to include are to:

- treat all children and young people with respect
- provide an example of good conduct that you wish others to follow
- ensure that whenever possible there is more than one adult present during activities with children and young people, or at least that you are within sight or hearing of others
- respect a young person's right to personal privacy
- be aware that even physical contact with a child or young person may be misinterpreted
- recognise that special caution is required in moments when you are discussing sensitive issues with children or young people
- operate within the organisation's principles and guidance
- challenge unacceptable behaviour and report all allegations/suspicions of abuse.

Induction, training and support

In order to make sure that all your staff and volunteers understand and are committed to a safeguarding culture it is important to make them feel welcome and supported. This starts right at the beginning of their involvement with your project or group and an induction plan will be an excellent starting point. This can cover all sorts of things such as the actual structure of your organisation – a ‘who’s who’; a description of the purpose of your project and what your aims are; other policies or documents they need to know about, eg, health and safety – and of course it is an opportunity to introduce new members to your child protection policy and procedures. It is a good idea to have a trial period and say that appointment will be conditional on the successful completion of a trial period (say six months). Attention should be given to the new worker’s approach to working with children and commitment to them.

Training can also be very important in making sure that new staff (or existing staff) are provided with opportunities for developing new skills or learning about new factual information that affects their role. Again, training should also cover child protection and the NSPCC has developed a range of resources designed to assist organisations in

providing child protection awareness training at different levels and at minimum cost (see resources).

Support and supervision provides an opportunity for both supervisors and staff and volunteers, to share any concerns about the work. Supervision involves meeting regularly with staff and volunteers either individually and/or in groups. It offers an opportunity to discuss some of the tricky situations that may arise. For example, ‘abuse of trust’ means a situation where a young person over the age of 18 who holds some power or influence over a younger person in the organisation, engages in a sexual relationship with them. This could be construed as an offence under the Sexual Offences (Amendments) Act 2000 (UK wide).

Supervision also conveys the message that you take your responsibilities seriously and are available to support staff. It is good practice to keep a note of any action points or issues of concern and these should be regarded as confidential. It is also important to have a system for a written annual review of workers so that they can be given praise for good work they are doing and helped to develop their skills further.

Resources – legislation, guidance, training resources and useful contacts

The Children Act 1989 (England and Wales)

The Children (Scotland) Act 1995

The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995

Legislation to ensure the welfare and developmental needs of children are met, including their need to be protected from harm.

Children Act 2004

This act legislates for children and young people and provides a national framework for change.

www.cpsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/20040031.htm

Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000

Provides a comprehensive definition of working with children.

www.hmsso.gov.uk

The Protection of Children Act 1999

A practical guide for all organisations working with children.

www.doh.gov.uk/scg/childprotect

The Data Protection Act 1984 and 1998

www.legislation.hmsso.gov.uk/acts/acts1998/19980029.htm

The Human Rights Act 1998

www.homeoffice.gov.uk/hract/hramenu.htm

What to do if you're worried a child is being abused (DHS 2003)

www.dh.gov.uk

Working Together to Safeguard Children

(Home Office, Department of Health, Department for Education and Employment 1999)

www.dh.gov.uk

(National Assembly for Wales 2000)

Co-operating to Safeguard Children

(Northern Ireland 2002)

Protecting Children – A Shared Responsibility

Scottish Executive

Government, Assembly or Parliamentary guidance for agencies working together in the protection of children, including community and voluntary services.

Caring for young people and the vulnerable?

Home Office guidance for preventing the abuse of trust

www.homeoffice.gov.uk

Forthcoming: Working Together to Safeguard Children

HM Government 2006

Our Duty to Care

Principles of good practice for the protection of children and young people. Available from Volunteer Development Agency, tel: 028 9023 6100

www.volunteering-ni.org

Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits and Exchanges

Department for Education and Employment (1998)

tel: 0808 100 50 60

Child Protection Awareness Programme (distance learning materials)

Keeping Children Safe

Keeping Children Safe in Sport

Creating a Culture of Safety

Child Protection Awareness in Health

Child Protection Awareness in Education

Educare, deBrus Marketing, tel: 01926 436200

www.debrus.co.uk

Protecting Disabled Children and Adults in Sport and Recreation

The National Coaching Foundation, 114 Cardigan Road,

Headingley, Leeds LS6 3BJ, tel: 0113 274 4802

email: coaching@ncf.org.uk

Away from Home and Safe – Getting Residentials Right

216 Belmont Road, Belfast BT4 2AT

tel: 01232 651498

www.niweb.org/safe

Have Fun and Be Safe

A guide to help parents and carers choose children's activities (produced by the Volunteer Development Agency and the NSPCC) Code 0188 – up to 10 copies free from NSPCC Publications and Information Unit, tel: 020 7825 2775 email: infounit@nspcc.org.uk

www.nspcc.org.uk

SafeSportAway

A guide for taking children and young people away on sports fixtures, trips or tours.

NSPCC and ASA (2000)

Available from the Child Protection in Sport Unit
tel: 0116 234 7278

Stop it now!

A public information and awareness raising campaign regarding sexual abuse. A helpline is available for those who are worried or unsure about their own or others' behaviour or thoughts about children.

Helpline: 0808 1000 900

www.stopitnow.org.uk

Child Protection in Sport Unit

Working in partnership with major sports organisations to develop safeguards for children in sport.

email: cpsu@nspcc.org.uk

www.thecpsu.org.uk

The Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service

Part of PCCA Christian Child Care

P.O. Box 133, Swanley, Kent, BR8 7UQ

www.ccpas.co.uk

www.pcca.co.uk

Criminal Records Bureau

PO Box 91, Liverpool L69 2UH

Helpline: 0870 90 90 811

www.crb.gov.uk

www.disclosure.gov.uk

Firstcheck (Prawfcyntaf)

A step-by-step guide to help organisations safeguard children.

Revised edition 2006 with accompanying CD-ROM.

Price £24, incl P&P

www.nspcc.org.uk/inform

Safetycheck (Prawfdiogelwch)

A set of standards for safeguarding and protecting children and young people in organisations.

Available from consultancy@nspcc.org.uk

Kidscheck (Prawfplant)

A companion product for children and young people to assess their organisations themselves.

Available from consultancy@nspcc.org.uk

NSPCC Child Protection Helpline – “Don’t Keep it to Yourself”

The NSPCC Child Protection Helpline is a free 24-hour service that provides counselling, information and advice to anyone concerned about a child at risk of abuse.

Telephone	0808 800 5000
Textphone for people who are deaf or hard of hearing	0800 056 0566
Email	help@nspcc.org.uk
NSPCC Asian Helpline (Monday – Friday, 11am – 7pm)	0800 096 7719
NSPCC Cymru/Wales Helpline (Monday – Friday, 10am – 6pm)	0808 100 2524



Useful numbers

You can fill this in with your local contacts:

Your named person

Children's services authority local office

Children's services authorities out of hours duty number

Local police station

Other

Other

Remember!

- never do nothing
- don't assume someone else will do something
- never push a child for more information
- never discuss your worries with the suspected abuser.

Good luck!



This booklet was produced by NSPCC Consultancy.
The material is drawn from the step-by-step guide **firstcheck** (**prawfycyntaf**).

Advice about our services or further copies can be obtained from:
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