

Safer Working Practices

Principles

All adults who come into contact with children and young people in their work have a duty of care¹ to safeguard and promote their welfare.

The Children Act 2004, as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017, strengthens an important relationship by placing new duties on key agencies in a local area. Specifically, the police, clinical commissioning groups and the local authority are under a duty to make arrangements to work together, and with other partners locally, to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area².

The vast majority of adults who work with children act professionally and aim to provide a safe and supportive environment for children and young people in their care. However, in this area of work, tensions and misunderstandings can occur, and the behaviour of adults can give rise to allegations of abuse being made against them.

Allegations may be malicious or misplaced. They may arise from differing perceptions of the same event, but when they occur, they are inevitably distressing and difficult for all concerned. Equally, it must be recognised that some allegations will be genuine and there are adults who will deliberately seek out, create or exploit opportunities to abuse children.

It is therefore essential that all possible steps are taken to safeguard children and young people and ensure that the adults working with them are safe to do so, and that adults recognize that they may be vulnerable to accusations and are made aware of what constitutes illegal behaviour and what might be considered as misconduct.

This document offers practical guidance for individuals likely to be working with children and young people in the settings and situations appropriate to mentoring and related activities. It works alongside Bath & North East Somerset Community Safety & Safeguarding Partnership Procedures at <https://bcssp.org.uk/p/policies-procedures/adult-policies-procedures>

These are followed by Mentoring Plus staff in the event that any issues are brought to their attention. This document should be read alongside the Lone Working policy for particular information relating to dangerous/threatening behaviour.

What to do if you are worried a child is being abused

Everyone working with children and young people through Mentoring Plus is made aware of the procedures for safeguarding the welfare of children and young people as set out in our Child Protection Policy.

Adults have a duty to report any child protection or welfare concerns to the relevant project safeguarding lead, the organisational designated safeguarding lead and / or

¹ The duty which rests upon an individual to ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure the safety of a child or young person involved in any activity, or interaction for which that individual is responsible. Any person in charge of, or working with children and young people in any capacity is considered, both legally and morally, to owe them a duty of care

² Taken from "Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023"

designated trustee (see section 8). These practitioners follow Bath & North East Somerset Community Safety & Safeguarding Partnership Procedures to immediately assess the risk to the child and take appropriate action.

All safeguarding leads, and practitioners should read and follow statutory guidance as offered in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 (HM Government), in order that they can respond to individual children's and young people's needs appropriately.

1. Underpinning Principles

- The welfare of the child is paramount.²
- It is the responsibility of all adults to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. This responsibility extends to a duty of care for those adults employed, commissioned or contracted to work with children and young people.
- Adults who work with children are responsible for their own actions and behaviour and should avoid any conduct which would lead any reasonable person to question their motivation and intentions.
- Adults should work, and be seen to work, in an open and transparent way.
- The same professional standards should always be applied regardless of culture, disability, gender, language, ethnicity, religious belief, sexual identity, or similar.
- Adults should continually monitor and review their practice and ensure they follow the guidance contained in this document.
- Whether working in a paid or voluntary capacity, adults have a duty to keep children and young people safe and to protect them from sexual, physical and emotional harm. Children and young people have a right to be treated with respect and dignity. It follows that trusted adults are expected to take reasonable steps to ensure the safety and well-being of children and young people.

2. Training and supervision

- 2.1 These guidelines form part of training and induction for all new staff members, freelancers and volunteers with Mentoring Plus. Every member of staff, freelancer and volunteer signs a confirmation that they have read and understood these guidelines.
- 2.2 These guidelines are shared at least annually to all staff who are required to review all relevant policies and procedures and participate in group discussions about implementation.
- 2.3 It is the responsibility of the Head of Practice, with support from Senior Practitioners to ensure that staff receive adequate supervision to remain aware of these practice guidelines and other issues impacting their work. All staff receive line management supervision at least once every month, in addition to clinical supervision, including identifying needs for professional development and training (see Supervision Policy).

² Children Act 1989

- 2.4 Practitioners working directly with young people report to their line manager once per month in addition to undertaking clinical supervision at least every month relating more specifically to their caseloads.
- 2.5 Practitioners working directly with young people are to undertake standard inter-agency child protection (CP) training at least every three years. Those in senior practitioner positions as well as designated safeguarding leads and deputies are required to access advanced inter-agency CP / specialist CP training every 2 years.
- 2.6 All Mentoring Plus staff are to undertake single agency training as a minimum requirement every 3 years. Staff and the nominated Trustee with safeguarding responsibility must undertake advanced CP training, with a refresher every 2 years. All other Trustees are to undertake internal safeguarding training at a minimum of every 3 years.
- 2.7 All mentors (staff, freelancers and volunteers) accept monthly supervision from practitioners within Mentoring Plus, referring to these guidelines as necessary, and during which any potential risk factors are always discussed and appropriate steps taken.
- 2.8 Mentoring Plus' Supervision Policy should be referred to for detailed scope methodology.

3. Trust and propriety

- 3.1 Adult staff, freelancers and volunteers working with children and young people are in a position of trust due to their age, knowledge and authority. They have a responsibility to ensure that an unequal balance of power is not used for personal advantage or gratification.
- 3.2 Adults always maintain appropriate professional boundaries and avoid behaviour which might be misinterpreted by others. They must report and record any incident with this potential.
- 3.3 Staff, freelancers and volunteers conduct themselves in accordance with our Behaviour Code for Adults, Equal Opportunities Policy and other relevant policies.
- 3.4 Staff and volunteers need to maintain public confidence in their ability to safeguard the welfare and best interests of children and young people, by maintaining acceptable standards of personal conduct. Their behaviour or actions in their personal life can indicate an unsuitability to work with children or young people. Examples include misuse of drugs or alcohol, acts of violence and making demeaning or discriminatory comments via any medium. Mentoring Plus will also have to assess potential risk to children and young people if the behaviour of an adult's family members indicates a similar risk.
- 3.5 In dress and appearance, staff and volunteers ensure they are dressed appropriately for tasks and work they undertake, and their clothing is not likely to be viewed as offensive, revealing, provocative, culturally insensitive or containing contentious slogans.
- 3.6 In order to protect data, all visitors attending Mentoring Plus offices to meet with Mentoring Plus must be accompanied off the premises at the end of the meeting.
- 3.7 Staff, volunteers and freelancers are to wear a valid Mentoring Plus photo ID badge.

4. Boundaries

- 4.1 No child or young person should be in or invited into, the home³ of an adult working with them through Mentoring Plus. If this is essential, the reason for it has been firmly established and agreed in advance with the charity's senior managers.
- 4.2 Staff, freelancers and volunteers are aware that giving gifts or rewards to children and young people is only acceptable if the action has been agreed by Mentoring Plus practitioners in advance, and the reason for doing so agreed and recorded. Methods and criteria for selecting young people to receive rewards are transparent and open to scrutiny. Adults may accept token gifts from children and their families but only on an irregular basis and of no significant value. All gifts must be recorded.
- 4.3 Occasionally, a child or young person may develop an infatuation with an adult who works with them. These adults should deal with these situations sensitively and appropriately to maintain the dignity and safety of all concerned, making sure that their own behaviour is above reproach. An adult, who becomes aware that a child or young person may be developing an infatuation, should discuss this at the earliest opportunity with their line manager or practitioner, so that appropriate action can be taken to avoid any hurt, distress or embarrassment.
- 4.4 Adults should not seek to have social contact with children and young people or their families, unless the reason for this contact has been firmly established and agreed with senior managers. In the case of coincidental contact, the adult should exercise their professional judgement and discuss the situation with their manager or with the parent of the child or young person.
- 4.5 Intimate or sexual relationships between children/young people and the adults who work with them is a grave breach of trust. It may be regarded as a criminal offence and will always be a matter for disciplinary action. Allowing or encouraging a relationship to develop in a way which might lead to a sexual relationship is also unacceptable. Adults are made aware that conferring inappropriate special attention and favour upon a child might be construed as being part of a 'grooming' process and will give rise to concerns about their behaviour.
- 4.6 Occasionally some forms of physical contact with children are necessary and appropriate as part of the adult's role. Adults must only touch children in ways which are appropriate in response to their needs at the time, of limited duration and appropriate to their age, stage of development, gender, ethnicity and background. It must never be assumed that it is acceptable to touch a child as a means of communication. Permission should be sought from a child or young person before physical contact is made.
- 4.7 It should not be necessary for any staff member or volunteer to carry out personal or intimate care on a child or young person except in administration of essential first aid.
- 4.8 Adults may volunteer to undertake first aid tasks, but they should be suitably trained and qualified before administering first aid and/or any agreed medication, except in life threatening situations or when operating with professional guidance e.g. from the emergency services. When administering

³ This includes any home or domestic settings used or frequented by the adult

first aid, wherever possible, adults should ensure that another adult is aware of the action being taken. Parents/carers should always be informed when first aid has been administered. Parents/carers should always be informed of any accident or incident that has taken place even if no first aid has been administered.

- 4.9 All children and young people have a right to be treated with respect and dignity even in those circumstances where they display difficult or challenging behaviour. Adults may never use any form of degrading treatment to punish a child, including sarcasm, demeaning or insensitive comments. The use of corporal punishment is never acceptable and has no legal defence for adults who work with children and young people.
- 4.10 The use of physical intervention can only be justified in exceptional circumstances e.g. to avoid immediate physical harm to the child or others. It must be proportionate to the risk of harm, and must only ever be used as a last resort⁴ when other strategies have failed. In all cases where physical intervention is employed the incident and subsequent actions must be documented and reported. This includes written and signed accounts of all those involved, including the child or young person. The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), or deputy in lieu of the DSL, will phone the social care Duty Team for advice. The parents/carers are informed the same day.

5. Communications, inappropriate content and usage

- 5.1 Unusually for an organisation working with children and young people, it is often necessary for a volunteer mentor to share a mobile number with a young person and vice versa, in order to facilitate arrangements to meet for mentoring. Mentors and mentees will only communicate for the purpose of arranging mentoring sessions. This information is only shared with the knowledge and consent of Mentoring Plus, the volunteer and the parent/carer of the young person.
- 5.2 With parent/carer permission, staff may also use a young person's mobile number to communicate with them about specific arrangements. A mobile number is also given to young people for calling/texting their designated practitioner and its reasonable use explained at the outset of their project involvement.
- 5.3 Adults do not share with or request from the young person any personal information via any medium other than what is essential and appropriate for carrying out their role. All communications with a young person are transparent, open to scrutiny and avoid any content which could be misinterpreted.
- 5.4 Recording children and young people via any form of recording equipment including cameras, camera phones, video, audio, webcams etc must only ever be carried out with the explicit agreement of Mentoring Plus and used for a specific and appropriate purpose, with the consent of the child and parent / carer. All recordings/images are immediately given to the charity and deleted from the device. Use of images in any public setting requires

⁴ The Last Resort Principle The use of physical restraint should only be taken when there is no other realistic alternative. This does not mean that we always expect people to methodically work their way through a series of failing strategies before attempting an intervention in which they have some confidence. Nor does it mean always waiting until the danger is acute and imminent, by which time the prospect of safely managing it may be significantly reduced. It does mean that we expect staff to conduct a risk assessment and choose the safest alternative available. This includes thinking creatively about any alternatives to physical intervention which may be effective. Bernard Allen 2005, Safeguarding Children Safeguarding Staff

informed consent of the parent/carer. Staff, freelancers and volunteers can also undertake live video calls through appropriate mediums following gaining consent from the parent / carer. Guidance on using this facility appropriately can be found in our “Staying Safe Online for Practitioners document” for staff members, and in our “Online mentoring guidance for mentors” document, available on request.

- 5.5 There are no circumstances that will justify adults possessing indecent images of children. Adults who access and possess links to such websites will be viewed as a significant potential threat to children and this will lead to criminal investigation and the individual being barred from working with children and young people, if proven.
- 5.6 Adults should not use equipment belonging to their organisation to access adult pornography; neither should personal equipment containing these images or links to them be brought into the workplace.
- 5.7 Adults ensure that children and young people are not exposed to any inappropriate images or web links. The Data Protection policy requires use of passwords etc, and the charity ensures that any use of computer equipment by children is supervised and subject to appropriate access controls.
- 5.8 Where any unsuitable materials are found, the police and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) should be immediately informed. Adults should not attempt to investigate the matter or evaluate the material themselves, as this may lead to evidence being contaminated which in itself can lead to a criminal prosecution.

Specific guidance on communications via social media is set out in our Online Communications Policy.

6. Group work / activities

- 6.1 Group work is any activity involving two or more children or young people. In group activity situations, adult staff, freelancers and volunteers remain in a position of trust and all behaviour must remain within professional boundaries as set out above.
- 6.2 Children attend activities and group sessions with their own consent and that of their parent/carer who is informed of the planned activities, supervision, transport and where relevant, sleeping arrangements (see 8.8 below)
- 6.3 All activities undertaken must be age-appropriate and meet requirements outlined in the Health & Safety Policy. Particularly where activities could present dangers such as sport, climbing or those on or in water, it is the responsibility of Mentoring Plus to ensure that it is led by suitably qualified instructors, all their guidance is followed, and that written assurance is gained in advance of adequate equipment, licensing and insurance. See also the Child Protection Policy for procedures ensuring the suitability of third-party service providers.
- 6.4 Mentoring Plus always supervises group work via at least 1 member of permanent staff, and in some situations adult volunteers may also be present. There is always a minimum ratio of 1 adult to 4 children for their safe supervision. Other than when driving young people, it is contrary to this policy for fewer than two adults to be present during any activity or group

session organised by the charity. If this is ever necessary, it must be previously justified and agreed by the CEO or designated deputy.

- 6.5 Staff undertake thorough risk assessments and offer the reports to young people and families for inspection before the event.
- 6.6 All young people (staff, freelancers and mentors where appropriate) are to wear safety gear appropriate to each activity. For example, a helmet must be worn whilst cycling, skateboarding, roller skating, scootering and horse riding; necessary padding must be worn for activities such as skateboarding. This list is not exhaustive.
- 6.7 All adults responsible for young people during a group activity share information about its aims and objectives and the appropriate background knowledge of each young person in advance of the session, including reading a personal risk assessment for each, incorporating medical information.
- 6.8 The responsible staff member ensures that children and young people hear and understand all necessary health and safety information about their activity, the setting and emergency procedures.
- 6.9 Where an overnight stay is involved in the activity, staff are responsible for ensuring that appropriate arrangements are made for the gender mix of staff. There is no sharing of beds by children, or by adults with children, and no sharing of bedrooms by adults with children except in a dormitory setting with more than one young person always present. In all cases, the arrangements are clearly communicated and consented to by the parent/carer in advance of the event.
- 6.10 Staff report on and review every activity afterwards, reflecting on any issues or safety concerns raised and incorporating lessons learnt into future plans.

7. Mentees carrying an article that could constitute a weapon

A 'mentor' is defined as a member of staff, freelancer or volunteer throughout. A 'weapon' is any item which could be interpreted for this use. This also includes 'practice weapons' (see 7.6).

- 7.1 A discussion takes place at the point of matching, led by the practitioner, which makes clear how Mentoring Plus would define a weapon, why the rules exist, and the few rare circumstances in which any such item could be brought into a mentoring session.
- 7.2 If a session has been planned where a mentor is to play a bat and ball game with their mentee and this has been discussed with the appropriate practitioner or another practitioner in their absence, then a bat would not constitute an article being deemed as a potential weapon in this situation, and therefore the mentoring session can continue.
- 7.3 If during a mentoring session, a mentor becomes aware that the young person (mentee) is carrying an article that could constitute a weapon;
 - The mentor insists that the item is dropped back to the parent/carer before the session can continue.
 - The mentor asks the young person to hand over the article until they have reached their destination.

- If this isn't possible, or the mentee won't consent, the mentor insists that the mentoring session ends and that the young person requires taking home. If the mentor is unsure in this situation and if it is safe to do so, the mentor is to contact their practitioner/the safeguarding lead for further guidance.
 - Regardless, the parent/carer and practitioner will be informed of the incident along with other services as required – e.g. social care as outlined in the Child Protection Policy.
- 7.4 If a bladed article is brought into a mentoring session, this cannot be justified; therefore, the session is not to take place. A practitioner and/or the safeguarding lead should be contacted when safe to do so. 999 should be dialled if a mentor feels that the young person, they, or another person is at risk of immediate harm; ask for the Police.
- 7.5 If a mentor is made aware of their young person being in possession of an article constituting a weapon during a mentoring session that is taking place during school hours and the young person is due to go back to school after the session, return the young person to school and liaise with your school contact and your practitioner immediately. The mentor must disclose the incident to the school and liaise with the school to support their safeguarding procedures.
- 7.6 The requirement to end a session extends to possession of 'practice' bladed articles (such as plastic 'butterfly knives') that are accessible to young people. It is not appropriate for a young person to have this during a mentoring session. Should a young person have such an object, the mentoring session is to end and the young person taken home and again explained why it is not appropriate to continue the mentoring session.
- 7.7 Any bladed articles for cooking or a similar activity are to be provided by the venue in which the mentoring session is due to take place. Such articles should not be carried by either the mentor or young person, regardless of intent. Sharp knives are kept locked away in Riverside and can only be accessed by a responsible adult who must ensure they are safely returned.
- 7.8 There may be rare occasions for group activities where a mentor can be given authorisation to carry such 'equipment' during a session for a specific purpose, by a Mentoring Plus practitioner. This is to be risk assessed by the Practitioner in advance.
- 7.9 Where prior agreement has not been gained as above, it will be at the relevant practitioner's discretion as to whether a young person is able to continue in an activities session if an article that could constitute a weapon is revealed during the session. In a case where such an article is revealed to staff, the Practitioner must safely lock the item away in their car, filing cabinet or similar. If the young person refuses to hand it over, the member of staff must insist that their attendance at the activity has come to an end that they are to be taken / sent home.
- 7.10 In all such cases, practitioners are to make other staff, freelancers and volunteers aware of the situation at the first available opportunity when safe to do so. All incidents are to be reported to the Safeguarding Lead as per the process in the Child Protection Policy.

8. Sharing concerns / whistleblowing

Whistle blowing is the mechanism by which adults can voice their concerns, made in good faith, without fear of repercussion. See also the Mentoring Plus Whistleblowing Policy, which meets the terms of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. The employment rights of adults who use the whistleblowing procedure are protected.

- 8.1 All allegations are taken seriously and properly investigated in accordance with local procedures and statutory guidance. If an allegation is made to someone other than a manager, information should be clearly and promptly recorded and reported to the CEO, designated deputy or responsible Trustee without delay. Accurate and comprehensive records are kept throughout the process.
- 8.2 Concerns raised are managed according to the Allegations Management procedures within our Whistleblowing Policy. In summary, adults who are the subject of allegations have the right to confidentiality while the claims are under investigation. They are advised to contact their professional association where appropriate, and they may also wish to seek independent legal advice. Without prejudice, they may in some circumstances be asked temporarily to suspend some or all of their usual activities during this time.

8.3 Responsible officers:

Designated Safeguarding Lead

Helen Goodchild – Head of Practice
helen.goodchild@mentoringplus.net
01225 429694 / 07749 431802

Deputy Safeguarding Lead

Humphrey Pain – Primary Mentoring Manager
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