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Lone Working Policy

Principles

Our lone working guidelines work alongside our Safer Working Practices policy and are set out below. Transporting young people is also covered as a related area, along with considerations around gender.

These guidelines intend to protect young people, staff, freelancers and volunteers from any potential risk that working together one to one might expose them to physical, emotional, medical or other difficulties, and that lone working sessions are well-planned and positive.

The aim is that with appropriate planning, setup, language and behaviour, the young person feels safe, relaxed and able to benefit fully from the conversation and support being offered.

In this policy, the term "young people" refers to children and young people under the age of 18, and to adults aged 18–25 who are working with Mentoring Plus.

1. Training & Support

1.1 All relevant staff, freelancers and volunteers attend appropriate training that includes training related to lone working.

1.2 Volunteers are supervised on a monthly basis where issues relating to lone working are raised as an agenda item.

1.3 Volunteers attend regular group sessions where issues relating to lone working are raised and attended to.

1.4 Staff and freelancers who are involved in lone working with young people receive regular supervision from their line manager. Any issues relating to lone working are raised as an agenda item.

2. Lone Working - staff lone working at Mentoring Plus offices

2.1 Staff working alone in the office should familiarise themselves with the Riverside risk assessment, should not place themselves in unnecessary danger and should not allow unknown people into the building.

2.2 Staff should arrange to arrive or leave with someone else and lock up in pairs unless happy to lone work in the building. This applies at all times, but may be particularly relevant when arriving at or leaving the building in the dark.

2.3 Staff lone working in the office should shut the main gate and must ensure that the front door is locked.

2.4 If Staff have arranged to work alone in the building including meeting with third parties, they should ensure that this is communicated to another team member.

3. Matching adults with young people

3.1 All our work is based on the principle that young people actively consent to participate in the project and help choose the plans for individual sessions. Young people who positively choose to participate in a mentoring matching, session or activity and see the benefits of their involvement are much less likely to feel disempowered, at risk or motivated to make a malicious allegation.

3.2 If a young person is to be matched with an adult of another gender (including trans-gender or non-binary individuals) for a long-term mentoring relationship, both must give informed consent and so must the parent/carer if the young person is under 18. There should be good reasons why a mentor/practitioner of one gender is seen as the best option for a mentee of another gender, and these should be explained and agreed to in ways appropriate to the young person's age and needs.

3.3 If the young person is identified to be at higher risk or has increased sensitivity due to age, circumstances, or history [e.g. risk of Child Sexual Exploitation], 1-1 work with a professional of another gender should only be undertaken with the prior agreement of the Head of Practice, who will evaluate and record whether the apparent benefits outweigh the additional risks and what mitigation measures have been taken. Please refer to the Mentoring Plus *Procedures for adults working with young people of another gender* document for further guidance.

4. Risk assessment

4.1 Staff, freelancers and volunteers obtain appropriate background knowledge of the young person in advance of the initial session. This includes writing their personal risk assessment. The process of risk assessing each young person involves gathering information from referrer, parent/carer and other services working with the young person, writing the document, having it signed off by the relevant safeguarding lead and uploading to Charity Log (CLOG). Risk assessments are dynamic documents that must be amended when pertinent information is gathered. Practitioners are to update CLOG with any medical emergencies and add to the Risk tab.

4.2 Where a young person is 18+, Mentoring Plus must gather information relating to emergency contacts and self-consents (photo consent, consent to be mentored etc). Where a young person turns 18 during their time on a mentoring programme or in youth club, Mentoring Plus will offer the opportunity to provide refreshed information and consents as outlined above.

4.3 This risk assessment is applied when planning for a session with a young person, in the choices made, consents sought and preparation for meeting the young person's needs throughout the session. If longer or high-risk activities are planned by a mentor, youth worker or similar, this is shared in advance with the relevant MP practitioner and advice followed.

5. Safe settings

5.1 Unusually for an organisation working with children and young people, the work of Mentoring Plus requires some degree of one-to-one working to allow the young person to talk openly about sensitive issues. For the protection of young people and adults, the settings chosen, and behaviours adopted must be carefully considered.

5.2 Staff, freelancers and volunteers are trained to choose public areas such as cafes instead of secluded or remote meeting places. They only meet a young person for the purpose of mentoring or Mentoring Plus purposes, such as fundraising activities as agreed in advance. This is only with the knowledge and consent of Mentoring Plus and parents/carers.

5.3 Sessions should not be for extensive lengths of time. We recommend a session per week of no longer than 3 hours. For longer sessions or with greater regularity this must be agreed with the relevant practitioner.

5.4 When meeting in a setting such as a school, staff, freelancers, and volunteers ensure that other staff are aware of their meeting, its purpose and duration. Rooms offering privacy from being overheard but where individuals are visible to others e.g. through glass doors, are to be used where possible.

5.5 When meeting a young person in a school and taking them off the premises for a mentoring session, they must always be signed out and back in on their return. If the school do not provide this system the member of staff should provide written proof of taking them out and returning, themselves.

6. Planning and communication

6.1 When lone working, staff, freelancers, and volunteers ensure they always have a charged mobile phone with them and they are aware of the relevant contact numbers to raise a concern including out of hours procedures.

6.2 When lone working, staff, freelancers, and volunteers ensure that if/when they meet a young person and the parent/carer is not present, they or a Mentoring Plus representative (e.g. practitioner) contacts the parent/carer to inform them of collection and estimated time of return.

6.3 If a young person does not keep an appointment the member of staff, freelancer or volunteer who had arranged to meet them must contact the parent/carer/emergency contact (in the case of 18+) and practitioner, where relevant, to say they have not met.

6.4 All lone working activities undertaken must be age-appropriate and meet requirements outlined in the Health & Safety Policy. Any exceptions to this are agreed and risk assessed in advance with the relevant practitioner or safeguarding lead or designated deputy. It is the responsibility of staff / volunteers to ensure that they and the young person have appropriate clothing, food, drink or equipment for any activities undertaken. Any incidents or accidents including near misses must be reported in accordance with our Health & Safety Policy.

7. Unsafe behaviour

7.1 Staff, freelancers and volunteers will not engage in lone work if either party is under the influence of drugs, alcohol, or energy drinks. If the young person appears to be under the influence during the session, the adult ends it immediately and ensures the young person is safely returned home in the most appropriate manner.

7.2 Staff, freelancers and volunteers will not smoke, vape or consume alcohol while engaging in a mentoring session. If the young person attempts to smoke, vape or

consume alcohol the adult ends it immediately and ensures the young person is safely returned home in the most appropriate manner.

7.3 If staff, freelancers or mentors become aware a young person has an article that could constitute a weapon, they must follow the instructions as listed in our Safer Working Policy, item 7.

7.4 If the young person behaves inappropriately in a way likely to expose themselves, staff, freelancers, volunteers or third parties to offence or harm, the adult must inform Mentoring Plus immediately by phone and take their instructions.

7.5 If during a lone working session a child or young person makes any allegations about the adult present or another Mentoring Plus volunteer, freelancer or staff member, the adult must ensure the young person is safely returned home in the most appropriate manner and then immediately follows the allegation procedure set out in section 6.3 of the Mentoring Plus Safeguarding Policy.

8. Home visits

8.1 No home visits should be made other than necessary to carry out mentoring or family support by a staff member. Volunteers will call at the home to collect or drop off their mentee but it is very unusual that a volunteer would be required or allowed to enter a family home, and only with prior authorisation from their practitioner. The following guidance would also apply to volunteers in this context. Visits are never without prior arrangement with the family. Staff, freelancers and volunteers must never remain alone with the young person in their home or visit private areas such as a bedroom.

8.2 Mentoring Plus assesses and mitigates any risk to staff, freelancers or volunteers of visiting the young person's home prior to such an arrangement being made.

8.3 Where staff, freelancers or volunteers have an arrangement to visit a young person in their home the following aspects must be considered whilst undertaking mentoring; and the steps to follow in anticipation of or response to risks:

- Staff, freelancers, or volunteers to read and understand the Mentoring Plus Lone Working policy
- Leave the home if feeling unsafe
- Leave the home if family become aggressive towards you or each other
- If necessary, call the police when safe to do so
- If you cannot safely speak on the phone, call 999 and use the "Silent Solution" procedure, by tapping "55". Further details can be found here: Silent Solution | Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC)
- Mentor to discuss boundaries re. behaviour at first opportunity, eg. no smoking around mentor and vice versa, and any sign of aggression whether direct or indirect will terminate the session
- If behaviour of mentee or family members is deemed irrational, leave the premises and contact supervisor/emergency number
- Ensure mobile phone is available and charged, with reception

- Mentor / staff member to surrender own property if threatened
- Thorough, accurate note taking of incidents post session
- Leave personal property (except mobile phone) in boot of car prior to entering premises

8.4 If a child or young person becomes distressed or angry in a lone working situation, this must immediately be reported to the relevant practitioner, safeguarding lead or designated deputy.

9. Transporting children and young people

9.1 Car journeys are an example of a setting which may unavoidably require a secluded one-to-one situation. These should be undertaken only with a specific purpose relevant to the work of the charity, by prior arrangement and with the permission of the young person and their parent/carer.

9.2 In the case of a child or young person urgently needing a lift without prior arrangement, the journey and the reason for it should be immediately reported to the charity and parent/carer.

9.3 Adults who use their own vehicles for transporting children must have a full, valid UK driving licence, ensure that the vehicle is roadworthy, has an up to date MoT, and is appropriately insured*. Mentoring Plus will run appropriate checks to confirm all of this is the case. For each journey, the driver must ensure that the maximum capacity is not exceeded, and that they are fit to drive. The driver is legally responsible for ensuring all passengers wear seat belts and that younger / shorter children use car seats where required under current legislation**.

9.4 Where adults transport children in a vehicle which requires a specialist license/insurance e.g. PCV or LGV6, staff must have an appropriate licence and insurance to drive such a vehicle.

9.5 If behaviour by a young person is sufficiently inappropriate to be putting staff, freelancers, volunteers or other passengers at risk whilst driving, the driver should park the car at the first safe opportunity, take the keys out of the car, and step out of the car in order to call project staff and take their instructions.

9.6 Staff, freelancers and volunteers will not normally be asked to drive more than 80 miles or for more than 3 hours in any one day in the supporting or collecting of young people. Driving in excess of this requires the prior agreement of the appropriate senior practitioner.

9.7 Only staff can transport more than one young person to and from group sessions. Under these circumstances staff may drive a maximum of three young people. If a car can accommodate more e.g. a 7-seater, an additional adult must also be present throughout the time the young people are being transported. A volunteer can transport more than one child only with prior arrangement and under exceptional circumstances.

9.8 Adults transporting young people must drive according to the law and model good behaviour as a road user.

** We are advised that most motor insurers will consider driving a young person as part of a voluntary arrangement falls under social, domestic and pleasure, provided*

that driving is not described as the main purpose of volunteering and they are not paid for driving other than to reclaim costs. Volunteers should check that this is the case with their insurance provider.

***Currently a child must use a booster seat until they are 12 years old or 135cm in height, whichever comes first, but check for any updates - https://www.gov.uk/child-car-seats-the-rules/using-a-child-car-seat-or-booster-seat*

9.9 Alongside the rules above, professionals must give special consideration to driving young people who identify as being of another gender to the driver. As above, the young person must be supported to understand why a plan to be driven by an individual adult is being proposed and to express how they feel about it without pressure or recrimination, and time must be allowed for this process.

9.10 A young person should not be required to be driven 1-1 by an adult they have not met before. If this is ever necessary, e.g. another driver is incapacitated, express consent should be obtained in advance by phone or text from the parent/carer, and the circumstances recorded on CLOG. The risk assessment for the young person should be shared with the driver.

9.11 The normal parent/carer consent process applies to an adult driving a young person of another gender. The circumstances should be made clear, and time allowed for discussing measures taken to ensure that the young person feels safe and comfortable.

9.12 In addition to normal procedures for safely driving young people 1-1, the adult should also:

- double check before setting off that the young person is still happy to make the journey
- ask the young person where they prefer to sit in the car, front or back
- plan carefully in advance for avoiding any undue physical proximity [e.g. not leaving items in the glove compartment and having to lean over to reach them; not sharing bags of sweets; the YP having access to their own bag, etc]
- discuss the route that will be taken and how long it is anticipated it will take
- give the young person chance to influence their in-car environment e.g. temperature setting, windows open, music choice
- allow the young person to use their phone during the journey, including using headphones, if they prefer, providing this does not distract the driver
- all of the above must be handled in a low-key and calm way without giving undue suggestion that they are measures to reduce personal risk, which might otherwise have the opposite effect.

9.13 For frequent journeys and/or higher risk young people, additional measures may be considered to protect both adult and child such as installing an in-car dashcam. Where this is used, the young person and parent/carer should be made aware that it is recording in order to maximise car safety, again without over-emphasising the potential for personal risk. Recordings made and saved must be shared immediately with Mentoring Plus and are subject to our Data Protection Policy.

10. Collecting and returning children to/from home

10.1 By law there is no set age for leaving children home alone. The law states that you shouldn't leave a child alone if they will be at risk. Deciding what constitutes as risk is left to parents'/carers' discretion.

10.2 However, under the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, parents and carers can be prosecuted for neglect; they can be fined or sent to prison if they are judged to have placed a child at risk of harm by leaving them home alone

10.3 The NSPCC outlines the following guidelines, which Mentoring Plus have used to define our approach:

- Babies, toddlers and very young children should never be left alone
- Children under the age of 12 are rarely mature enough to cope in an emergency and should not be left at home alone for a long period of time
- Children under the age of 16 should not be left alone overnight
- Parents and carers can be prosecuted for neglect if it is judged that they placed a child at risk by leaving them at home alone
- A child should never be left at home alone if they do not feel comfortable with this, regardless of their age
- If a child has additional needs, these should be considered when leaving them at home alone or with an older sibling
- When leaving a younger child with an older sibling think about what may happen if they were to have a falling out - would they both be safe?

10.4 Mentoring Plus guidelines on leaving child and young people home alone:

- Children aged under 12 will in no circumstances be left home alone by staff or volunteers after mentoring and activities.
- Children aged under 12 can be taken to an alternative address and / or with a 'named individual' other than the parent / carer. To enable this written consent needs to be received from the parent / carer prior to the child being dropped off. Consent will be accepted by text, letter, e-mail or similar as shared with staff or volunteers. 'Named individuals' need to be 16 years and older.
- Regardless of age, mentees will not be left home alone, with a parent / carer or with a 'named individual', if:
    - The mentee is scared or worried to be left
    - The mentor is concerned about the wellbeing of the child
    - The mentor feels the environment is not safe
- All parents / carers will be informed of our policy on this matter.

10.5 If for under 12s there is no parent / carer home **or** you are concerned about leaving a mentee aged over 12 home alone:

- Contact the parent/carer to find out where they are
- If they will be less than 30 minutes, wait with the young person in the car and text your practitioner to notify them
- If they will be more than 30 minutes or you cannot get hold of the parent/carer, call your practitioner who will advise on next steps. If the practitioner is not available, contact the out of hours phone on 01225 429694. If there is no response, call the Emergency Duty Team (Children's Social Services) on 01454 615165.

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