



Safeguarding: Recognise, respond, report

Use this page to prepare for handling safeguarding concerns. It outlines all three main steps of the process and shows you how to think about meeting your reporting responsibilities.

When you do safeguarding well, you reduce the risk of harm and abuse for you, your team and all the children and adults you work with. There will still be issues to deal with, but a safer organisation prepares its staff and volunteers so they're ready to deal with problems when they happen. Leaders in an organisation must work hard to make sure everyone feels respected and safe so they are able to speak up.

Recognising signs of harm and abuse

People in your organisation should know the signs and symptoms of harm and abuse. Signs and symptoms are not always obvious or clear. However, the more that staff and volunteers know about possible warning signs, the more likely they are to recognise abuse and take action. You must understand the particular risks and circumstances of the children and adults you work with so you can decide what staff and volunteers need to know about. As a general rule, the more directly your staff or volunteers work with children or adults at risk, the more detail about recognising the different types of harm and abuse they should know.

Example

Book Bus is a mobile library run by volunteers that parks in school playgrounds and meets children weekly to talk to them about their books. The service works with a special educational needs school and with a girls' secondary school. Book Bus gave its volunteers additional training in recognising signs of abuse and harm among children on the autism spectrum, and in how girls and young women may be sexually exploited.

Remember people don't need to be certain before they speak up. If anyone in your organisation is ever worried about someone, they should always speak to the person responsible for safeguarding.

- Thinking about children? Use this collection of guides to different types of harm or this definition and signs of abuse factsheet (from NSPCC Learning): <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/>
- Want to know more about safety of adults? This list of types of harm has clickable links to signs and symptoms of many issues that affect adults at risk (from Ann Craft Trust): <https://www.anncrafttrust.org/resources/types-of-harm/>

This factsheet has been adapted, with minimum changes, from a series of free, online, high-quality factsheets, practical tools, podcasts and videos to promote a good safeguarding culture in charities that were developed collaboratively by an NCVO-led partnership (<https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/safeguarding>).

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Responding to safeguarding concerns

You must make it clear to all staff and volunteers in your organisation that they are expected to record safeguarding concerns, disclosures or allegations and take action in response. You need to develop procedures for everyone to follow.

You should let your staff and volunteers know that you understand it can be hard to take action.

Five statements that help encourage people to speak up.

- We must all stand up for people who can't speak up for themselves.
- Speaking up if you're worried someone is harming or abusing someone else is always the right thing to do. It's not the same as 'snitching' or 'being a grass'.
- People are often worried that if they report someone for doing wrong, they'll hurt that person. But doing nothing could hurt others even more.
- There are many reasons why people might feel uncomfortable or be scared to report suspicions of abuse. That's ok. It's worth fighting those fears so you can help someone.
- If you speak up, your organisation should protect you and make sure you're not harmed or criticised for it.
- Want to share this advice with your colleagues? Use NCVO's slideshow of statements about speaking up:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_I0loz0yh8

What to do next depends on the type of harm, level of risk and whether you are talking with a child or an adult.

You must develop your own specific organisational procedures. These procedures should recognise that safeguarding is often not black and white and people will need support to make the right judgement call. However, some general principles apply when a staff member or volunteer is responding to a safeguarding concern.

- Always make sure the person speaking up feels they're being listened to and supported
- Don't promise to keep information confidential between you and them. Refer to and follow your organisation's policy and procedures to make sure information is only shared with people who need and have the right to know
- Ask for their consent to share the information – if they refuse and you are still worried that they or someone else is at risk of harm, you cannot wait for this consent. You must share this information to the person responsible for safeguarding in your organisation
- Tell the designated safeguarding lead about any concerns so they can decide what the next steps are
- Write a clear statement of what you have been told, seen, or heard

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- When you've been told something is wrong, don't go straight to the person that's been reported. Instead, tell the designated safeguarding lead

Example

Peter volunteers for a local community running group. He helps to set up the run every week and gets to know many of the other volunteers. He notices that one of the junior runners has bruises on his arm and is trying to cover them up. Peter is worried about the bruises and has also noticed changes to the boy's behaviour. Peter approaches the person responsible for safeguarding (designated safeguarding lead) and tells them what he has seen. He is asked to complete a form with the details. The designated safeguarding lead then takes the issue up with social services.

Want to know more about creating a culture where people can speak up? Knowhow NCVO's 'letting people know they have a right to be safe' section is a good starting point for ideas: <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/safeguarding/steps-to-a-safer-organisation/getting-people-involved#section-1>

Reporting safeguarding concerns

As noted in the 'Reporting procedures' section of Knowhow NCVO's policy and procedures page (<https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/safeguarding/steps-to-a-safer-organisation/policies-and-procedures#section-1>), you must have a procedure that sets out how to report different types of incident. Different local areas have different methods and templates for reporting concerns about a child or adult at risk. Who you need to tell may be different depending on:

- whether your organisation is a registered charity or not
- whether it's a child or adult at risk
- if you or someone implicated belongs to a professional body
- if you or someone implicated is part of a regulated activity
- whether it is a safeguarding concern or a workplace harassment issue.

There are several types of report an organisation may need to produce. This will depend on what's happened and the nature of your organisation.

Types of report could include:

- an internal incident report
- a referral report to social services
- a referral report to the police
- a report to the Charity Commission or other organisations.

Your procedures will state which of these elements you need to include, depending on your level of risk and where you are in the country. In addition to your reporting procedures you will want a whistleblowing policy or other guidance for what people should do if they don't think concerns are being dealt with properly.

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Further information about reporting

- 'Responding to safeguarding concerns', is a set of pages which looks in more detail at aspects of reporting internally and externally:
<https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/safeguarding/checklists-training-and-other-support/specialist-guides/a-designated-safeguarding-leads-handbook/responding-to-safeguarding-concerns>.

It is designed for designated safeguarding leads but can be used for anyone who wants to get to grips with responding and reporting.

- If you want to focus on working with children, then use reporting procedures and creating forms for safeguarding children (from NSPCC Learning):
<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/recognising-and-responding-to-abuse/>
- If you want to focus on working with adults at risk, then use this safeguarding reporting guidance (from Ann Craft Trust):
<https://www.anncrafttrust.org/safeguarding-checklist-reporting-recording/>
- If you want to speak to someone or get tips on how to find the rules in your area use Knowhow NCVO's local and national support page:
<https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/safeguarding/checklists-training-and-other-support/local-and-national-support> or email Northumberland CVA:
enquire@northumberlandcva.org.uk.
- Ready to work on whistleblowing? Then encouraging people to speak out helps you think about how to make sure people feel confident whistleblowing in relation to safeguarding. Has links to helplines.
<https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/safeguarding/steps-to-a-safer-organisation/recognise-respond-and-report/recognise-respond-and-report>

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