



Safeguarding: Understanding the Risks

Use this page to start to understand different types of harm and abuse, and how people may be affected. It is the first step towards being able to manage safeguarding risks.

You should discuss the types of abuse and harm that people within and connected to your organisation might experience. This will help you decide which policies and procedures you need to work on most urgently.

Who is most at risk?

Anyone can be at risk of abuse. People are at risk at different times and in different situations.

Children and young people

All organisations and individuals have a responsibility to safeguard children. A child is anyone under the age of 18.

Example

Fabulous! is a community arts group for 5-12 year olds run by parent volunteers. When they first started, as they were all parents, they didn't think they needed to do safeguarding. But, they spoke to their local voluntary sector support group and realised that parenting and running a group are very different. The management committee has now completed the NSPCC Safeguarding Standards and Checklist and they review all their processes regularly.

Adults at risk

Any adult may experience abuse or harm. However, certain people are considered to be at greater risk, so are given more protection by law.

An adult at risk is anyone aged 18 or over who:

- has needs for care and or support
- as a result of care and support needs is unable to protect themselves from abuse
- is currently experiencing or is at risk of abuse.

Adults at risk may:

- have a mental or physical illness
- have a learning disability
- have addiction problems
- be frail.

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>).

Whether an adult is at risk or not is something which changes with their circumstances – it's not fixed.

Example

Mara and David were the two most active members of a group in their village who shop for elderly people and visit them to give them company. At a local event Mara got talking to a local safeguarding advisor and realised the people they help are often frail and may be adults at risk. David went on a one-day safeguarding course through Good Neighbour Schemes and now they have helpful safeguarding plans to follow.

Your staff or volunteers

Protecting your staff and volunteers is not necessarily safeguarding – but you do have a duty to keep them safe. This means paying attention to the particular types of harm that can develop within an organisation.

Example

Maze Festival is an annual summer community festival. The core team of 10 work all year round on the festival and over 100 people volunteer at the event. A new volunteer joins and is warned that one of the core team can get a bit 'handsy' if they've had a drink. They are warned to avoid working with them at night. The volunteer is worried so they check their handbook and the Code of Conduct makes it clear that sexual harassment is never acceptable. They report what they have been told to another core team member who reassures them and follows up on the issue.

Types of abuse and harm

You need to be aware of several types of harm.

- Physical
- Sexual
- Emotional
- Psychological
- Neglect
- Radicalisation
- Discriminatory
- Financial

Empowerment and self-determination

Everyone has the right to make decisions for themselves. When you're safeguarding adults, you must understand this right. Otherwise you can accidentally cause a different kind of harm by removing a person's freedom of choice.

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Guides about abuse and harm

- Need to learn more about child abuse? Use the definition and signs of child abuse (from NSPCC Learning): <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/briefings/definitions-signs-child-abuse>
- Need to learn more about harm and abuse affecting adults? Use this clickable list of [14 types of harm](#) (from The Ann Craft Trust): <https://www.anncrafttrust.org/resources/types-of-harm/>
- Ready to explore decision making with adults at risk? Start with this mental capacity, self-determination and unwise decisions page (from The Ann Craft Trust): <https://www.anncrafttrust.org/resources/capacity-making-decisions/>
- Need to think about why you should act to keep everyone safe from sexual harassment? Start with this explanation of sexual harassment. (from Citizens Advice): <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/law-and-courts/discrimination/what-are-the-different-types-of-discrimination/sexual-harassment/>

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