

Respect Project

Child Protection Policy and Procedures

Child Protection Policy Statement

The Respect Project is fully committed to promoting children's rights, notably their right to be protected from harm, abuse and exploitation and to be involved in any decisions that directly affect them. The Respect Project has a duty of care to implement effective policies and procedures for safeguarding the welfare of children and young people. In order to achieve this we will ensure our leaders / volunteers are carefully selected, screened, trained and supervised. Furthermore we will endeavour to keep up to date with national developments relating to the care and protection of children and young people.

The Respect Project will:

- Ensure that all leaders / volunteers understand their legal and moral obligations to protect children and young people from harm, abuse and exploitation
- Develop best practice in relation to the recruitment of all leaders / volunteers
- Provide opportunities for all new leaders / volunteers through the provision of induction training, which gives an overview of the purpose, values, structure and services of the Respect Project.
- Ensure that all leaders / volunteers understand their responsibility to work to the standards and procedures detailed in the Respect Project's Code of Conduct and Child Protection procedures
- Ensure that all leaders / volunteers understand their obligations to report care or protection concerns about a child/young person, or a leaders / volunteers conduct towards a child/young person, to the Project's designated person for child protection
- Ensure that all procedures relating to the conduct of volunteers are implemented in a consistent and equitable manner
- Ensure that the designated child protection officer understands his/her responsibility to refer any child protection concerns to the statutory child protection agencies (i.e. PSNI and/or social work)
- Provide opportunities for all leaders / volunteers to develop their skills and knowledge particularly in relation to the care and protection of children and young people
- Ensure that children and young people are enabled to express their ideas and views on a wide range of issues and will have access to the Respect Project's complaints procedures
- Endeavour to keep up to date with national developments relating to the care and protection of children and young people

Child Protection Procedures

Section 1 - Introduction

The Respect Project is committed to providing a safe environment for young people. This Child Protection Policy and Procedures reflects this commitment and aims to ensure that all concerns about the care and protection of children and young people are effectively managed

The Respect Project's Child Welfare Officer is responsible for developing and reviewing the organisation's Child Protection Policy statement and other care and protection policies and guidelines. However, all Respect Project leaders / volunteers are required to implement the child protection procedures

The Respect Project recognizes that all children and young people have the right to freedom from abuse as outlined in the UN Convention of Rights of the Child. The Respect Project will constantly strive to provide a safe environment, free from any forms of abuse, for all the young people in its care. The Respect Project's understanding of abuse can be found in Appendix 2

The Respect Project has a commitment to children's rights, notably their right to be protected from harm, abuse and exploitation and to be involved in any decisions which directly affect them

Section 2 - Recruitment

The Respect Project recognizes that appropriate recruitment and selection procedures are a vital part in developing and maintaining a safe environment for children and young people. The following procedures are in place to ensure that only suitable applicants are accepted as leaders / volunteers of the Respect Project:

- All potential new leaders / volunteers will be asked to complete an application form
- All potential new leaders / volunteers will be asked to complete a self-declaration form
- All successful leaders / volunteers will be asked to provide suitable references
- All potential new leaders / volunteers will be asked to attend an interview
- A self-declaration form will be used so that interviewed applicants can declare and discuss any convictions (and their context) with the Project

Section 3 - Training

All newly appointed leaders / volunteers at the Respect Project will receive training, support, information and guidance to ensure they understand their role and responsibilities with regard to Child Protection.

This will include:

- Details of the structure of the Project will be provided, including the details of overall responsibility for child protection within the Project
- Details of the Project's aims and objectives will be provided
- An assessment of leaders / volunteers training and development requirements will be completed
- The roles and responsibilities of leaders / volunteers within the Project will be clarified
- Clear details of the expectations, roles and responsibilities of all newly appointed leaders / volunteers will be provided
- All leaders / volunteers must agree and sign up to the Project's Child Protection Policy and procedures
- Training, information and a copy of the Project's Code of Conduct will be provided
- The contact details and roles and responsibilities of the Project's Child Protection Officer will be provided

Section 4 - Responding to suspicion or allegation of abuse

All Project leaders / Volunteers have a duty to report any suspicions, allegations or disclosures to the Child Welfare Officer. However, the first concern must be the reassurance of the child or young person and their protection from any potential risk. During the reporting process the young person should be protected from further contact with the individual involved in the allegation.

As a Project leader / volunteer your role in child protection is not to investigate or decide if abuse has taken place. Your role is to observe, record and report. The following steps should be followed in response to suspicion or allegation of abuse:



For example if:

A child/young person has alleged that they are being abused

You see or suspect abuse

The organisation has received a third party report that a child/young person is being abused/neglected

There are signs and indicators which could point to abuse/neglect



ACT IMMEDIATELY

Discuss your concerns with the Project's Child Welfare Officer as soon as possible. If the allegation is about the Project's Child Welfare Officer contact the Chairperson of the Project. These steps should be taken as soon as possible.

Discussions should focus on: Nature of concerns; Risks to the child or young person; Action and next steps to be taken



In following the procedures below please bear in mind:

DO NOT INVESTIGATE – Leaders / Volunteers should not attempt to investigate the situation any further or interview the child or young person regarding the situation.

CONFIDENTIALITY - Details of suspicion, allegations or disclosures should only be passed on to the Child Welfare Officer. If responding to an allegation from a young person you must not promise to keep the information they disclose confidential.



RECORD INFORMATION

Detailed written records should be made of all events and what the young person or other individuals have said (where this applies). A form is supplied in Appendix 1 to help structure this. It can also be used to inform Social Work/PSNI of the events that have occurred. Above and beyond the facts, any opinions or personal interpretations of the facts presented can be recorded but it should be clear they are opinions, rather than facts. Records should be signed and stored in a secure place



SEEK ADVICE and REFER TO APPROPRIATE AGENCY

The Child Welfare Officer should contact the Social Work Department and/or the PSNI and ask to speak to the Duty Officer about a child protection issue. If the report is received during an evening then the Social Work department Emergency Duty team and/or the PSNI should be contacted. Any further action should only be taken in line with the advice given by the Social Work Department. This includes whether the parent or carer of the young person should be informed of the child protection concerns.

Section 5 - Responding when a child or young person discloses abuse

It is likely that a child or young person who has been abused will have given a lot of thought as to whether they should disclose the abuse. It is highly likely that they will be nervous and afraid that they might be rejected, blamed or not believed. It is important that all volunteers follow the steps outlined below:

Stay calm

Remain calm and natural. You have been approached because you are trusted, not because you are an expert counsellor. Do not promise to keep the information secret; you may have to inform an appropriate person. You must take any disclosure seriously and reassure the young person that you believe them.

Listen and take the allegation seriously

Listen to what the child or young person is saying. Give them the time and opportunity to tell you as much as they are able and willing to. Do not pressurise them and allow them to disclose information at their own pace. You should not investigate, ask leading questions or ask specific or explicit questions. You should only clarify what they are willing to tell you in their own words. Try to do this in an appropriate place, such as a room where other people can see in through an open door or window. Whilst it's important to respect the young person's privacy it should not be at the expense of other child protection measures.

Reassure

Reassure them that you believe what they are saying and that you know it is not their fault. You should also give them some indication of what you will do next with the information that they have given you.

Confidentiality

Reiterate that you cannot promise to keep the information secret. You must take any disclosure seriously. Details of the disclosure should only be passed on to the Child Welfare Officer, who should refer the case to the appropriate authorities

Wherever possible you should try not to discuss any concerns that you have about a child or young person in a way that may lead others to suspect that they are being abused.

Record

If you are able to, make brief notes during the initial disclosure, explaining to the young person why you are doing it. If it's not possible to do so at the time, record the details as soon as possible after the disclosure with as many facts as possible (dates, times, actual words used).

Look after yourself

Being trusted with a disclosure of abuse directly from a young person can be emotionally draining, worrying and very stressful. Whilst it's essential that confidentiality is maintained at all times, it's important that you consider your own emotional feelings and discuss any anxieties you have with the Child Welfare Officer. If appropriate, the Child Welfare Officer will arrange additional support for you.

Section 6 - Protection of Leaders /Volunteers who report care and protection concerns

Deciding to report a colleague or volunteer you suspect of abusing or otherwise harming a child can be stressful and difficult and you may be worried about the person concerned taking action against you. The law does give you protection if you raise concerns or report a colleague as long as the report was not malicious or vexatious.

Section 7 – Data Protection and management of confidential information

The Respect Project is committed to the safe and secure management of confidential information. All personnel information, including leader / volunteer information, is kept locked and can only be accessed by those that require it to carry out their role. Only relevant information is kept and this is regularly reviewed and outdated information destroyed appropriately.

The Respect Project is also committed to the rights of children and young people to confidentiality and this will be respected by all leaders / volunteers. However, where a leader / volunteer feels that the information disclosed by a child or young people should be referred to the child welfare officer for investigation by an appropriate agency, the young person should be told that confidentiality cannot be kept.

Section 8 - Review of Child Protection policy and procedures

This policy and procedures document will be reviewed annually by Child Welfare Officer and all leaders / volunteers will be notified of any changes.

Appendix 1

Child Welfare Report Form

A report should be made by the person who has had the initial concerns about a child's welfare using this pro forma

The report should be handed to the Child Welfare Officer in a sealed envelope

The Child Welfare Officer should contact the appropriate Social Work Dept. /PSNI

Name: _____

Date: _____

Who is putting the child/young person at risk? (E.g. staff member, family member)

Name and contact details of child/young person/s your concern relates to:

Outline your reasons for concern:

Key Points:

Brief outline of any action you have already taken to protect the child/young person:

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Signature: _____

Designation: _____

Date: _____

Follow up action taken by Child Welfare Officer:

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Signature: _____

Designation: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 2

Respect Project - Understanding of Abuse

Abuse to children or vulnerable young people is described under the following headings:

Neglect

The persistent or severe neglect of a child or young person, whether wilful or unintentional, which results in serious impairment to physical health and development. For example:

- Exposing a child to extreme weather conditions e.g. heat and cold.
- Failing to seek medical attention for injuries.
- Exposing a child to risk of injury through the use of unsafe equipment.
- Exposing a child to a hazardous environment without a proper risk assessment of the activity.
- Failing to provide adequate nutrition and water.

Signs which **may** raise concerns about physical neglect include:

- constant hunger
- poor personal hygiene and/or poor state of clothing
- constant tiredness
- frequent lateness or unexplained non-attendance (particularly at school)
- untreated medical problems
- low self-esteem
- poor peer relationships
- stealing

Physical Injury

Actual or attempted physical injury to a child or young person where there is definite knowledge or reasonable suspicion that the injury was inflicted or knowingly not prevented. For example:

- Deliberately hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise harming a child.

Signs which **may** raise concerns about physical abuse include:

- refusal to discuss injuries
- aggression towards others
- improbable excuses given to explain injuries
- fear of parents being approached for an explanation
- running away
- untreated injuries
- excessive physical punishment
- avoiding activities due to injuries or possibility of injuries being discovered
- unexplained injuries, particularly if recurrent

Emotional Abuse

The adverse effect on the behaviour and emotional development of a child or young person, caused by failure to provide for their basic emotional needs. For example:

- Persistent failure to show any respect to a child (e.g. continually ignoring a child)
- Constantly humiliating a child by telling them they are useless.
- Continually being aggressive towards a child, making them feel frightened.
- Acting in a way which is detrimental to the child's self-esteem (e.g. name calling, sarcasm, constant criticism)

Signs which **may** raise concerns about emotional abuse include:

- low self-esteem
- significant decline in concentration
- running away
- indiscriminate friendliness and neediness
- extremes of passivity or aggression
- self-harm or mutilation

Sexual Abuse

Any child or young person below the age of 18 may be deemed to have been sexually abused when any person, by design or neglect, exploits the child or young person directly or indirectly, in any activity intended to lead to the sexual arousal or other forms of gratification of that person or any other person including organised networks. This includes forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities whether or not they are aware of or consent to what is happening. Sexual abuse may involve physical contact, and non-contact acts such as forcing children to look at or be involved in the production of pornographic material, to watch sexual activities or encouraging them to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. For example:

- Exposure to sexually explicit inappropriate language or jokes.
- Showing a child pornographic material or using a child to produce such material.
- Inappropriate touching.

The following signs **may** raise concerns about sexual abuse:

- lack of trust in adults or over familiarity with adults, fear of a particular adult
- social isolation - being withdrawn or introverted, poor peer relationship
- sleep disturbance (nightmares, bedwetting, fear of sleeping alone)
- running away from home
- drug, alcohol or solvent abuse
- display of sexual knowledge beyond the child's age

Other abusive behaviour towards children and young people

Volunteers and committee members should also be aware of other, perhaps less obvious, forms of abuse. These may be dismissed by perpetrators as 'just fun' or 'having a laugh' with young people but can have a serious impact and cannot be allowed or go unchallenged:

- Bullying of any form, including name calling or constant criticism
- 'Picking on' a young person because of their family background, manner of dress or physical characteristic
- Racism or sectarianism of any form
- Favouritism and exclusion - all young people should be equally supported and encouraged
- Abusive language or gestures