



Safeguarding Children and Young Person Policy

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Purpose

The RSPCA is committed to ensuring that young people (under the age of eighteen) who participate in its activities have a safe, positive and enjoyable experience. All individuals, whatever their age, gender, language, disability, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, socio-economic status and culture have the right to protection from abuse and to be treated fairly. The RSPCA has a separate Safeguarding policy for Adults at Risk.

We recognise we have a duty to protect and promote the welfare of all children under the age of eighteen. This duty also extends to those children and young people we engage with through the work that we undertake. It is always unacceptable for anyone to experience abuse of any kind, including through social media or other online activity.

Although this is a child safeguarding policy, we adopt a *Think Family* approach. We acknowledge that individuals do not live in isolation and that concerns about abuse or neglect may impact the wider family network. Where safeguarding concerns arise within a family context, we will consider the needs and risks affecting the whole family, regardless of whether the primary focus of our work is with an adult or a child.

Everyone has a legal right to protection from all forms of abuse, and we will ensure that all safeguarding concerns are taken seriously, and we will act in the best interests of the individuals concerned.

We are committed to safeguarding practices and procedures and to providing a welcoming, safe, positive and inclusive environment in which all can engage with the activities that the RSPCA provides. This commitment applies to all RSPCA activities, whether they take place on RSPCA premises or at any other location where RSPCA activities are delivered. Where roles involve regulated activity or otherwise require safeguarding checks, the RSPCA will ensure that appropriate Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are carried out in accordance with its recruitment procedures and relevant legislation.

Our commitment also extends to those external organisations that our colleagues and volunteers engage with. Although these organisations are responsible for their own safeguarding arrangements, we will ensure that we are satisfied with the quality of their policies and procedures and that they are aware of the standards that we expect.

The RSPCA works within the principles of *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (2023) to ensure coordinated responses when concerns involve both children and adults at risk, and to consider transitional safeguarding needs for young people aged 16–25.

Scope

This policy applies to all persons working for the RSPCA or on our behalf, including trustees, employees at all levels, whether permanent or temporary, directors, agency workers, seconded workers, volunteers, interns, agents, contractors and external consultants.

The Board of RSPCA Assured has decided that it will adopt and apply this policy for its employees. For employees of RSPCA Assured, references in this policy to the RSPCA should be understood to refer to RSPCA Assured

Roles & Responsibilities

The Assistant Director of Employee Experience is responsible for ensuring the policy is reviewed, updated and communicated.

Heads of Departments & Line Managers are responsible for ensuring that this policy is complied with.

All colleagues have an obligation to be aware of and comply with this Policy.

Legislation and Statutory Guidance

The practices and procedures within this policy are based on the principles contained within the UK Legislation and Government Guidance and have been developed to complement the Safeguarding of Children. This includes reference to the following;

- Human Rights Act 1998
- Children Act 1989 & 2004
- Children and Young People Act 1989 & 2004
- Sexual Offences Act 2003
- Children and Young People Act 2004
- Serious Crime Act 2015
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023
- Keeping Children and Young People Safe in Education 2023 & 2025
- Data Protection Act 2018

- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022
- Prevent Duty Guidance 2023
- Online Safety Act 2023

Definitions and Terminology

The following definitions are referred to in this policy;

DSL - Designated Safeguarding Lead

Child - In England, Northern Ireland, and Wales, a child is someone under the age of eighteen whether living with their families, in state care, or living independently

Safeguarding children is defined as:

- Protecting children from abuse and maltreatment;
- Preventing harm to children's mental and physical health or development;
- Ensuring children grow up with the provision of safe and effective care and
- Taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes in line with National guidance

Safeguarding concern - When there is information that a child or young person has been harmed, or is at risk of being harmed, by their own or someone else's behaviour.

We recognise that children exposed to domestic abuse are victims under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, and that using animals to control, threaten, or harm constitutes coercive control and is treated as a safeguarding concern.

Safeguarding allegation - Where a person who is either a colleague, a volunteer or contractor working on behalf of the RSPCA has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child/young person or may have harmed a child
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child or young person
- Behaved towards a child or young person in a way that indicates that they may pose a risk of harm to other children or
- Behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children or young people.

Abuse of Trust

The Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000, section 3, created the offence of abuse of trust. It is an offence for a person aged 18 or over to have sexual intercourse with a person under 18, or to engage in any other sexual activity with, or directed towards such a person, if in either case that person is in a position of trust in relation to the under 18-year-old. This applies even if the relationship is consensual.

A person aged 18 or over (Person A) is in a position of trust in relation to a person under that age (Person B) if any of four conditions are satisfied.

One of these relates to the education field and is as follows: (Person A) looks after persons who are under 18 and are receiving full-time education in an institution, and (Person B) is receiving such education within that institution. This applies within the RSPCA and includes those in a professional support role and volunteers.

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 broadened 'position of trust' provisions to include roles such as sports coaches and faith-based workers, and this extended definition applies to all RSPCA activities.

Abuse

A form of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children and young people may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by others. Abuse can take place wholly online, or technology may be used to facilitate offline abuse. They may be abused by an adult or adults or by another child or children.

Please see Appendix A for types of abuse.

Poor practice

Sometimes, concerns may relate to poor practice, where an adult or another young person's behaviour is inappropriate and may be causing distress to a child or young person. In the application of this policy, poor practice includes any behaviour which contravenes the principles of this document or the Safeguarding Code of Conduct. Where poor practice is serious or repeated, this could also constitute abuse and should be reported immediately.

All colleagues and volunteers must understand and maintain professional boundaries when working with children and young people.

Safeguarding Roles and Responsibilities

The safeguarding leads and deputies support colleagues within their area if they have any safeguarding concerns or questions. The Safeguarding Team will work closely

together and, where circumstances dictate, share agreed responsibilities and functions. However, it will be the RSPCA Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) who has overarching responsibility in terms of decision making around safeguarding concerns or allegations.

Failure to Comply with this Policy

Failure to follow the policy or agreed course of action could result in disciplinary action under our disciplinary process. We have the right to follow the disciplinary process if it is deemed appropriate, given the facts and circumstances of each situation.

Contact

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this policy, and its contents, please contact safeguarding.support@rspca.org.uk

Review:

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis or in response to changes in safeguarding legislation and/or best practice.

Appendix 1: Types of Abuse

Physical abuse

A form of abuse which may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces illness in a child.

Emotional abuse

The persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond a child's developmental capability as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning or preventing the child from participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyberbullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, although it may occur alone.

Sexual abuse

Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adults. Children can also commit acts of sexual abuse. The sexual abuse of children by other children is a specific safeguarding issue.

Neglect

The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to: a. provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment) b. protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger c. ensure adequate supervision (including the

use of inadequate caregivers) d. ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment
It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Related issues in addition to the above categories, there are other forms of harm or abuse that should involve the notification of the police and other organisations working together to protect children. These include:

Bullying

Bullying is deliberately hurtful behaviour, usually repeated over a period of time, where it is difficult for the victims to defend themselves. The damage inflicted by bullying is often underestimated. It can cause considerable distress to children, to the extent that it affects their health and development and can be a source of significant harm, including self-harm and suicide. Bullying can include emotional and/or physical harm to such a degree that it constitutes significant harm.

The four main types of bullying are:

- Physical abuse: hitting, kicking, stabbing and setting alight including for filming with mobile telephones and theft, commonly of mobile phones
- Verbal or mobile telephone / online (internet) message abuse (for example, racist, sexist or homophobic name-calling or threats: this type of physical bullying may include sexual harassment)
- Mobile telephone or online (internet) visual image abuse: these can include real or manipulated images
- Emotional abuse, for example, isolating an individual from the group or emotional blackmail

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based forms of child physical, sexual and emotional abuse can include bullying via mobile telephones or online (internet) with verbal and visual messages.

Child Sexual Exploitation which can include Human Trafficking

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

Criminal Exploitation

As set out in the Serious Violence Strategy, published by the Home Office, where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal

activity in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child criminal exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

County Lines

As set out in the Serious Violence Strategy, published by the Home Office, where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child criminal exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

Hate crimes

Hate incidents and hate crime are acts of violence or hostility directed at people because of who they are or who someone thinks they are. For example, it includes being verbally abused by someone in the street because of disability or sexual orientation.

Female Genital Mutilation

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is the partial or total removal of external female genitalia for non-medical reasons. It is also known as female circumcision or cutting. Religious, social or cultural reasons are sometimes given for FGM. However, FGM is child abuse. It is dangerous and a criminal offence. There are no medical reasons to carry out FGM. It does not enhance fertility and it does not make childbirth safer. It is used to control female sexuality and can cause severe and long-lasting damage to physical and emotional health.

Domestic Violence & Abuse

The cross-Government definition of domestic violence and abuse is:

Any incident of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- Psychological
- Physical
- Sexual
- Financial
- Emotional

Honour based abuse

So-called 'honour-based' abuse (HBA) encompasses incidents or crimes which have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or the community, including female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, and practices such as breast ironing.

Abuse committed in the context of preserving 'honour' often involves a wider network of family or community pressure and can include multiple perpetrators. It is important to be aware of this dynamic and additional risk factors when deciding what form of safeguarding action to take. All forms of HBA are abuse (regardless of the motivation) and should be handled and escalated as such. Professionals in all agencies, and individuals and groups in relevant communities, need to be alert to the possibility of a child being at risk of HBA, or already having suffered HBA.

Forced marriage

A forced marriage (as distinct from a consensual arranged marriage) is defined as one which is conducted without the valid consent of both of the parties and where duress is a factor. Duress includes both physical and emotional pressure and cannot be justified on religious or cultural grounds. Forced marriage is child abuse and can put children and young people at risk of physical, emotional and sexual violence including rape. Forced marriage can have a negative impact on a child's health and development.

Radicalisation

The aim of radicalisation is to inspire new recruits, embed extreme views and persuade vulnerable individuals to the legitimacy of a cause. This may be direct through a relationship, or through social media. Whilst there is a National Prevent agenda 12 all concerns should be reported through normal child protection procedures.

Appendix 2: Safeguarding Code of Safe Conduct

Working in a way that safeguards young people and adults at risk is central to the culture of the RSPCA. When working with or for children, young people or adults at risk, we are doing so in a position of trust and must act responsibly. Regardless of job role, all people who work or volunteer for or with the RSPCA will work to the highest standards of safeguarding practice, taking into account any specific issues listed below, which are included in their work.

Everyone representing the RSPCA will:

1. Have a good knowledge of, and adhere to, the RSPCA's safeguarding policies and procedures at all times.
2. Treat everyone with whom they come into contact with respect and challenge discrimination or prejudice should they see it.
3. Keep their private and professional lives separate.
4. Be aware of professional boundaries; any contact with a child or an adult at risk outside the work environment is never usually appropriate, including the sharing of personal contact details or having contact with them through social media.
5. Ensure that, where practical, there is always one other colleague present during any organised activities or official journeys. If at all possible, then two people should be present, but on those occasions where they can't then the person should take reasonable steps to mitigate any risks.
6. Exercise caution when discussing sensitive issues with children or adults at risk.
7. Report any safeguarding concerns about the behaviour of colleagues or members of the public to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or a Deputy for safeguarding for the appropriate area without delay.
8. Be vigilant for, recognise and record any safeguarding concerns, allegations or disclosures made by a member of the public and report this, following the RSPCA's reporting procedures.
9. Treat any safeguarding issues with the strictest confidentiality, including with friends and family.

10. Only touch others when it is essential, for example, administering first aid and where possible in the sight of another colleague. Where such activities take place, they should be recorded.
11. Seek permission from parents or carers if colleagues want to take photographs, videos or other images of a child, young person or adults at risk during activities.
12. Do not give a child or adults at risk a personal gift of any kind, or accept one. All offers of gifts should be reported to the relevant line manager.
13. Speak with their line manager if they consider that their work may put them in a position that might lead to an allegation of professional misconduct.
14. Exercise their right to whistleblow, using the RSPCA's whistleblowing procedures, or if they are concerned that safeguarding issues are being mismanaged or ignored within the RSPCA.