



YOUTHLINE COUNSELLING SERVICE

Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy

As an organisation, Youthline recognises the responsibilities it has for promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children and young people. For the avoidance of doubt, this policy applies to children and young people who have not reached their eighteenth birthday.

Youthline is committed to creating the safest possible environment for children and young people:

- The safety and welfare of children and young people is of paramount importance, whatever the circumstances.
- Everyone working with children and young people has a responsibility to safeguard and promote their welfare particularly with regards to protecting them from abuse. In cases of suspected child abuse all staff and volunteers have a responsibility to act in line with the procedures set out below. Immediate action, to consult or refer, is required where there is a suspicion of abuse
- Special care is needed in dealing with children and young people whose ages, inexperience or physical state make them particularly vulnerable to abuse.
- The organisation operates 'safe recruitment' procedures. Paid staff and volunteers are subject to a rigorous recruitment and selection procedure. This includes interviews, the uptake of references and appropriate DBS checks.
- All staff and volunteers must take part in appropriate Child Protection training.
- All staff and volunteers must be aware of Youthline procedures with regards to child protection procedures and which staff member is responsible for child protection matters.

Recognising abuse

Abuse can take a variety of forms. It can be physical, sexual, emotional or because of neglect. Please refer to the Youthline Safeguarding form for a more detailed explanation regarding the above.

All staff and volunteers at Youthline should familiarise themselves with the Local Safeguarding Children Board's Safeguarding Cue Card which is issued to all staff and volunteers as part of the induction process.

Staff and volunteers should also be aware that the Berkshire Child Protection Procedures are available on-line at www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/safeguardingchildren.

Staff and volunteers should be aware that the Youthline Safeguarding box file containing all the above information is clearly visible and accessible in the office located on top of the Admin Support desk found in the main office area.

Key roles and responsibilities

The Head of Counselling Services is the designated Safeguarding Officer for Youthline and the Counsellor & Outreach Coordinator is the designated Child Protection Officer in Schools. The Youthline Safeguarding Officer and Child Protection Officer in Schools will follow Bracknell Forest Council child protection guidelines when reporting suspected abuse. The Safeguarding Officer will inform the Chair of Trustees of any severe child protection or safeguarding concerns.

Responsibility for investigation lies with Children's Social Care in conjunction with the Police. The contact number can be found in the Safeguarding Cue Cards. These agencies have the necessary skills and experience

to balance the necessity for action to protect the child or young person with the potential adverse effects on the family and/or others.

Local Authority Guidance on historical and recent sexual abuse

Youthline follows Bracknell Forest Council child protection guidelines when reporting suspected sexual abuse. Both Youthline and the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) are not emergency services. If there is an immediate risk to a child which requires an emergency response then the police should initially be contacted before contact is made with MASH.

The key procedure for MASH is around whether the concerns warrant a call or online referral.

Guidelines for sexual assault / abuse:

1. **Immediate risk of harm** – is the child at a immediate risk of harm, if yes then call to be made to the police first followed by a call to children’s services.
2. **Child has recently been harmed, but in a safe place** – calls should be made to police and children’s services.
3. **Child has disclosed historical abuse, and still has regular contact with the perpetrator** – if the perpetrator is a family member then a call should be made to children’s services and police. If the perpetrator is another peer and there are safety measures in place for today then a call can be made to police and an online referral completed to children’s services.
4. **Child has disclosed historical abuse, and no longer has contact with the suspect** – online referral can be submitted to children’s services alongside a report being made to the police.

NOTE: It is important to inform clients that Youthline’s Safeguarding Leads will need to contact their parent or carer to provide support, unless the alleged perpetrator is a family member living in the home or has visitation rights.

Responding to a disclosure or concern

If someone tells you that they, or someone they know, has been or is being abused:

- Believe what the person is saying and take it seriously
- Remind the client about the initial contract on confidentiality
- Reassure the person making the disclosure to you that they have done the right thing
- Give the person time to talk, but do not probe or ask **leading** questions. Investigation is not your responsibility. Use the **TED** method (clients tell, explain, describe).
- Do not promise to keep secrets. All allegations of harm or potential harm must be acted upon.
- Assure the young person that you will continue to support them, if they wish, regardless of the outcome.
- Explain to the young person that you must share the information with the designated Safeguarding Lead for Youthline in accordance with our procedures. If it is not possible to contact the designated Safeguarding Lead, advice must be sought from Children’s Social Care
- The timing of referrals must always reflect the perceived risk and should normally be within one working day of recognition.
- Always assure the person that whatever decisions are taken they will be discussed with them first wherever possible.
- Email, telephone or text messages received with details of suspected abuse should be responded to within 24 hours by contacting the young person by telephone or face to face to obtain further information.
- Using the Highly Confidential Youthline Safeguarding form, make careful factual records of what is said using the client’s words as soon as is possible following the disclosure. Date, time and sign the record for the immediate attention of Youthline’s Safeguarding Lead.

- The forms are highly confidential and should be encrypted before sending them to the Safeguarding Lead using the standard encryption password.
- Do not speak to or confront the alleged abuser. Do not share suspicions with anyone other than the designated Safeguarding Lead, Children's Social Care or the Police.

Acting on concerns regarding an adult's behaviour

If you have concerns about an adult's behaviour towards children or young people (not a staff member of volunteer working for Youthline):

- Do not ignore it.
- Discuss your concerns with the designated Safeguarding Lead who will raise concerns with the statutory agencies.
- Do not confront the adult but seek advice from the designated Safeguarding Lead or from Children's Social Care.

Acting on a disclosure from an adult that they are involved in the abuse of a child or young person

If someone not employed by Youthline discloses that they are involved in the abuse of a child or young person, you must take action:

- Believe what they are saying and take them seriously
- Explain the limits of confidentiality before they disclose more information
- Record details of what you have been told as soon as possible
- Report the disclosure to the designated Safeguarding Lead for Youthline who will ensure that the appropriate actions are taken. If for any reason you cannot contact the designated Safeguarding Lead, you should contact either Children's Social Care or the Police.

What happens when a referral is made to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)?

When a referral is made to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub you can expect that it will be treated seriously, handled sensitively, and shared only on a 'need to know' basis entirely to protect the interests of the young person. To ensure that young people are safeguarded based on proper evidence, the source of the referral cannot be kept anonymous. *(The Youthline confidentiality clause will mention the legal limitations of confidentiality and the client is to be reminded of what was discussed at the initial session)*. Verbal and telephone referrals must be confirmed in writing within 48 hours. Ensure that a written response is received through your Co-ordinator.

A record of contact with the MASH will be registered on Lamplight and the Safeguarding Lead will send you encrypted email documents to keep you up to date with information.

NOTE: Communication is key in any safeguarding disclosure informed by a duty of care towards the client. If you have not heard from the Safeguarding lead you are required to contact the Safeguarding lead before the client's next session. You are also required to keep the Safeguarding lead up to date with any further information disclosed in sessions as soon possible.

Acting on allegations against any employee or volunteer working for Youthline

If you believe there to be a child protection issue directly relating to a staff member or volunteer working for Youthline, the designated Safeguarding Lead must be informed. If you believe there to be a child protection issue that relates to the Safeguarding Lead, then the matter must be reported to the Chair of Trustees.

In such cases, appropriate confidentiality will always be maintained whilst any investigation is underway. Appropriate support will be provided for the member of staff/volunteer who is the subject of an allegation whilst it is underway.

It is important that all allegations, even those that appear less serious are followed up and examined objectively by someone independent of Youthline. A referral to Children's Social Care in most cases will result in a child protection strategy meeting that will discuss how to proceed about possible police investigation, child protection enquiries and/or disciplinary investigation. All allegations will be considered by the Local Authority Designated Officer, who acts on behalf of the Local Safeguarding Children Board to monitor allegations and ensure that appropriate actions are taken.

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

The LADO plays a crucial role in safeguarding children. They are responsible for managing and overseeing allegations against adults who work with children up to the age of 18.

Key responsibilities include:

- Providing advice and guidance to employers and organisations such as Youthline, on concerns related to adults working with children.
- They ensure that allegations are handled properly and in accordance with statutory guidelines.
- They liaise with various agencies such as the police, education providers, and residential facilities to ensure a coordinated approach.
- They monitor the progress of cases to ensure they are resolved promptly and fairly.

Recording Information and Data Protection on Lamplight

All information is held in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018). Data extracted from Lamplight is used to populate the MASH online safeguarding prompts. The Safeguarding Lead is responsible for reporting all safeguarding concerns at Youthline.

Youthline requires all information to be clear and factual using as much of the client's language as possible.

Once information has been logged onto Lamplight changes are unable to be made. If data is subpoenaed by the Courts, Youthline is obliged to provide them with the requested client data through our reporting system.

Maintaining a safe working environment

The following guidelines apply to Youthline's paid staff and volunteers:

- Always avoid unnecessary physical contact with a young person
- Do not take a young person alone in a car, however short the journey. Do not offer to take a young person home, to hospital or anywhere else.
- *If you find yourself in a situation where you are alone with a child or young person, make sure that others can clearly observe you.*
- Except in the case of an emergency, no member of staff or volunteer should be alone with a child or young person
- Maintain appropriate relationships with a child or vulnerable adult.
- Do not divulge personal contact details such as an email address or telephone number.
- Do not invite a child or young person to stay at your home or offer to drive them home.
- Do not make suggestive or inappropriate remarks to or about a child, even in fun, as this could be misinterpreted
- If a child, young person, or vulnerable adult makes any kind of accusation regarding a member of staff or volunteer at Youthline you should report this immediately to the designated Safeguarding Lead.

- Participate in all annual mandatory safeguarding training which is available to you to support your work with children, young people, and vulnerable adults.
- Remember that those who abuse children, young people and vulnerable adults can be of any age (including other children, young people, and vulnerable adults), gender, ethnic background, or class, and it is important not to allow personal preconceptions about people to prevent appropriate action taking place
- Good practice includes valuing children, young people and vulnerable adults as individuals and the adult modelling of appropriate conduct – which would exclude bullying, aggressive behaviour, racism, sectarianism, or sexism.

Safer workforce: recruitment and selection

The recruitment and selection process adopted by Youthline includes the following elements:

- Job descriptions will explicitly reference safeguarding responsibilities and applicants will be provided with information about Youthline’s Safeguarding policy and practices
- Enhanced DBS check
- Use of application forms. CVs on their own will not be accepted
- A minimum of two people will check for gaps in employment/education and training history and explore any gaps at interview
- At least two references from previous employers, which specifically covers whether or not there have been any concerns or allegations about the applicant’s behaviour towards children; any disciplinary action and confirmation of the applicant’s responsibilities. This will be compared with the application and any inconsistencies followed up with the referee
- Applicants’ attitudes towards children and young people, their motivation for pursuing the role and managing boundaries will be explored at interview
- Any inconsistencies or uncertainties will always be followed up and resolved before commencement of duties.

Policy Date: _____ Policy Review Date: _____

Signature: _____ Name: _____