SAFEGUARDING & HELPLINES

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INTRODUCTION

This introductory guide on safeguarding is for helpline managers, heads of service, trustees and organisations that are considering creating or developing helpline services. It may also be useful for helplines in general.

Helplines work across a range of settings, providing non-face-to-face support to children and adults, some of whom may be vulnerable. Safeguarding is important for all helplines to consider. Some helplines receive complex calls from children or adults who are in challenging situations or are at risk of harm. Helplines should consider the risks that their callers face, and ensure that this is reflected within their safeguarding policies.

By having a robust approach to safeguarding, and understanding the challenges in ensuring that services are safe when delivered in non-face-to-face environments, helplines can be confident that they are offering safe and appropriate services to children and adults who may be vulnerable.

WHAT IS SAFEGUARDING?

Safeguarding is the approach that your helpline takes to ensuring that anyone using your services is safe. Safeguarding is used to describe work to protect children or vulnerable adults with particular focus on protecting vulnerable groups from the risk of abuse or harm.

In Working Together to Protect Children the government defines children’s safeguarding in the following way:

Whilst local authorities play a lead role, safeguarding children and protecting them from harm is everyone’s responsibility. Everyone who comes into contact with children and families has a role to play. Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined ....as:

- protecting children from maltreatment
- preventing impairment of children’s health or development
- ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care
- taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes
HOW DOES SAFEGUARDING WORK ON HELPLINES?

Helplines deliver services which are not in direct contact with the person who is using the service. This is an important distinction because most guidance on safeguarding is written for organisations that have face-to-face contact with service users.

Helplines also need to consider how they keep people who use their services safe from harm. Key ways in which a helpline can do this is in having:

- Effective policies and procedures
- Good recruitment practices for staff, volunteers and trustees
- Effective staff training in safeguarding

It is good practice for helplines to ensure that there are strong links between their safeguarding and confidentiality policies.

Helplines can face particular safeguarding concerns when a child or vulnerable adult discloses that they might be:

- At risk from another person
- At risk of self-harm or experiencing suicidal thoughts or feelings
- At risk of harm in some other way, such as not having a safe place to stay

Where a helpline is enacting their safeguarding policy, a disclosure may need to be made to the police, social services or an appropriate healthcare provider.
POLICIES

- Develop safeguarding and confidentiality policies which consider when information will be shared externally to safeguard service users, and consider how your helpline will support service users who may be experiencing suicidal thoughts or feelings.

PRACTICE

- Ensure that your policies apply across all channels for which you provide support. This may include policies on follow up responses to emails or text messages that have given cause for concern.

TRAINING

- All call handlers need to have adequate training to ensure they understand their helpline’s policies and how to apply them.

PROCESS

- Develop an internal process for safeguarding. Who will make a decision to refer? Many helplines that work with children and young people have a specialist safeguarding team comprising more senior staff. Call handlers need to be able to refer matters of concern quickly to staff who can then decide if action needs to be taken.

PROCEDURE

- Decide in advance how you will share information in an emergency, and what types of information you can share, with thorough consideration given to the needs of the vulnerable person. Some helplines use caller line identification (CLI) which could provide a contact number for the service user. Other helplines hold identifying information about callers such as their name or address.

RECORDING

- When a disclosure needs to take place to protect a vulnerable child or adult then ensure that effective records are kept about what information has been shared, and with which particular agency.
Helplines need to be aware that their safeguarding policies should also encompass a number of key areas identifying and reducing risks of harm that children or vulnerable adults may have when accessing helpline services.

Helplines should have effective internal systems for responding to safeguarding concerns. This should include ensuring that while there may be a lead person for safeguarding, decisions are not made in isolation and that there is effective management oversight. Keeping appropriate records of concerns and the actions that the helpline took in response is also important.

Where a helpline is part of a wider organisation that delivers face-to-face or onsite services, it is important to ensure that vulnerable groups are adequately protected. The safeguarding policies of the organisation may be more complex as a result. Helplines typically provide indirect support to children or vulnerable adults however it is still important to have safe working practices that work effectively across the entire organisation.

**SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN**

Safeguarding children has been defined in the following way by the government in *Working together to safeguard children 2015*:

- Protecting children from maltreatment
- Preventing impairment of children’s health and development
- Ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care
- Taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes

Trustees of charities which work with vulnerable groups, including children, must always act in the best interests of any vulnerable service users and ensure they take all reasonable steps to prevent harm to them. Having safeguards in place within your organisation not only protects and promotes the welfare of children, and other vulnerable groups, it can enhance the confidence of staff, volunteers, parents/carers and the general public.
These safeguards should include a child protection policy and procedures for dealing with issues of concern or abuse. For the purposes of child protection legislation the term ‘child’ refers to anyone up to the age of 18 years.

WHO IS A VULNERABLE ADULT?

A vulnerable adult has been defined as:
“Any person aged 18 years or over who is, or may be, unable to take care of him or herself or who is unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation. This may be because he or she has a mental health problem, a disability, a sensory impairment, is old and frail, or has some form of illness. Because of his or her vulnerability, the individual may be in receipt of a care service in his or her own home, in the community or be resident in a residential care home, nursing home or other institutional setting.’

Until the Care Act 2014 came into force on 1st April 2015, there was no English law that dealt specifically with safeguarding adults who might be at risk of abuse or neglect. The ideas that underpin the Care Act are:

- Stop abuse and neglect where possible
- Prevent harm and reduce the risk of abuse and neglect
- Safeguard adults in a way that supports them in making choices and having control about how they want to live
- Concentrate on improving life for the adult concerned
- Raise public awareness so that communities play a role alongside professionals
- Provide accessible information and support about how to stay safe and how to raise a concern
- Address the cause of the abuse and neglect

The statutory guidance also sets out 6 key principles:
The Care Act was designed to give protection to adults who have
- care and support needs,
- are experiencing, or are at risk of abuse or neglect;
- or because of their care and support needs cannot protect themselves against actual or potential abuse or neglect.

The Care Act contains new responsibilities for local authorities, health and care providers to keep vulnerable people safe and provide adequate services to vulnerable groups. There are also new rules on safeguarding and sharing information that apply to statutory services and care providers.

WHAT DOES GOOD PRACTICE LOOK LIKE WHEN DEVELOPING POLICIES?

Good practice within your procedures and systems should provide clear step-by-step guidance on what to do in different circumstances and define roles and responsibilities. Systems for recording information and dealing with complaints are also needed. It may be appropriate to consider links to your Local Safeguarding Children Board’s procedures or national good practice guidance.

In order to be effective, helplines must consider the following points when developing polices and implementation plans.

CHECKLIST

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<th>Question</th>
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<tr>
<td>Who is the lead person for safeguarding, and who will be their deputy?</td>
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<td>Do all your call handlers understand what abuse is, and the different types of abuse that can occur?</td>
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<td>How would you respond if you had concerns about a child or vulnerable adult’s welfare?</td>
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<td>How would you respond if you had concerns about the actions of a trustee, staff member or volunteer?</td>
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<td>Who would you pass concerns on to?</td>
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<td>Question</td>
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<td>How would you record incidents or referrals, and store them appropriately?</td>
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<td>Are you confident in being able to share information?</td>
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<td>Do all trustees, staff and volunteers understand appropriate behaviour, and know there are consequences linked to disciplinary and grievance processes?</td>
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<td>Do you have a safe recruitment process? This can include DBS checks if you are eligible, and also include good selection and taking up references.</td>
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<td>Do you have a complaints process for people who use your services?</td>
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<td>What training do you give to your staff, volunteers and trustees?</td>
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<td>Have you considered specific issues regarding eSafety, and the particular risks your service users might face?</td>
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<td>Does your policy work across all of the channels through which you offer your services?</td>
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<td>Is there adequate post-contact support available for staff and volunteers who have responded to safeguarding concerns?</td>
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**SAFE RECRUITMENT**

Helplines have a responsibility to keep vulnerable groups safe. Helpline staff and volunteers engage with children living in challenging circumstances, young people and adults with complex needs. While this contact is indirect, there is still the potential for harm to occur.

Having safe recruitment procedures reduces the risk of having call handlers on your helpline who are not suitable to provide services to children or vulnerable adults. Helpline users place a high degree of trust in the helpline services which they use, and it is highly important that this trust is not taken advantage of.

A safe recruitment process on a helpline might have the following components:
WHAT’S THE ROLE OF DISCLOSURE AND BARRING CHECKS?

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) helps employers make safer recruitment decisions and prevent unsuitable people from working with vulnerable groups, including children. They can process DBS checks that look into a person’s criminal history. They also maintain a barred list of people who are not suitable to work with children or vulnerable adults.

A check can only be made by a registered employer, and the employer needs to be carrying out work that meets the frequency and intensity requirements of regulated activity. This means that a person must be having a certain type of contact with a child or vulnerable adult, and that this activity must be taking place regularly. The rules on this are specific, and the DBS produces guidance on who is eligible.

Sometimes, a person may present too much of a risk to be allowed to work with children.
or vulnerable adults, and may be placed on the Barring List, which is managed by the DBS. It is a criminal offence for a barred person to seek to work, or work in, activities from which they are barred. It is also a criminal offence for employers or voluntary organisations to knowingly employ a barred person in regulated activity. It’s therefore important for helpline managers and trustees to understand what activities are regulated, and be able to apply this information to their services.

DBS checks are one part of a safe recruitment process. If your helpline finds that it is not eligible to have a check then you must still ensure that you apply a safe recruitment process, have an effective policy and procedure, and provide good training to staff, volunteers and trustees.

Some larger organisations may run a range of services, where only some of these services fall within regulated activity. Care needs to be taken where a staff member or volunteer moves from an unregulated to a regulated activity, and additional checks may be needed.

WHAT IS THE THRESHOLD FOR HAVING A CHECK?

In 2012 the Government tightened the eligibility under which checks could take place. A check cannot be made on a person who is under 16, and there are different requirements for whether the work that your organisation does will be with children or vulnerable adults.

Working with children

The regulated activity relating to children covers unsupervised activities. This can include teaching, training, instructing, caring for or supervising children, or providing advice or guidance on well-being, or drive a vehicle only for children. It also covers some specific area such as working in schools, providing childcare and providing personal care.

One area that is particularly relevant to helplines is providing advice or guidance on well-being. This falls into a group of activities which are only regulated (meaning that a check can take place) if they are done regularly. The information published by the government on regulated activity states that advice or guidance provided wholly or mainly for children relating to their physical, emotional or educational wellbeing if carried out by the same person frequently (once a week or more often), or on 4 or more days in a 30-day period or overnight would fall into regulated activity. In this situation the organisation would potentially be able to have a check.
Another area that can be very relevant for helplines is moderating web spaces which are used by children or teenagers. The government guidance on regulated activity in relation to children states that moderating a public electronic interactive communication service likely to be used wholly or mainly by children, carried out by the same person frequently (once a week or more often), or on 4 or more days in a 30-day period is regulated activity. The exception to this would be activity by a person who did not have access to the content of the matter, or contact with users.

There is an important distinction between supervised and unsupervised activity. Helpline managers and trustees should be aware that supervision has to take place on a regular basis, meaning that supervision must not, for example, be concentrated during the first few weeks of an activity and then tail off afterwards. It must take place on an ongoing basis, whether the worker has just started or has been doing the activity for some time. Helpline managers may wish to consider how unsupervised calls or other interactions are with children as part of the service delivery.

If a person on your helpline is:

- providing advice or guidance on wellbeing to children or
- moderating spaces used by children or young people

and this work is carried out at least once a week, or 4 times in 30 days or overnight then you may be eligible to request a DBS check.

If you are not sure whether the activity is supervised or not then you could also consider the following points:

- ages of the children, including whether their ages differ widely
- number of children that the individual is working with
- the nature of the individual’s work
- how vulnerable the children are (the more they are, the more an organisation might opt for workers to be in regulated activity)

Helplines that run services for children and young people up to 18 may find that their work falls within the definition of regulated activity, and would be eligible to have a DBS check carried out on staff or volunteers. More information is available from the Disclosure and Barring Service.

**Working with vulnerable adults**

The changes which were made to disclosure and barring in 2012 no longer labelled adults as ‘vulnerable’. Instead, the definition identifies the activities which, if any adult requires them, could lead to that adult being considered vulnerable at that
particular time. This means that the focus is on the activities needed by the adult and not the personal needs or circumstances of the adult receiving the activities.

With adults, there is not a requirement for a person to do the activities a certain number of times before they are engaging in regulated activity.

There are six categories of people who will fall within the new definition of regulated activity, and this definition also includes anyone who provides day-to-day management or supervision of people carrying out the following activities:

- Providing health care
- Providing personal care
- Providing social work
- Giving assistance with cash, bills and/or shopping to an adult because of their age, illness or disability, if that includes managing the person’s cash, paying their bills or shopping on their behalf
- Giving assistance in the conduct of a person’s own affairs
- Conveying, which means transporting an adult because of their age, illness or disability. This does not include family and friends or taxi drivers

Some of these categorises are more relevant to helplines, particularly the category relating to providing health care. This definition includes any health care professional providing health care to an adult, or anyone who provides health care to an adult under the direction or supervision of a health care professional. Health care includes all forms of health care provided for individuals, whether relating to physical or mental health and also includes palliative care. A health care professional is a person who is a member of a profession regulated by a body mentioned in section 25(3) of the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Act 2002. This includes doctors, nurses, dentists, pharmacists and other medical professionals.

If your helpline provides health care or health care advice delivered by registered medical professionals then you may be carrying out regulated activity.

**IMPORTANT**

Helplines providing support to vulnerable adults need to look carefully at the activities they are providing to see if the activities are regulated.

Assistance in the conduct of an adult’s own affairs is also regulated activity, but it falls within very specific circumstances such as:

- having enduring or lasting power of attorney
- being an independent mental health advocate in line with the Mental Capacity Act 2005
• providing independent advocacy services under the National Health Service Act 2006 or National Health Service (Wales) Act 2006
• being appointed as a representative to receive payments on behalf of a person under the Social Security Administration Act 1992

More information on these categories can be found by looking at the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, as amended by the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012.

CONCLUSIONS

Helplines need to ensure that people using their services are safe from harm. A good way to do this is through having effective safeguarding policies, training, safe recruitment practices and clear boundaries on acceptable practices within the helpline service delivery.

Through their work, helplines may identify individuals who are at risk of harm. These might be children or vulnerable adults, and the information might be about the service user or another person. It is very important that helplines have good policies of how they will support service users, and link their safeguarding policy to their confidentiality policy.

Safeguarding is a complex area. Helplines deliver support to a number of groups of people, and some helpline services may work with more complex safeguarding issues than others.

Your safeguarding policy should be appropriate to the work that you are delivering and the risks that your service users face. If you have any doubts or concerns about safeguarding on your helpline then you should seek further advice from a suitably qualified professional.
GLOSSARY

SAFEGUARDING POLICY
A policy that sets out how your helpline will protect children and vulnerable adults who use your services.

CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY
The policy that governs how you respond to and manage information given to you by people who use your service. This policy can have a significant impact on your helpline’s service focus.

STATUTORY GUIDANCE
Information published by government which explains how organisations should apply specific pieces of legislation.

SAFE RECRUITMENT PROCESSES
Ensuring that your staff, volunteers and trustees are appropriate people to work with children or vulnerable adults.

CALLER LINE IDENTIFICATION
Storing information relating to the number that your caller has used to contact your service.

DBS CHECK
A check using the Disclosure and Barring Service. It provides information on whether a person is safe to work with vulnerable groups. It is only available in certain settings.

DISCLOSURE AND BARRING SERVICE
A government agency which carries out DBS checks.

REGULATED ACTIVITY
The type of work that a person needs to be delivering to be eligible for an organisation to make a DBS check.

CHILD PROTECTION
Having an awareness of risks of different types of harm that children are at risk of, and taking steps to prevent or reduce harm.
FURTHER READING SECTION

Child protection resources
http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-protection-system/

More information on safeguarding

Information on vulnerable adult safeguarding
http://www.scie.org.uk/adults/safeguarding/

Information on safeguarding within the charity sector

Further information on the Care Act

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)
https://www.gov.uk/disclosure-barring-service-check/overview

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