



Safeguarding Children Policy

The purpose of this policy statement is:

- To protect children and young people who receive The Special Lioness's services from harm. This includes the children of adults who use our services;
- To provide staff and volunteers, as well as children and young people and their families, with the overarching principles that guide our approach to child protection; and
- This policy applies to anyone working on behalf of The Special Lioness, including senior managers and the board of trustees, paid staff, volunteers, sessional workers, agency staff and students.

This policy has been drawn up on the basis of legislation, policy and guidance that seeks to protect children in England/Northern Ireland/Scotland/Wales.

This policy statement should be read alongside our organisational policies, procedures, guidance and other related documents and the Policy will be updated annually.

We recognise that:

- The welfare of children is paramount in all the work we do and in all the decisions we take all children, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation have an equal right to protection from all types of harm or abuse;
- Some children are additionally vulnerable because of the impact of previous experiences, their level of dependency, communication needs or other issues; and
- Working in partnership with children, young people, their parents, carers and other agencies is essential in promoting young people's welfare.

We will seek to keep children and young people safe by:

- Valuing, listening to and respecting them;
- Appointing a nominated child safeguarding / protection lead for children and young people;
- Adopting child protection and safeguarding best practice through our policies, procedures and code of conduct for staff and volunteers;
- Providing effective management for staff and volunteers through supervision, support, training and quality assurance measures so that all staff and



volunteers know about and follow our policies, procedures and behaviour codes confidently and competently;

- Recruiting and selecting staff and volunteers safely, ensuring all necessary DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) and identity checks are made;
- Recording, storing and using information professionally and securely, in line with data protection legislation and guidance;
- Sharing information about safeguarding and good practice with children and their families via leaflets, posters, group work and one-to-one discussions;
- Making sure that children, young people and their families know where to go for help if they have a concern;
- Using our safeguarding and child protection procedures to share concerns and relevant information with agencies who need to know, and involving children, young people, parents, families and carers appropriately;
- Using our procedures to manage any allegations against staff and volunteers appropriately;
- Creating and maintaining an anti-bullying environment and ensuring that we have a policy and procedure to help us deal effectively with any bullying that does arise;
- Ensuring that we have effective complaints and whistleblowing measures in place;
- Ensuring that we provide a safe physical environment for our children, young people, staff and volunteers, by applying health and safety measures in accordance with the law and regulatory guidance; and
- Building a safeguarding culture where staff and volunteers, children, young people and their families, treat each other with respect and are comfortable about sharing concerns.

Policy Review

We will review and update this policy annually to ensure it remains compliant with Safeguarding legislation and our team and Volunteers are trained and updated around policy and procedure changes regularly. The next review and re-issue date is 15th January 2027.

Contact details Designated Safeguarding lead Name: **Claire Stewart** Trustee/Senior Lead for Safeguarding.

This policy was last reviewed by:

Signed: Claire Stewart - Trustee

Date: 15th January 2026

Next Review Date: 15th January 2027



Understanding and identifying abuse and neglect Procedure

Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment – a person may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm.

Child welfare concerns may arise in many different contexts, and can vary greatly in terms of their nature and seriousness. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting, by those known to them or by a stranger, including, via the internet. In the case of female genital mutilation, children may be taken out of the country to be abused. They may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children. An abused child will often experience more than one type of abuse, as well as other difficulties in their lives. Abuse and neglect can happen over a period of time, but can also be a one-off event. Child abuse and neglect can have major long-term impacts on all aspects of a child's health, development and well-being.

The warning signs and symptoms of child abuse and neglect can vary from child to child. Disabled children may be especially vulnerable to abuse, including because they may have an impaired capacity to resist or avoid abuse. They may have speech, language and communication needs which may make it difficult to tell others what is happening. Children also develop and mature at different rates so what appears to be worrying for a younger child might be normal behaviour for an older child. Parental behaviours may also indicate child abuse or neglect, so you should also be alert to parent-child interactions which are concerning and other parental behaviours. This could include parents who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol or if there is a sudden change in their mental health.

By understanding the warning signs, you can respond to problems as early as possible and provide the right support and services for the child and their family. It is important to recognise that a warning sign doesn't automatically mean a child is being abused.

There are a number of warning indicators which might suggest that a child may be being abused or neglected. Some of the following signs might be indicators of abuse or neglect:

- Children whose behaviour changes – they may become aggressive, challenging, disruptive, withdrawn or clingy, or they might have difficulty sleeping or start wetting the bed;
- Children with clothes which are ill-fitting and/or dirty;
- Children with consistently poor hygiene;
- Children who make strong efforts to avoid specific family members or friends, without an obvious reason;
- Children who don't want to change clothes in front of others or participate in physical activities;



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- Children who are having problems at school, for example, a sudden lack of concentration and learning or they appear to be tired and hungry;
- Children who talk about being left home alone, with inappropriate carers or with strangers;
- Children who reach developmental milestones, such as learning to speak or walk, late, with no medical reason;
- Children who are regularly missing from school or education;
- Children who are reluctant to go home after school;
- Children with poor school attendance and punctuality, or who are consistently late being picked up;
- Parents who are dismissive and non-responsive to staff / volunteers' concerns;
- Parents who collect their children from school when drunk, or under the influence of drugs;
- Children who drink alcohol regularly from an early age;
- Children who are concerned for younger siblings without explaining why;
- Children who talk about running away; and
- Children who shy away from being touched or flinch at sudden movements.

There are four main categories of abuse and neglect: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. Each has its own specific warning indicators, which you should be alert to.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is deliberately physically hurting a child. It might take a variety of different forms, including hitting, pinching, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning or suffocating a child.

Physical abuse can happen in any family, but children may be more at risk if their parents have problems with drugs, alcohol and mental health or if they live in a home where domestic abuse happens. Babies and disabled children also have a higher risk of suffering physical abuse.

Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child. Physical abuse can also occur outside of the family environment. Some of the following signs may be indicators of physical abuse:

- Children with frequent injuries;
- Children with unexplained or unusual fractures or broken bones; and
- Children with unexplained: o bruises or cuts; o burns or scalds; or o bite marks.



Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child. It is also sometimes called psychological abuse and it can have severe and persistent adverse effects on a child's emotional development.

Although the effects of emotional abuse might take a long time to be recognisable, staff / volunteers will be in a position to observe it, for example, in the way that a parent interacts with their child. Emotional abuse may involve deliberately telling a child that they are worthless, or unloved and inadequate. It may include not giving a child opportunities, to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate.

Emotional abuse may involve serious bullying – including online bullying through social networks, online games or mobile phones – by a child's peers. Some of the following signs may be indicators of emotional abuse:

- Children who are excessively withdrawn, fearful, or anxious about doing something wrong;
- Parents or carers who withdraw their attention from their child, giving the child the 'cold shoulder';
- Parents or carers blaming their problems on their child; and
- Parents or carers who humiliate their child, for example, by name-calling or making negative comparisons.

Sexual abuse and exploitation

Sexual abuse is any sexual activity with a child. You should be aware that many children and young people who are victims of sexual abuse do not recognise themselves as such. A child may not understand what is happening and may not even understand that it is wrong. Sexual abuse can have a long-term impact on mental health.

Sexual abuse 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 clothing. It may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in the production of sexual images, forcing children to look at sexual images or watch sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children. Some of the following signs may be indicators of sexual abuse:

- Children who display knowledge or interest in sexual acts inappropriate to their age;



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- Children who use sexual language or have sexual knowledge that you wouldn't expect them to have;
- Children who ask others to behave sexually or play sexual games; and
- Children with physical sexual health problems, including soreness in the genital and anal areas, sexually transmitted infections or underage pregnancy.

Child sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse where children are sexually exploited for money, power or status. It can involve violent, humiliating and degrading sexual assaults. In some cases, young people are persuaded or forced into exchanging sexual activity for money, drugs, gifts, affection or status. Consent cannot be given, even where a child may believe they are voluntarily engaging in sexual activity with the person who is exploiting them. Child sexual exploitation doesn't always involve physical contact and can happen online. A significant number of children who are victims of sexual exploitation go missing from home, care and education at some point. Some of the following signs may be indicators of sexual exploitation:

- Children who appear with unexplained gifts or new possessions;
- Children who associate with other young people involved in exploitation;
- Children who have older boyfriends or girlfriends;
- Children who suffer from sexually transmitted infections or become pregnant;
- Children who suffer from changes in emotional well-being;
- Children who misuse drugs and alcohol;
- Children who go missing for periods of time or regularly come home late; and
- Children who regularly miss school or education or don't take part in education.

Neglect

Neglect is a pattern of failing to provide for a child's basic needs, whether it be adequate food, clothing, hygiene, supervision or shelter. It is likely to result in the serious impairment of a child's health or development.

Children who are neglected often also suffer from other types of abuse. It is important that staff / volunteers remain alert and do not miss opportunities to take timely action. However, while you may be concerned about a child, neglect is not always straightforward to identify.

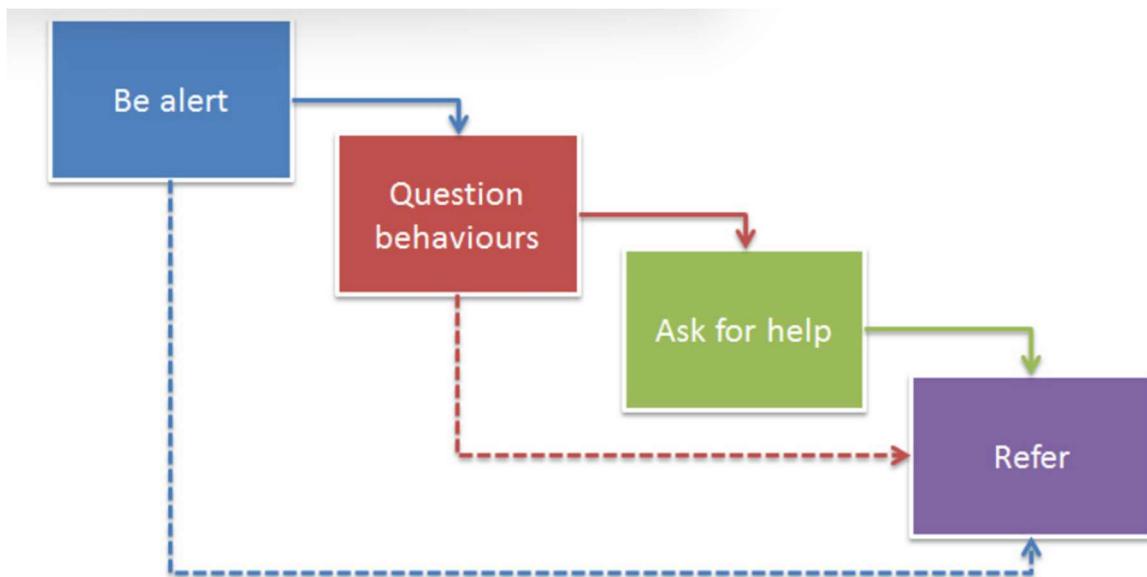
Neglect may occur if a parent becomes physically or mentally unable to care for a child. A parent may also have an addiction to alcohol or drugs, which could impair their ability to keep a child safe or result in them prioritising buying drugs, or alcohol, over food, clothing or warmth for the child.

Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal drug or alcohol abuse. Some of the following signs may be indicators of neglect:

- Children who are living in a home that is indisputably dirty or unsafe;
- Children who are left hungry or dirty;

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- Children who are left without adequate clothing, e.g. not having a winter coat;
- Children who are living in dangerous conditions, i.e. around drugs, alcohol or violence;
- Children who are often angry, aggressive or self-harm;
- Children who fail to receive basic health care; and
- Parents who fail to seek medical treatment when their children are ill or are injured.



Taking action

As well as the responsibility of all staff / volunteers to consider the welfare of children, a number of local agencies have specific duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

There are four key steps to follow to help you to identify and respond appropriately to possible abuse and/or neglect.

It may not always be appropriate to go through all four stages sequentially. **If a child is in immediate danger or is at risk of harm, you should refer to children's social care and/or the police.** Before doing so, you should try to establish the basic facts. However, it will be the role of social workers and the police to investigate cases and make a judgement on whether there should be a statutory intervention and/or a criminal investigation.



You should record, in writing, all concerns and discussions about a child's welfare, the decisions made and the reasons for those decisions. Being alert to signs of abuse and neglect. The first step is to be alert to the signs of abuse and neglect, to have read this document and to understand the procedures set out in your local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

Questioning behaviours

The signs of child abuse might not always be obvious and a child might not tell anyone what is happening to them. You should therefore question behaviours if something seems unusual and try to speak to the child, alone, if appropriate, to seek further information.

If a child reports, following a conversation you have initiated or otherwise, that they are being abused and neglected, you should listen to them, take their allegation seriously, and reassure them that you will take action to keep them safe. You will need to decide the most appropriate action to take, depending on the circumstances of the case, the seriousness of the child's allegation and the local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements in place. You might refer directly to children's social care and/or the police, or discuss your concerns with others and ask for help. At all times, you should explain to the child the action that you are taking. It is important to maintain confidentiality, but you should not promise that you won't tell anyone, as you may need to do so in order to protect the child.

Asking for help

Concerns about a child's welfare can vary greatly in terms of their nature and seriousness, how they have been identified and over what duration they have arisen. If you have concerns about a child, you should ask for help.

You should discuss your concerns with your designated safeguarding lead, Claire Stewart. The safeguarding lead will usually decide whether to make a referral to children's social care; who should liaise with local statutory children's services agencies, children's social care (and, in emergencies, the police) if they have concerns about the safety or welfare of a child.

You can also seek advice at any time from the NSPCC helpline – help@nspcc.org.uk or 0808 800 5000. Next steps might involve undertaking an early help assessment or making a referral directly to children's social care/the police.

If you have concerns about the safety or welfare of a child and feel they are not being acted upon by your designated safeguarding lead, it is your responsibility to take action. Early help assessment Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges. As part of your area's local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements there will be processes in place around the assessment of children who may benefit from early help. An early help assessment should be undertaken by a lead



professional who should provide support to the child and family, act as an advocate on their behalf and coordinate the delivery of support services. Any frontline practitioner from any agency working with children, young people and families, including the voluntary and community sector, can undertake an early help assessment. You might, therefore, act as the lead professional for an early help assessment, or be asked to participate in such an assessment. Whatever the case, you will need to work closely with other staff / volunteers to decide whether the child and family would benefit from coordinated support from more than one agency.

Referring to children's social care

If, at any time, you believe that a child may be a child in need, or that a child is being harmed or is likely to be, you should refer immediately to local authority children's social care. This referral can be made by any practitioner. If you see further signs of potential abuse and neglect, report and refer again. When referring a child to children's social care, you should consider and include any information you have on the child's development needs and their parents'/carers' ability to respond to these needs within the context of their wider family and environment.

Children are considered to be 'in need' under s17 of the Children Act 1989 if:

- They are unlikely to achieve or maintain or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a satisfactory level of health or development without the provision of services;
- Their health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision of such services; or
- They are disabled.

Information sharing It is important to remember that throughout the four stages, sharing information is an intrinsic part of any practitioner's role. The decisions about how much information to share, with whom and when can have a profound impact on people's lives. You should weigh up what might happen if the information is shared against the consequences of not sharing the information. Early sharing of information is key to providing effective early help where there are emerging problems. At the other end of the continuum, sharing information can be essential to put in place effective child protection services.

Designated Safeguarding Lead	Deputy Safeguarding Lead	Local Authority – Sunderland Council
<i>Claire Stewart Claire@TheSpecialLioness.com Tel – 07970 413825</i>	<i>Amy Howes Amy@TheSpecialLioness.com Tel – 07834 036314</i>	<i>Together for Children Team children@togetherforchildren.org.uk Tel – 0191 560 5560</i>

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