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Safeguarding Children and Young People

Policy

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1 Purpose

1.1 This policy sets out Evolves approach to preventing and reducing the risk of harm, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children and young people.

1.2 The policy is also intended to protect those who work with young people and children from unfounded accusations, or from behaving in ways that may be well-intended but inadvisable, and to enable Evolve services to fulfil the duty of support it provides.

1.3 It provides guidance for volunteers, staff, managers and board members on prompt and effective responses and reporting procedures. Should abuse be suspected, disclosed or discovered, regardless of the setting in which the abuse has taken place, it must be reported in line with this policy and procedure.

1.4 It recognises the obligations and duty of care that organisations working with children and young people have, as covered in The Children Act (1989, 2004) and The Care Act (2014).

1.5 This policy reflects the updates in the 2026 Working Together statutory guidance provided by the government to enhance the scope of working with all children including unborn children. It provides greater focus on anti-racist and discriminatory practice and increased harms, such as honour based violence, online harm and faith and group-based abuse.

1.6 This policy must be considered with all evictions and exclusions from services across Evolve. Consideration must be given for alternative placement and or referrals where safeguarding is identified.

2 Scope

2.1 This policy is applicable to all permanent and temporary staff, including senior managers, bank workers, agency staff, our board, volunteers and anyone else working on behalf of the organisation. Reporting of safeguarding concerns and abuse is everyone's responsibility.

2.2 Contractors working for Evolve are also bound by this policy and may have their own policy in place in addition.

2.3 This policy is to be read in conjunction with the documents listed in section 10 – Relevant documents.

3 Definitions

3.1 **Child:** Evolve uses the definition in the Children Act 1989: Anyone under the age of 18 years up until their 18th birthday. For the purpose of this policy, this includes unborn children.

3.2 **Abuse:** Is a form of maltreatment where a child is harmed, either by inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent harm**.**

3.3 **Safeguarding:** A broad concept promoting children's welfare and putting measures in place to improve children's safety and prevent abuse.

3.4 **Concern:** is the term used to describe when there is or might be an incident of abuse or neglect.

3.5 **Alert:** the term used to describe when a concern is raised with the local authority**.**

3.6 **Significant harm:** The Children Act 1989 introduced significant harm as the threshold that justifies compulsory intervention in family life in the best interests of children. Physical, sexual or emotional abuse as well as neglect are all categories of significant harm.

3.7 **Statutory agencies**: The key statutory agencies for leading the safeguarding process are: Police, children's services and NHS.

3.8 **Local authority designated officer (LADO**): The person responsible for managing allegations against adults who work with children, who oversees investigations of these allegations.

3.9 **Children affected by domestic abuse:** The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 defines domestic abuse as occurring where the victim and perpetrator are over 16 years of age. Abusive behaviour directed at a person under 16 years of age would be dealt with as child abuse rather than domestic abuse. However, the Act defines a child as a victim of domestic abuse if:

- They see, hear, or experience the effects of domestic abuse
- They are related to a person carrying out domestic abuse or the victim of domestic abuse.

The Act defines a child being related to a person if the:

- Person is a parent of, or has parental responsibility for, the child, or the Child and the person are relatives.

4 Principles

4.1 All Evolve colleagues have an overriding responsibility to report a safeguarding concern. The welfare of the child is paramount. Wherever appropriate, children and young people should be listened to and their views considered. Information may be shared without consent where necessary to safeguard a child or young person or where required by law. Any such decision must be proportionate and recorded.

4.2 Evolve is committed to the following safeguarding principles which support effective safeguarding practice for children and young people.

- **Empowerment** – children and young people are encouraged to make their own decisions and are provided with support and information
- **Prevention** – strategies are developed to prevent abuse and neglect that promotes resilience and self-determination
- **Proportionate** – a proportionate and least intrusive response is made balanced with the level of risk
- **Protection** – children and young people are offered ways to protect themselves and there is a coordinated response to safeguarding
- **Partnerships** – local solutions through services working together within their communities
- **Accountability** – accountability and transparency in delivering a safeguarding response

4.2 **Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility** which means that we should never ignore cases of concern and must report any concerns or incidents of harm or abuse that are raised or that we witness during our work.

4.3 **Information sharing is fundamental to good safeguarding practice.** Sharing the right information, at the right time, with the right people, is fundamental to good safeguarding practice. We have a duty to cooperate and share information where there is a concern raised about the safety of a child or young person. We have a right to request cooperation from relevant agencies and have a duty to cooperate where a request is made of us.

4.4 **Confidentiality** Wherever possible the consent to share information should be obtained, however safeguarding concerns take priority over confidentiality when a child or young person is at risk.

4.5 The law does not prevent the sharing of sensitive, personal information between organisations where the public interest served outweighs the public interest served by protecting confidentiality.

5 Roles and responsibilities

5.1 **Board** members have a collective responsibility around safeguarding across the organisation.

5.2 **Board Safeguarding Champion** provides strategic oversight and assurance on safeguarding.

5.3 To be the point of contact, on behalf of the Board, for the Senior Safeguarding Lead, ensure safeguarding remains a standing item on board agendas,

promotes a positive safeguarding culture and provide challenge and scrutiny to senior managers regarding safeguarding performance.

5.4 **Senior Safeguarding Lead:** To be the owner of the safeguarding policies and to ensure that the policies are fully implemented and reviewed.

5.5 To provide advice to Designated Safeguarding Leads on appropriate responses to concerns

5.6 **Designated Safeguarding Lead:** Promote the importance of safeguarding, ensuring all department staff have undertaken required safeguarding training and are implementing policy and procedures effectively, and poor practice is challenged.

5.7 To provide advice and support to other staff on welfare, safeguarding and child protection matters; ensuring safeguarding practice is discussed in team meetings to identify any training needs.

5.8 **All Managers:** To be familiar with the Association's safeguarding policies and procedures.

5.9 To provide advice, guidance and support to staff when handling concerns to ensure they are managed and recorded effectively.

5.10 To induct all new members of staff, students or volunteers on procedures, ensuring all staff and volunteers know how to identify and respond to a safeguarding concern.

5.11 **All Staff:** Being familiar with safeguarding policies and procedures and completing mandatory safeguarding training.

5.12 Recording concerns accurately and reporting any safeguarding concerns promptly and appropriately.

5.13 Maintaining professional boundaries and acting in the best interests of children and young people.

6 Responding to a Report

6.1 Detailed operational guidance for receiving disclosures, recording concerns, raising referrals, escalation, managing rejected referrals and allegations against staff is contained within the Safeguarding Children and Young People Procedure.

6.2 All resident facing staff can receive reports of safeguarding concerns. Reports can be made by a child experiencing abuse or external parties such as a concerned neighbour, a relative, a contractor or support agencies.

6.3 Staff will treat all reports seriously and listen empathetically, so witnesses and individuals experiencing safeguarding issues feel supported and believed. Due to data protection, we may not always be able to keep people updated on the management of issues that they report.

6.4 Staff are expected to report any safeguarding concerns or suspicions as soon as they arise on Inform, our internal caseload management system to minimise the risk of harm to children at risk. Once we receive a report or suspect abuse, staff will do some initial fact-finding to assess if a referral is required.

6.5 Where we are concerned that a child may be at risk but doesn't meet the threshold for a safeguarding referral, we are able to share concerns with relevant agencies.

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6.6 The Charity Commission's serious incident reporting regime also requires trustees to report serious incidents.

7 Colleague Wellbeing

7.1 Colleagues should be supported throughout any safeguarding alerts raised in a number of ways as listed below. It is important to recognise that each colleague may require a different level of support, but it is essential that every person raising a safeguarding has a check in with the manager or area manager following the alert.

- Reflective Practice - Can be offered individually or as a team
- EAP – Free counselling and support
- Weekly check in
- Additional one-to-ones
- Time away or flexible working

8 Monitoring and Controls

8.1 **Caseload Management System:** Inform is used to monitor and record safeguarding cases. Managers use Inform to monitor safeguarding cases and actions.

8.2 **Operational Safeguarding Group:** This group, made up of service managers and chaired by the Designated Safeguarding Leads, meets monthly to provide structured peer support for staff managing complex safeguarding cases and promotes consistent, high-quality decision-making.

8.3 **Strategic Safeguarding Group:** Aims to support in developing a culture that enables issues about safeguarding and promoting welfare to be addressed. The Senior Safeguarding Lead chairs the quarterly group. This group will oversee any high-level cases that involve reporting, monitor quality and compliance and identify emerging themes and trends.

8.4 Board are provided with a quarterly safeguarding report and an annual review report.

8.5 The Corporate Plan includes a Key Performance Indicator of 100% of staff with up-to-date safeguarding training.

9 Safer Recruitment & Training

7.1 Evolve is committed to safe recruitment and we meet our responsibilities in safer recruitment and selection through:

- Thorough application and interview processes,
- Verification of candidates' identities and employment histories.
- Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks .
- References obtained and scrutinised before appointment
- At least one member of each interview panel will be trained in safer recruitment practices.

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9.2 All staff, volunteers, and Board members will complete mandatory safeguarding elearning training as part of induction and repeated annually.

9.3 Frontline staff will attend mandatory training sessions, appropriate to their role.

10 Diversity impact assessment

10.1 Evolve recognises that abuse can happen to any child or young person, regardless of age, gender, sexuality, religion or cultural background.

10.2 The use of this policy and procedure will ensure consistency is applied when staff are dealing with safeguarding children and young people in our services.

10.3 Our residents are from a diverse range of backgrounds with individual beliefs, values and needs. Dealing with a safeguarding case should be a person-centred process. Any cultural or religious implications need to be considered as there may be culturally specific services available to support the victim.

10.4 Religion or cultural background is never an excuse for abuse. Evolve will apply this policy and procedure in all situations.

10.5 This policy and procedure attempts to ensure that all concerns of safeguarding a child or young person are identified and appropriate actions taken. We will challenge any instance of inequality and ensure all our staff are trained in equal opportunities.

11 Relevant documents

› Code of conduct
› Confidentiality policy and procedure
› Data Protection policy
› Disciplinary policy
› Incident policy and procedure
› Safeguarding adults policy
› Safeguarding adults procedure
› Whistleblowing policy and procedure
› Welfare Checks policy and procedure
› Health and Safety policy
› IT User policy
› Equality Diversity and Inclusion
› Lone working policy

12 Legislation

12.1 Legislation that underpins safeguarding practices includes:

- The Children Act 1989 and 2004
- The Care Act 2014
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026

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- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- Children and Social Work Act 2017
- The Equality Act 2010
- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UKGDPR)
- Modern Slavery Act 2015
- The Counterterrorism and Security Act 2015

This procedure was developed in consultation with:

1. **Operational SMT**

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Appendix 1 – Types of abuse (Taken from NSPCC)

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is when someone hurts or harms a child or young person on purpose. It includes:

- hitting with hands or objects
- slapping and punching
- kicking
- shaking
- throwing
- poisoning
- burning and scalding
- biting and scratching
- breaking bones
- drowning

Physical abuse is any way of intentionally causing physical harm to a child or young person. It also includes causing a child to become unwell.

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is any type of abuse that involves the continual emotional mistreatment of a child. It's sometimes called psychological abuse. Emotional abuse can involve deliberately trying to scare, humiliate, isolate or ignore a child.

Emotional abuse is often a part of other kinds of abuse, which means it can be difficult to spot the signs or tell the difference, though it can also happen on its own.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is when a child or young person is forced, tricked or coerced into sexual activities. They might not understand that what's happening is abuse or that it is wrong. They might be afraid to tell someone. Sexual abuse can happen anywhere. It can happen in person or online.

It is never a child's fault they were sexually abused – it's important to make sure children know this.

There are 2 types of sexual abuse – contact and non-contact abuse.

Contact abuse is where an abuser makes physical contact with a child. This includes:

- sexual touching of any part of a child's body, whether they're clothed or not
- using a body part or object to rape or penetrate a child
- forcing a child to take part in sexual activities
- making a child undress or touch someone else

Contact abuse can include touching, kissing and oral sex – sexual abuse isn't just penetrative.

Non-contact abuse is where a child is abused without being touched by the abuser. This can be in person or online and includes:

- exposing or flashing
- showing pornography
- exposing a child to sexual acts
- making them masturbate
- forcing a child to make, view or share child abuse images or videos
- making, viewing or distributing child abuse images or videos
- forcing a child to take part in sexual activities or conversations online or through a smartphone

Sexual abuse may be preceded by grooming, see below.

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is any type of controlling, bullying, threatening or violent behaviour between people in a relationship. It can seriously harm children and young people and witnessing domestic abuse is child abuse.

Bullying and cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place online. Unlike bullying in the real world, online bullying can follow the child wherever they go, via social networks, gaming and mobile phone.

Cyberbullying can include:

- sending threatening or abusive text messages
- creating and sharing embarrassing images or videos
- trolling – the sending of menacing or upsetting messages on social networks, chat rooms or online games
- excluding children from online games, activities or friendship groups
- shaming someone online
- setting up hate sites or groups about a particular child
- encouraging young people to self-harm
- voting for or against someone in an abusive poll
- creating fake accounts, hijacking or stealing online identities to embarrass a young person or cause trouble using their name
- sending explicit messages, also known as sexting
- pressuring children into sending sexual images or engaging in sexual conversations

Child sexual exploitation

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a type of sexual abuse. When a child or young person is exploited they're given things, like gifts, drugs, money, status and affection, in exchange for performing sexual activities. Children and young people are often tricked into believing they're in a loving and consensual relationship. This is called grooming. They may trust their abuser and not understand that they're being abused.

Children and young people can be trafficked into or within the UK to be sexually exploited. They're moved around the country and abused by being forced to take part in sexual activities, often with more than one person. Young people in gangs can also be sexually exploited.

Sometimes abusers use violence and intimidation to frighten or force a child or young person, making them feel as if they've no choice. They may lend them large sums of money they know can't be repaid or use financial abuse to control them.

Anybody can be a perpetrator of CSE, no matter their age, gender or race. The relationship could be framed as friendship, someone to look up to or romantic. Children and young people who are exploited may also be used to 'find' or coerce others to join groups.

Child trafficking

Trafficking is where children and young people tricked, forced or persuaded to leave their homes and are moved or transported and then exploited, forced to work or sold. Children are trafficked for:

- sexual exploitation
- benefit fraud
- forced marriage
- domestic slavery like cleaning, cooking and childcare
- forced labour in factories or agriculture
- committing crimes, like begging, theft, working on cannabis farms or moving drugs

Trafficked children experience many types of abuse and neglect. Traffickers use physical, sexual and emotional abuse as a form of control. Children and young people are also likely to be physically and emotionally neglected and may be sexually exploited.

Female genital mutilation

FGM is when a female's genitals are deliberately altered or removed for non-medical reasons. It's also known as 'female circumcision' or 'cutting' but has many other names.

Grooming

Grooming is when someone builds a relationship, trust and emotional connection with a child or young person so they can manipulate, exploit and abuse them.

Children and young people who are groomed can be sexually abused, exploited or trafficked.

Anybody can be a groomer, no matter their age, gender, race or sexuality. Grooming can take place over a short or long period of time – from weeks to years. Groomers may also build a relationship with the young person's family or friends to make them seem trustworthy or authoritative.

Grooming may take place online, in person or both.

Groomers may use tactics like:

- buying gifts for the victim

- pretending to be younger
- giving advice or showing understanding
- giving attention or compliments
- giving reassurance on a victim's insecurities
- becoming indispensable to the family
- taking the victim on trips, outings or holidays

Grooming can set the child up to appear to be complicit in the abuse. Children and young people may not understand they've been groomed. They may have complicated feelings, like loyalty, admiration, love, as well as fear, distress and confusion.

We always have a role to safeguard children, even if they do not understand they are in an abusive situation.

Neglect

Neglect is the ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs and the most common form of child abuse. A child might be left hungry or dirty, or without proper clothing, shelter, supervision or health care. This can put children and young people in danger. And it can also have long term effects on their physical and mental wellbeing.

Non-recent abuse

Non-recent child abuse, sometimes called historical abuse, is when an adult was abused as a child or young person under the age of 18.

Online abuse

Online abuse is any type of abuse that happens on the internet. It can happen across any device that's connected to the web like computers, tablets and mobile phones. And it can happen anywhere online, including:

- social media
- text messages and messaging apps
- emails
- online chats
- online gaming
- live-streaming sites.

Children can be at risk of online abuse from people they know or from strangers. It might be part of other abuse which is taking place offline, like bullying or grooming. Or the abuse might only happen online.

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Appendix 2 – Possible signs of abuse (some content from NSPCC):

Possible indicators are suggestions and not exhaustive - colleagues should be alert to any changes in a residents' behaviour and how they look after themselves and their room.

Physical signs of abuse

If someone is being physically abused, they will likely have frequent bruises or physical injuries consistent with being punched, choked, or knocked down—and they'll likely have a weak or inconsistent explanation for these injuries. It should be noted that physical injuries will not always be a sign of abuse. Children and young people may also have injuries from trips or accidents. If a child has regular injuries, no good explanation for injuries or if there seems to be a pattern to injuries these could all be signs of abuse.

Some signs of physical abuse include:

- bruises
- broken or fractured bones
- burns or scalds
- bite marks

It can also include other injuries and health problems, such as:

- scarring
- the effects of poisoning, such as vomiting, drowsiness or seizures
- breathing problems from drowning, suffocation or poisoning

Head injuries in babies and toddlers can be signs of abuse so it's important to be aware of these. Visible signs include:

- swelling
- bruising
- fractures
- being extremely sleepy or unconscious
- breathing problems
- seizures
- vomiting
- unusual behaviour, such as being irritable or not feeding properly

It is also common for someone to try to cover up the physical signs with clothing. For example, you may notice that someone is wearing long sleeves or scarves in the hot summer. In children, someone may try to disguise marks or bruises with food, such as chocolate.

Emotional signs of abuse

There might not be any obvious physical signs of emotional abuse or neglect. And a child might not tell anyone what's happening until they reach a 'crisis point'. That's why it's important to look out for signs in how a child is acting.

As children grow up, their emotions change. This means it can be difficult to tell if they're being emotionally abused. But children who are being emotionally abused might:

- seem unconfident or lack self-assurance
- struggle to control their emotions
- have difficulty making or maintaining relationships
- act in a way that's inappropriate for their age

The signs of emotional abuse can also be different for children at different ages.

Babies and pre-school children who are being emotionally abused or neglected might:

- be overly-affectionate to strangers or people they don't know well
- seem unconfident, wary or anxious
- not have a close relationship or bond with their parent
- be aggressive or cruel towards other children or animals

Older children might:

- use language you wouldn't expect them to know for their age
- act in a way or know about things you wouldn't expect them to know for their age
- struggle to control their emotions
- have extreme outbursts
- seem isolated from their parents
- lack social skills
- have few or no friends

Some other emotional signs of abuse include:

- Agitation, anxiety, or constant apprehension
- Changes in sleep habits (sleeping too much or not enough)
- Physical pain, such as stomach aches or headaches
- Developing a drug or alcohol problem
- Extremely apologetic or meek
- Loss of interest in daily activities
- Low self-esteem
- Seeming fearful
- Symptoms of depression
- Talking about or attempting suicide

Behavioural or mood changes

If you notice that someone who was once outgoing and cheerful has gradually become quiet and withdrawn, it could be a sign of abuse.

You may notice a person:

- Becomes reserved and distant
- Begins isolating themselves by cutting off contacts with friends and family members
- Cancels appointments or meetings with you at the last minute
- Drops out of activities they would usually enjoy
- Exhibits excessive privacy concerning their personal life

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Showing signs of fear

People who are being abused may seem anxious or nervous when they are away from the abuser, or they may seem overly anxious to please a particular person.

Although victims may not talk about the actual abuse, they might refer to the abuser as "moody" or having a bad temper. They may mention that the person is particularly bad-tempered when drinking alcohol.

Signs of sexual abuse:

Emotional and behavioural signs:

- Avoiding being alone with or frightened of people or a person they know
- Language or sexual behaviour you wouldn't expect them to know
- Having nightmares or bed-wetting
- Alcohol or drug misuse
- Self-harm
- Changes in eating habits or developing an eating problem

Physical signs of sexual abuse:

- Bruises
- Bleeding, discharge, pains or soreness in their genital or anal area
- Sexually transmitted infections
- Pregnancy

If a child is being or has been sexually abused online, they might:

- spend a lot more or a lot less time than usual online, texting, gaming or using social media
- seem distant, upset or angry after using the internet or texting
- be secretive about who they're talking to and what they're doing online or on their mobile phone
- have lots of new phone numbers, texts or email addresses on their mobile phone, laptop or tablet

Signs of FGM:

Signs FGM might happen:

- a relative or someone known as a 'cutter' visiting from abroad
- a special occasion or ceremony takes place where a girl 'becomes a woman' or is 'prepared for marriage'
- a female relative, like a mother, sister or aunt has undergone FGM
- a family arranges a long holiday overseas or visits a family abroad during the summer holidays
- a girl has an unexpected or long absence from school
- a girl struggles to keep up in school
- a girl runs away – or plans to run away - from home

Signs FGM might have taken place:

- Having difficulty walking, standing or sitting.

- Spending longer in the bathroom or toilet.
- Appearing quiet, anxious or depressed.
- Acting differently after an absence from school or college.
- Reluctance to go to the doctors or have routine medical examinations.
- Asking for help – though they might not be explicit about the problem because they're scared or embarrassed.