



Speaking Out Forum

Draft Revised 02/2025

Child, Young Person, and Vulnerable Adult Safeguarding and Protection Policy

1 Introduction

Everyone who participates in a Speaking Out Forum (SOF) programme is entitled to do so in an enjoyable and safe environment. SOF has a moral and legal obligation to ensure that, when given responsibility for children, young people and vulnerable adults, SOF employees, volunteers, and anyone acting on their behalf, provide them with the highest possible standard of care.

SOF is committed to devising and implementing policies which ensure that everyone involved in any way with its activities accepts their responsibilities for safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults from harm and abuse. This means that everyone involved adopts and follows the procedures contained within this policy statement which are specifically designed to protect children, young people and vulnerable adults with the very highest standards of care.

The aim of the policy is to promote good practice, providing children, young people and vulnerable adults with appropriate safety/protection whilst in the care of SOF employees, volunteers and those acting on behalf of SOF and to allow employees, volunteers and those acting on SOF's behalf to make informed and confident responses to specific child protection issues.

A child/young person is defined as any person under the age of 18 (Children Act 1989)

This policy applies to all employees and volunteers of SOF and anyone acting on behalf of SOF. In this policy, "volunteers" means and includes SOF trustees as well as all other volunteers.

For the most part, the events and activities promoted as part of SOF are delivered by other agencies (Partner Organisations) which are required by law to have their own discrete safeguarding and protection policies. In these situations, SOF will need to satisfy itself that such third party policies are in line with the policies and procedures set out in this statement.

a. Policy Statement

SOF is committed to the following:

- the welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults is paramount
- all children, young people and vulnerable adults, whatever their age, culture, ability, gender, language, racial origin, religious belief and/or sexual identity should be able to participate in SOF events and activities in a fun and safe environment
- taking all reasonable steps to protect children, young people and vulnerable adults from harm, discrimination and degrading treatment and at all times respecting their rights, wishes and feelings
- a “zero tolerance” policy regarding abuse within SOF: all suspicions and allegations of poor practice or abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately
- all SOF employees and volunteers who work with children, young people and vulnerable adults will be recruited with regard to their suitability for that responsibility and will be provided with guidance and/or training in good practice and child protection procedures
- working in partnership with parents, children, young people and vulnerable adults is essential for the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults.

SOF will work in partnership with other agencies to ensure that appropriate procedures are in place for reporting, making referrals and accessing training for specialist support as and when required.

b. Monitoring and review of the policy and procedures

The implementation of procedures should be regularly monitored and reviewed. The SOF **Chair of Trustees** will regularly report progress, challenges, difficulties, achievements, gaps and areas where changes are required, to the Board.

The policy will be reviewed every 2 years or whenever there is a major change in the organisation or in relevant legislation.

2 Promoting Good Practice

2.1 Introduction

It is not always easy to distinguish poor practice from abuse. It is therefore NOT the responsibility of employees, volunteers or participants in SOF to make judgements about whether or not abuse is taking place. It is, however, their responsibility to identify poor practice and possible abuse and act if they have concerns about the welfare of the child, as explained in section 4.

This section will help you identify what is meant by good practice and poor practice.

2.2 Good Practice

All employees and volunteers should adhere to the following principles and action:

- always work in an open environment (e.g. avoiding private or unobserved situations and encouraging open communication with no secrets);
- make the experience of SOF **educational**, fun and enjoyable: promote fairness and wellbeing and confront and deal with bullying;
- treat all children, young people and vulnerable adults equally and with respect and dignity;
- always put the welfare of the child, young person and/or vulnerable adult first;
- maintain a safe and appropriate distance between children, young people and vulnerable adults and employees and volunteers (e.g. it is not appropriate for employees or volunteers to have an intimate relationship with a child or to share a residential room with them);

- avoid unnecessary physical contact with children, young people and vulnerable adults. Where any form of manual/physical support is required it should be provided openly and with the consent of the child, young person or vulnerable adult. Physical contact can be appropriate so long as it is neither intrusive nor disturbing and the child's, young person's or vulnerable adult's consent has been given;
- involve parents/carers wherever possible, e.g. where children, young people or vulnerable adults need to be supervised in changing rooms, encourage parents to take responsibility for their own child. If groups have to be supervised in changing rooms always ensure parents, employees or volunteers etc. work in pairs;
- request written parental consent if employees or volunteers are required to transport children, young people or vulnerable adults in their cars;
- obtain written parental consent for any significant travel arrangements e.g. overnight stays;
- ensure that if any children, young people or vulnerable adults are taken away, they should always be accompanied by a male and female employee/volunteer;
- all employees and volunteers should be an excellent role model: this includes not smoking or drinking alcohol in the company of children, young people or vulnerable adults;
- always give enthusiastic and constructive feedback rather than negative criticism;
- recognise the developmental needs and capacity of the child, young person or vulnerable adult and do not risk sacrificing welfare in a desire for company or personal achievements;
- obtain written parental consent for any activity in which SOF acts in loco parentis: parental consent should include permission for the administration of emergency first aid or other medical treatment if the need arises;
- keep a written record of any accident or incident that occurs, along with details of any treatment given.

Poor Practice

The following are regarded as poor practice and should be avoided by all employees and volunteers:

- unnecessarily spending excessive amounts of time alone with children, young people or vulnerable adults away from others;
- taking children, young people or vulnerable adults alone in a car on journeys, however short;
- taking children, young people or vulnerable adults to your home where they will be alone with you;
- sharing a room with a child, young person or vulnerable adult;
- engaging in rough, physical or sexually provocative games, including horseplay;
- allow or engage in inappropriate touching of any form;
- allowing children, young people or vulnerable adults to use inappropriate language unchallenged;
- making sexually suggestive comments to a child, young person or vulnerable adult, even in fun;
- reducing a child, young person or vulnerable adult to tears as a form of control;
- allow allegations made by a child, young person or vulnerable adult to go unchallenged, unrecorded or not acted upon;
- do things of a personal nature that the child, young person or vulnerable adult can do for themselves.

When a case arises where it is impractical /impossible to avoid certain situations e.g. transporting a child, young person or vulnerable adult in your car, the tasks should only be carried out with the full understanding and consent of the parent/care and the child, young person or vulnerable adult involved.

If during your care you accidentally hurt a child, young person or vulnerable adult and the child, young person or vulnerable adult seems distressed in any manner,

appears to be sexually aroused by your actions and/or if the child, young person or vulnerable adult misunderstands or misinterprets something you have done, report any such incidents as soon as possible to another colleague and make a written note of it. Parents should also be informed of the incident.

3 Defining Harm and Abuse

3.1 Introduction

Child abuse is any form of physical, emotional or sexual mistreatment or lack of care that leads to injury or harm, it commonly occurs within a relationship of trust or responsibility and is an abuse of power or a breach of trust. Abuse can happen to a child, young person or vulnerable adult regardless of their age, gender, race or ability.

There are four main types of abuse: **physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect**. The abuser may be a family member, someone the child, young person or vulnerable adult encounters in residential care or in the community, including sports and leisure activities. Any individual may abuse or neglect a child, young person or vulnerable adult directly, or may be responsible for abuse because they fail to prevent another person harming the child, young person or vulnerable adult.

Abuse in all of its forms can affect a child, young person or vulnerable adult at any age. The effects can be so damaging that, if not treated, they may follow the individual into adulthood.

Children, young people or vulnerable adults with disabilities may be at increased risk of abuse through various factors such as stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, isolation and a powerlessness to protect themselves or adequately communicate that abuse had occurred.

3.2 Types of Abuse

- **Physical Abuse:** where adults physically hurt or injure a child, young person or vulnerable adult e.g. hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, biting,

scalding, suffocating, and drowning. Giving children, young people or vulnerable adults alcohol or inappropriate drugs would also constitute child abuse.

This category of abuse can also include when a parent/carer reports non-existent symptoms or illness deliberately causes ill health in a child, young person or vulnerable adult they are looking after. This is called Munchausen's syndrome by proxy.

- **Emotional Abuse:** this is the persistent emotional ill treatment of a child, young person or vulnerable adult, likely to cause severe and lasting adverse effects on their emotional development. It may involve telling a child, young person or vulnerable adult they are useless, worthless, unloved, and inadequate or valued in terms of only meeting the needs of another person. It may feature expectations of children, young people or vulnerable adults that are not appropriate to their age or development. It may cause a child, young person or vulnerable adult to be frightened or in danger by being constantly shouted at, threatened or taunted which may make the child, young person or vulnerable frightened or withdrawn.

Ill-treatment of children, young people and vulnerable adults, whatever form it takes, will always feature a degree of emotional abuse.

Emotional abuse may occur when the child, young person or vulnerable adult is constantly criticised, given negative feedback, expected to perform at levels that are above their capability. Other forms of emotional abuse could take the form of name calling and bullying.

- **Bullying** may come from a child, young person or an adult. Bullying is defined as deliberate hurtful behaviour, usually repeated over a period of time, where it is difficult for those bullied to defend themselves. There are three main types of bullying.

It may be physical (e.g. hitting, kicking, slapping), verbal (e.g. racist or homophobic remarks, name calling, graffiti, threats, abusive text messages), emotional (e.g. tormenting, ridiculing, humiliating, ignoring, isolating from the group), or sexual (e.g. unwanted physical contact or abusive comments).

- **Neglect** occurs when an adult fails to meet the child's, young person's or vulnerable adult's basic physical and/or psychological needs, to an extent that is likely to result in serious impairment of the individual's health or development,

for example, failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing, failing to protect from physical harm or danger, or failing to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

Refusal to give love, affection and attention can also be a form of neglect.

- **Sexual Abuse** occurs when adults (male and female) use children, young people and vulnerable adults to meet their own sexual needs. This could include full sexual intercourse, masturbation, oral sex, anal intercourse and fondling. Showing children, young people or vulnerable adults pornography or talking to them in a sexually explicit manner are also forms of sexual abuse.

Activities which might involve physical contact with children, young people or vulnerable adults could potentially create situations where sexual abuse may go unnoticed.

3.3 Indicators of Abuse

Even for those experienced in working with child abuse, it is not always easy to recognise a situation where abuse may occur or has already taken place. Most people are not experts in such recognition, but indications that a child, young person or vulnerable adult is being abused may include one or more of the following:

- unexplained or suspicious injuries such as bruising, cuts or burns, particularly if situated on a part of the body not normally prone to such injuries;
- an injury for which an explanation seems inconsistent;
- the child, young person or vulnerable adult describes what appears to be an abusive act involving them;
- another child, young person or adult expresses concern about the welfare of a young person or vulnerable adult;
- unexplained changes in the behaviour of a child, young person or vulnerable adult e.g. becoming very upset, quiet, withdrawn or displaying sudden outbursts of temper;
- a child, young person or vulnerable adult showing inappropriate sexual awareness and/or engaging in sexually explicit behaviour;

- a child, young person or vulnerable adult showing a distrust of adults particularly those with whom a close relationship would normally be expected;
- a child, young person or vulnerable adult having difficulty in making friends;
- a child, young person or vulnerable adult being prevented from socialising with others;
- a child, young person or vulnerable adult displaying variations in eating patterns including overeating or loss of appetite;
- a child, young person or vulnerable adult losing weight for no apparent reason;
- a child, young person or vulnerable adult becoming increasingly dirty or unkempt.

Signs of bullying include:

- behavioural changes such as reduced concentration and/or becoming withdrawn, clingy, depressed, tearful, emotionally up and down, reluctance to go training or competitions;
- an unexplained drop off in performance;
- physical signs such as stomach aches, headaches, difficulty in sleeping, bed wetting, scratching and bruising, damaged clothes, bingeing e.g. on food, alcohol or cigarettes;
- a shortage of money or frequent loss of possessions.

It must be recognised that the above list is not exhaustive, but also that the presence of one or more of the indicators is not proof that abuse is taking place. It is **NOT** the responsibility of those working in SOF to decide that child abuse is occurring. It **is** their responsibility to act on any concerns.

3.4 Use of Photographic/Filming Equipment during SOF Programmes, Events and Activities

People may use SOF events and activities as an opportunity to take inappropriate photographs or film footage of children, young people and vulnerable adults. All employees and volunteers should be vigilant and any concerns should be reported to the SOF **Chair or a Trustee, if present**. Parental (or Partner Organisation) consent should always be obtained beforehand where events and activities involving children and young people are recorded by the use of photography and film or video footage and similarly the consent of vulnerable adults involved in these events or activities should also be obtained beforehand.

All parents and performers should be made aware when event organisers are using video equipment or photography as a monitoring and evaluation aid and their consent obtained.

4 Responding to Suspicions and Allegations

4.1 Introduction

It is not the responsibility of anyone working in SOF in a paid or unpaid capacity to decide whether or not abuse has taken place. However there is a responsibility to act on any concerns through contact with the appropriate authorities so that they can then make inquiries and take necessary action to protect the child, young person or vulnerable adult. This applies **BOTH** to allegations/suspicions of abuse occurring within SOF events and activities and to allegations/suspicions that abuse is taking place elsewhere.

This section explains the procedures which SOF will follow to respond to allegations/suspicions.

4.2 Receiving Evidence of Possible Abuse

SOF employees and/or volunteers may become aware of possible abuse in various ways. We may see it happening, we may suspect it happening because of signs such as those listed in section 3 of this document or it may be reported to us by someone else or directly by the child, young person or vulnerable adult affected.

In the last of these cases, it is particularly important to respond appropriately. If a child, young person or vulnerable adult says or indicates that they are being abused, you should:

- **stay calm** so as not to frighten them;
- **reassure** the child, young person or vulnerable adult that they are not to blame and that it was right to tell;
- **listen** to the child, young person or vulnerable adult, showing that you are taking them seriously;
- **keep questions to a minimum** so that there is a clear and accurate understanding of what has been said. The law is very strict and abuse cases have been dismissed where it is felt that the child, young person or vulnerable adult has been led or words and ideas have been suggested during questioning. Only ask questions to clarify;
- **inform** the child, young person or vulnerable adult that you have to inform other people about what they have told you. Tell the child, young person or vulnerable adult this is to help stop the abuse continuing;
- **the safety of the child, young person or vulnerable adult** is paramount. If the child, young person or vulnerable adult needs urgent medical attention call an ambulance, inform the doctors of the concern and ensure they are made aware that this is a child protection issue;
- **record** all information;
- **report** the incident to the SOF **Chair of Trustees**.

In all cases if you are not sure what to do you can get help from the NSPCC 24 hour help line Tel No: 0800 800 5000

4.3 Recording Information

To ensure that information is as helpful as possible, a detailed record should always be made at the time of the disclosure/concern. In recording you should confine yourself to the facts and distinguish what is your personal knowledge and what others have told you. Do not include your own opinions.

Information should include the following:

- the name, age and date of birth of the child, young person or vulnerable adult;
- the home address and telephone number of the child, young person or vulnerable adult;
- whether or not the person making the report is expressing their concern or someone else's;
- the nature of the allegation, including dates, times and any other relevant information;
- a description of any visible bruising or injury, location, size etc. Also any indirect signs, such as behavioural changes;
- details of witnesses to the incidents;
- the child, young person or vulnerable adult's account, if it can be given, of what has happened and how any bruising/injuries occurred;
- have the parents or carers been contacted? If so what has been said;
- has anyone else been consulted? If so record details;
- has anyone been alleged to be the abuser? Record detail.

4.4 Reporting the concern

All suspicions and allegations **MUST** be reported appropriately. It is recognised that strong emotions can be aroused particularly in cases where sexual abuse is suspected or where there is misplaced loyalty to a colleague. It is important to understand these feelings but not allow them to interfere with your judgement about any action to take.

SOF expects its employees and volunteers to discuss any concerns they may have about the welfare of a child, young person or vulnerable adult immediately with the person in charge who should report to the SOF Chair of Trustees. They should subsequently check that appropriate action has been taken.

If the SOF Chair is not available you should take responsibility and seek advice from another SOF Trustee or the Partner Organisation Sponsor on the programme, or the NSPCC helpline, the duty officer at the Manchester Contact Centre (see below) or the Police. Telephone numbers can be found in your local directory. If a child, young person or vulnerable adult is in immediate danger, you should ring the emergency services or the police.

Responding to a Disclosure:

Do not

- Ever promise confidentiality
- Ever promise that 'everything will be alright' – it may not.
- Interrogate the child, young person or vulnerable adult with lots of questions. REMEMBER it is not your job to carry out an investigation – that role is performed by other agencies i.e. the Manchester Contact Centre and/or the police
- Cast doubt on what a child is telling you. It has probably taken a great deal of courage for him/her to speak to you
- Ask leading questions like 'did he/she do X to you' or 'did he/she touch you there'
- Make value judgements about the abuser. Remember that in many instances a child, young person or vulnerable adult may still love the abuser
- Say anything that could make the child, young person or vulnerable feel responsible for the abuse e.g. 'why did you not tell someone before' or 'are you sure this has happened to you'

- PANIC. – Think – Feel – Act. You need to have all three in balance when responding to suspected or alleged abuse. Emotion can get in the way of rational thinking and acting too hastily can be counter productive

Do.....

- Receive what is said
- Take a child, young person, vulnerable adult seriously
- Listen without shock or disbelief
- Clarify and check out what you are being told
- Tell the child, young person or vulnerable adult that you are glad they told you and acknowledge that they have been very brave in telling you
- Be honest about your position i.e. who you will have to tell and why
- Make sure the child, young person or vulnerable adult knows what you will be doing next
- Make careful notes and complete an early referral form, available from <https://www.manchestersafeguardingboards.co.uk/resource/early-help-support-form/> immediately after your discussion with the child, young person or vulnerable adult
- Refer at once to a supervisor/line manager, if present, who will then report to the SOF Chair, or directly to the SOF Chair
- Remember the rules of confidentiality. Try to avoid telling interested colleagues about the incident – Does this person really need to know?
- Give the child, young person or vulnerable adult information about confidential resources such as Child Line
- Remain calm

Where there is a complaint against an employee or volunteer of SOF or of a third party contractor, or Partner Organisation, there may be three types of investigation.

- **Criminal** in which case the police are immediately involved
- **Child protection** in which case the Manchester Contact Centre on behalf of the Children's MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) (and possibly) the police will be involved
- **Disciplinary or misconduct** in which case the SOF Chair (or a senior person in the third party organisation) will be involved

As mentioned previously in this document SOF is not a child protection agency and it is not their responsibility to determine whether or not abuse has taken place.

The Manchester Contact Centre on behalf of the Children's MASH has a legal responsibility under The Children and vulnerable adults Act 1989 to investigate all child protection referrals by talking to the child, young person or vulnerable adult and family (where appropriate), gathering information from other people who know the child, young person or vulnerable adult and making inquiries jointly with the police.

NB: If there is any doubt, you must report the incident: it may be just one of a series of other incidences which together cause concern

Any suspicion that a child, young person or vulnerable adult has been abused by a SOF employee or volunteer or representative of a third party organisation should be reported to the SOF Chair who will take appropriate steps to ensure the safety of the child, young person or vulnerable adult in question and any other child, young person or vulnerable adult who may be at risk. This will include the following:

- the SOF Chair will refer the matter to the Manchester Contact Centre;
- the parent/carer of the child, young person or vulnerable adult will be contacted as soon as possible following advice from the Manchester Contact Centre;
- the SOF Board Chair will be notified so s/he can decide how any media inquiries should be dealt with and whether any immediate disciplinary proceedings should be initiated;
- if an SOF Trustee, is the subject of the suspicion/allegation the report must be made to the SOF Board Chair who will refer the matter to the Manchester Contact Centre.

Allegations of abuse are sometimes made sometime after the event. Where such an allegation is made, you should follow the same procedures and have the matter

reported to Manchester Contact Centre. This is because other children, young people and vulnerable adults may be at risk from the alleged abuser. Anyone who has a previous conviction for offences related to abuse against children, young people and vulnerable adults is automatically excluded from working with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

4.5 Concerns outside the immediate SOF environment (e.g. a parent or carer)

- Report your concerns to the SOF **Chair**
- If the Chair is not available, the person being told or discovering the abuse should contact the Manchester Contact Centre or the police immediately, and notify the SOF Board Chair.
- The Manchester Contact Centre and the SOF Chair will decide how to inform the parents/carers.
- The SOF Chair should also report the incident to the SOF Board. The Board should ascertain whether or not the person/s involved in the incident plays a role in the organisation and act accordingly.
- Maintain confidentiality on a need to know basis.

4.6 Confidentiality

Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned. Information should be handled and disseminated on a need to know basis only. This includes the following people:

- the SOF **Trustee or Chair**;
- the parents or carers of the child, young person or vulnerable adult;
- the person making the allegation;

- the Manchester Contact Centre/police;
- the alleged abuser (and parents or carers if the alleged abuser is a child, young person or vulnerable adult) although the advice of the Manchester Contact Centre should be sought on who should approach the alleged abuser.

All information should be stored in a secure place with limited access to designated people, in line with data protection laws.

4.7 Internal Inquiries and Suspension

- The SOF Chair will make an immediate decision about whether any individual accused of abuse should be temporarily suspended pending further police and Manchester Contact Centre inquiries
- Depending on the findings of the Manchester Contact Centre or police inquiries the SOF Chair will assess all individual cases to decide whether a member of staff or volunteer can be reinstated and how this can be sensitively handled. This may be a difficult decision; especially where there is insufficient evidence to uphold any action by the police. In such cases the SOF Chair must reach a decision based upon the available information which could suggest that on the balance of probability, it is more likely than not that the allegation is true. The welfare of the child, young person or vulnerable adult should remain of paramount importance throughout.

5 Recruiting and Selecting Personnel to work with Children, Young People and vulnerable adults

5.1 Introduction

It is important that all reasonable steps are taken to prevent unsuitable people from working with children, young people and vulnerable adults. This applies equally to paid staff and volunteers, both full and part time. To ensure unsuitable people are prevented from working with children, young people and vulnerable adults, the following steps should be taken when recruiting.

5.2 Controlling Access to Children, Young People and vulnerable adults

- All employees and volunteers should complete an application form. The application form should request information about the applicant's past and a self-disclosure about any criminal record.
- Consent should be obtained from the applicant to seek information from the Criminal Records Bureau.
- Two confidential references, including one regarding previous work with children young people and vulnerable adults should be obtained. These references **MUST** be taken up and confirmed through telephone contact.
- Evidence of identity (passport or driving licence with photo)

5.3 Interview and Induction

All employees and volunteers will be required to undertake an interview carried out to acceptable protocol and recommendations. All employees and volunteers who will work closely with children, young people and vulnerable adults should receive formal or informal induction during which:

- a check should be made that the application form has been completed in full, including the section on criminal records and self-disclosures;
- their qualifications should be substantiated;
- the job requirements and responsibilities should be clarified;
- the policies and procedures set out in this policy statement should be explained and any training needs identified e.g. basic child protection awareness.

5.4 Training

In addition to pre-selection checks, SOF's safeguarding process includes training after recruitment to help staff and volunteers to:

- analyse their own practice against what is deemed good practice, and to ensure their practice is likely to protect them from false allegations;
- recognise their responsibilities and report any concerns about suspected poor practice and/or abuse;
- respond to concerns expressed by a child, young person or vulnerable adult;
- work safely and effectively with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

SOF requires:

- all employees and volunteers who have access to children, young people and vulnerable adults to undergo a DBS enhanced check;
- all employees, volunteers and freelancers who have access to children, young people and vulnerable adults to undertake relevant child protection training or undertake a form of home study, to ensure their practice is exemplary and to facilitate the development of positive culture towards good practice and child protection;
- all employees and volunteers to receive advisory information outlining good/bad practice and informing them what to do if they have concerns about the behaviour of an adult towards a child, young person or vulnerable adult.

Declaration

On behalf of SOF we, the undersigned, will oversee the implementation of this Child, Young Person and Vulnerable Adult Safeguarding and Protection Policy and take all necessary steps to ensure it is adhered to.

Signed:

Signed:

Name:

Name:

Position: Charity Manager (as appropriate) **Position:** Chair

Date

Date: