

Our Free Minds

Safeguarding Policy Statement

The purpose and scope of this policy statement

Our Free Minds is a consent-based, self-directed learning community for home-educated young people in Wiltshire.

We create a space for young people to explore what is interesting and important to them, facilitated by open and interested adults and supported by a flexible community structure in which their voices are heard.

Our Free Minds is committed to building a 'culture of safety' in which the children in our care are protected from abuse, harm and radicalisation.

The purpose of this policy statement is:

- To protect children and young people who receive OFM's services from harm.
- 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.

This policy applies to anyone working on behalf of OFM, including senior managers and the board of trustees, paid staff, volunteers, sessional workers, agency staff and students.

Legal framework

This policy has been drawn up on the basis of legislation, policy and guidance that seeks to protect children in England. A summary of the key legislation and guidance is available from [nspcc.org.uk/child protection](http://nspcc.org.uk/child_protection).

Supporting documents

This policy statement should be read alongside our related organisational policies, procedures, guidance and documents including:

- Role description for the designated safeguarding officer / nominated child protection lead
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures
- Code of conduct for staff and volunteers
- Safe recruitment policy
- Health and safety policy
- Privacy and data policy
- Complaints policy
- Uncollected children policy
- Missing child policy
- Internet, Technology and Media Safety policy

Safeguarding Ethos

Our safeguarding approach is grounded in a commitment to children's safety, dignity, and rights. We recognise that safeguarding is most effective when it is relational, proportionate, and responsive to context, rather than reliant on constant adult surveillance. Children benefit developmentally and emotionally from having appropriate autonomy, privacy, and opportunities to manage themselves and their relationships, while knowing that trusted adults are available and attentive. This approach is underpinned by regular safety education, including six-monthly grounds safety training for all children, which supports a shared understanding of boundaries, risks, and expectations within the setting.

Supervision is therefore intentional and dynamic, with additional oversight provided where activities or individual needs require it.

We believe that:

- Children and young people should never experience abuse of any kind.
- We have a responsibility to promote the welfare of all children and young people, to keep them safe and to practise in a way that protects them.

We recognise that:

- The welfare of children is paramount in all the work we do and in the decisions we take.
- Working in partnership with children, young people, their parents, carers and other agencies is essential in promoting young people's welfare.
- 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.
- Extra safeguards may be needed to keep children who are additionally vulnerable from abuse.

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

- Valuing, listening to and respecting them.
- Appointing a nominated Child Protection Lead and a Trustee for Safeguarding.
- Adopting child protection and safeguarding best practice through our policies and related procedures.
- 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, procedure and staff conduct codes confidently and competently (please also refer to our Staff Code of Conduct for further information).
- Recruiting and selecting staff and volunteers safely, ensuring all necessary checks are made (please refer to our Safe Recruitment policy).

- Recording and 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 posters, sharing useful websites, group work during morning meetings and one-to-one mentoring 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 following our policy and procedure to help us deal effectively with any bullying that does arise (with reference to the Managing Conflict Policy and Anti Bullying Policy).
- Ensuring that we have effective complaints and whistleblowing measures in place - these are outlined in our Staff Code of Conduct and below in the section titled "Whistleblowing Procedure".
- 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 (please see our Health and Safety policy for more information).
- 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.
- Keeping children safe online- please refer to our Internet, Tech and Media Safety Policy.

Nominated child protection lead

Name: Guy Asherson-Taylor

Email: guy@ourfreeminds.org

Phone: 07502337396

Trustee lead for safeguarding and child protection

Name: Clea Sambrook

Email: cleasunshine@hotmail.com

NSPCC Helpline: 0808 800 5000

We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice annually.

This policy was adopted by: Our Free Minds	Last reviewed and signed by:
Last signed off by all staff and volunteers: 5.12.25 To be reviewed: 21.1.27	Katie Kotting, Chair of the Board of Trustees - 17.01.26 Clea Sambrook, Trustee for Safeguarding - 17.01.26 Poppy De Witt, Trustee - 17.01.26 Guy Asherson Taylor, Facilitator and CPL - 17.01.26 Hannah Woolven, Facilitator - 17.01.26 Sze Wai Wong, Admin Support and Volunteer Facilitator - 17.01.26 Mouse Mulford - Volunteer Facilitator - 17.01.26 Joanne Gilchrist - Volunteer Facilitator - 17.01.26

Our Free Minds

Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures

The purpose and aim of these procedures is to provide detailed guidance and the steps to be taken to promote and ensure children and young people's safety and protection from harm and abuse. They are written for everyone who comes into contact with children and young people via OFM.

OFM will respond promptly and appropriately to all incidents or concerns regarding the safety of a child that may occur. These child protection procedures are based on NSPCC guidance to comply with all relevant legislation and best practice.

Adult to child supervision ratios

OFM recognises the NSPCC guidance that supervision ratios should be as a minimum 1 adult per 8 children age 9-12 and 1 adult per 6 children age 5-8.

We generally aim to work at the more conservative ratio of 1 adult per 6 children, across all our age-groups, and, do not exceed the 1:8 ratio across any age group.

Recognising and responding to abuse

Child abuse is any form of physical, emotional or sexual mistreatment; or lack of care that leads to injury or harm. An individual may abuse or neglect a child directly, or by failing to

protect them from harm. Some forms of child abuse and neglect are listed below.

• **Emotional abuse** is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child so as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve making the child feel that they are worthless, unloved, or inadequate. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

• **Physical abuse** can involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may be also caused when a parent or carer feigns the symptoms of, or deliberately causes, ill health to a child.

• **Sexual abuse** involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. This can involve physical contact, or non-contact activities such as showing children sexual activities or encouraging them to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

• **Neglect** is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and emotional needs. It can involve a failure to provide adequate food, clothing and shelter, to protect a child from physical and emotional harm, to ensure adequate supervision or to allow access to medical treatment.

Further information on the different types of child abuse and neglect, how to recognise the signs and to work to prevent and respond to it can be found here:

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect>

Extremism and radicalisation

We recognise our duty to protect children from the risk of radicalisation and being drawn into extremism. There are many reasons why a child might be vulnerable to radicalisation, for example.:

- feeling alienated or alone
- seeking a sense of identity or individuality
- suffering from mental health issues such as depression
- desire for adventure or wanting to be part of a larger cause
- associating with others who hold extremist beliefs

Identifying Concerns – Disclosure:

Disclosure is the process by which children and young people start to share their experiences of abuse with others.

We recognise that:

- This can take place over a long period of time – it is a journey, not one act or action.
- Children may disclose directly or indirectly and sometimes they may start sharing details of abuse before they are ready to put their thoughts and feelings in order.
- Not all disclosures will lead to a formal report of abuse or a case being made or a case being taken to court, but all disclosures should be taken seriously.
- It takes extraordinary courage for a child to go through the journey of disclosing abuse.

We are committed to provide children and young people with the support they need to undertake this journey.

How disclosure happens:

Children and young people may disclose abuse in a variety of ways, including:

- directly – making specific verbal statements about what's happened to them
- indirectly – making ambiguous verbal statements which suggest something is wrong
- behaviourally – displaying behaviour that signals something is wrong (this may or may not be deliberate)
- non-verbally – writing letters, drawing pictures or trying to communicate in other ways.

We recognise that:

- Children and young people may not always be aware that they are disclosing abuse through their actions and behaviour.
- Sometimes children and young people make partial disclosures of abuse. This means they give some details about what they've experienced, but not the whole picture.
- They may withhold some information because they:
 - are afraid they will get in trouble with or upset their family
 - want to deflect blame in case of family difficulties as a result of the disclosure
 - feel ashamed and/or guilty
 - need to protect themselves from having to relive traumatic events.
- Some children and young people are reluctant to seek help because they feel they don't have anyone to turn to for support.
- They may have sought help in the past and had a negative experience, which makes them unlikely to do so again.
- They may also:
 - feel that they will not be taken seriously
 - feel too embarrassed to talk to an adult about a private or personal problem
 - worry about confidentiality
 - lack trust in the people around them (including parents) and in the services provided to help them
 - fear the consequences of asking for help
 - worry they will be causing trouble and making the situation worse
 - find formal procedures overwhelming

Spotting signs of abuse:

Signs of possible abuse and neglect may include:

- significant changes in a child's behaviour
- deterioration in a child's general well-being
- unexplained bruising or marks
- comments made by a child which give cause for concern
- reasons to suspect neglect or abuse outside the setting, e.g. in the child's home,
- reasons to suspect that a child may have been subjected to (or is at risk of) female genital mutilation (FGM)
- reasons to suspect that the child may have witnessed domestic abuse
- inappropriate behaviour displayed by a member of staff, or any other person. For example, inappropriate sexual comments, excessive one-to-one attention beyond the requirements of their role, or inappropriate sharing of images.

We recognise that:

- Children and young people who have been abused may want to tell someone, but not have the exact words to do so.
- They may attempt to disclose abuse by giving adults clues, through their actions and by using indirect words.
- Adults need to be able to notice the signs that a child or young person might be distressed and ask them appropriate questions about what might have caused this.
- Child protection training can help increase adults' confidence in recognising the indicators of abuse and understanding the different ways a child might try to share what they have experienced.
- We should never wait until a child or young person tells us directly that they are being abused before taking action. Instead, we will ask the child if everything is OK or discuss our concerns with OFM's child protection lead, or the NSPCC helpline.
- Waiting for a child to be ready to speak about their experiences could mean that the abuse carries on and they, or another child, are put at further risk of significant harm.
- Not taking appropriate action quickly can also affect the child's mental health. They may feel despairing and hopeless and wonder why no-one is helping them. This may discourage them from seeking help in the future and make them distrust adults.

Further information: 'Definitions and signs of child abuse' NSPCC Guidance Sheet

Signs of possible radicalisation:

- changes in behaviour, for example becoming withdrawn or aggressive
- claiming that terrorist attacks and violence are justified
- viewing violent extremist material online
- possessing or sharing violent extremist material

Helping children disclose abuse

We recognise that:

- It's important to create an environment where children and young people are comfortable about speaking out if anything is worrying them.
- The people they choose to disclose to need to listen, understand and respond appropriately so the child gets the help, support and protection they need.
- Many children and young people will seek help because they know where to go and believe that it will make a difference.
- Others may not have the confidence to seek support or be too scared to ask for help. They may not get the help they need until they reach crisis point.

We are committed to making it easy for young people to find and take up our offer of help.

We will:

- Reinforce positive messages about those who seek help as a sign of strength.
- Encourage parents to support their children in seeking help.
- Be positive about young people, their capacity for change and their resilience.
- Listen to children and young people about how we can improve OFM.
- Engage with young people both in terms of their strengths and their weaknesses.
- Build trust by treating young people with respect.
- Support young people to help each other.

Responding to disclosures

We will utilise three key interpersonal skills that have been shown to help a child feel they are being listened to and taken seriously. We will:

- show we care, help them open up: Give our full attention to the child or young person and keep our body language open and encouraging. Be compassionate, be understanding and reassure them their feelings are important.
- take our time, slow down: Respect pauses and don't interrupt the child – let them go at their own pace. Recognise and respond to their body language. And remember that it may take several conversations for them to share what's happened to them.
- show we understand, reflect back: Make it clear we're interested in what the child is telling us. Reflect back what they've said to check our understanding – and use their language to show it's their experience.

If abuse is suspected or disclosed

When a child makes a disclosure to a member of staff, that member of staff will:

- Reassure the child that they were not to blame and were right to speak out.
- Listen to the child but not question them.
- Give reassurance that the staff member will take action.
- Record the matter as soon as possible using the 'Logging a concern form'.
- Never talk to the alleged perpetrator about the disclosure; this could make things a lot worse for the child.
- Maintain an unbiased approach and follow our procedures to ensure each case is treated in a fair and transparent manner and that the child gets the protection and support they need.

If a third party expresses concern that a child is being abused, we will encourage them to contact MASH / Social Care directly. If they will not do so, we will explain that OFM is obliged to and that the incident will be logged accordingly.

If a member of staff suspects that a child is at risk of becoming radicalised, they will record any relevant information or observations on a **Green form logging a concern**, and refer the matter to the Child Protection Officer (CPO).

Logging a concern

We recognise that it is vital to keep accurate and detailed notes on any concerns we have about a child; and that these will be shared with the nominated child protection lead. The green form logging a concern is available to all members of staff and the form includes:

- the child's details (name, age, address)
- what the child said or did that gave cause for concern (if the child made a verbal disclosure, write down their exact words)
- any information the child gave about the alleged abuser
- date of the disclosure, or the incident, or the observation causing concern

- date and time at which the record was made
- name, signature and job title of the person making the record

The record will be given to the designated child protection officer (CPO) who will decide on the appropriate course of action.

Reporting concerns:

We recognise that if a child is suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm we can share information with appropriate agencies or professionals without the child or parent's consent.

We will:

- Call the police if the child is in immediate danger, or there is an urgent radicalisation concern
- Make a referral to MASH (Social Care) in response to a disclosure of abuse
- Contact the NSPCC Helpline for advice – 0808 800 5000 help@nspcc.org.uk
- The CPO will follow up all referrals to MASH (Social Care) in writing within 48 hours. If a member of staff thinks that the incident has not been dealt with properly, they may contact MASH directly.
- Contact the NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line 0800 028 0285 if we have concerns about how a child protection issue is being handled.
- Call the police if a child under 18yrs has informed us of undergoing FGM or we observe physical signs that FGM may have been carried out.

For minor concerns regarding **radicalisation**, the CPO will contact:

- the local Prevent team on 01278 647466,
- or the National Prevent Advice Line on 0800 011 3764.

For more serious concerns the CPO will contact:

- the Police on the non-emergency number (101),:
- or the anti-terrorist hotline on 0800 789 321.

Information sharing

We recognise that:

- Sharing information about a child's welfare helps professionals build a clearer picture of the child's life and gain a better understanding of any risks the child is facing.
- Information sharing helps to ensure that an individual receives the right services at the right time and prevents a need from becoming more acute and difficult to meet.
- Timely information sharing is key to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.
- Whether in a paid or voluntary role at OFM, we may need to share information about the children and families we are involved with for a number of reasons. These include:
 - When making a referral to arrange additional support for someone in the family
 - Someone from another agency has asked for information about a child or family
 - Someone in the family has asked to be referred for further help
 - A statutory duty or court order requires information to be shared
 - We are concerned that a child or a member of their family may be at risk of significant harm
 - We think a serious crime may have been committed or is about to be committed which involves someone in the family.

We will:

- Make sure we always have a clear and legitimate purpose for sharing a child's personal information.
- Ensure that children are given the opportunity to decide whether they agree to their personal information being shared.
- Keep a record of the reasons why we are sharing or requesting information about a child or their family.
- Make sure we are not putting a child's safety and welfare at risk by sharing information about them.
- Always seek consent to share information about a child and their family. In the case of a child protection concern, if this isn't given we can still share information with relevant professionals.
- Carefully decide what specific information is appropriate to share and who to share it with.
- Record any information as factually as possible, identifying any opinions and differentiating them from fact stating whose opinion is being given.
- Never promise a child that we will keep things they're telling us a secret; instead explaining that we need to share what they've told us with someone who can help.
- Direct children to Childline 08001111 for confidential help and advice.
- If we share information without consent we will keep a written record explaining:
 - what steps we took to get consent
 - the person's reasons for not giving consent (if known)
 - why we felt it was necessary to share information without consent.
- We will pass a copy of this record on to the agency/agencies we're sharing the information with.

For more information about how we store, process and protect personal information please refer to our Privacy and Data Policy.

Staff and volunteer supervision, support, training and quality assurance

OFM has a Safe Recruitment policy statement which sets out our organisation's commitment to employing staff and volunteers who are suitable to work with children. We have clear procedures for recruitment of all staff and volunteers: please refer to our Safe Recruitment Policy. We ensure that all staff and volunteers who have contact with children are ID checked and DBS checked at the Enhanced DBS level before beginning work.

We follow an induction process for all new staff and volunteers and this includes child protection training. Our staff and volunteers receive ongoing supervision, support, appraisal and child protection training.

OFM promotes awareness and understanding of child abuse and the risk of radicalisation through its staff training.

We ensure that:

- the designated CPO has relevant experience and receives appropriate training in safeguarding and the Prevent Duty, and is aware of the Channel Programme and how to access it
- designated CPO training is refreshed every two years
- all staff and volunteers have a copy of this **Safeguarding policy**, understand its contents and are vigilant to signs of abuse, neglect or radicalisation
- all staff and volunteers are aware of their statutory duties with regard to the disclosure or discovery of child abuse, and concerns about radicalisation

- all staff receive basic safeguarding training, and safeguarding is a permanent agenda item at all staff meetings
- all staff receive basic training in the Prevent Duty
- all staff are familiar with the Safeguarding File which is kept in the information and policies box.

Allegations against staff

If anyone makes an allegation of child abuse against a member of staff:

- The allegation will be recorded on a **Greenpaper “Log a Concern”** form. Any witnesses to the incident should sign and date the entry to confirm it.
- The allegation must be reported to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and to Ofsted. The LADO will advise if other agencies (e.g. police) should be informed, and the Club will act upon their advice. Any telephone reports to the LADO will be followed up in writing within 48 hours.
- Following advice from the LADO, it may be necessary to suspend the member of staff pending full investigation of the allegation.
- If appropriate, the Group will make a referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service.

Taking, storing and sharing photographs and images of children

Photographs will only be taken of children with their parents' written permission. Images of children will only be stored and shared for purposes of marketing in line with written parental permission.

Peer-on-peer abuse

We recognise that children are vulnerable to abuse by their peers. Peer-on-peer abuse is taken seriously by staff and will be subject to the same child protection procedures as other forms of abuse. Staff are aware of the potential uses of information technology for bullying and abusive behaviour between young people.

Staff will not dismiss abusive behaviour as normal between young people. The presence of one or more of the following in relationships between children should always trigger concern about the possibility of peer-on-peer abuse:

- Sexual activity of any kind, including sexting
- One of the children is significantly more dominant than the other (e.g. much older)
- One of the children is significantly more vulnerable than the other (e.g. in terms of disability, confidence, physical strength)
- There has been some use of threats, bribes or coercion to ensure compliance or secrecy.

If peer-on-peer abuse is suspected or disclosed

We will follow the same procedures as set out above for responding to child abuse.

Please also see our Managing Conflict Policy and Anti-Bullying Procedure for further information on how we assist with conflict and disagreement between children.

Arrival and Collection

Children must be handed over to and collected from facilitators in person by a responsible adult. The collecting or dropping-off adult must remain present for a brief handover acknowledgement, so that responsibility for the child is clearly transferred and any

essential safeguarding information can be shared if required.

Independent Leaving

Our Free Minds' standard safeguarding arrangement is that children are collected in person by a responsible adult.

Where a family wishes their child to leave independently, this may only take place with written parental consent and in accordance with agreed safeguarding arrangements. Even in these circumstances, a child must inform the facilitators before leaving the premises.

Whistle-Blowing Procedure

Whistleblowing is when someone reports wrongdoing on the basis that it is in the public interest for the wrongdoing to be brought to light. This is usually something that they've seen at work - but not always. The wrongdoing might have happened in the past, be happening now, or be something that the whistle blower is concerned may happen in the future (Gov.uk 2019).

Our Free Minds is committed to the safeguarding of children and we encourage our community to hold us accountable to that aim. If somebody "blows the whistle" they will not be penalised in any way.

If any person should have concerns about the way child protection is being managed in Our Free Minds, they should contact the NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line by telephoning 0800 028 0285 or emailing: help@nspcc.org.uk.

For example, contact the Whistleblowing Advice Line if:

- OFM or another organisation doesn't have clear safeguarding procedures to follow
- concerns aren't dealt with properly or may be covered up
- a concern that was raised hasn't been acted upon
- you are worried that repercussions are likely to arise if you raise a concern.

Contact numbers

- MASH: 0300 456 0108
- MASH out of hours contact: 00300 456 0100
- Local Prevent team: 01278 647466
- National Prevent Advice Line on 0800 011 3764
- Police: 101 (non-emergency) or 999 (emergency)
- Anti-terrorist hotline: 0800 789 321
- NSPCC: 0808 800 500
- Ofsted: 0300 123 1231
- NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line 0800 028 0285

This policy was adopted by: Our Free Minds	Date of last review: 21.1.2025
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To be reviewed by: 21.1.26 (Currently under review)

Signed:
Katie Kotting, Chair of the Board of Trustees - 17.01.26

Clea Sambrook, Trustee for Safeguarding - 17.01.26

Poppy De Witt, Trustee - 17.01.26

Guy Asherson Taylor, Facilitator and CPL - 17.01.26

Hannah Woolven, Facilitator - 17.01.26

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