



Citizens Advice Wandsworth safeguarding procedure

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We have a safeguarding lead and deputy safeguarding leads. The lead is the person responsible for reporting concerns of abuse and neglect to the relevant authority. In their absence a deputy safeguarding lead will take this action. If no safeguarding leads are available two managers can agree and decide to breach confidentiality.

In addition a member of our trustee board is assigned the responsibility of overseeing safeguarding for our organization including reporting serious concerns to the Charity Commission and making decisions on safeguarding concerns about our staff and volunteers or children and adults at risk in their care

1. Introduction

This procedure should be followed when a volunteer or staff member has concerns about the safety or wellbeing of a child or an adult at risk.

The procedure explains when we can breach confidentiality in order to protect someone's health, wellbeing or human rights. Confidentiality is a key part of our service, it can be breached if someone is at risk and unable or unwilling to give consent.

This procedure should be read in conjunction with our Safeguarding Adults Policy, Safeguarding Children Policy and [Citizens Advice guidance about safeguarding and confidentiality](#). There's a flowchart of the procedure in Appendix 1.

2. If there's a serious or immediate risk to someone's safety

Confidentiality considerations shouldn't stop you taking immediate action when it's needed.

If you think anyone is in serious and immediate risk, call 999 immediately.

There's a serious and immediate risk if all of these apply:

- there's a danger to someone's health, safety or wellbeing - whether or not they're a client
- the danger is about to happen now or soon
- urgent intervention is needed, probably from the police or medical professionals.

Your decision must be based on clear evidence rather than suspicion, but you'll also need to use your judgement.

Examples of an immediate risk include:

- a client begins to lose consciousness after claiming to have taken an overdose
- a client picks up a chair, approaches a volunteer aggressively and threatens that they'll hit them with the chair
- someone is self-harming in the waiting room by burning themselves with a lighter.

If you decide to breach because of an immediate risk, you should only share the client's basic information, not the details of their client record.

If you've breached confidentiality because of an immediate risk you must report this to a safeguarding lead so they can record the reasons for the decision. If it's a safeguarding issue you should also complete a concerns form and send this to a safeguarding lead.

3. If you identify a concern about someone

This guidance is for frontline staff and volunteers who aren't safeguarding leads.

If you have a safeguarding concern about the safety or wellbeing of a client or someone else associated with them, you should tell your safeguarding lead or deputy lead. A safeguarding issue might be the result of:

- a direct allegation of abuse made by a child or an adult
- an allegation by a third party
- a staff member or volunteer seeing or hearing something that prompts a concern.

You should consider reporting a safeguarding concern if it's about the safety or wellbeing of an adult at risk.

3.1 Definition of 'child' and 'adult at risk'

Anyone under 18 should be considered a child for the purpose of safeguarding.

An adult at risk is someone who's all of the following:

- has care and support needs
- experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect
- unable to protect themselves because of their care and support needs.

When you first identify or find out about a concern, you can take notes to help when you report the concern.

3.2 Try to get permission from the client

If the safeguarding concern is about an adult client, you should try and get permission from them before you take any action, unless it could put them at more risk. Consider what the client wants to happen.

If you have a safeguarding concern about a child, it might not be appropriate to ask for permission from the child or their parent, guardian or carer. Consider the child's safety when you're deciding whether to ask for permission.

When you ask for permission to help the client, you should try and get their name and address to be able to report the concern correctly.

If the client doesn't provide a name and address you might not be able to take action. If they continue to get advice and give personal information that could identify them, tell them you might still report the concern even if they don't want you to. This is because of your safeguarding responsibilities.

If you can't get any permission from the person you're concerned about, or it's not appropriate to ask for it, you should still speak to the safeguarding lead or deputy lead. They might still report the concern to the local authority.

3.3 Complete the safeguarding concerns form

Use the concerns form in Policies and Procedures to record your observations, concerns and other relevant information.

If you haven't been able to fill in the form, you can use your written notes to explain the situation to the safeguarding lead or deputy lead.

If you use notes to explain the situation, you should complete a form after to keep in your records.

3.4 Contact the safeguarding lead or deputy safeguarding lead

Tell the safeguarding lead or deputy all of the information you have. You should speak to them in person or by phone as soon as it's appropriate and you have the information you need.

They will make a decision whether to report the safeguarding concern to the relevant authority.

3.5 If you make notes about a concern

When you become aware of a safeguarding concern, you should make notes about what you're told by the client at the time, or as soon as possible afterwards. These are called 'contemporaneous notes'.

For example, if a client says something during an appointment that feels like it could be a safeguarding concern, you should try to write down:

- what they said
- what you're concerned about
- any key phrases or quotes you think could help justify why you're concerned
- the date and time of the event or conversation.

You shouldn't act as an investigator. Only record the information the client tells you and don't ask leading questions.

Making notes will help you report the concern and can also be used as evidence if the case goes to court. If you make notes on paper, you should give these to the safeguarding lead you speak to at the first opportunity.

If the safeguarding concern isn't about the client and there's no case record, you should store the safeguarding concerns form in a secure place in the office. For example, if the concern is about a child in the care of a client.

You don't need to update the safeguarding section of Casebook – this is the responsibility of the safeguarding lead or managers you speak to.

3.6 If you need emotional support

Dealing with safeguarding concerns can be distressing and when you're making decisions on what actions to take about an adult at risk or child, it's natural for these to play on your mind.

We care about our clients and want to help them, so witnessing situations where they're at risk of harm may not be something that's easy to process. If you need support after dealing with a safeguarding concern, you should speak to your line manager.

It's important to make sure that everyone involved has the support they need to talk about what's happened and how they feel, in their own time.

It can also be difficult to not hear back from the local authority after raising a concern. It may help to follow up to find out what's been done, but in some situations be aware you may not get to know what's happened.

4. If you're a safeguarding lead and someone raises a concern

This guidance is for the safeguarding lead, deputy lead or managers dealing with a safeguarding concern in the absence of a lead.

When a staff member or volunteer raises a safeguarding concern, you'll need to decide whether to report it to your local authority. For example, the police, social services or both. If you report it, you'll be breaching confidentiality - unless the client gives permission.

You don't need permission from national Citizens Advice to breach confidentiality if it's a safeguarding concern.

The safeguarding lead or deputy lead should decide whether to breach confidentiality in this way.

Either the safeguarding lead or deputy lead should be contactable when a concern is raised or discovered. If they're both unavailable, two managers should make the decision.

Confidentiality is a key part of our service, but you can breach it if a child or at-risk adult is at risk of harm or abuse.

Check the member of staff who raised the concern has:

- completed the safeguarding concerns form
- sent you any notes they made or stored them securely in the office
- tried to get consent from the client, if appropriate.

4.1 Making a decision to report the concern to your local authority

Check the safeguarding concern form or the notes to understand the issue raised by the member of staff or volunteer.

If you're not in the office, discuss the details of the concern with the person who raised the issue.

Take action if you think there's an [immediate risk](#). There might still be a safeguarding concern when the immediate risk is dealt with.

Under the Care Act 2014 (in England) and the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014 (Wales), safeguarding applies to an adult at risk. An adult at risk is someone who's all of the following:

- has care and support needs
- experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect

- unable to protect themselves because of their care and support needs.

Anyone under 18 should be considered a child for the purpose of safeguarding. If the concern is about a child, you should use the children's safeguarding policy and [find out more about safeguarding children](#) on the NSPCC website.

You should usually report the concern if the person's safety or wellbeing could be at risk of harm from others or themselves.

Make sure the person's safety is the priority when you make a decision.

Examples of when you might want to report a concern:

- a client with young children seems to be living in a hostile environment and you suspect there might be a domestic incident e.g. there's shouting and furniture being pushed over
- A child client makes a direct disclosure that their uncle is coming to their birthday party next month and he usually does bad things, but they need to keep it a secret. An adult client who has a learning disability says they don't have access to their own money and that it's controlled by their father. The client says they're only allowed to have £5 to spend on food a week
- you suspect an elderly person who's cared for by a client is being abused and is having their medication withheld.

4.3 If you need help making a decision

If the concern is about a child, you can [get advice from the NSPCC helpline](#). Use their advice to inform your decision, you don't have to follow it completely.

If the concern is about an adult, you can get advice from your local authority's safeguarding board.

If you get advice about a concern, don't share any personal information about the client - only describe the situation.

You can also [contact the operations support team](#) if you want help working out how to:

- implement your safeguarding policy
- breach confidentiality because of a safeguarding concern.

- You must make the final decision whether to report a concern.

4.4 Reporting the concern to your local authority

If you decide to report the concern, make sure you speak to the right person in the local authority. This should be a member of your local authority's safeguarding board. Always report the concern directly by phone, rather than leaving a message or sending an email.

Record the decision you make on the safeguarding concerns form, scan the form and add it to the case record of the client.

You should still record the decision if you decide not to report the concern.

4.6 If you need emotional support

Coming into contact with safeguarding concerns can be distressing and when you're making decisions on what actions to take about an adult at risk or child, it's natural for these to play on your mind.

At Citizens Advice we care about our clients and want to help them, so witnessing situations where they're at risk of harm may not be something that's easy to process.

If you need support after dealing with a safeguarding concern, you should speak to your line manager.

Make sure the member of staff or volunteer who reported the concern is alright. They've had closer contact with the person who's at risk of harm or abuse and may have witnessed a distressing situation.

It's important to make sure everyone involved has the support they need to talk about what's happened and how they feel, in their own time. It can also be difficult to not hear back from the local authority after raising a concern. It may help to follow up to find out what's been done, but in some situations be aware you might not get to know what's happened.

4.6 If you're not happy with how the local authority responds to the concern

If you think the local authority hasn't taken the right action, or they haven't responded at all, you can escalate the concern.

How you escalate the concern depends on how your local authority works and the contacts you have. The chair of the safeguarding board is usually a good escalation point.

In some situations you may not find out what happened to your reported concern.

4.7 If you have a concern about a colleague or a child or adult at risk in their care

If the individual is an employee, [contact your relationship manager](#) for advice. If the individual is a volunteer, email the volunteering team for advice at volunteeringteam@citizensadvice.org.uk.

Appendix 1: Flowchart of procedure

