



In partnership with



# CHILD SAFEGUARDING IN VOLUNTEERING ORGANISATIONS

ECPAT International and  
Global Safeguarding



The Down to Zero Alliance brought together Terre des Hommes Netherlands, Child Rights Coalition Asia (CRC Asia), Conexión, Defence for Children – ECPAT Netherlands, Free a Girl and Plan International, in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, to address the sexual exploitation of children.



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# Why Child Safeguarding Matters — Even When Children Are Not Your Focus



Many volunteering organisations do not exist to serve children directly. Their mandates may centre on environmental protection, conservation, humanitarian response, community development, or social action. Yet across all of these contexts, children are present - in the communities where volunteers live and work, in the spaces volunteers move through, and in the online environments where boundaries between personal and professional can blur.

This presence creates responsibility. Volunteers are often perceived as authority figures, benefactors, or trusted outsiders. They may have informal contact with children well beyond the edges of their formal role. They may share images, form relationships, or engage digitally in ways that carry risk — not necessarily through bad intent, but through the dynamics that arise wherever adults hold power and trust in relation to children.

Child safeguarding is not only about preventing deliberate abuse. It is about recognising that harm can arise through informal contact, cultural misunderstanding, poorly defined boundaries, or inadequate oversight — and taking proportionate steps to prevent it. The principle at the heart of these tools is *do no harm*: safeguarding as a positive, practical commitment built into how organisations operate, recruit, communicate and partner.

***Safeguarding responsibility does not depend on whether children are your direct beneficiaries. It depends on whether your activities, presence or volunteers could place children at risk. For most volunteering organisations, the answer is yes.***

## 1. WHAT THESE TOOLS OFFER

This suite of resources was developed by ECPAT International and Global Safeguarding specifically for organisations that engage volunteers — whether their model involves intensive work with children, in sports, arts or youth clubs for instance, community presence, short-term international placements, remote roles, or any combination of these. Some contexts require specialist child safeguarding frameworks. Volunteering in schools, early childhood or daycare facilities, and other structured child-serving settings carries risks that general volunteering safeguarding tools alone cannot adequately address. Organisations operating in these contexts should consult frameworks specifically designed for higher-risk settings.<sup>1</sup>

The tools are designed to be modular and proportionate. They do not assume specialist safeguarding capacity or large organisational infrastructure. They recognise that in many organisations — particularly small, volunteer-led, or resource-constrained ones — multiple responsibilities sit with the same people, formal roles may not exist, and safeguarding has to be embedded into day-to-day practice rather than delegated to a dedicated team.

Taken together, the tools support organisations to:

- » Understand where safeguarding responsibility arises across different volunteering models
- » Put proportionate, practical systems in place before harm occurs
- » Give volunteers, managers, and leaders clarity about what is expected of them
- » Respond appropriately and confidently when concerns arise
- » Manage risk across communications, partnerships, and contracting.

<sup>1</sup> Please visit [www.keepingchildrensafe.global](http://www.keepingchildrensafe.global) or <https://safeguardingsupporthub.org/> for more specialized resources.

## 2. WHAT IS IN THE SUITE OF PRACTICAL TOOLS

The suite comprises one overarching guidance document and seven supporting resources. Each resource

can be used independently, but they are designed to work together as an integrated child safeguarding framework.

| Resource                                                       | What it covers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>I.<br/>Guidance</b>                                         | The foundation document. Sets out safeguarding principles and their application across diverse volunteering models — from direct work with children to incidental community contact, international placements, and remote roles. Explains how to use the suite as a whole.             |
| <b>II.<br/>Code of Conduct</b>                                 | Explains why codes of conduct matter and how to make them work in practice. Provides three adaptable templates suited to different volunteering contexts: organisations serving children directly, those with incidental contact, and a commitment-based model for mixed environments. |
| <b>III.<br/>Volunteer Recruitment and Safeguarding Support</b> | Covers safer recruitment from role design through to background and reference checks, interview processes, and post-appointment support. Addresses the specific risks posed by different volunteer profiles — short-term international, community-based, remote, and trustee roles.    |
| <b>IV.<br/>Risk Assessment</b>                                 | Provides two practical tools: an organisational self-assessment for reviewing safeguarding arrangements, and an activity-level risk assessment for programme planning. Includes indicators of unsafe organisational environments and guidance on proportionate application.            |

|                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>V.</b><br/><b>Roles and Responsibilities</b></p>     | <p>Clarifies what safeguarding requires from volunteers, managers, leaders, and designated safeguarding leads — including how to manage situations where these roles overlap or are held by the same person.</p>                                                                      |
| <p><b>VI.</b><br/><b>Reporting and Case Management</b></p> | <p>Sets out how to establish accessible, trusted reporting routes and manage concerns once raised. Addresses the realities of informal reporting, anonymous concerns, and situations where internal capacity is limited. Includes signposting to external safeguarding resources.</p> |
| <p><b>VII.</b><br/><b>Communications</b></p>               | <p>Addresses safeguarding in the use of images, stories, consent and social media — with particular attention to the risks posed by volunteers using personal devices and informal digital platforms. Covers informed consent as a relational, not just procedural, requirement.</p>  |
| <p><b>VIII.</b><br/><b>Partnerships and Contracts</b></p>  | <p>Supports organisations to identify and manage safeguarding risks in partnership and contracting arrangements — including sending/host volunteer models, sub-grants, and informal collaboration. Emphasises shared responsibility and proportionate expectations.</p>               |

### 3. HOW TO USE THESE RESOURCES

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Start with the Guidance document to establish a shared understanding of safeguarding responsibility in your volunteering context. Then use the supporting resources in whatever sequence reflects your priorities — whether that is reviewing your code of conduct, strengthening your recruitment process, or clarifying reporting routes.

Each resource is designed to be adapted. Organisational size, legal context, volunteering model, and available capacity all shape what proportionate safeguarding looks like in practice. The tools provide structure and tested content; your organisation provides the context.

I.

## Guidance



## 1. INTRODUCTION

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These resources are written specifically for organisations that work with volunteers and want to safeguard children effectively and responsibly within volunteering contexts.

Many volunteering organisations do not exist to serve children directly. Their core mandate may be environmental protection, conservation, community development, humanitarian assistance, education, tourism, or social action. However, through their activities, presence in communities, or the behaviour of volunteers outside formal programme settings, children may still be exposed to risk. These resources recognise that reality and are designed for organisations that engage volunteers across a wide range of contexts — from direct programme delivery to community presence, international placements, and remote roles. But they are intended to support organisations that do not already operate within a specialist child protection framework. Organisations working within established specialist child protection or safeguarding systems may find these tools useful as a complement to existing frameworks, but should ensure alignment with any more specific guidance that applies to their context.

Safeguarding in volunteering contexts presents distinct challenges. Risk is often shaped less by formal programme design and more by context, relationships, power dynamics, cultural assumptions, and informal or unsupervised time. Volunteers may live or socialise in communities, be perceived as authority figures or benefactors, interact with children outside structured activities, or engage online in ways that blur personal and professional boundaries. These factors can increase safeguarding risk even where organisations have policies in place and positive intentions.

## 2. RESOURCES

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These resources are not intended to restate safeguarding principles in abstract terms. Its purpose is to help organisations translate safeguarding into day-to-day practice within the realities of volunteering. It explains how safeguarding responsibilities apply across different volunteering models, including organisations that involve direct work with children (but not specialist child protection organisations), those where contact is incidental or community-based, and those using international, short-term, or remote volunteers.

The guidance is grounded in the principle of **do no harm**. This includes recognising that not all volunteering models or activities are appropriate, and that in some circumstances the safest decision may be to redesign an activity, restrict volunteer roles, or exclude volunteers altogether. Safeguarding is not only about responding to concerns once harm has occurred, but about making proportionate and defensible decisions in advance to prevent harm.

Safeguarding is treated throughout as a shared organisational responsibility. While designated safeguarding leads play a critical role, effective safeguarding in volunteering contexts depends on leadership, supervision, clear expectations, and the confidence of managers and volunteers to exercise judgement, challenge behaviour, and act when something does not feel right.

Safeguarding in volunteering is an ongoing process, not a one-off activity or a compliance exercise. When applied thoughtfully and consistently, the approaches set out here can help organisations strengthen safeguarding culture, support volunteers to act safely and appropriately, and reduce the risk of harm to children across diverse volunteering contexts.

### 3. ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT, EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

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A clear and visible commitment to child safeguarding is a critical foundation for safe and responsible volunteering. This commitment should be understood not only by staff and volunteers, but also, where appropriate, by children, communities and partners. Making safeguarding expectations explicit helps to set boundaries, support challenge and reinforce that children's safety takes precedence over convenience, custom or organisational reputation.

Organisations should take proportionate steps to inform and educate people about their child safeguarding commitment. This may include incorporating safeguarding expectations into induction processes, volunteer briefings, codes of conduct, community engagement, and public-facing communications. Education in this context does not require technical training for all audiences, but should ensure that people understand what safeguarding means, what behaviour is expected, and how concerns can be raised safely.

Communicating safeguarding commitments openly supports transparency, accountability and trust. It also helps create environments in which harmful behaviour is less likely to be normalised, excused or overlooked, and where children and others feel more confident to speak up. For volunteering organisations operating across different cultural and community contexts, clear communication of safeguarding commitments provides a consistent reference point that supports ethical decision-making and protects children from harm.

### 4. DIFFERENT VOLUNTEERING MODELS AND SAFEGUARDING RISKS

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Safeguarding risks vary depending on the volunteering model used. Organisations should consider how risk presents differently across models, including:

- » Direct delivery roles, where volunteers work directly with children in structured activities
- » Incidental or community roles, where volunteers encounter children outside programmes
- » International or short-term placements, where cultural difference, language barriers and limited oversight may increase vulnerability
- » Remote or digital volunteering, where contact occurs online and supervision may be indirect
- » Fee-paying or voluntourism-style arrangements, where expectations and power dynamics may be shaped by financial contribution

Each model requires tailored safeguards. Risk assessment, supervision, and decision-making should reflect how volunteers operate in practice rather than assuming a single approach.

### 5. CONTEXT, CAPACITY AND PROPORTIONATE APPLICATION

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Volunteering organisations operate in a wide range of contexts and with varying levels of resources, capacity and formality. In many organisations, particularly small or volunteer-led groups, individuals may hold multiple roles and responsibilities, such as governance, management,

supervision and direct delivery. Safeguarding responsibilities may therefore sit alongside other functions, rather than being assigned to dedicated roles or teams.

This guidance recognises those realities. Safeguarding arrangements are expected to be proportionate to organisational size, structure and risk, and should be adapted to reflect how organisations operate in practice. Limited resources do not remove safeguarding responsibilities, but they do require organisations to think carefully about how roles are defined, how decisions are recorded, and how accountability is maintained where functions overlap.

Where roles are combined, organisations should be clear about who is responsible for safeguarding decisions, how conflicts of interest are managed, and how concerns can be raised safely, including where the concern relates to a senior volunteer or trustee. Practical steps such as clear role descriptions, written records of decisions, external advice or peer support can help ensure safeguarding remains effective even where capacity is limited.

## 6. HOW TO USE THESE RESOURCES

This guidance for Child Safeguarding in Volunteering Organisations is structured as a set of practical, interconnected sections, supported by separate training materials and resources.

This guidance is modular and adaptable. Organisations are encouraged to use it in whole or in part and tailor it to their size, capacity, legal context, and volunteering model. It should be read alongside organisational safeguarding policies, codes of conduct, and reporting procedures, and used as a practical tool to support decision-making, training, and supervision.

Organisations may use this document in full or select sections that are most relevant to their volunteering model and level of safeguarding maturity. If your organisation is unsure where to begin, it is recommended that you start with this guidance and then move to [Section IV: Risk Assessment](#), which supports organisations to assess their activities, volunteering roles, and exposure to safeguarding risk.

The sections of this guidance are:



The accompanying training guidance contains training materials, facilitation notes, scenarios, and additional resources to support learning and discussion with volunteers, managers, and leaders. Key terms are defined later in this document.

## **7. SAFEGUARDING AND WELLBEING**

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Considering safeguarding is a positive and responsible step for any organisation that works with volunteers. It reflects a commitment to children's safety, organisational integrity, and ethical practice. Most people involved in volunteering are motivated by good intentions and a genuine desire to contribute positively to communities. Safeguarding exists to support that aim, not to undermine it.

Safeguarding can, however, be uncomfortable to engage with. It requires an acknowledgment that children can be harmed, including in settings that are intended to be supportive or beneficial. Safeguarding risk can also arise unintentionally through everyday decisions, behaviours, or assumptions.

While most people volunteer for positive reasons, organisations must also recognise that volunteering can create access to children. In some cases, individuals may deliberately seek opportunities to harm children. In others, weak systems, limited oversight, or blurred boundaries can be exploited over time. There are also situations where risk develops gradually through a combination of opportunity, poor supervision, and organisational culture. These different pathways to harm highlight the importance of robust safeguarding systems and a clear culture that consistently puts children's safety first.

Because of this, safeguarding discussions may provoke strong or negative reactions, including discomfort, defensiveness, disbelief, or concern that safeguarding

implies mistrust. Cultural norms, power dynamics, or organisational identity may make it particularly difficult to talk openly about harm or abuse involving children. In some contexts, practices that are culturally accepted or normalised may still place children at risk; safeguarding requires organisations and volunteers to prioritise children's rights and safety even where this means challenging long-standing norms or expectations.

Safeguarding discussions can also affect individual wellbeing. Some staff, volunteers, or trustees may have lived experience of abuse or exploitation, and engaging with safeguarding topics may trigger distressing emotions. Organisations should be mindful of this and aim to create safeguarding discussions that are respectful, supportive, and appropriately paced.

This guidance encourages organisations to approach safeguarding with openness and care, recognising these challenges while not allowing them to prevent action. Safeguarding is not about assuming harm has occurred or viewing volunteers with suspicion. It is about creating conditions in which harm is less likely, risks are recognised early, and concerns can be raised and addressed safely, particularly in volunteering contexts where trust and informal relationships play an important role.

## **8. UNDERSTANDING HOW CHILDREN ARE HARMED**

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Understanding how children are harmed is an essential part of effective safeguarding. This section is not about assuming bad intent or viewing volunteers as a risk by default. It is about recognising well-established patterns of harm so that organisations can design safer systems, make better decisions, and reduce the likelihood of abuse or exploitation occurring.

All forms of child abuse involve an imbalance of power. Children may be harmed by adults or by other children, and in some cases children who are themselves experiencing abuse may be coerced or exploited into harming others. Harm can occur in families, institutions, communities, online spaces, and any setting where children are present, including environments that are intended to be supportive or beneficial.

Evidence consistently shows that children are most often harmed by people who are known to them. This may include family members, peers, community members, staff, volunteers, or others who are trusted or familiar. In volunteering contexts, this is particularly important, as volunteers may be welcomed into communities, perceived as authority figures, role models, benefactors, or people who should not be questioned.

Some people intentionally seek access to children to harm them. This may involve joining organisations, taking on volunteering roles, or positioning themselves in ways that allow contact with children. In many cases this behaviour involves grooming, where trust is gradually built with children, families, communities, or organisations to reduce suspicion, avoid scrutiny, and create opportunity for harm. For this reason, safeguarding cannot rely solely on trust, good intentions, or assumptions about character.

Not all harm is intentional. Children may also be harmed through poor judgement, boundary confusion, cultural misunderstanding, lack of supervision, or informal practices that develop over time. In volunteering contexts, this may include unsupervised contact, informal socialising, gift giving, online communication, or activities that take place outside formal programme

structures. These situations can increase risk even where no harm is intended, for example:

- » A short-term international volunteer is invited to spend time with children outside programme hours. Without clear boundaries, this informal contact increases risk.
- » A community-based volunteer regularly gives gifts to children as a sign of generosity, unintentionally creating dependency or favouritism.
- » A remote volunteer begins private messaging a young person through social media to offer support, without organisational oversight.

These situations may arise from positive intent, but without clear expectations and supervision they can create safeguarding risk.

Organisations themselves can also be groomed. This may involve unsafe practices becoming normalised over time, reluctance to challenge senior or trusted individuals, prioritising reputation or gratitude over children's safety, or failing to act on early concerns. Families and communities may also be groomed to accept risk, minimise concerns, or remain silent due to dependency, trust, or fear of consequences.

Effective safeguarding therefore depends less on identifying "bad people" and more on understanding risk, power, and context. Strong safeguarding systems, a clear Code of Conduct, effective supervision, and a culture that encourages challenge and reporting all play a critical role in preventing harm. By recognising how grooming and harm can occur, organisations are better placed to protect children, support safe behaviour, and respond early when something does not feel right.

### What This Means for Volunteering Organisations

Understanding how children are harmed helps volunteering organisations design safer activities, roles, and systems. It does not mean if volunteers intend to cause harm. It means recognising that risk arises through context, power, and everyday practice, particularly in environments that rely on trust, informality, and good intentions.

For volunteering organisations, this means:

- » Safeguarding arrangements should be designed around how volunteers actually operate, including informal time in communities, social interactions, online activity, and reduced supervision outside structured programmes.
- » Decisions about volunteering roles should be based on risk and suitability, not solely on demand for volunteers or positive intent.
- » Recruitment, induction, and supervision should focus not only on compliance

checks, but on behaviour, boundaries, and ongoing judgement over time.

- » Clear codes of conduct and expectations help protect children, volunteers, and organisations, and should always apply, not only during formal activities.
- » Volunteers and staff should feel able to challenge behaviour, ask questions, and raise concerns without fear of damaging relationships or reputations.
- » Organisations should be prepared to redesign activities or restrict volunteer roles where safeguarding risks cannot be reduced to an acceptable level.

By taking a risk-informed and reflective approach, volunteering organisations can strengthen safeguarding culture, support volunteers to act safely and appropriately, and reduce the likelihood of harm to children across a wide range of volunteering contexts.

## 9. WHEN VOLUNTEERING IS NOT APPROPRIATE / HARMFUL VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering is often associated with positive intent, generosity, and community benefit. However, in some circumstances, the involvement of volunteers can increase the risk of harm to children rather than reduce it. Recognising when volunteering is not appropriate is a critical part of effective safeguarding and responsible programme design.

Safeguarding risks may be unacceptably high where volunteering roles involve unsupervised access to children, poorly defined responsibilities, weak supervision, or settings in which children are particularly vulnerable. This risk may be further increased in short-term placements, fee-paying volunteering arrangements, international or cross-cultural contexts, or where volunteers are placed in environments with limited safeguarding infrastructure or oversight.

In some cases, the nature of the activity itself may create risk that cannot be adequately mitigated. This includes situations where boundaries are difficult to maintain, where power imbalances are pronounced, or where community expectations or cultural norms make it difficult to challenge behaviour or raise concerns. In such circumstances, attempting to manage risk through additional rules or training alone may be insufficient.

The principle of *do no harm* requires organisations to consider not only how to safeguard volunteers and children within activities, but also whether those activities should take place at all. Where safeguarding risks cannot be reduced to an acceptable level, **the exclusion of volunteers from specific roles or settings is a necessary and appropriate safeguarding measure.**

Decisions to redesign activities, restrict volunteer roles, or decline volunteer involvement should be understood as safeguarding strengths, not failures. Such decisions demonstrate organisational

responsibility, sound judgement, and a commitment to prioritising children's safety and wellbeing over organisational convenience, demand for volunteers, or reputational considerations.

### What This Means for Volunteering Organisations

Recognising when volunteering is not appropriate supports safer, more ethical decision-making and strengthens organisational safeguarding culture.

For volunteering organisations, this means:

- » Safeguarding risk assessments should explicitly consider whether volunteers should be involved at all, not only how their involvement might be managed.
- » Volunteer roles should be clearly defined, supervised, and time-limited, with caution applied to roles involving direct or unsupervised access to children.
- » Organisations should be prepared to decline, redesign, or discontinue volunteering activities where risks to children cannot be adequately reduced.

- » Decisions should be guided by children's safety and wellbeing, rather than pressure to place volunteers, meet targets, or respond to external expectations.
- » Leaders and managers should support staff and safeguarding leads to make difficult but defensible decisions, including saying no to volunteers or partners where necessary.
- » Clear communication with volunteers, partners, and communities helps ensure that safeguarding decisions are understood as protective measures, not punitive actions.

By recognising the limits of safe volunteering and acting accordingly, organisations can better protect children, support volunteers to act appropriately, and ensure that volunteering contributes positively without creating avoidable risk.

**Special attention** should be given to volunteering in orphanages and residential care institutions. This form of volunteering should be systematically discouraged because it sustains demand for residential care institutions and exposes children to harm by creating recurring, unsupervised access to children in highly vulnerable contexts. For more details about why volunteering in orphanages should be banned, please see '[Rethink orphanages](#)', [The Code's Voluntourism Policy](#) and the [Global Case Study](#): How to regulate the issue of voluntourism with children.

## 10. TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED HARMS

Safeguarding risks increasingly arise through digital and online environments, which form an integral part of how children, volunteers and communities communicate, learn and interact. In volunteering contexts, there is often little distinction between online and in-person engagement, and safeguarding approaches need to reflect that reality.

Rather than treating online harms as a separate or specialist issue, this guidance addresses technology-facilitated risk throughout, recognising that behaviour, boundaries and power dynamics operate across both digital and physical spaces.

This includes the use of social media, messaging platforms, digital images, online communication with communities, and remote or hybrid volunteering roles.

Embedding consideration of technology-facilitated harms across the guidance supports a more realistic and proportionate approach. It encourages organisations and volunteers to apply the same safeguarding principles online as they would in face-to-face settings, including respect for boundaries, appropriate conduct, supervision and accountability.

## **11. SAFEGUARDING BEYOND FORMAL VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES**

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Safeguarding considerations are not limited to formal volunteering activities or structured programme settings. In many volunteering contexts, risks to children arise through informal interactions, social environments and everyday behaviour that sit outside defined roles or schedules. These risks may occur when volunteers spend time in communities, engage online, or are present immediately before or after organised activities, and may affect children who are not directly connected to the organisation's work.

Volunteers who do not have direct contact with children as part of their role may still encounter situations where children are present, vulnerable or at risk. In some circumstances, volunteers may inadvertently create risk; in others, they may be well placed to notice concerns or help protect children from harm. Supporting volunteers to understand the broader safeguarding context in which they operate is therefore an important part of responsible volunteering.

This includes helping volunteers recognise how children may be exploited or harmed in the environments in which they are present, for example through forced labour, sexual exploitation linked

to travel and tourism, or online abuse. Awareness of these risks supports safer behaviour, informed decision-making and appropriate action when concerns arise.

Organisations that engage volunteers remotely should apply the same principles. Online spaces can create opportunities for interaction, influence or harm, particularly where boundaries are unclear or supervision is limited. Safeguarding arrangements should therefore consider digital activity alongside in-person engagement and support volunteers to understand and manage risk in online environments.

By acknowledging that safeguarding extends beyond formal activities, organisations can better support volunteers to act responsibly, reduce unintended harm and contribute positively to the safety and wellbeing of children across a range of volunteering contexts.

## **12. BASELINE SAFEGUARDING EXPECTATIONS FOR VOLUNTEERING ORGANISATIONS**

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All organisations that work with volunteers have a responsibility to ensure that their activities do not cause harm to children. While safeguarding arrangements should be proportionate to context, size and risk, there are a small number of baseline safeguarding expectations that apply across all volunteering settings.

These expectations represent a minimum foundation for safe and responsible volunteering. They are not intended to be a comprehensive safeguarding framework, nor a checklist to be completed once. Rather, they provide a common baseline to support sound judgement, accountability and consistency across diverse volunteering models, including organisations whose primary mandate is not child focused.

The expectations set out below are consistent with established good practice within the volunteering sector, including the Global Volunteering Standard<sup>2</sup> developed by the International Forum for Volunteering in Development. That Standard emphasises duty of care, risk-based decision-making, and the importance of recognising when volunteering itself may create harm. This guidance does not seek to replicate or replace existing volunteering standards, but aligns with their emphasis on responsible, ethical volunteering and the principle of *do no harm*.

### 12.1 Core Baseline Expectations

#### » **Organisational commitment**

Organisations should make an explicit commitment to safeguarding children from harm, abuse and exploitation. This commitment should be reflected in organisational values, leadership behaviours and public-facing communications, and apply to all staff, volunteers, partners and activities.

#### » **Safeguarding policy and procedures**

Organisations should have a clear safeguarding policy, supported by procedures that explain how concerns are identified, reported and responded to. These should apply to volunteers as well as staff, include mandatory reporting requirements where relevant, and be approved and reviewed at leadership or board level.

#### » **Codes of conduct**

Organisations should have a code of conduct that sets clear expectations for behaviour and boundaries. Codes of conduct should always apply to volunteers, including during informal activities, online engagement and time spent in communities, and should be understood as protective measures rather than expressions of mistrust.

#### » **Risk assessment and decision-making**

Organisations should assess safeguarding risks associated with their activities and volunteering roles before they begin and review them regularly. This includes considering whether volunteer involvement is appropriate at all in certain roles or settings. Where risks cannot be reduced to an acceptable level, activities should be redesigned or volunteers excluded as a necessary safeguarding measure.

#### » **Safer recruitment and role suitability**

Recruitment processes should be proportionate to role and risk and focus on suitability as well as skills. This includes clear role descriptions, appropriate checks, references where relevant, and discussion of motivation, boundaries and expectations. Recruitment should be understood as an ongoing process rather than a one-off event.

#### » **Training, induction and awareness**

Volunteers and staff should receive safeguarding information and training appropriate to their role and context. This should support understanding of safeguarding responsibilities, acceptable behaviour, reporting pathways and how to respond to concerns, including in informal or unplanned situations.

#### » **Clear reporting and response mechanisms**

Organisations should have accessible and trusted mechanisms for reporting safeguarding concerns. Volunteers, staff, community members and partners should know how to raise concerns safely and without fear of retaliation. Organisations should respond to concerns promptly, proportionately and in line with legal and ethical obligations.

#### » **Leadership oversight and accountability**

Safeguarding should be actively overseen by organisational leadership.

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<sup>2</sup> The Global Volunteering Standard - <https://forum-ids.org/global-volunteering-standard/>

Designated safeguarding roles should be clearly defined and supported, and leaders should be accountable for ensuring safeguarding expectations are implemented, reviewed and strengthened over time.

In day-to-day practice, this means leaders and managers regularly asking:

- » How are volunteers interacting with children, not only in role descriptions?
- » Where does informal time create risk?
- » Are volunteers clear about boundaries when using personal devices or social media?
- » Would we design this activity the same way if safeguarding risk were our primary consideration?

Safeguarding becomes effective when these questions are embedded into planning, supervision and review, rather than addressed only after concerns arise.

#### **What This Means for Volunteering Organisations**

These baseline expectations are intended to support good judgement, not replace it. For volunteering organisations, this means recognising that safeguarding is not only about having policies in place, but about how decisions are made, how volunteers are supported and supervised, and how risk is understood in everyday practice.

Organisations should feel confident that applying these expectations proportionately and being willing to say no to unsafe volunteering arrangements, reflects good safeguarding and responsible volunteering. Meeting baseline expectations is a starting point for safeguarding, not an endpoint, and should support continuous reflection, learning and improvement.

This guidance contains tools and templates to help implement these standards.

## **13. KEY CHILD SAFEGUARDING DEFINITIONS**

The language used in safeguarding matters. This guidance follows the principles set out in the Interagency Working Group [Terminology Guidelines](#) for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), which emphasise that terminology should protect children, support accountability and avoid causing further harm.

Facilitators and organisations should use language that is child-centred, non-judgemental and free from [victim-blaming](#), recognising that children cannot consent to abuse or exploitation and that harm arises from power imbalances, coercion and context. Terms that minimise, normalise or sensationalise abuse, or that place responsibility on children for what has happened to them, should be avoided.

Where safeguarding language is adapted for volunteering contexts, this is done to support clarity and understanding while remaining consistent with internationally recognised definitions and the core principle of doing no harm.

As you use this guidance you will come across a variety of terms that you may not have encountered before. Wherever possible we will explain them when they are first used, but a helpful list is provided below. These definitions reflect internationally recognised safeguarding terminology and are intended to support shared understanding across diverse volunteering contexts. You can also refer to '[Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#)' here: <https://ecpat.org/terminology/>

| Term                                      | Definition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Child/ren</b>                          | A child is any person under the age of 18 years, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. For the purposes of safeguarding, this definition applies regardless of gender, nationality, legal status, cultural context, disability, or perceived maturity, and includes all children who may come into direct or indirect contact with the organisation's activities, staff or volunteers.                                                                                |
| <b>Child Safeguarding</b>                 | Safeguarding is the responsibility to prevent harm, abuse, exploitation and neglect, and to protect the rights, safety and wellbeing of children and adults at risk. It is grounded in the do no harm principle and requires organisations to take proactive steps to identify, reduce and manage risk; to regulate access to vulnerable people; and to respond appropriately to concerns, suspicions or allegations, in line with international human rights standards and the best interests of the child. |
| <b>Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)</b> | Child sexual abuse material refers to any representation, by whatever means, of a child engaged in real or simulated explicit sexual activities, or any depiction of a child's sexual parts for primarily sexual purposes.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Child Sexual Exploitation</b>          | Sexual exploitation of children is a form of sexual abuse in which a child is exploited for sexual purposes in exchange for money, goods or other benefits. Children cannot consent to exploitation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Do No Harm</b>                         | The principle of do no harm refers to the responsibility to avoid causing harm and to prevent or mitigate unintended harm.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Duty of Care</b>                       | Duty of care refers to an organisation's legal and ethical responsibility to take reasonable steps to protect children from foreseeable harm arising from its activities, decisions, staff, volunteers or partners. In volunteering contexts, duty of care includes designing activities safely, managing risk, supervising volunteers appropriately, responding to concerns, and ensuring that organisational actions do not place children at increased risk of harm.                                      |

### **Emotional Abuse**



Persistent emotional maltreatment that impacts on a child's emotional development. Emotionally abusive acts include restriction of movement, degrading, humiliating, bullying (including cyberbullying), and threatening, scaring, discriminating, ridiculing or other non-physical forms of hostile or rejecting treatment.

### **Grooming**



Grooming is a process by which a person prepares a child, other individuals and the environment for sexual abuse.

### **Neglect**



Persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, which is likely to result in serious impairment of a child's healthy physical, spiritual, moral and mental development. It includes the failure to properly supervise and protect children from harm and provide for nutrition, shelter and safe living/working conditions. It may also involve maternal neglect during pregnancy as a result of drug or alcohol misuse.

### **Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse/ Technology-Facilitated CSEA**



Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Children (and technology-facilitated CSEA) refers to acts of sexual exploitation or abuse that are facilitated, enabled or amplified through digital technologies. This may include online grooming, coercion, sexual extortion, live-streamed abuse, the creation, possession or sharing of child sexual abuse material, or the use of online platforms to arrange or normalise abuse. It may occur entirely online or in combination with in person abuse.

### **Physical Abuse**



Actual or potential physical harm. It may involve hitting, shaking, poisoning, drowning, and burning. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of or deliberately induces illness in a child.

### **Power Imbalance**



A power imbalance exists where one person or group holds greater authority, status, resources, physical strength, age, knowledge or influence than another, limiting the latter's ability to make free and informed choices or to challenge behaviour. In safeguarding contexts, power imbalances increase children's vulnerability to abuse, exploitation or harm and are a defining feature of child sexual abuse, grooming and exploitation.

## Safeguarding

Safeguarding is the responsibility to prevent harm, abuse, exploitation and neglect, and to protect the rights, safety and wellbeing of people who may be at risk. It is grounded in the do no harm principle and requires organisations to take proactive steps to identify, reduce and manage risk; to regulate access to vulnerable people; and to respond appropriately to concerns, suspicions or allegations, in line with international human rights standards.

## Safeguarding in the context of volunteering

In the context of volunteering, safeguarding requires that activities are designed and delivered in ways that do not create harm or increase risk, even where intentions are positive. This includes ensuring that volunteering roles are appropriate, structured and supervised; that individuals are suitably recruited, vetted and trained; and that the needs, rights and wellbeing of children take precedence over the experience, expectations or motivations of volunteers.

## Sexual Abuse

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 may include physical contact or non-contact acts, including involving a child in looking at or producing sexual images.

## Trafficking

Trafficking in children involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation.

## Volunteer

A volunteer is a person who provides time, skills or expertise to support the work of an organisation without financial remuneration beyond reasonable expenses or subsistence.

Professional volunteering, which is structured, skills-based and subject to appropriate safeguarding and oversight, is distinct from voluntourism. Unregulated voluntourism, particularly where it involves contact with children, presents significant safeguarding risks and should not be undertaken.<sup>3</sup>

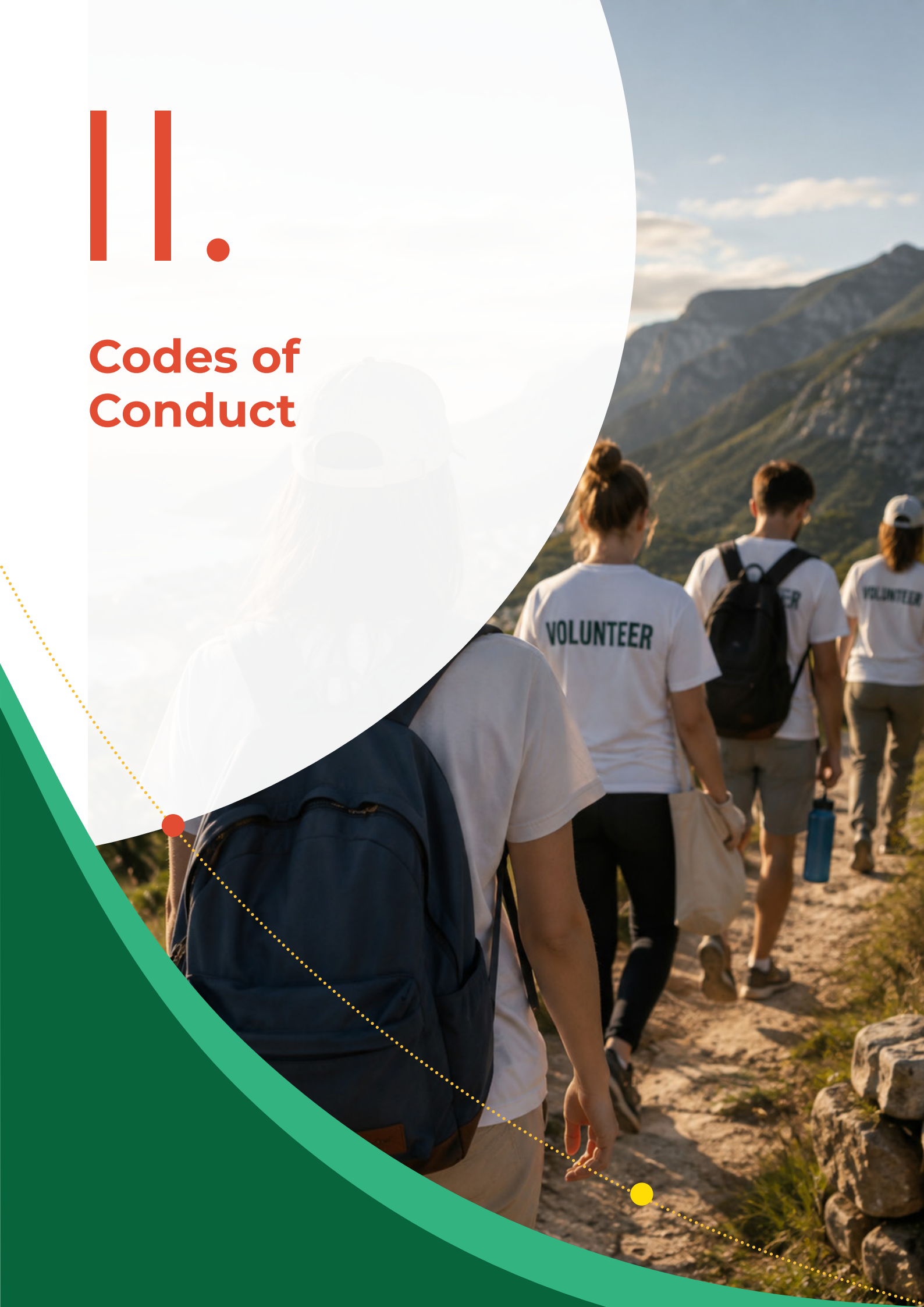
## Zero Tolerance

A position, often reflected in policies that organisations will not tolerate any form of child abuse or exploitation and will always take action to protect children.

<sup>3</sup> ECPAT International (2025). *Protecting Children in Travel and Tourism: Global Case Study – How to Regulate the Issue of Voluntourism with Children*. ECPAT International, Bangkok.



# Codes of Conduct



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Every organisation should have a code of conduct, which should contain minimum standards of behaviour and what actions must be taken if child abuse is suspected or alleged. Some organisations choose to have one code of conduct to address general behaviour, safeguarding children, safeguarding adults and ethical conduct. This guidance only discusses safeguarding.

## 2. APPLICABILITY

The code of conduct should apply to everyone appointed by the organisation, including board members and trustees, staff, volunteers and visitors. These categories of people are included because all may encounter children through the organisation's activities, presence in communities or online engagement, even where safeguarding is not their primary role. The code of conduct sets expectations for behaviour wherever individuals are acting on behalf of, or associated with, the organisation. It should be mandatory to follow the code and considered a serious disciplinary matter if breached.

Where permissible by local legislation, a code of conduct should always apply, including when individuals are outside of work or not volunteering on behalf of the organisation. As an organisational policy, the code of conduct may also set standards of behaviour that go beyond minimum legal requirements where this is necessary to protect children and uphold organisational values.

Organisations should ensure that the code of conduct is referenced in other policies and procedures. This is to ensure it is re-enforced and to allow organisations to investigate breaches, take disciplinary action and remove individuals from their position for

breaches. The code of conduct should also be referenced in contracts with partners where applicable.



### TIP

***A code of conduct helps to promote a safe culture and reduce power imbalances, everyone must follow it and leaders should demonstrate their commitment. These actions strengthen protection, encourage reporting and address any imbalance of power between volunteers and others.***

This means that, in day-to-day practice, leaders and volunteer coordinators should:

- » Regularly discuss the code of conduct during induction and supervision.
- » Use real-life volunteering scenarios to test understanding of boundaries.
- » Reinforce expectations before activities that involve close or informal contact with children.
- » Ensure volunteers know who to contact if they are unsure whether behaviour crosses a boundary.

A code of conduct is most effective when it is actively used and discussed, rather than signed once and filed away.

## 3. USING CODES OF CONDUCT

Codes of conduct often contain clear and detailed expectations about behaviour. For some volunteers, particularly those who do not work directly with children or who volunteer in informal or community-based settings, this level of detail may feel extensive or restrictive. This is a common and understandable reaction.

The purpose of this code of conduct is not to assume bad intent or to limit positive engagement. Rather, it exists to make expectations explicit, reduce ambiguity, and support safe decision-making in situations where boundaries may be unclear. Clear guidance helps protect children, volunteers and organisations by setting out what is expected and by reducing reliance on individual judgement alone in high-risk or sensitive situations.

Codes of conduct are particularly important where cultural or social norms discourage challenge, deference to authority is expected, or practices involving children are widely accepted but unsafe. Volunteers should understand that cultural acceptance does not make harmful behaviour acceptable, and that safeguarding responsibilities apply regardless of local custom or tradition.

Safeguarding risks often arise not through deliberate harm, but through misunderstanding, informal practices, cultural differences, or situations that develop over time without clear boundaries. Providing specific examples of expected and unacceptable behaviour helps volunteers recognise risk early, avoid unintended harm, and act confidently and appropriately when concerns arise.

Codes of conduct apply across formal activities and more informal contexts, including time spent in communities and online environments. It is designed to support a consistent safeguarding culture, encourage transparency and accountability, and make it easier for individuals to challenge behaviour or raise concerns when something does not feel right.

In practice, codes of conduct are particularly important in situations such as:

- » A volunteer who is invited to spend time with children outside formal activities, such as visiting homes or socialising in the community.
- » A volunteer who wishes to share photographs of children on personal social media accounts.
- » A volunteer who develops a friendly relationship with a child and begins communicating privately online.
- » A volunteer staying in accommodation close to children and interacting informally outside programme hours.

Clear expectations in advance help prevent misunderstanding and reduce the risk of boundary crossings in these common volunteering scenarios. By setting out clear expectations in advance, the code of conduct supports responsible volunteering and helps ensure that safeguarding responsibilities are understood and shared, rather than left to assumption or interpretation.

## 4. TEMPLATE EXAMPLES

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The code of conduct templates provided are intended as starting points. They are deliberately high level so they can be adapted to different volunteering models, roles and contexts. Organisations should develop and adopt their own code of conduct, drawing on the template that best reflects how volunteers interact with children in practice. Involving staff, volunteers or trustees in shaping the code of conduct can strengthen understanding, ownership and accountability, particularly where expectations need to reflect specific volunteering activities, risks or cultural contexts.

We have provided three template examples below to allow organisations to adapt for their needs:

- » Template one is designed for organisations that serve children in some way. It is based on a concept from the United Kingdom Scout Association<sup>4</sup> which is available on a small yellow card given to every adult in the organisation. This may benefit organisations with volunteers that work more directly with children.
- » Template two is designed for organisations that do not serve children, but who have volunteers who encounter children incidentally or in communities.
- » Template three is an alternative model that is framed around commitments, which may be more suited to some organisations with mixed models of volunteering.

Regardless of the model you use, volunteers should be required to acknowledge their acceptance of the code. You will need to amend the templates before use to ensure they reflect organisational contexts, legislation and circumstances. You should not simply copy templates for use without consideration and amendment.

Organisations are encouraged to tailor language, examples and expectations to reflect whether volunteers work

directly with children, encounter children incidentally in communities, or engage through remote or digital roles. Guidance on identifying and managing volunteering-specific safeguarding risks is set out elsewhere in this document.

Organisations should select or adapt a template based on how volunteers operate in practice. For example:

- » If volunteers work directly with children in structured programmes, Template One may be most appropriate.
- » If volunteers encounter children incidentally through community presence, environmental or humanitarian work, Template Two may provide proportionate expectations.
- » If volunteers operate across mixed roles or where a values-based approach is preferred, Template Three may be suitable.

Organisations may combine elements from different templates where volunteering models overlap. The key consideration is how volunteers interact with children in day-to-day practice, not simply the organisation's stated mandate. Where appropriate, sharing codes of conduct with children and communities can help reinforce expectations and support challenge of inappropriate behaviour.



<sup>4</sup> <https://www.scouts.org.uk/volunteers/staying-safe-and-safeguarding/safe-scouting-cards/safeguarding-code-of-conduct-for-adults-yellow-card/>

## TEMPLATE ONE

*This Code of Conduct sets out clear expectations to support safe, respectful and appropriate behaviour. It is intended to protect children, volunteers and organisations, and to provide clarity. Safeguarding is everybody's responsibility.*

### **Child Safeguarding Code of Conduct**

- ✓ **Do** remember that you are always a role model, inside and outside of [ORGANISATION]. You must set a good example for others to follow.
- ✓ **Do** treat everyone with dignity and respect.
- ✓ **Do** treat all children equally – do not show favouritism.
- ✓ **Do** always follow the adult-to-young-people ratios.
- ✓ **Do** remember that you have been placed in a position of trust – do not abuse this trust.
- ✓ **Do** remember that someone may misinterpret your actions.
- ✓ **Do** respect children's right to personal privacy.
- ✓ **Do** encourage an open and transparent culture, where people challenge or report behaviour that is not in line with this code.
- ✓ **Do** make everyone aware of this code.
- ✓ **Do** create an environment where children feel safe and able to voice their concerns.
- ✓ **Do** have separate sleeping accommodation for young people and adults.
- ✓ **Do** plan activities that involve more than one other person being present. If that's not possible, make sure other people know what you are doing and can see and hear what's going on.
- ✗ **Do not** engage in any form of sexual activity with children.
- ✗ **Do not** support or take part in child marriage.
- ✗ **Do not** employ children.
- ✗ **Do not** plan to be alone with a child or young person, either online or in person.
- ✗ **Do not** drink alcohol when you are responsible for children in your role and never allow under 18s to drink alcohol on [ORGANISATION] activities or premises.
- ✗ **Do not** trivialise concerns or abuse.
- ✗ **Do not** let concerns or abuse go unreported. Contact [INSERT CONTACT], especially if you feel your concern has not been taken seriously.
- ✗ **Do not** join in physical contact games with children and young people.
- ✗ **Do not** overstep the boundaries with children and young people by being involved in friendships or personal relationships with them.
- ✗ **Do not** allow activities that encourage bullying behaviour, including initiation ceremonies, dares or forfeits.
- ✗ **Do not** use inappropriate, suggestive or threatening language, whether verbal, written or online.
- ✗ **Do not** rely on your reputation or position to protect you.
- ✗ **Do not** get involved with a safeguarding concern if you have a personal friendship or family connection with those involved. Step back and tell the [INSERT CONTACT] about the connection.

***If a child tells you about a concern you must;***

1. *Allow them to speak without interruption and accept what they say.*
2. *Be understanding and reassuring, but do not give your opinion.*
3. *Tell them you will try to help but must pass the information on.*
4. *Write careful notes of what was said using the actual words used. Don't ask leading questions or try to find out whether the concern is justified.*
5. *Make sure that [INSERT ORGANISATION] activities do not cause further risk to their welfare.*
6. *Contact [INSERT CONTACT].*

***If you are concerned about a child, or if there is a complaint or allegation about you or another person, you must;***

1. *Write careful notes of what was said using the actual words used.*
2. *Not ask leading questions or try to find out whether the concern is justified.*
3. *Make sure the [INSERT ORGANISATION] does not cause any further risk of harm.*
4. *Contact [INSERT CONTACT].*

*It is your duty to report all child safeguarding concerns, whether you are told about them directly or indirectly, as soon as possible (always within 24 hours). Reporting should be done in line with organisational procedures and local guidance, and with due regard to safety, confidentiality and the best interests of the child.*

*If you are not sure what to do, or you are not sure if a concern has been reported, contact [INSERT CONTACT].*

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**Note**

In jurisdictions where it is safe to do so your code of conduct should include a requirement to inform the relevant authorities of any concern if there is an emergency or a legal duty to do so. This is usually law enforcement and child protective services or similar.

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## TEMPLATE TWO

*This Code of Conduct sets out clear expectations to support safe, respectful and appropriate behaviour. It is intended to protect children, volunteers and organisations, and to provide clarity. Safeguarding is everybody's responsibility.*

### **Child Safeguarding Code of Conduct**

- ✓ **Do** remember that you are always a role model, inside and outside of [ORGANISATION]. You must set a good example for others to follow.
- ✓ **Do** treat everyone with dignity and respect.
- ✓ **Do** treat all children equally – do not show favouritism
- ✓ **Do** remember that you have been placed in a position of trust – do not abuse this trust.
- ✓ **Do** remember that someone may misinterpret your actions.
- ✓ **Do** respect children's right to personal privacy.
- ✓ **Do** encourage an open and transparent culture, where people challenge or report behaviour that is not in line with this code.
- ✓ **Do** make everyone aware of this code
- ✗ **Do not** engage in any form of sexual activity with children.
- ✗ **Do not** support or take part in child marriage.
- ✗ **Do not** employ children.
- ✗ **Do not** use inappropriate, suggestive or threatening language, whether verbal, written or online.
- ✗ **Do not** rely on your reputation or position to protect you.
- ✗ **Do not** support or take part in any informal or community resolution to a safeguarding concern, you must report.

### **If you are concerned about a child, or if there is a complaint or allegation about you or another person, you must;**

1. Write careful notes of what was said using the actual words used.
2. Not ask leading questions or try to find out whether the concern is justified.
3. Make sure the [INSERT ORGANISATION] does not cause any further risk of harm.
4. Contact [INSERT CONTACT]

*It is your duty to report all child safeguarding concerns, whether you are told about them directly or indirectly, as soon as possible (always within 24 hours). Reporting should be done in line with organisational procedures and local guidance, and with due regard to safety, confidentiality and the best interests of the child.*

*If you are not sure what to do, or you are not sure if a concern has been reported, contact [INSERT CONTACT].*

### TEMPLATE THREE

*This Code of Conduct sets out clear expectations to support safe, respectful and appropriate behaviour. It is intended to protect children, volunteers and organisations, and to provide clarity. Safeguarding is everybody's responsibility.*

#### **Child Safeguarding Code of Conduct for Volunteers**

I, [INSERT NAME] agree that in my engagement as a volunteer for the [INSERT ORGANISATION]

##### **I will:**

- ✓ *Treat all children and young people with respect regardless of race, colour, sex, language, disability, religion, political or other opinion, national ethnic or social origin, or other status.*
- ✓ *Provide a welcoming, inclusive and safe environment for all children and young people.*
- ✓ *Encourage children and young people, to speak up should they have any issues, concerns and/or incidents where they do not feel comfortable and safe.*
- ✓ *Immediately report concerns/allegations that a child is in danger of harm or any other risk.*
- ✓ *Ensure that, whenever possible, another adult is present when I am working with children, or in the proximity of children.*
- ✓ *Advise the organisation if I am involved in any situation where my actions could be misinterpreted.*
- ✓ *Advise the organisation if I am investigated for or charged any crime.*

##### **I will not:**

- ✗ *Use inappropriate language – whether of an offensive, discriminatory, demeaning, abusive or sexual nature.*
  - ✗ *Engage in behavior to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade a child or young person or otherwise emotionally abuse a child or young person.*
  - ✗ *Act in a sexually provocative manner or engage children in any form of sexual activity, including paying for sexual services.*
  - ✗ *Hold, kiss, cuddle or touch a child in an inappropriate, unnecessary or culturally insensitive way.*
  - ✗ *Condone or participate in, behavior with children which is illegal, unsafe or abusive including child marriage or labour.*
  - ✗ *Discriminate against or in favour of particular children.*
  - ✗ *Spend time outside volunteer requirements with any child or young person whom we engage with in the course of our work.*
  - ✗ *Do things for children of a personal nature that they can do for themselves such as toileting them or changing their clothes.*
  - ✗ *Share accommodation with children or allow children into my accommodation.*
  - ✗ *Access or create sexually abusive images of children; and*
  - ✗ *Use computers, mobile phones or any other technology for the purpose of exploiting or harassing children.*
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*I have read and understood the above Child Safeguarding Code of Conduct for Volunteers.*

- » *I understand that a breach of the above Child Safeguarding Code of Conduct may provide grounds for the immediate termination of my volunteer engagement, in line with my organisation's procedures.*
- » *I understand that allegations or suspicions of abuse will be reported to the authorities.*
- » *I understand that it is my responsibility to use common sense and avoid actions or behaviours that are abusive or exploitative of children or could be construed as such.*
- » *I confirm my willingness to participate in training and workshops as well as be constantly reminded of my child safeguarding responsibilities.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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#### Note

In jurisdictions where it is safe to do so your code of conduct should include a requirement to inform the relevant authorities of any concern if there is an emergency or a legal duty to do so. This is usually law enforcement and child protective services or similar.

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# Volunteer Recruitment and Safeguarding Support



## 1. INTRODUCTION

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Organisations should ensure that they have appropriate recruitment measures in place to help ensure every volunteer appointed is a fit and proper person for the role. Child safeguarding checks are an important part of any recruitment process. Post recruitment volunteers require management and support throughout their time with an organisation.

This guidance defines recruitment as the process for selecting volunteers to undertake any role, this process may be identical to the process for paid employees. Organisations should be aware that the recruitment and management of volunteers is a holistic process, not a single event nor just confined to regular formal reviews. Organisations must supervise and support volunteers, re-enforcing values and the protection of children at every opportunity. This should be demonstrated by leadership.

The recruitment guidance contains two key definitions.

- » **Reference Checks** are employment/ volunteer or character references obtained before engagement to help assess a candidate's suitability. Reference checks should not come from family members.
- » **Background Checks** include police or criminal records checks which vary in each jurisdiction. They also include publicly available information also known as open-source information or professional registers that may be used to verify a candidate's suitability. Guidance is provided below for professional qualifications and international police checks.



### TIP

***Organisations that have any doubt as to the suitability of volunteers should be cautious and not make an appointment. Organisations should empower people to trust their instinct and support them in refusing a volunteer for a role or ending a where there is doubt about their suitability.***

## 2. APPLICABILITY

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Recruitment standards, management and support should apply to all roles within an organisation. Organisations should ensure that minimum standards are referenced in other policies and procedures. This is to ensure it is re-enforced and to allow organisations to investigate breaches, take disciplinary action and remove individuals from their position for breaches.

Organisations should not feel obligated to retain volunteers who are unsuitable.

Organisations must adapt these standards to their context and jurisdiction to ensure compliance with legislation. Organisations should ensure they understand the applicable law relating to conducting reference or background checks and should obtain legal advice if required.

## 3. BASELINE RECRUITMENT EXPECTATIONS FOR VOLUNTEERING ORGANISATIONS

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These baseline recruitment expectations set out the minimum safeguards that should be considered when recruiting volunteers. They are not intended to

operate as a fixed checklist or a one-size-fits-all model. Organisations should apply them proportionately, taking account of the nature of their volunteering roles, their organisational context and the level of safeguarding risk involved.

Where specific measures cannot be applied as written due to legal, cultural or operational constraints, organisations should record their rationale and consider alternative ways to reduce risk:

- » All roles have a written role description
  - › All role descriptions should include a commitment to protecting children from abuse and harm.
  - › All role descriptions should include the expected level of interaction with children and young people required by the role. This should be taken in consideration during the interview process with questions relevant to these levels of interaction being asked to the candidates.
- » All candidates use the same application form and process.
- » All candidates take part in an interview.
  - › Records of interviews should be kept.
- » All candidates must provide two satisfactory reference checks.
  - › Further checks may be requested if required. Checks should not come from family members, and one should ideally reflect the role being undertaken.
- » All candidates must undergo a background check
  - › Where applicable this should include checks against professional registers or similar. If possible, this should include a criminal records check.
- » All candidates sign a pre-appointment disciplinary and criminal record declaration.
- » All candidates provide proof of identity

Recruitment risk varies depending on the volunteering model used. For example:

- » Short-term international volunteers may present additional risk due to limited local oversight, cultural difference or challenges verifying documentation.
- » Community-based volunteers recruited informally through local networks may not have prior employment history or formal references.
- » Remote volunteers may have no physical contact with children but may have access to systems, data or online communication channels.
- » Trustees or board members may not see themselves as child-facing but may hold decision-making power that affects safeguarding culture.

Organisations should consider how volunteers are recruited in practice, not only the formal role description, and adapt recruitment safeguards accordingly.

## 4. OPERATIONALISING BASELINE RECRUITMENT EXPECTATIONS FOR VOLUNTEERING ORGANISATIONS

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Organisations use different volunteering models, and the safeguarding risks associated with recruitment vary accordingly. Categorising volunteering roles helps organisations apply safeguarding measures proportionately, rather than assuming that the same recruitment approach is appropriate for all roles.

The categories below are intended to support risk-informed decision-making by distinguishing between roles with different levels of contact, access and influence in relation to children. They are not intended to imply that any role

carries no safeguarding responsibility, but to help organisations focus additional safeguards where risk is higher and adapt recruitment processes where risk is lower.

Organisations should use these categories as a guide, applying professional judgement and considering how their specific context, activities and operating environment may increase or reduce risk.

In practice, recruitment challenges may arise in situations such as:

- » A long-standing community member offering to volunteer informally without completing an application form.
- » A trustee believing that safeguarding checks do not apply to governance roles.

- » A volunteer presenting a background check from a jurisdiction where checks are limited in scope or easily forged.
- » An international volunteer recruited through a third-party agency with unclear screening processes.
- » A volunteer expressing reluctance to challenge harmful practices involving children because they are described as “cultural” or “traditional”.

In each case, organisations should apply the baseline expectations proportionately, ensuring that safeguarding principles are upheld even where processes need to be adapted.

| LEVEL        | CRITERIA                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | REQUIREMENTS                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>One</b>   | <p>No access to systems, premises or electronic systems. No contact with children. Limited contact with other volunteers and employees. Likely to be to volunteers working remotely on limited projects.</p> <p><i>While these roles involve no direct contact with children, safeguarding awareness and appropriate boundaries remain important, particularly in online or community contexts</i></p>                                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Minimum expectations above.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Two</b>   | <p>No unsupervised contact with children, role may have incidental, but supervised contact with children</p> <p>Note: Likely to include all trustees or board members.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Minimum expectations above.</li> <li>» Criminal background check (if lawful).</li> </ul>                                                                                              |
| <b>Three</b> | <p>Unsupervised contact with children, responsibility for teaching/caring for children, work in schools/hospitals etc. Or line managing anyone in a role with these features.</p> <p>Note: If the individual is a registered or qualified professional for example a teacher or medical professional, organisations should ensure that they are qualified and licenced to work in the relevant jurisdiction. Checks should be made with the relevant professional regulator.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Minimum expectations above.</li> <li>» Criminal background check (if lawful).</li> <li>» If previous work with children at least one reference should come from this work.</li> </ul> |

In day-to-day practice, for small or volunteer-led organisations, this may mean:

- » Using structured interviews even where recruitment is informal.
- » Seeking character references where employment references are unavailable.
- » Recording recruitment decisions clearly, even if processes are simple.
- » Seeking advice from safeguarding specialists or umbrella bodies where background checks are not available.
- » Joining the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme<sup>5</sup>, which helps organisations to ensure that suitable references are obtained.

Recruitment safeguards do not need to be complex, but they should be deliberate, documented and proportionate to risk.

## 5. RECRUITMENT TEMPLATES

This section contains templates that organisations can adapt to their circumstances, context and jurisdiction.

### » Child Safeguarding Statement for Role Descriptions

Organisations should make their commitment to child safeguarding clear when advertising to recruit volunteers adding a short statement to each role description and advertisements for roles, such as:

*[INSERT ORGANISATION] believes anyone who is involved in our work or connected to it, especially children, should be safe from harm. Our first priority will always be to safeguard anyone at risk of harm or abuse.*

*[INSERT ORGANISATION] operates robust recruitment practices to ensure candidates for all roles are suitable. Our process includes values-based questions during interviews and performance reviews, reference checks, background checks and pre-deployment declarations. We do not tolerate any form of abuse or exploitation and act robustly to any allegations or concerns*

### » Child Safeguarding Declarations

Before starting any role, volunteers should have signed (digitally or on paper) a declaration that they have provided any relevant information. Organisations must ensure that asking each question and requiring a declaration is consistent with local legislation.

### » Disciplinary Action and Investigations

1. *Have you ever had any disciplinary action taken against you at work or in any role in relation to a safeguarding related issue? This may include children aged under 18, vulnerable or at-risk adults, sexual harassment or abuse of any person? If yes please provide details including a summary, which should include the date and outcome.*
2. *Have you ever been investigated at work, in a voluntary position or by a local authority adult or children's services regarding your involvement with a child under 18 or a vulnerable person? If yes please provide details including a summary, which should include the date and outcome.*
3. *Have you ever been investigated in relation to a safeguarding matter? If yes please provide details including a summary, which should include the date and outcome.*

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<sup>5</sup> <https://misconduct-disclosure-scheme.org>

4. *Is there anything else which may be relevant to your application e.g. pending investigations, prosecutions or disciplinary cases?*
5. *Is there any information in your application or that you have given us that is inaccurate or incomplete that may affect your appointment? If you conceal information that is relevant you will be removed for your position, or an offer of a role will be withdrawn.*

## 6. REFERENCES AND OTHER SUITABILITY INFORMATION

Organisations should assess an individual's suitability to volunteer using information from a range of sources. This may include references, self-disclosures, application materials, interviews, background checks where appropriate, and information identified during the recruitment process. Approaches should be proportionate to the role and level of safeguarding risk, and consistent with local legislation.

References and other suitability information can provide insight into an individual's previous conduct, reliability and appropriateness for roles involving trust, responsibility or proximity to children. Where references are used, organisations should consider how they are obtained, verified and followed up, particularly where information is incomplete, unclear or raises concerns.

The Misconduct Disclosure Scheme<sup>6</sup> helps organisations gain references and relevant information from a variety of organisations and may assist.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://misconduct-disclosure-scheme.org>

Organisations should not disregard information that raises safeguarding concerns. Where appropriate and lawful, further enquiries should be made to clarify the information received. If it becomes clear that an individual has provided misleading information, withheld relevant information, or failed to complete required stages of the recruitment process, they should not be appointed.

If, after considering all available information, an organisation remains unsure about an individual's suitability for a volunteering role, the individual should not be appointed. Decisions not to appoint should be understood as a proportionate safeguarding measure, taken in the best interests of children and the organisation.



### TIP

**Organisations should be aware that some jurisdictions place restrictions on the type of information that can be disclosed, how it can be used and how long it can be retained. Organisations should ensure they understand and comply with their legal obligations.**

## 7. BACKGROUND CHECKS

Background checks are one source of information that may support recruitment decisions, but they do not provide assurance that an individual is safe to work with children. Organisations should apply background checks

consistently and in accordance with local legislation, taking account of role, context and safeguarding risk.

Different jurisdictions use different terminology and systems for background checks, including criminal records checks, police good conduct certificates and other forms of disclosure. The scope and reliability of these checks vary widely. Some include only local convictions, others may include additional information, and in some contexts, it may not be possible to obtain checks at all. Some certificates may be forged or subject to interference.

Where possible and appropriate, organisations may seek checks from relevant jurisdictions, such as a volunteer's country of residence or countries where they have lived for a significant period. In some contexts, additional sources such as professional registration checks may be relevant where a volunteer is relying on a regulated qualification or professional status.

If your organisation is part of the aid and development sector, you may be able to receive support from INTERPOL's Project Soteria<sup>7</sup>, including advice on background checking.

Background checks are only relevant at the time they are issued. The absence of information does not indicate that a volunteer poses no risk. Checks should be understood as one element of a broader recruitment and suitability assessment, alongside interviews, references, supervision and ongoing review.



#### TIP

**Where background check certificates are provided, organisations should take reasonable steps to verify that the document relates to the individual presenting it, including checking identification where appropriate.**

## 8. INTERVIEWS

All candidates should undergo an interview prior to appointment. The interview should consider the technical requirements of the role and how the volunteer fits with organisational values. This section provides organisations with a framework to ask values-based interview questions. Organisations may find it helpful to consider that these questions are designed to establish *how* someone achieves something and *why* they make decisions or choices as opposed to what they have achieved.

### 8.1 How To Use The Questions

A bank of potential interview questions is provided below to technical interview questions. Organisations can select any of these questions and adapt them for the role or use them as an example to draft questions. Each question is accompanied by an example of what a positive answer may feature, and information that might indicate that you need to seek support or clarification regarding the answers. There are example questions for managers and senior leaders as well as those that relate directly to safeguarding.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.interpol.int/en/How-we-work/Safeguarding-vulnerable-communities/Project-Soteria>

## 8.2 Method

When using these questions, organisations may find it helpful to use the SOAR method:

|                       |                                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>S</b><br>SITUATION | <b>Situation =</b><br>tell me about a time when, briefly outline a situation when, give us an example of...                                         |
| <b>O</b><br>OBJECTIVE | <b>Objective =</b><br>what was your objective, what did you want to achieve, what was your role?                                                    |
| <b>A</b><br>ACTION    | <b>Action =</b><br>what did you do, how did you do it, what was the outcome?                                                                        |
| <b>R</b><br>RESULT    | <b>Result =</b><br>What impact did you have on others, how did you learn from it, how did you feel about the outcome, why did you take that action? |

Interviewers should spend most of their time understanding the result, use questions including what/why/how to probe, and avoid using closed questions unless you need to clarify specifics or to conclude a question in the interview.



### TIP

Organisations should be aware that recruitment processes can be misused or misunderstood, and that information provided by applicants may not always be complete or accurate. Recruitment measures should therefore be designed to reduce reliance on any single source of information and to support careful judgement, transparency and appropriate challenge throughout the process.

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS

### General Questions For Any Volunteer

| Question                                                                                                                                                                                       | Positive Indicator                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Seek Support or Clarification                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>One of our values is integrity, tell me about a time at work or outside work where you displayed integrity. What was the situation? How did you handle it? Why was integrity important?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Maintained an evidenced based position that may have been unpopular with vested interests</li> <li>» Adjusted their position after learning new information</li> <li>» Appropriately challenged a concerning situation</li> <li>» Maintained their accountability to others</li> <li>» Followed policy or procedure</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Supported the status quo or a popular position despite reservations</li> <li>» Ignored concerning or problematic behaviour</li> <li>» Ignored information or evidence that was important</li> <li>» Failed to declare or identify a conflict of interest</li> </ul> |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>One of our values is collaboration, can you tell me about a time at work when you worked in collaboration with others? What would you differently now?</i>                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Worked with and supported others</li> <li>» Helped others participate or achieve</li> <li>» Accepted different views or preferences to achieve a goal</li> <li>» Adapted, reflected, and learnt</li> </ul>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Failed to take account of other experience or views</li> <li>» Insisted on own method</li> <li>» Didn't transfer learning and experience</li> <li>» Worked in isolation</li> </ul>                                                                                                               |
| <i>Tell us about a time when someone has challenged your professional boundaries. How did you manage the situation? What did you learn?</i>                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Understood and described boundaries</li> <li>» Sought support</li> <li>» Reflected on experience</li> <li>» Appropriately challenged others</li> <li>» Clear about expectations and roles</li> </ul>                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Didn't differentiate between personal and professional boundaries</li> <li>» Unable or unwilling to understand own behaviour</li> <li>» Ignored policy or procedure</li> </ul>                                                                                                                   |
| <i>Tell us about a time when you were doing a challenging piece of work. How did you deal with the situation, how did you feel about it? How did you get support and cope? What did you learn?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Sought support and shared concerns</li> <li>» Explained coping strategies</li> <li>» Remained focussed on task</li> <li>» Explained learning</li> <li>» Appropriately shared feelings</li> <li>» Persevered and remained professional</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Did not seek solutions</li> <li>» Can't explain how they would cope with a challenging situation</li> <li>» Internalised pressure, did not seek support</li> <li>» Gave up easily or became defensive</li> <li>» Blamed others or became victim</li> <li>» Cannot articulate learning</li> </ul> |

#### Management and Leadership Roles

|                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Tell us about an occasion at work when you had to be careful about using your power and influence. What was the situation and your role? How did you manage the situation?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Reflected on past performance</li> <li>» Learnt from mistakes</li> <li>» Acted with integrity</li> <li>» Recognised their responsibilities</li> <li>» Understood limits to their authority and when to seek support</li> </ul>                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Unaware of their personal position and power</li> <li>» Unwilling to accept challenge</li> <li>» Failed to consider the needs others or the organisation</li> </ul>                                                            |
| <i>Tell us how in your current role you have contributed towards improving safeguarding. What did you do? How did it impact on the safety of others?</i>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Took personal responsibility</li> <li>» Prioritised the safety of others over operational imperatives</li> <li>» Used influence to achieve change within team or organisation</li> <li>» Made wellbeing a priority</li> <li>» Values evident in response</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Delegated responsibility/ leadership</li> <li>» Focussed on targets and operational priorities</li> <li>» Failed to consider the impact on children/others</li> <li>» Adopted a minimalist approach to safeguarding</li> </ul> |

|                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Tell us about a time when your work was criticised? What were the circumstances? How did you feel about it and what did you do? What did you learn from the experience? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Sought solutions, proactively works to make negative situations positive</li> <li>» Demonstrated learning from a difficult situation</li> <li>» Articulated coping strategy</li> <li>» Reflected on experience</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Did not seek solutions or support</li> <li>» Held on to negativity</li> <li>» Negative about change or personal development</li> <li>» Did not adjust or learn</li> </ul> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

## Child Safeguarding Roles

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Tell us how you have developed your safeguarding knowledge or practice over the last year. What impact did this have and how did you put your learning into action?</i>                                                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Sought support and self-development</li> <li>» Recognised personal experience and feelings</li> <li>» Willing to adapt and learn</li> <li>» Understood that personal development supports safer decision making</li> </ul>                                                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Didn't seek support or development</li> <li>» Adopted a minimalist and narrow approach to learning</li> <li>» Unwilling to take part in training or learning</li> </ul>                                                                                                               |
| <i>Give us an example about a situation in which you were clear about what you needed to do to protect a child at risk, but a colleague disagreed. How did you manage the situation, what did you do? What was the outcome? Were you satisfied with the outcome?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Clear about role and responsibilities</li> <li>» Followed procedure appropriately</li> <li>» Prioritised safeguarding and welfare</li> <li>» Sought appropriate help and was transparent</li> <li>» Worked effectively with colleagues</li> <li>» Understood how personal feelings affected the situation</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Unclear about own responsibilities</li> <li>» Allowed personal views to overtake decision making</li> <li>» Failed to follow process or procedure</li> <li>» Cannot evidence cooperation with others</li> <li>» Allocated blame or responsibility to others</li> </ul>                |
| <i>Can you tell us about how you believe adult power affects children?</i>                                                                                                                                                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Recognised how power can be misused</li> <li>» Understood how power influences decision making by those with power and those with less influence</li> <li>» Identified imbalances of power</li> <li>» Reflected on how others may feel</li> <li>» Reflected on own power and influence</li> </ul>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Focused on personal and professional relationships with others</li> <li>» Unable to understand why others may feel differently or make different decisions</li> <li>» Did not recognise own power and influence</li> <li>» Inappropriately used power, systems, or process</li> </ul> |

## 9. SUPERVISING AND MANAGING VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers require ongoing support and management to safely and successfully undertake their role. This includes regular reviews and a named supervisor or manager. Volunteers will benefit from clear roles descriptions and objectives.

### » Personal Development Reviews

Organisations should consider operating a Performance Development Review (PDR) process for all volunteers. A PDR should operate over medium to long period or over a project and support a volunteer to work safely in their role. A PDR should look forward and back a past performance to identify opportunities for improvement. PDRs do not need to be overly formal, there should however be a written record. The manager or supervisor conducting the review should:

- a) send some preparation information in advance of the review.
- b) set the context at the start of the discussion.
- c) ensure that the volunteer is encouraged to contribute honestly and share any concerns.
- d) prepare a few questions beforehand to prompt discussion.
- e) ensure that all contributions and questions are welcomed.
- f) summarise any learning; and
- g) identify any follow-up or actions or support needs that arise from the review.

### » Questions

#### *Looking Back*

- a) *Have you had an opportunity to develop your safeguarding knowledge or practice? If so, what impact did this have, how did you put your learning into action and how was this received by others?*

- b) *How is safeguarding working for you and your team? How do you think our values of [INSERT VALUES] are demonstrated in this?*
- c) *[For someone new] How effective was your safeguarding training? How has it impacted on what you do at work and in other aspects of your life? How does it link to our values? How do you feel it helps to keep children safe.*
- d) *How have you found adjusting to a different culture and community? What differences have you noticed?*

#### *Looking Forward*

- a) *What, if anything, will you and your team do differently or better regarding safeguarding in the future? How will this demonstrate our values?*
- b) *Are there any changes/developments you would like to see regarding safeguarding? This might draw on external experience as well as the volunteer experience.*
- c) *Is there anything that we could help you with or should have done to make you more comfortable in your role?*

### » Group Safeguarding Discussions And Reviews

To support a culture of discussion and reviewing child safeguarding related topics managers and supervisors may wish to have discussions with groups or teams of volunteers and colleagues. These discussions could take place on a regular schedule, as part of a project life cycle or after an event or activity. This approach helps to support a culture that:

- › safeguarding is kept in people's minds.
- › people feel more confident in the processes involved; and
- › are prepared to challenge and question practice and behaviour.

Adequate time will need to be given to prepare for these discussions, the person running the discussion should:

- a) *send some preparation information to participants in advance of the discussion.*
- b) *set the context at the start of the discussion.*
- c) *ensure that everyone is encouraged to contribute as long as they feel safe to do so.*
- d) *prepare a few questions beforehand to prompt discussion.*
- e) *ensure that all contributions and questions are welcomed.*
- f) *allow a short silence if people are thinking – don't always jump in if people are quiet.*
- g) *remember that confidentiality is important, discussions should not share personal / confidential information and must never become gossip rather than professional discussions.*
- h) *summarise any learning; and*
- i) *identify any follow-up or actions that arise from the discussion.*

### The Review Technique

1. The review technique follows a few simple principles:
2. It is easier to act on a smaller number of areas than on a larger number.

3. It is better to start with areas that went well before covering difficulties otherwise we tend to stick with the problems and then get depressed.
4. Split the items two thirds good and one third difficulties.
5. Start by brainstorming the general areas rather than diving into the detail otherwise we tend to get bogged down.

The review technique can be used to provide a softer approach to identifying key problem areas and addressing them, it can be inclusive rather than exclusive. It can be applied with equal success to activities as well as the way in which someone carries out a role and therefore focusses on people rather than processes.

### Running The Review Technique:

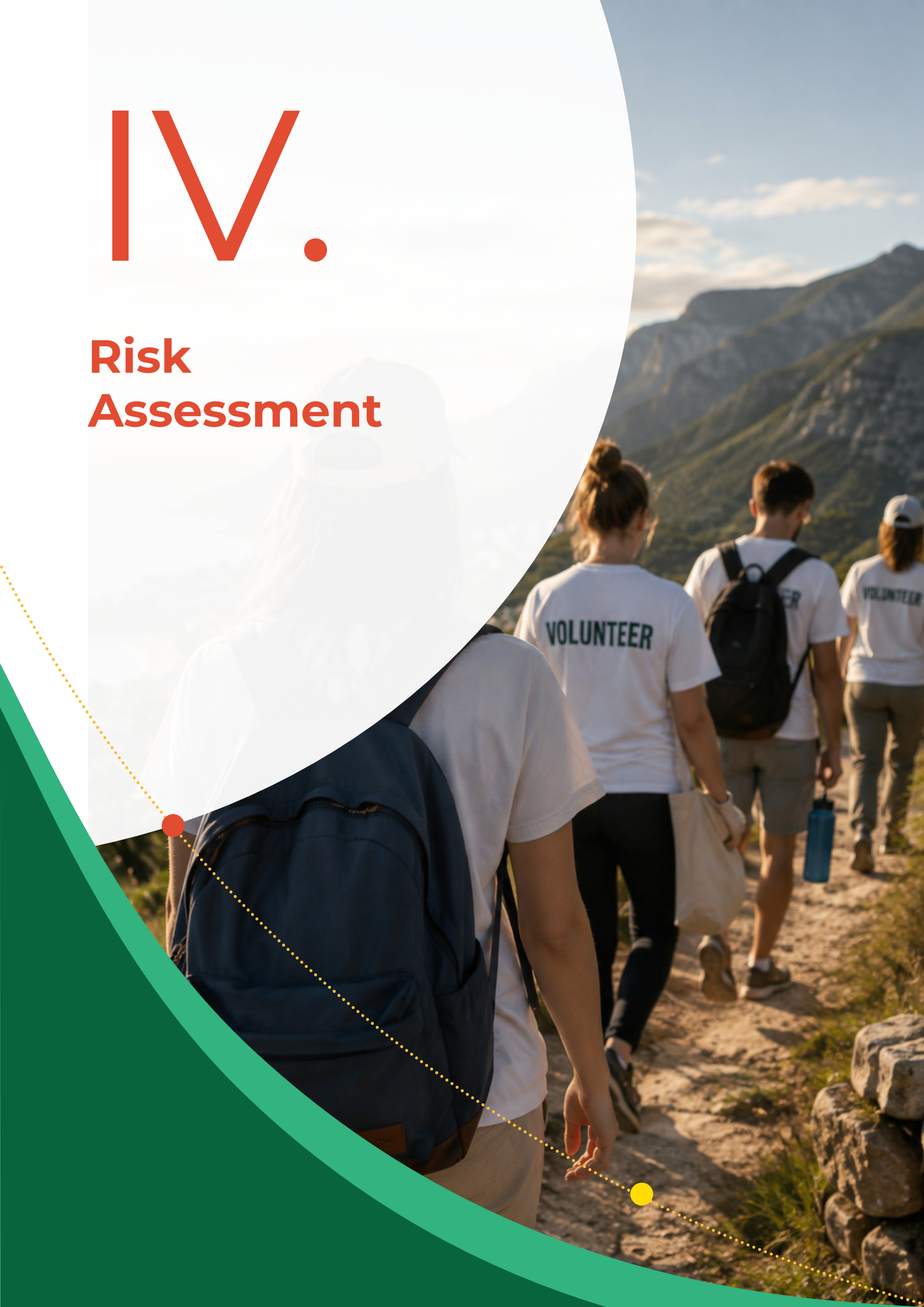
1. Brainstorm items for *what went well* (WWW)
2. Brainstorm items for *difficulties that occurred* (DTO).
3. Items may appear in WWW and DTO for different (or the same) reason.
4. After brainstorming, go back and fill in why this was the case.
5. Finally, plan for next time. The plan must be self-standing to be useful so that the reasons for it (especially if there are any sensitive issues) can be removed/discarded.

**Below is a brief example for the safeguarding aspects of a fictitious event:**

| WHAT WENT WELL<br>FILL THIS COLUMN IN FIRST                       | WHY?<br>FILL THIS IN SECOND                                                                    | NEXT TIME...<br>FILL IN LAST                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pre event briefing                                                | Held three weeks before the event so we had time to make any changes.                          | Sara will schedule briefings at least three weeks before a major event.                                |
| Internal support                                                  | Designated Safeguarding Lead attended our meeting and answered our questions.                  | Amir will check each briefing and invite an internal expert if relevant or we are unsure on something. |
| Difficulties that Occurred                                        | Why?                                                                                           | Next time...                                                                                           |
| Some key parents were not aware of the processes we had in place. | We didn't explain the parents on the process we will use if the children had a small accident. | Sara will contact all the parents and find out how best to inform them of accidents in future.         |

# IV.

## Risk Assessment



## 1. INTRODUCTION

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This guidance contains information on two types of risk assessment. The first will help organisations self-assess their child safeguarding arrangements to identify areas for improvement and development. The second helps organisations assess individual activities or programmes. Templates for both types of assessment are provided and contain information for child-serving organisations as well as organisations that may only have incidental contact with children, or whose volunteers may have contact with children outside of their volunteering roles.

## 2. APPLICABILITY ACROSS VOLUNTEERING CONTEXTS

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Volunteering takes many different forms, and organisations engaging volunteers operate in diverse contexts. Some organisations work directly with children as part of their core mandate in youth or sports clubs for instance, while others may only have incidental or indirect contact with children through community presence, service delivery or online engagement. Volunteering roles may be short-term or long-term, local or international, in-person or remote, structured or informal.

This guidance is designed to support safeguarding risk assessment across this diversity. It does not assume a single organisational model, level of safeguarding maturity or type of volunteering activity. Instead, it provides a framework to support proportionate, context-specific decision-making, recognising that safeguarding risks arise differently depending on role, environment and power dynamics.

Organisations should use this guidance to inform judgement, not to apply a uniform approach. Where capacity,

mandate or legal frameworks differ, organisations should adapt their approach while maintaining a clear focus on preventing harm to children.

## 3. RISK ASSESSING ORGANISATIONS

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Organisations engaging volunteers vary widely in size, structure, resources and safeguarding experience. Some may have established safeguarding systems and specialist roles, while others may be volunteer-led, operating with limited infrastructure or within challenging legal and regulatory environments.

The organisational self-assessment is intended to support reflection and improvement across this range. It should be applied proportionately, taking account of organisational capacity and context, and used to identify priorities for strengthening safeguarding rather than as a measure of compliance or performance.

When considering these questions organisations should be honest and use the following prompts to reflect on the extent to which safeguarding arrangements are in place and working effectively:

- a) What evidence is there to support the finding?
- b) Is the expectation consistently met across the organisation?
- c) Does the organisation have assurance processes to ensure that the expectation is met?

In day-to-day practice, or small or volunteer-led organisations, this may mean:

- » Holding informal risk discussions before new activities begin, even where formal documentation is minimal.

- » Recording key risks and mitigation decisions in simple written form.
- » Reviewing supervision arrangements where volunteers operate independently or in communities.
- » Seeking external advice or peer support where safeguarding expertise is limited.
- » Risk assessment does not need to be complex, but it should be deliberate and regularly reviewed.

| SAFEGUARDING EXPECTATION                                                                                                                                                                    | NOT YET IN PLACE | PARTIALLY IN PLACE | IN PLACE | ACTION NEEDED |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|----------|---------------|
| A commitment to protecting children for all forms of harm and abuse, that is reflected in policy and organisational values.                                                                 |                  |                    |          |               |
| A safeguarding policy applicable to everyone that contains mandatory procedures for reporting, code of conduct and baseline recruitment expectations                                        |                  |                    |          |               |
| A code of conduct applicable to everyone.                                                                                                                                                   |                  |                    |          |               |
| Procedures for responding to abuse.                                                                                                                                                         |                  |                    |          |               |
| Mandatory safeguarding training or briefing for all on joining the organisation and on a regular basis.                                                                                     |                  |                    |          |               |
| Safer recruitment applied to all roles consistently that meets the baseline recruitment expectations set out in this guidance.                                                              |                  |                    |          |               |
| Risk assessments required for all activities that may involve children.                                                                                                                     |                  |                    |          |               |
| Board engagement, the board or trustees approve the safeguarding policy, regularly consider safeguarding issues and hold themselves and leaders to account for implementation.              |                  |                    |          |               |
| Designated safeguarding leads who are named and responsible for receiving and responding to concerns and allegations of abuse.                                                              |                  |                    |          |               |
| Publicised safeguarding measures available to the public and all. If applicable displayed in premises and online.                                                                           |                  |                    |          |               |
| Access to children is controlled and supervised. Only those who must have unsupervised access are permitted and only if they have been appointed in accordance with the recruitment policy. |                  |                    |          |               |
| Whistleblowing Policy                                                                                                                                                                       |                  |                    |          |               |

## 4. INDICATORS OF UNSAFE ORGANISATIONS OR ENVIRONMENTS

Certain patterns and practices can indicate that a programme, team, or workplace is at higher risk of safeguarding failures. These may include:

- » Power imbalances
  - › Volunteers have control over access to food, shelter, employment, or education.
  - › Volunteers are embedded in communities with minimal external supervision.
  - › Community members rely heavily on a small number of individuals for services.
- » Lack of accountability
  - › No functioning complaints mechanism exists, or it is not trusted.
  - › Volunteers are poorly supervised or rarely challenged on their behaviour.
  - › Contractors or third parties are not held to the same safeguarding expectations.
- » Cultural silence or fear
  - › People are discouraged from reporting concerns or fear reprisals.
  - › Children are blamed, ignored, or discredited.
  - › Leadership is dismissive or defensive when safeguarding is raised.
  - › Harmful practices affecting children being justified, minimised or left unchallenged because of culture, tradition or social norms.
- » Weak recruitment and vetting practices
  - › Volunteers are hired without reference checks or background screening.

- › There is no safeguarding content in induction or training.
  - › High turnover and use of temporary staff create oversight gaps.
- » Sexualised or inappropriate culture
    - › “Jokes” or comments of a sexual nature are normalised.
    - › Relationships between staff and community members are tolerated.
    - › No clear boundary between professional and personal conduct.

In practice, these indicators may be visible in situations such as:

- » Volunteers living within communities where they also deliver services, without clear supervision arrangements.
- » A programme relying heavily on a small number of trusted individuals with limited oversight.
- » Volunteers distributing goods or resources without transparent criteria, creating dependency or favouritism.
- » Volunteers forming close personal relationships with children outside formal programme structures.

These situations do not automatically indicate abuse, but they increase environmental vulnerability and should prompt further assessment.



### TIP

***Where these indicators are present, the environment may facilitate or conceal abuse, whether any has been reported. Organisations should assess environmental risks.***

## 5. ASSESSING ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMMES

Safeguarding risks associated with volunteering are shaped by how volunteers are positioned in relation to children and communities, not only by the activities they undertake. Volunteers may have direct contact with children, incidental contact through their presence, or no formal contact as part of their role while still operating in environments where children are present.

Risk assessment should therefore consider how different volunteering models, levels of supervision, living or travel arrangements, and informal interactions before, during and after activities may create safeguarding risks, even where child contact is not the primary purpose of the role, for example:

- » In short-term international placements, limited oversight, language barriers and unfamiliarity with local norms may increase safeguarding risk.
- » In community-based or informal volunteering, blurred boundaries between professional and personal relationships may create additional vulnerability.
- » In remote volunteering, safeguarding risks may arise through digital communication, data access or unsupervised online interaction.
- » In volunteer-led organisations, limited supervision structures may

require additional planning to ensure accountability and oversight.

Risk assessments should explicitly consider how the chosen volunteering model influences supervision, power dynamics and informal interaction.

Organisations should ensure that they conduct child safeguarding risk assessments for activities that involve children. Assessment should start as soon as possible before an activity or project and be kept under review. At the end of the activity or programme a review should take place to consider any lessons learned. Each of the templates will need to be adapted by organisations to ensure they are applicable to the context.

These templates are designed to assess child safeguarding risk. They can also be adapted for wider risk assessments, such as health and safety, where appropriate.

### 5.1 Risk Assessing Programmes - Template

Section one of this template (questions one to seven) is designed to assess any programme, regardless of contact with children. Organisations should use this section to identify community risks. These might include the presence of the exploitation of children in prostitution or children involved in harmful child employment. Section two goes on to consider risks when children will be involved in the activity or programme.

#### Risk rating key

| PROBABILITY |                  |   | IMPACT     |  | RISK LEVEL |          |
|-------------|------------------|---|------------|--|------------|----------|
| 1           | Unlikely         | 1 | Negligible |  | 1-5        | Low      |
| 2           | Possible         | 2 | Minor      |  | 6-11       | Moderate |
| 3           | Likely           | 3 | Moderate   |  | 12-19      | High     |
| 4           | Highly likely    | 4 | Severe     |  | 20-25      | Extreme  |
| 5           | Certain/imminent | 5 | Critical   |  |            |          |

**Probability x Impact = Risk Rating**

## SECTION ONE - ALL PROGRAMMES

| Key question | Detail | Potential or actual risk to community, partners, volunteers, children | How might these be prevented, mitigated or managed? | Risk rating before mitigation | Risk rating after mitigation |
|--------------|--------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
|--------------|--------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|

Describe key project activities.

What contact will the organisation and volunteers have with other people?

Outline the resourcing and line management structure, including volunteers.

Outline volunteer living arrangements

How do informal interactions before, during and after activities create safeguarding risk?

List any harmful practices and locations where these are prevalent.

List any observations on attitudes or behaviours in programme locations that may cause harm.

Does the project activity involve children?

## SECTION TWO - PROGRAMMES THAT INVOLVE CHILDREN

Will contact between volunteers and children ever be one to one/unsupervised?

---

Will volunteers be supervised and by who?

---

Will volunteers need to have physical contact with children?

---

Will the project involve employees or volunteers host children in their homes?

---

Will volunteers and employees be expected to communicate with children via any digital communication platform – social media, messaging, email etc.?

---

Will children be photographed, filmed or asked to share their stories?

---

Will parents/carers be present or are volunteers caring for children?

---

Will project activities include distribution of resources or goods such as food, water etc?

---

Will volunteers' control or influence access to services or programmes

---

Will the project include overnight activities?

---

Will volunteers be providing personal or intimate care?

---

Other safeguarding considerations...

---

Where a programme with a high or extreme level of safeguarding risk cannot be reduced to an acceptable level, the exclusion of volunteers from parts or all the programme should be considered a necessary and appropriate safeguarding measure. Decisions to allow volunteers to participate should be recorded in writing and approved by senior leadership or the board.

## 5.2 Risk Assessing Individual Activities For Children – Template

The areas of concern in this template will need to be adapted to suit the nature of the activity.

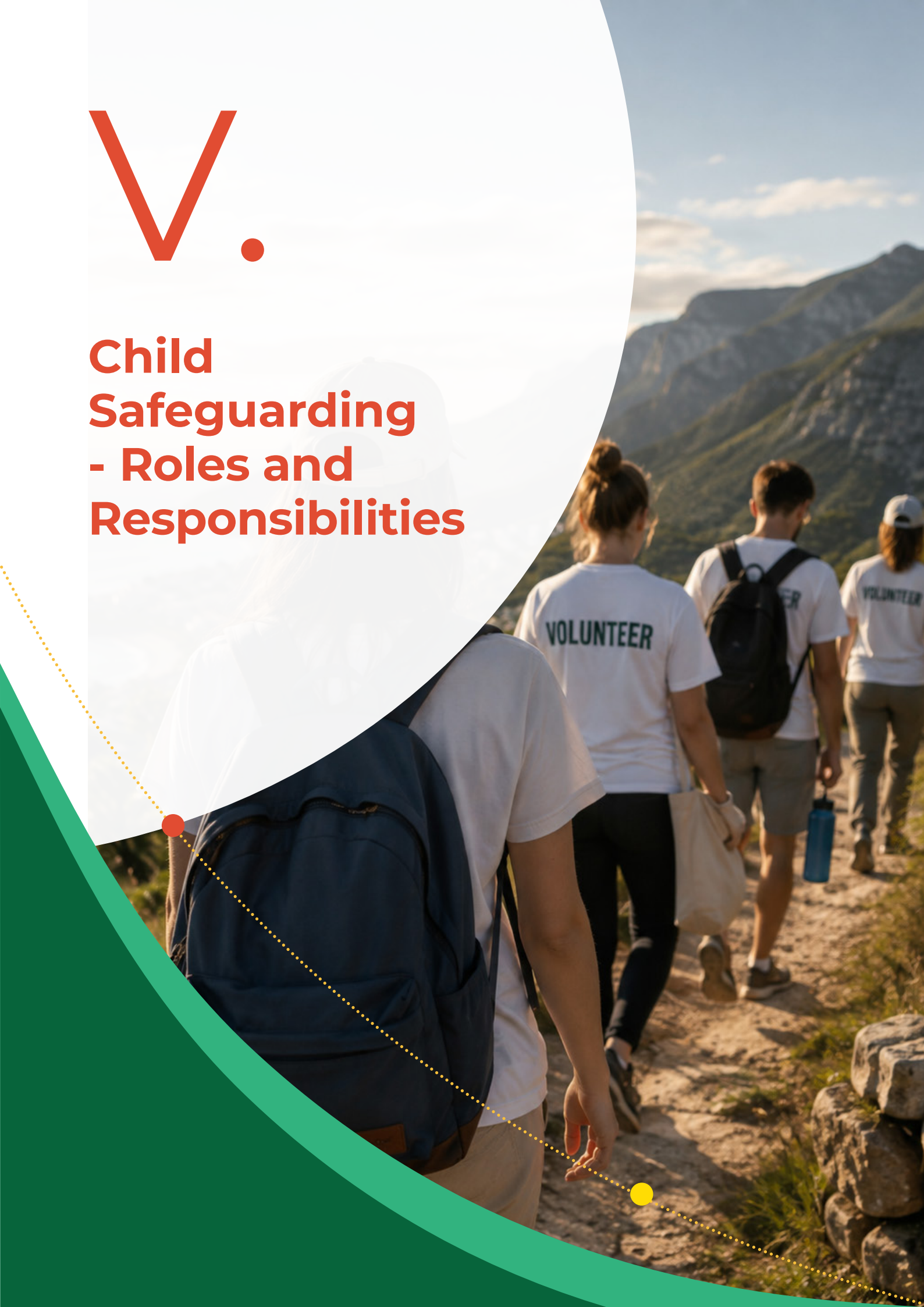
| SECTION ONE - ACTIVITY                       |                                                                       |                               |                                                     |                              |                      |
|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Area of concern<br>(adapt as needed)         | Potential or actual risk to community, partners, volunteers, children | Risk rating before mitigation | How might these be prevented, mitigated or managed? | Risk rating after mitigation | Review post-activity |
| Supervision and ratios of adults to children |                                                                       |                               |                                                     |                              |                      |
| Photography/film/publicity                   |                                                                       |                               |                                                     |                              |                      |
| External support for example instructors     |                                                                       |                               |                                                     |                              |                      |
|                                              |                                                                       |                               |                                                     |                              |                      |
|                                              |                                                                       |                               |                                                     |                              |                      |

| SECTION TWO – PLACE/LOCATION  |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Travel arrangements           |  |
| Public access                 |  |
| Internet access               |  |
| Toilet and medical facilities |  |
| Overnight accommodation       |  |
|                               |  |
|                               |  |

# V.

## Child Safeguarding - Roles and Responsibilities



## 1. INTRODUCTION

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This guidance will help organisations to understand the differences in the typical roles and responsibilities people have and the obligations that should apply to everyone in an organisation. We have used general terms for managers, supervisors and leaders to describe boards, directors and senior employees who run organisations. We have used the term Designated Safeguarding Lead to refer to those with special responsibilities for receiving and responding to allegations or concerns about the safety of children.

Volunteering organisations operate in diverse contexts and take many different forms. Some organisations work directly with children as part of their core mandate, while others may only have incidental or indirect contact with children through community presence, service delivery or online engagement. Volunteering roles may be short-term or long-term, local or international, in-person or remote, structured or informal.

This guidance recognises that organisations also vary widely in size, resources, safeguarding experience and governance arrangements. It is designed to support safeguarding across this diversity and does not assume a single organisational model or level of safeguarding capacity. Roles and responsibilities should therefore be applied proportionately and adapted to organisational context, while maintaining a clear focus on preventing harm to children.



### TIP

**Being clear about roles and responsibilities helps keep children safe and empowers decision making.**

## 2. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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The roles and responsibilities set out below describe safeguarding functions rather than fixed job titles. In practice, these functions may be held by different individuals, shared across roles, combined within a single position, or supported through external advice or partnership arrangements.

In volunteering organisations, particularly those that are small, volunteer-led or operating with limited resources, safeguarding roles may not be clearly separated. Individuals may hold more than one function, for example combining governance, management, supervision or safeguarding responsibilities. This is a common and legitimate feature of volunteering contexts.

Where roles overlap, organisations should take proportionate steps to ensure clarity, accountability and safety. This includes being clear about who holds safeguarding decision-making responsibility, how conflicts of interest are identified and managed, and how concerns can be raised where they relate to someone in a senior or influential role. Where internal separation of roles is not possible, organisations may use external safeguarding advice, peer support or referral pathways to strengthen oversight and confidence in decision-making.

Smaller or volunteer-led organisations, and those operating with limited resources or within challenging legal or regulatory environments, may not have all roles in place in a formal way. Organisations should ensure that the safeguarding responsibilities described are fulfilled in a manner that is appropriate to their context and capacity.

| ROLE                            | RESPONSIBILITIES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Volunteers</b>               | <p><i>All volunteers and representatives have a role to play in safeguarding, though the way these responsibilities apply will vary depending on the nature of their role, level of contact with children and the contexts in which they operate. Some volunteers may work directly with children, while others may encounter children only incidentally or not at all as part of their formal role.</i></p> <p><i>Safeguarding responsibilities will present differently depending on the volunteering model, for example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <i>Short-term international volunteers may require clearer boundaries around informal time and community interaction.</i></li> <li>» <i>Community-based volunteers may need support in managing blurred personal and professional relationships.</i></li> <li>» <i>Remote volunteers may need explicit guidance on online boundaries and digital communication.</i></li> <li>» <i>Trustees or governance volunteers may influence safeguarding culture through oversight rather than direct contact.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Organisations should ensure volunteers understand how safeguarding applies specifically to their role and context.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <i>Follow safeguarding policies and procedures.</i></li> <li>» <i>Report concerns and allegations of abuse.</i></li> <li>» <i>Follow rules in place to protect children.</i></li> <li>» <i>Follow organisational values.</i></li> <li>» <i>Complete mandatory training.</i></li> <li>» <i>Challenge behaviour that is not acceptable.</i></li> <li>» <i>Listen to and advocate for children.</i></li> </ul> |
| <b>Managers and supervisors</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Support volunteers and direct reports to safely carry out their role.</li> <li>» Demonstrate their commitment to safeguarding to their direct reports.</li> <li>» Meet on a one-to-one basis with their volunteers to discuss their role.</li> <li>» Identify any training or learning needs.</li> <li>» Follow recruitment, induction and volunteer management procedures.</li> <li>» Challenge unacceptable conduct and behaviours.</li> <li>» Be aware of child safeguarding risks in the community and the organisation.</li> <li>» Help volunteers understand cultural differences between volunteers, others and communities.</li> <li>» Supporting volunteers to distinguish between cultural sensitivity and safeguarding responsibility, and to challenge practices that place children at risk.</li> </ul> <p>In practice, this may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Discussing boundaries with a volunteer who has been invited to socialise with children outside formal activities.</li> <li>» Reviewing supervision arrangements where volunteers work independently in communities.</li> <li>» Addressing early signs of favouritism, gift-giving or private communication with children.</li> <li>» Supporting volunteers who feel uncertain about cultural differences affecting safeguarding expectations.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

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**Leaders**

*Provide visible leadership and oversight for safeguarding, setting expectations and fostering a culture in which safeguarding is prioritised, discussed openly and supported through appropriate resources, training and decision-making. Leaders should ensure safeguarding arrangements are proportionate to organisational context and risk, and that legal and regulatory requirements are met as part of a broader commitment to preventing harm to children.*

- » *Demonstrate their commitment to safeguarding.*
- » *Approve policies and ensure compliance.*
- » *Discuss child safeguarding as a leadership team.*
- » *Understand the child safeguarding risks in the organisation and context.*
- » *Ensure volunteers are not appointed to roles that they are not suited to.*
- » *Engage with other organisations and networks to address child safeguarding.*
- » *Ensure compliance with legislation and reporting requirements.*
- » *Engage with and listen to children to understand their perspective.*
- » *Ensure child safeguarding is properly resourced.*

In day-to-day practice, this may involve:

- » Reviewing safeguarding risks alongside programme and partnership decisions.
- » Asking how volunteering models create specific safeguarding vulnerabilities.
- » Ensuring safeguarding is discussed routinely at leadership meetings, not only following incidents.
- » Providing visible support when safeguarding concerns are raised.

---

**Designated  
Safeguarding  
Leads**

*Not all organisations will have a formally designated safeguarding lead or specialist safeguarding role. Where this is the case, organisations should ensure that the safeguarding lead function is clearly assigned and supported. This may involve shared responsibilities, access to external safeguarding advice, or partnership arrangements, depending on organisational size, capacity and context.*

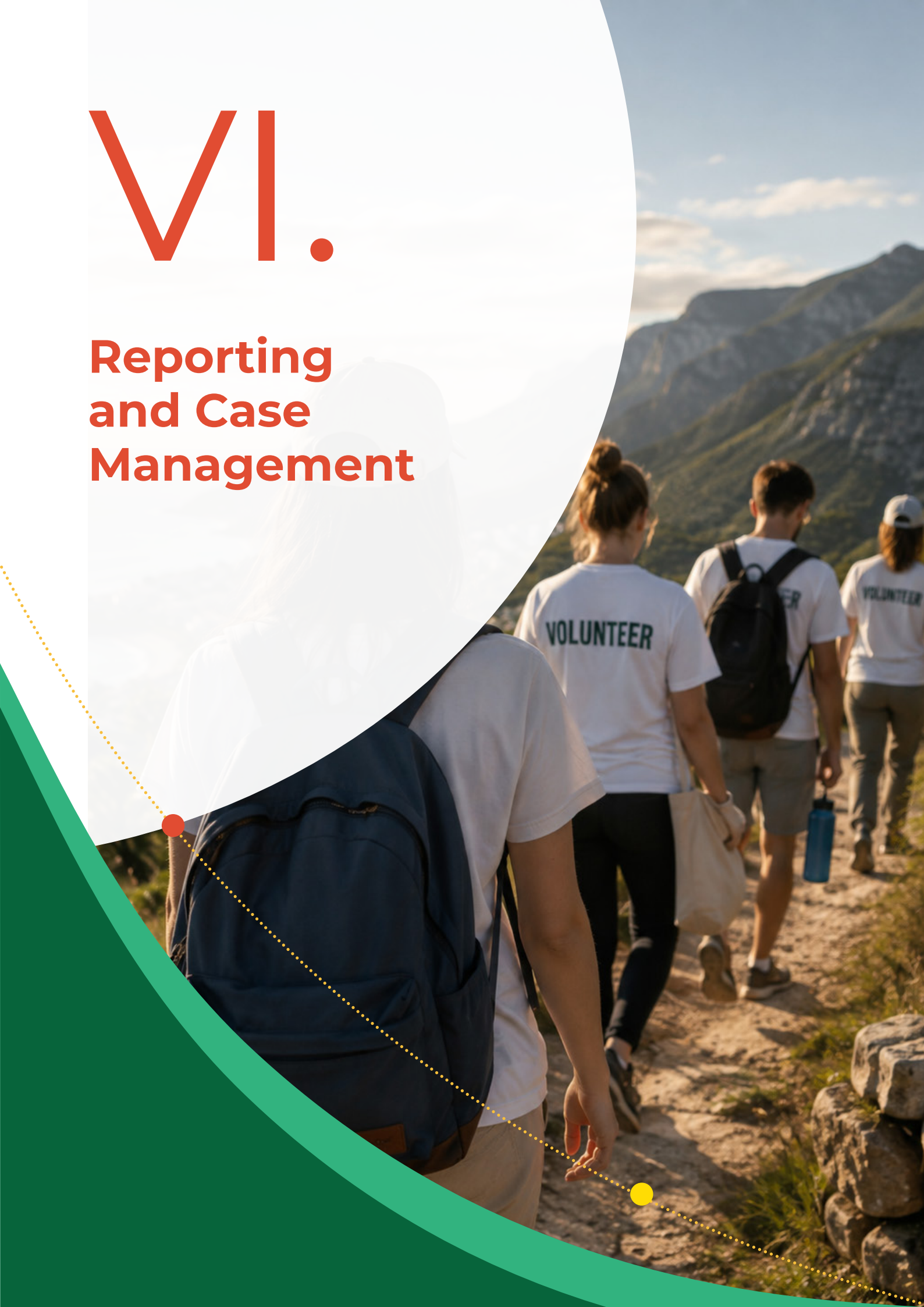
- » First point of contact for safeguarding matters.
- » Receive, record, and respond to reports.
- » Ensure prompt referral of cases.
- » Support & guide on safeguarding matters.
- » Ensure safeguarding training and awareness are delivered regularly.
- » Maintain confidential records.
- » Report trends, risks, and updates.
- » Promote a child-centred and rights-based approach.

In smaller or volunteer-led organisations, the safeguarding lead function may be carried out by a senior volunteer or through external advice. In such cases, it is important that:

- » The safeguarding contact is clearly communicated to volunteers and communities.
  - » Concerns can be raised safely and confidentially.
  - » Records are maintained securely and proportionately to organisational capacity.
-

# VI.

## Reporting and Case Management



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Organisations that engage volunteers operate in diverse contexts and take many different forms. Some work directly with children as part of their core mandate, while others may only have incidental or indirect contact with children through community presence, service delivery or online engagement. Volunteering roles may be short-term or long-term, local or international, in-person or remote, structured or informal.

This guidance is designed to support reporting and case management across this diversity. It does not assume a single organisational model, level of safeguarding capacity or formal reporting infrastructure. Organisations should adapt reporting and case management arrangements to their context, while maintaining a clear focus on protecting children and responding appropriately to safeguarding concerns.

Inaction is never a reasonable risk management strategy to any child safeguarding concern. The reputation of an organisation or perpetrators must never be a reason to delay reporting or not report.

## 2. INTERNAL REPORTING

Organisations should establish mechanisms for receiving concerns from within the organisation and the community. These can be supported by feedback mechanisms for volunteers, children and the community. Each of these systems should be carefully planned and regularly promoted.



**TIP**

**Accessible and safe reporting mechanisms are necessary to encourage people to come forward and share their concerns.**

Organisations use different internal arrangements to receive and manage safeguarding concerns. Not all organisations will have the same reporting structures, formal roles or governance mechanisms in place. Reporting routes should be designed to be accessible, clearly communicated and appropriate to organisational context and capacity, particularly for volunteers and others who may be unfamiliar with formal safeguarding processes.

Where organisations do not have all the reporting mechanisms described below, they should ensure that clear and trusted routes exist for raising concerns and that individuals know how and where to report.

Organisations may establish multiple routes to reporting. Typically, these include:

- » A Designated Safeguarding Lead.
- » A telephone number or email address (only accessed by designated people).
- » A paper-based system with secure storage such as a locked post box.
- » A senior leader or board member.
- » A whistleblowing policy and procedure.
- » An external mechanism such as a child safeguarding non-governmental organisation.

In practice, safeguarding concerns may arise in situations such as:

- » A volunteer forming a close relationship with a child outside programme hours.
- » A short-term volunteer accused of inappropriate behaviour shortly before returning home.
- » A community member reporting concerns informally to a volunteer rather than through official channels.

- » A remote volunteer communicating privately with a young person through social media.

Reporting mechanisms should be accessible and responsive to these realities of volunteering.



#### TIP

**Organisations should never discount or exclude reports that are anonymous or considered informal or incomplete. The protection of children must be paramount.**

Reporting routes should:

- » Allow for anonymous reporting.
- » Be culturally appropriate and overcome cultural barriers (cultural considerations should never be used to discourage reporting or delay action where a child may be at risk).
- » Be confidential.
- » Be child-friendly (if they are for children) and tailored to language and literacy restrictions.

### 3. FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

Feedback mechanisms can support child safeguarding by encouraging volunteers and others to share information on any subject. To be effective they should support collecting information (including anonymously), acknowledging the information (where possible), analysing and using the information to provide feedback to the appropriate person or team and then closed by reporting back to the original source if possible.



### 4. SIGNPOSTING TO EXTERNAL SAFEGUARDING AND COMPLAINTS RESOURCES

Volunteering organisations are not expected to manage safeguarding concerns in isolation. In many cases, particularly where capacity or experience is limited, it is appropriate and responsible to seek external advice, referral support or specialist guidance. This includes access to independent complaint mechanisms, survivor-centred support services and safeguarding expertise.

Organisations should ensure that information about external safeguarding and complaints resources is accessible to staff, volunteers, children and communities where appropriate. This may include signposting to national child protection services, regulatory bodies, ombudspersons, or independent safeguarding support platforms.

One example of an international resource is the **Safeguarding Support Hub** (<https://safeguardingsupporthub.org/>), which provides guidance, tools and access

to specialist support for organisations working to prevent sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. Such resources can support organisations to strengthen reporting pathways, access advice on case management, and ensure that concerns can be raised safely where internal mechanisms are not appropriate or sufficient.

Signposting to external resources should be understood as a complement to, not a replacement for, internal safeguarding procedures.

## 5. EXTERNAL REPORTING

Organisations should understand and if required map out external reporting routes that are consistent with any local guidance and legislation. Reporting routes can be to government agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and, in some humanitarian and development contexts United Nations bodies or clusters.

External reporting is used to provide protection and support to children and their families, allow for criminal investigations and prevent unsuitable people from having access to children.

### 5.1 Who to report to

- » **Children's services** to provide protection and support to children. Usually, government or NGO run on a local or national basis. They often provide access to social workers, psychological or medical support and often have the power to intervene to safely house and care for children. Sometimes referred to as family services, women and children's offices or similar.
- » **Law enforcement** for criminal investigation and sharing intelligence. Where possible organisations should establish contact with specialist child

protection officers. These are specially trained officers who investigate child abuse and often work with children's services and NGOs. Some police stations or posts have designated officers, sometimes referred to as women and children's officers or desks. In some circumstances organisations may have to consider making a report to law enforcement in a volunteer's home country. Some jurisdictions have legislation that allows for their citizens to be prosecuted at home for crimes against children committed in other countries. Further advice can be found on the INTERPOL website at: [www.interpol.int](http://www.interpol.int)

- » **NGOs** operating in environments where there are no safe or effective government services or in partnership with government, NGOs can be a route to reporting child safeguarding concerns.

Where volunteers operate across borders, organisations should consider how allegations will be managed if a volunteer returns to their home country. This may include:

- » Retaining relevant records securely.
- » Understanding whether referral to authorities in another jurisdiction is appropriate or required.
- » Informing relevant partners where safeguarding risk persists.
- » Cross-border volunteering arrangements should anticipate this possibility in advance.



#### TIP

**INHOPE is a global network of hotline providers tackling child sexual abuse material online. Their website offers guidance and contacts at [www.inhope.org](http://www.inhope.org).**

## 5.2 External Reporting Risks

Organisations operating in environments in which external reporting may place children at risk of harm, should ensure they understand these risks or are able to access specialist advice. Children can be at increased risk because of their gender, sexual orientation, social expectations, and local legislation and customs regarding sexual activity outside of marriage.

Decisions about external reporting should be guided by the best interests of the child and an assessment of potential risks arising from reporting itself. In some contexts, reporting to external authorities may increase the risk of harm to a child, their family or others.

Where risks are complex or unclear, organisations should seek specialist safeguarding/ legal advice. Delayed or alternative reporting routes may be appropriate where reporting would increase risk.

All risks should be considered by organisations from both a policy perspective and as part of the risk management process for allegations management. Inadequate risk assessments can have consequences beyond the very serious personal ones.



### TIP

More information about the risks of external reporting can be found [here](#).

## 6. RESPONSE AND CASE MANAGEMENT

### 6.1 Case Management and Case Handling

The terms *case management* and *case handling* are sometimes used interchangeably in safeguarding practice.

In this guidance, *case management* is used deliberately to describe the broader process by which safeguarding concerns are received, assessed, recorded, referred, monitored and concluded. This includes decision-making, coordination with external agencies, risk management, record keeping and oversight of actions taken to protect children.

*Case handling* is understood as a component of case management and refers more narrowly to the practical steps taken in response to a specific concern or allegation, such as receiving information, making referrals, implementing immediate protective measures or supporting those involved.

Using the term *case management* reflects the need for a structured, end-to-end approach that ensures safeguarding concerns are managed consistently and responsibly over time, even where organisations are small, volunteer-led or operating with limited resources.

Organisations should develop case management processes to ensure that any concerns or allegations are consistently and appropriately managed.

The case management roles described below reflect safeguarding functions rather than fixed job titles. In practice, these functions may be carried out by different individuals, combined within a single role, or supported through external safeguarding expertise or partnership arrangements.

Case management arrangements may need to operate differently depending on the volunteering model, for example:

- » In short-term international placements, allegations may arise shortly before departure or after a volunteer has returned to their home country.
- » In community-based volunteering, concerns may emerge through informal community channels rather than formal reporting routes.

- » In remote or digital volunteering, evidence may consist of online communications, stored data or platform records.
- » In volunteer-led organisations, case management responsibilities may be carried out by senior volunteers with access to external advice.

Organisations should consider how their volunteering model affects the practical management of concerns, including supervision, evidence preservation and communication.

Smaller or volunteer-led organisations, and those operating with limited resources or within challenging legal or regulatory environments, may not have all roles in place in a formal way. Organisations should ensure that the functions described are fulfilled in a manner that is appropriate to their context and capacity.

The structure uses the following terms.

- › Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) – the person assigned to manage a case
- › Subject – the person who is subject to the allegation or concern.
- › Injured Party – the child harmed.
- › Manager – the subject's line manager/supervisor.
- › Leadership – the person responsible for organisational considerations.
- › Agency – police or child protective services (see 'Who to report to' above)

In day-to-day practice, for small or volunteer-led organisations, this may mean:

- » Identifying in advance who will manage safeguarding concerns, even if roles are shared.
- » Establishing simple written records of concerns and actions taken.

- » Seeking external safeguarding advice where specialist expertise is not available internally.
- » Ensuring volunteers know how to report concerns involving partners or external individuals.

## 6.2 Sample Response Plans

Case management processes do not need to be complex, but they must be clear, consistent and prioritise the safety of children. Below are sample action plans for organisations to follow or adapt:

### 6.2.1 Allegations, suspicions or concern about anyone involved in the organisation's activities

*On receipt of a concern the DSL should immediately take the following actions.*

1. *Assess the risk. If anyone is at an imminent risk of harm, contact police (if safe to do so)*
2. *If the subject of the allegation is present at any [INSERT ORGANISATION] premises or activity their removal must be considered if it is required to safeguard anyone from a risk of harm*
3. *Consideration must be given as to which agency should receive a referral, a meaningful referral should be made as soon as possible and, where practicable, within one working day, unless doing so would increase risk or is not feasible due to contextual constraints*
4. *The DSL must discuss the response with the relevant manager, including whether a suspension from duties is required.*
5. *Records should be maintained securely and accessibly, taking account of organisational context, capacity and data protection requirements.*

### 6.2.2 Concerns for the welfare of children outside the organisation's activities or programmes

On receipt of a concern the DSL should immediately take the following actions.

1. *Conduct an immediate risk assessment. If anyone is an immediate risk of harm, contact the police (if it is safe to do so).*
2. *If the subject of the concern relates to a [INSERT ORGANISATION] partner organisation, contact should be made with the relevant designated safeguarding lead. In many circumstances a partner such as a school, which may have greater knowledge of those involved, are best placed to deal with a concern regarding an individual to whom they owe a duty.*
3. *If another party is not making a referral, consideration must be given to [INSERT ORGANISATION] making a referral to the appropriate agency, a meaningful referral should be made within one working day, unless an exemption has been authorised by the [INSERT LEADERSHIP].*
4. *Records should be maintained securely and accessibly, taking account of organisational context, capacity and data protection requirements.*

### 6.2.3 Supporting Injured Parties

The DSL must give consideration as to how best to support the child who has been harmed (the injured party or IP). This may include notifying parents (if this will not endanger the child who has been harmed). DSL should not interview the child who has been harmed at this stage as this may impact any law enforcement or other investigation. The priority must be the welfare of the child who has been harmed.

## 7. RECORD KEEPING

*Detailed records of concerns and allegations must be securely stored, taking account of organisational context, capacity and data protection requirements, and should include:*

- » *The full names, dates of birth and any job titles of those involved*
- » *If known, the location and time of any abuse/incidents*
- » *The type or nature of the concern or allegation*
- » *Details of to whom a referral was made, with a copy of the referral (when possible) or contemporaneous note and acknowledgement (where applicable)*
- » *Details of why a referral was not made (if applicable)*
- » *Decisions taken to safeguard anyone from a risk of harm and any risk assessments undertaken*
- » *Detailed and dated notes of actions taken*
- » *The outcome including whether, in relevant cases if any allegation was substantiated, unsubstantiated or deliberately false/malicious*
- » *A copy of any referral made to any agency*

Records must be searchable by authorised staff and cross-referenced with related concerns or other records; this ensures that if a volunteer is removed from a position following a safeguarding allegation, they are prevented from being engaged as an employee without an appropriate assessment of risk.

Records must be kept separate from Human Resources records to ensure that they are retained for the appropriate period and not subject to destruction or alteration for the purposes of keeping non-safeguarding records. If documents,

and files are password protected, these should be removed when the case is closed to ensure they are accessible for decision-makers in the future. When making and maintaining records consideration must be given to how clear and accessible these will be in the future.

## 8. INTERNAL INVESTIGATIONS

When it is necessary to conduct a child safeguarding investigation, or an investigation related to safeguarding, the DSL must work closely with the relevant leadership to agree how an investigation will be conducted. Consideration must be given to the following:

- » The production of clear terms of reference
- » Any policy or procedural requirements
- » The skills and experience required to conduct the investigation
- » Any support required to those involved, including the supervision of investigators
- » Who should receive the investigation report

When selecting investigators careful consideration must be given to skillset and experience. Safeguarding investigations will routinely require specialist knowledge. Investigatory experience in other fields, such as human resources, legal services or fraud, must not be assumed to provide competence in safeguarding matters without specialist training. Sometimes it is necessary, if resources allow, to have external/independent people investigate.

### 8.1 Injured Party Care

In all instances the care of child who has been harmed must be carefully considered.

Where a child's account needs to be recorded, it must be undertaken in a trauma informed manner by a qualified and supervised individual. Under no circumstances must children be interviewed by anyone who is not specially trained to interview child victims of abuse. If required, a presumption should be made that children have provided truthful information unless there are significant and exceptional reasons to suggest otherwise.

Children may prefer to provide an account through an intermediary, parent or in written form and should be supported to do so if they would prefer this route.

### 8.2 Anonymous, 'informal', brief, and non-recent allegations

Organisations should encourage the reporting of safeguarding concerns, regardless of when the incident occurred or how information is shared. Individuals should be supported to raise concerns without fear of blame, reprisal or dismissal. Incomplete, anonymous or informal information should be taken seriously and considered in line with organisational procedures.

All allegations must receive a professionally curious response that is reflective of organisational obligations and potential or known risk. The absence of formal complaints or allegations should not interfere with the implementation of safeguarding procedures. The mechanism by which an allegation is made must not in itself be used to dismiss the concerns or support inaction.

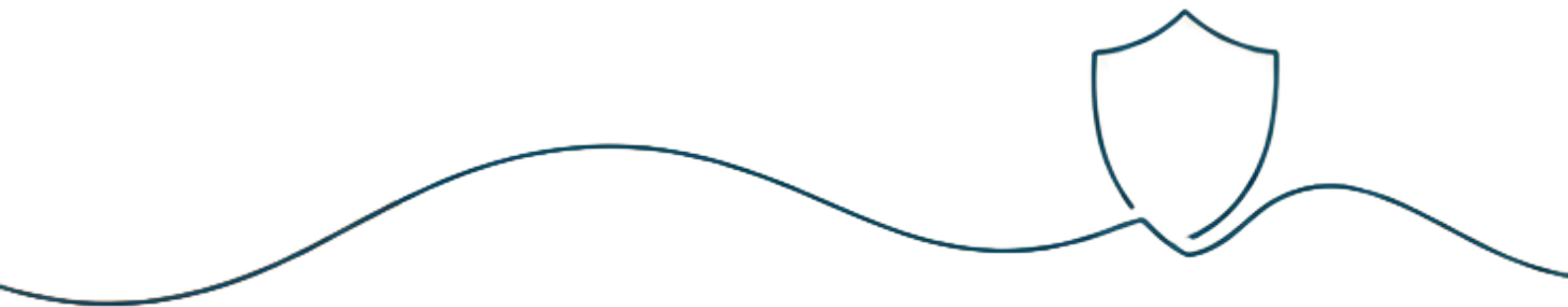
There is no time limit on accountability to those that have or may have been harmed. Non-recent allegations or incidents of abuse that may have taken place some time ago must be investigated in accordance with safeguarding procedures and judgements made in relation to any risk of harm.

9. SERVICE MAPPING

Organisations that operate in contexts that do not have clearly defined pathways for referral or support should carry out a mapping exercise and review

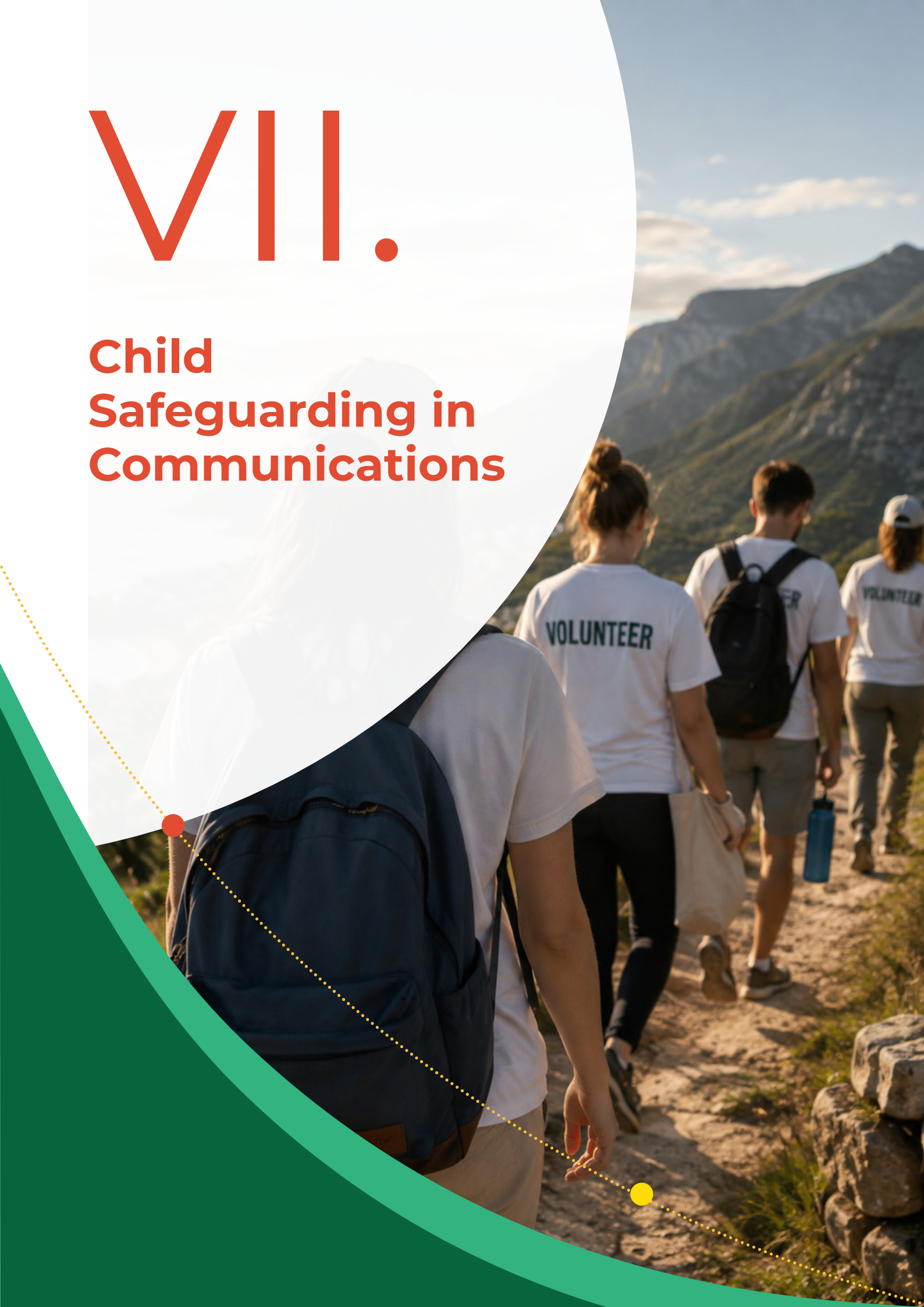
it on a regular basis. This ensures that if the need for a service arises there is no delay. Organisations should consider if multiple mapping exercises are needed to reflect variations in differing locations. The table below provides a framework:

| SERVICE                                            | ORGANISATION | CONTACT POINT | OPENING HOURS |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| Medical and mental health and psychosocial support |              |               |               |
| Law enforcement                                    |              |               |               |
| Safe refuge                                        |              |               |               |
| Legal services                                     |              |               |               |
| Child protection services                          |              |               |               |
| Other                                              |              |               |               |



# VII.

## Child Safeguarding in Communications



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Organisations should carefully consider how they safeguard children in any communications, media or publicity, including online publication and social media. Children (where appropriate) and their parents or carers must give informed consent to the use of their stories and any form of image being collected and distributed.

Volunteering organisations engaging in communications, contracting and partnership working operate in diverse contexts and take many different forms. Some work directly with children as part of their core mandate, while others may only have incidental or indirect contact with children through community presence, service delivery or online engagement. Organisations also vary widely in size, resources, communications capacity and safeguarding experience, and may rely on staff, volunteers or partners to gather and share content.

This guidance is designed to support safe and responsible practice across this diversity. It does not assume a single organisational model, level of safeguarding maturity or professional communications infrastructure. The principles set out below should be applied proportionately and adapted to context, while maintaining a clear focus on preventing harm to children.

The use of personal devices, social media and informal digital platforms represents one of the most significant safeguarding risks in volunteering contexts today. Images or information shared informally by volunteers can be rapidly copied, redistributed, altered or misused beyond the organisation's control. In some cases, material originally gathered with positive intent can contribute to the creation, circulation or normalisation of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse material. These risks make clear expectations, supervision

and strong organisational controls essential.

Communications risk varies depending on the volunteering model, for example:

- » Short-term international volunteers may seek to document their experience through photographs or blogs, increasing the risk of informal image capture.
- » Community-based volunteers embedded in local settings may develop personal relationships that blur professional boundaries in storytelling.
- » Remote volunteers may gather or share digital content without direct supervision.
- » Volunteer-led organisations without dedicated communications staff may rely on informal processes for content approval and storage.

Organisations should consider how their volunteering model affects supervision, consent processes, digital behaviour and oversight.



### TIP

**Individuals who have little, or no understanding of how social media operates are unlikely to be able to give informed consent.**

## 2. KEY PRINCIPLES

The safeguards set out below are intended to prevent harm, exploitation and re-identification of children, and to protect children's dignity and privacy. While the principles are universal, organisations should apply them with an understanding of local cultural, social and digital contexts, recognising how material may be interpreted, shared or misused beyond its original purpose.

The principles below should be applied with particular care where volunteers use personal devices, personal social media accounts or informal digital platforms. These contexts significantly increase safeguarding risk and require heightened clarity and consistency.

- » Only properly appointed staff/ volunteers should be authorised to gather and use material.
- » All material should reflect the dignity of children and respect their wishes, portraying them accurately.
- » All material should reflect organisational values and promote the rights of children.
- » Informed consent must always be given with systems in place to withdraw consent.
- » Children should never be identifiable, do not use a combination of identifying information such as name, location, age, school, parental information and identifying images.
- » Material should not depict partially clothed children.
- » All material should be gathered by authorised people and securely stored with access only by those that need it.
- » Consideration should be given to the local culture and context. This should not result in the portrayal, acceptance or normalisation of practices that harm or exploit children.
- » Organisations must never publish or distribute sexualised images of children for any reason.
- » Material including children must never be used for the benefit of volunteers.
- » Volunteers must not gather, retain or share images, video, audio recordings or stories involving children for personal use. This includes posting on personal social media accounts, blogs, fundraising pages, academic work or professional promotion. Informal sharing of such material significantly

increases the risk of misuse, loss of control, re-identification of children and technology-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse.

- » All material regarding sexual abuse should use appropriate terminology see <https://ecpat.org/terminology/>

### 3. INFORMED CONSENT

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Informed consent means that those giving consent fully understand the risks involved. Organisations should ensure that material and any publication do not cause any harm. Informed consent is not solely a procedural requirement, but a relational and context-specific safeguarding consideration. Power imbalances, dependency on services or aid, cultural expectations, and volunteering dynamics can all influence whether consent is freely given or can be safely withdrawn.

Organisations should recognise that consent may be compromised or inappropriate in some circumstances, even where it appears to have been formally obtained. Decisions about the use of images, stories or personal information should therefore be guided by an assessment of risk, dignity and the best interests of the child, rather than reliance on consent alone.

To ensure organisations gain informed consent they should consider if the following is fully understood:

- » Why the content is being gathered and by whom.
- » The type of communications and scope of audiences.
- » Once content is published online control is lost.
- » The right to refuse to participate.
- » The right to choose a pseudonym.
- » Any legal rights.
- » That content can be digitally altered by others once published.

How consent is recorded may vary, organisations should ideally ensure there is written consent where possible. Older children who have the capacity to give consent should be engaged in this process. Care should be taken to ensure that parents and carers remain involved, and legislation is followed. When the content being gathered is video recorded, informed consent can be gathered directly into the camera.

### 3.1 Gathering Content

Volunteers often play a role in capturing images, stories or information, often in informal settings or while embedded in communities. In these contexts, boundaries may be less clear, and expectations may not be explicitly stated.

Organisations should provide clear guidance, training and support to volunteers on appropriate behaviour, consent, boundaries and the use of personal devices. Expectations should be proportionate to role and context and designed to support volunteers to act responsibly rather than to restrict positive engagement.

### 3.2 Ethical Content Gathering

Safeguarding risks can arise through communications activities, including the creation, storage and sharing of images, video, audio and written content. These risks may not be immediately visible and can extend beyond the original purpose or audience for which content was created.

Organisations should consider how children may be identified or re-identified through combinations of information, such as location, background details, timing, relationships or distinctive features, even where names are not used.

Digital content may be copied, shared or altered without the organisation's control, and may remain accessible long after the original context has changed. In some cases, images or information of children

shared informally or without adequate safeguards can be misused to create or circulate child sexual abuse material or contribute to other forms of technology-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse.

Communications activities should avoid presenting children in ways that reinforce stereotypes, expose vulnerability, or prioritise organisational messaging over the dignity and best interests of the child. Decisions about how children are represented should consider power, agency and the potential impact on the child now and in the future.

Where volunteers or partners are involved in gathering or sharing content, organisations should provide clear guidance on acceptable practice, including the use of personal devices, informal photography, social media sharing and storage of material. Content captured informally should be subject to the same safeguarding considerations as content produced through formal channels.

Organisations should also consider how communications materials are stored, reviewed and retired over time. Content that was appropriate at the time it was created may become harmful or inappropriate considering changing circumstances and should be reviewed periodically to ensure ongoing safeguarding.

In practice, safeguarding risks in communications may arise in situations such as:

- » A volunteer sharing images of children on personal social media accounts following a community visit.
- » A short-term volunteer creating a blog or fundraising page using identifiable details about a child.
- » A partner organisation sending photographs via informal messaging platforms without clear consent records.

- » An organisation reusing historic images of a child whose circumstances have since changed.
- » A volunteer filming children during informal time outside structured activities.
- » A volunteer storing images of children on a personal phone or cloud account, increasing the risk of loss, unauthorised access or onward distribution.

Clear expectations and oversight help prevent these common volunteering-related risks. In day-to-day practice, for volunteering organisations, this may include:

- » Briefing volunteers clearly on communications boundaries before activities begin.

- » Reinforcing that personal devices and social media are subject to safeguarding expectations.
- » Reviewing images and stories before publication, even when gathered informally.
- » Maintaining simple, proportionate consent records.
- » Periodically reviewing existing materials to ensure they remain appropriate.

Safeguarding in communications is most effective when expectations are discussed openly and applied consistently, rather than treated solely as a compliance exercise.



# VIII.

## Safeguarding in Contracts and Partnership Working



## 1. INTRODUCTION

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This guidance sets out safeguarding considerations for organisations that work with partners, contractors or third parties in contexts where children may be affected by activities, services or decisions. It is intended to support organisations to identify, manage and reduce safeguarding risks arising through partnership and contractual arrangements.

This guidance complements organisational safeguarding policies and procedures and should be applied proportionately, taking account of context, capacity and risk.

## 2. SCOPE AND APPLICABILITY

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Organisations engage in partnerships in many ways and with varying degrees of formality. These may include:

- » Formal contractual partnerships
- » Sub-grants or funding arrangements
- » Consortia or networks
- » Informal collaboration or referral arrangements
- » Relationships with service providers, suppliers or intermediaries

Not all organisations will use formal contracts, and not all partnerships will involve children directly. This guidance applies wherever partnership working may create safeguarding risk, regardless of whether arrangements are formalised in writing.

The guidance does not assume that partners have the same safeguarding capacity, resources or governance arrangements, and should not be used to exclude organisations solely based on their starting point.

## 3. VOLUNTEERING MODELS AND PARTNERSHIP RISK

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Safeguarding risk within partnerships varies depending on how volunteers are involved, for example:

- » In sending/host arrangements, one organisation may recruit volunteers while another supervises them day-to-day. Clear agreement is needed about who holds responsibility for safeguarding, reporting and supervision.
- » In short-term international placements, partners may host volunteers for limited periods with reduced oversight and cultural familiarity.
- » In community-based or informal partnerships, volunteers may be embedded in local networks where boundaries are less formalised.
- » In volunteer-led organisations, partnerships may operate without formal contracts but still create safeguarding risk.

Organisations should explicitly consider how their volunteering model influences supervision, accountability and reporting arrangements within partnerships.

## 4. SAFEGUARDING AS A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

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Safeguarding in partnerships is a shared responsibility. All parties have a role in preventing harm to children and responding appropriately to safeguarding concerns.

Organisations should recognise that:

- » Partners may operate in different legal, cultural and social contexts
- » Power imbalances may exist between organisations
- » Expectations and terminology may not be shared or understood in the same way

Organisations should be alert to situations where safeguarding concerns are minimised within partnerships due to cultural deference or fear of damaging relationships

Effective safeguarding in partnerships is therefore based on dialogue, clarity and ongoing engagement, rather than reliance on policies alone.

## 5. PROPORTIONALITY AND RISK-BASED APPROACH

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Safeguarding expectations within partnerships should be proportionate to risk, taking account of:

- » The nature of activities
- » The level and type of contact with children
- » The role of the partner in delivering or influencing activities
- » The operating environment, including legal and political context
- » The partner's existing safeguarding capacity

A risk-based approach allows organisations to focus attention and resources where the potential for harm is greatest, while avoiding unnecessary or unrealistic requirements.

## 6. SAFEGUARDING EXPECTATIONS IN PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

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Where appropriate, organisations should seek to establish shared safeguarding expectations with partners. These may include:

- » Commitment to preventing harm to children

- » Clear processes for raising and responding to safeguarding concerns
- » Agreed roles and responsibilities for safeguarding
- » Expectations around behaviour, conduct and boundaries
- » Information sharing arrangements that respect confidentiality and safety

These expectations may be documented in contracts, memoranda of understanding or other agreements, but should always be discussed and understood in practice.

## 7. ASSESSING SAFEGUARDING CAPACITY AND GAPS

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Before or during partnership working, organisations should consider a partner's safeguarding capacity in a supportive and proportionate way. This may include understanding:

- » Whether safeguarding policies or guidance exist
- » How concerns are currently identified and managed
- » Whether staff or volunteers have received safeguarding guidance or training
- » How children and communities can raise concerns

Where gaps are identified, organisations should consider whether risks can be mitigated through:

- » Support, guidance or capacity strengthening
- » Clear escalation and reporting arrangements
- » Adjustments to activities or roles
- » Increased oversight or monitoring

A lack of formal documentation should not automatically preclude partnership, provided risks can be appropriately managed.

In practice, safeguarding capacity issues may arise in situations such as:

- » A partner hosting volunteers in schools without formal supervision arrangements.
- » A small community partner with no written safeguarding policy but long-standing informal practices.
- » A partner collecting photographs or stories involving children for volunteer communications without clear consent processes.
- » A third-party volunteer agency conducting recruitment with limited transparency about screening processes

In these situations, organisations should focus on identifying risk and strengthening safeguards, rather than relying solely on documentation.

## **8. SAFEGUARDING IN CONTRACTS AND AGREEMENTS**

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Where formal contracts or agreements are used, organisations may include safeguarding provisions that are proportionate and clear. These may cover:

- » Commitment to safeguarding principles
- » Expectations around behaviour and conduct
- » Reporting of safeguarding concerns
- » Cooperation with safeguarding processes
- » Circumstances under which activities may be paused or ended for safeguarding reasons

Safeguarding clauses should be written in accessible language and explained to partners, rather than treated as purely legal protections.

## **9. RESPONDING TO SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS INVOLVING PARTNERS**

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Where safeguarding concerns arise, organisations should focus on protecting children and preventing further harm, rather than on blame or contractual enforcement alone. Organisations should have clarity about how safeguarding concerns involving partners will be handled, including:

- » How concerns can be raised safely
- » Who is responsible for receiving and responding
- » How information will be shared appropriately
- » When external reporting may be required

Where volunteers operate across borders, organisations should anticipate how safeguarding concerns will be managed if a volunteer returns to their home country or if allegations involve multiple jurisdictions. Partnership agreements should clarify how information will be shared lawfully and how ongoing risk will be managed across organisational and national boundaries.

## **10. MANAGING RISK, ESCALATION AND DECISION-MAKING**

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In some circumstances, safeguarding concerns may require difficult decisions, including:

- » Adjusting activities or roles
- » Increasing oversight or support

- » Pausing elements of partnership working
- » Ending a partnership where risks cannot be adequately managed

Such decisions should be guided by:

- » The best interests of the child
- » Assessment of ongoing risk
- » Proportionality and fairness
- » Awareness of potential unintended consequences

In day-to-day practice, for organisations working with volunteers, this may include:

- » Clarifying in writing who supervises volunteers and who receives safeguarding concerns.
- » Discussing safeguarding expectations during partnership planning, not only in contracts.
- » Reviewing partnership arrangements where volunteers operate in informal or community settings.
- » Ensuring volunteers understand how to report concerns involving partner organisations.
- » Periodically revisiting safeguarding responsibilities as programmes evolve.

Safeguarding in partnerships is most effective when roles and expectations are discussed openly and revisited regularly.

## 11. ONGOING ENGAGEMENT AND REVIEW

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Safeguarding in partnerships is not a one-off activity. Organisations should:

- » Review safeguarding arrangements periodically
- » Respond to changes in context or activity
- » Maintain open communication with partners
- » Learn from safeguarding incidents and near misses

Building trust and shared understanding over time is often more effective than reliance on static agreements.

## 12. KEY PRINCIPLES

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Safeguarding in contracts and partnership working should be guided by the following principles:

- » The safety and wellbeing of children is paramount
- » Safeguarding is a shared responsibility
- » Expectations should be proportionate and context-aware
- » Power imbalances should be recognised and addressed
- » Improvement and prevention should be prioritised over exclusion.





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