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**Northfields & District Play Association**

Safeguarding Children Policy

Northfields and District Play Association

Version 1.0

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# Version Control

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# Introduction

Northfield and District Play Association ("The Playbarn") is a safe and engaging environment where young people from 6 - 15 years old can enjoy themselves. There is a focus on; socialising, informal education, fun and engaging physical activities, life skills and inclusivity.

Children and young people are a particularly vulnerable group in society.

It is a frightening fact that abuse can be inflicted by a wide range of individuals or groups, some of whom have roles caring for the children they abuse. It is, therefore, appropriate to consider anyone a potential threat to the welfare of children and young people.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility; however, as a service providing children’s services, we acknowledge our duty of care to safeguard the children and young people accessing our service and recognise that being proactive is the best way to stamp out abuse and neglect.

The Playbarn is committed to, through our work and as outlined in this policy, supporting and working with the local authority safeguarding children's services and our partners to promote the welfare of the families we engage with.

Our principal aim is to follow best practice in safeguarding as per [Working together to safeguard children UK statutory guidance](http://workingtogetheronline.co.uk/) and [Keeping Children Safe in Education](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1101454/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2022.pdf) (2022).

# Scope

This policy applies to all The Playbarn staff, including agency workers, self-employed contractors, apprentices, and student learners, who are, by the nature of their position, required to work for or on behalf of the organisation.

This policy also applies in part to service users, their parents or guardians, and other stakeholders who engage with our organisation.

Although this policy is primarily aimed at safeguarding our service users, it and the procedures within also apply to concerns regarding:

* The family, guardians, carers, and others associated with our service users who have any interaction with The Playbarn; and
* The Playbarn staff, apprentices, or volunteers who are under 18 years of age or are, by definition, vulnerable.

# Definitions

Working Together to Safeguard Children defines **Safeguarding** as:

* Protecting children from maltreatment.
* Preventing impairment of children's mental and physical health or development.
* Ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care.
* Taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.

**Children:** A child is defined as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday.

**Young People:** A young person may be referred to as a young person if they are between 16 and 18 years of age. This group has certain rights, including but not limited to being asked to consent to a report being made on their behalf in relation to certain safeguarding concerns.

**Harm** is defined as the ill-treatment or impairment of health and development. This definition was clarified by section 120 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (implemented on 31 January 2005) to include "impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another" (for example, in the case of a child who witnesses domestic abuse).

The Children Act 1989 introduced the concept of 'Significant Harm' as the threshold that justifies compulsory intervention in family life in the best interests of children; the act places a duty on local authorities to make enquiries to decide whether they should take action to safeguard or promote the welfare of a child who is suffering or is likely to suffer Significant Harm.

There are no absolute criteria on which to rely when judging what constitutes significant harm; however, sexual, physical, and emotional abuse and neglect are all considered significant harm in certain situations. Sometimes a single violent episode may constitute significant harm, although more often, it is an accumulation of significant events, both acute and longstanding, which interrupt, damage, or change the child's development.

**Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL):** A designated and fully trained staff member who takes the lead responsibility for safeguarding and child protection issues. The DSL responsibilities are outlined below.

**Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)**: The individual within the local authority who is responsible for providing advice and coordinating the response to child protection and safeguarding concerns.

# Roles and Responsibilities

All staff are responsible for the safety and welfare of the under-18s and for:

* Reading and abiding by this policy; and
* Engaging with the mandatory safeguarding children training; and
* Providing supervision for our service users; and
* Remaining vigilant to threats and matters affecting their health, safety, and welfare; and
* Following the safeguarding procedure below and reporting all concerns to the DSL or external organisation (see Who to Contact section) in a timely manner; and
* Helping us to improve our policy and procedures where necessary.

The DSL (Miss Tia Ross) is responsible for the overarching safeguarding of children within the organisation and for:

* Engaging with the mandatory safeguarding children training to the required level and remaining up to date; and
* Being available for all staff to discuss any safeguarding issues or concerns; and
* Ensuring that all relevant staff are fully trained in safeguarding, know how to spot and raise concerns, and are aware of their responsibilities; and
* Ensuring that adequate reporting and recording systems are in place for safeguarding procedures; and
* Ensuring that cases of suspected or actual child safeguarding concerns are referred to the appropriate agencies; and
* Ensuring that this policy and procedure are reviewed and updated regularly; and
* Communicating with service users and their parents/guardians about the organisation’s policies and procedures, as well as any concerns or referrals where appropriate; and
* Complying with any Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) requirements; and
* Ensuring the organisation has sufficient safer recruitment procedures and supporting policies; and
* Being aware of any child within the service requiring specific safeguarding needs or being more vulnerable to harm and neglect.

# Guidance

## Types of Abuse

Abuse is a form of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or an institutional or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by others. Abuse can take place wholly online, or technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. Children may be abused by adults or other children.

### Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is a form of abuse which may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child.

Physical harm may also be caused when a parent, guardian, or carer fabricates the symptoms of or deliberately induces illness in a child.

### Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve:

* Conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only as far as they meet the needs of another person.
* Not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them, or ridiculing what they say or how they communicate.
* Imposing age or developmentally inappropriate expectations on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child from participating in normal social interaction.
* Seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another.
* Serious bullying (including cyberbullying).
* Causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger.
* Exploiting and corrupting children.

Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

### Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development.

Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance misuse.

Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent failing to fulfil any of the following:

* Provide adequate food, clothing, and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment).
* Protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger.
* Ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate caregivers).
* Ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

### Potential Risk of Harm to an Unborn Child

In the UK, unborn children are not given legal recognition. However, child protection procedures can apply to parents-to-be if there is a reasonable belief that the baby will be at risk of significant harm when it is born.

Any concern should be addressed as early as possible before the birth so that a full assessment can be undertaken and support offered to enable the parent/s (wherever possible) to provide safe care to the baby.

Examples of circumstances where this may be the case include:

* Where a parent has a conviction for harming another child.
* Where another child has been removed from the care of one of the parents.
* Where a parent's lifestyle is such that there is the likelihood of significant harm to the child, for example, exposure to domestic abuse, severe emotional, behavioural, or mental health difficulties, or dependency on drugs, alcohol, or other substances.

### Sexual Abuse and Violence

When referring to sexual abuse and violence in this policy, we do so in the context of child-on-child sexual violence; however, it is recognised that children are also at risk of this type of abuse from adults.

When referring to sexual violence, we are referring to sexual offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003134 as described below:

* Rape: A person (A) commits an offence of rape if: he intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of another person (B) with his penis, B does not consent to the penetration, and A does not reasonably believe that B consents.
* Assault by Penetration: A person (A) commits an offence if: s/he intentionally penetrates the vagina or anus of another person (B) with a part of her/his body or anything else, the penetration is sexual, B does not consent to the penetration, and A does not reasonably believe that B consents.
* Sexual Assault: A person (A) commits an offence of sexual assault if: s/he intentionally touches another person (B), the touching is sexual, B does not consent to the touching, and A does not reasonably believe that B consents. (NOTE - a single act of kissing someone without consent or touching someone’s bottom/breasts/genitalia without consent can still constitute sexual assault).
* Causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent: A person (A) commits an offence if: s/he intentionally causes another person (B) to engage in an activity, the activity is sexual, B does not consent to engage in the activity, and A does not reasonably believe that B consents. (NOTE – this could include forcing someone to strip, touch themselves sexually, or engage in sexual activity with a third party).

## Persons in a Position of Trust

A position of trust is a legal term that refers to certain roles and settings where an adult has regular and direct contact with children. Examples of positions of trust include teachers, care workers, and social workers.

It is against the law for someone in a position of trust to engage in sexual activity with a child (anyone under the age of 18) in their care, even if that child is over the age of consent (16 or over).

## Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Children’s sexual behaviour exists on a wide continuum ranging from normal and developmentally expected to inappropriate, problematic, abusive, and violent. Problematic, abusive, and violent sexual behaviour is developmentally inappropriate and may cause developmental damage. A useful umbrella term is “harmful sexual behaviour” (HSB). The term has been widely adopted in child protection and is used in this advice. HSB can occur online and/or face-to-face and can also occur simultaneously between the two. HSB should be considered in a child protection context.

When considering HSB, both ages and the stages of development of the children are critical factors. Sexual behaviour between children can be considered harmful if one of the children is much older, particularly if there is more than two years difference or if one of the children is pre-pubescent and the other is not. However, a younger child can abuse an older child, particularly if they have power over them, for example, if the older child is disabled or smaller in stature.

## Child Sexual Exploitation

Child sexual exploitation is also a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs when an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of eighteen into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator.

The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

## What is Consent?

Consent is about having the freedom and capacity to choose.

Consent to sexual activity may be given to one sort of sexual activity but not another. Consent can be withdrawn at any time during sexual activity and each time activity occurs. Someone only consents if they agree by choice to that penetration and have the freedom and capacity to make that choice.

General principles are as follows in law:

* A child under the age of thirteen can never consent to any sexual activity.
* The age of consent is sixteen.
* Sexual intercourse without consent is rape.

**Child-on-child abuse (peer abuse)** is most likely to include, but may not be limited to:

* Bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying)
* Abuse in intimate personal relationships between children (sometimes known as ‘teenage relationship abuse’)
* Physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm (this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and/or encourages physical abuse)
* Sexual violence such as rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault; (this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and/or encourages sexual violence)
* Sexual harassment, such as sexual comments, remarks, jokes, and online sexual harassment, which may be standalone or part of a broader pattern of abuse
* Causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent, such as forcing someone to strip, touch themselves sexually, or engage in sexual activity with a third party
* Consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and/or videos (also known as sexting or youth-produced sexual imagery)
* Upskirting, which typically involves taking a picture under a person’s clothing without their permission, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification or cause the victim humiliation, distress, or alarm, and
* Initiation/hazing type violence and rituals (this could include activities involving harassment, abuse or humiliation used as a way of initiating a person into a group and may also include an online element).

## Human Trafficking

Child trafficking is a very serious issue which can have a devastating and lasting impact on its victims. Children can be trafficked into, within and out of the UK.

Children are trafficked for many reasons, including sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, labour, benefit fraud and involvement in criminal activity such as pick-pocketing, theft and working in cannabis farms. There are a number of cases of minors being exploited in the sex industry.

Human trafficking is a crime and safeguarding issue.

## Extremism and Radicalisation

Radicalisation is targeting the vulnerable by seeking to promote division between communities based on race, faith, or denomination; justify discrimination towards women and girls; persuade others that minorities are inferior or argue against the primacy of democracy and the rule of law in our society. This may lead to extremism and criminal acts.

Children may also be radicalised through grooming or coercion.

### Child Criminal Exploitation

Child criminal exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial or another advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or (c) through violence or the threat of violence. This includes child slavery and child trafficking. Signs include children having received expensive gifts or large amounts of money, going missing, being secretive, signs of physical abuse, gang-related behaviours, changes in mood, being frightened, and inappropriate sexual knowledge or behaviour.

County lines is a form of criminal exploitation where urban gangs persuade, coerce or force children and young people to store drugs and money and/or transport them to suburban areas, market towns and coastal towns (Home Office, 2018). It can happen in any part of the UK and is against the law and a form of child abuse.

## Possible Signs of Abuse (Red Flags)

### Neglect

* Non-organic failure to thrive, e.g., weight loss where no medical cause is found.
* A consistently unkempt, dirty appearance.
* Unmet medical needs, e.g., failure to seek medical advice or attend appointments for illness, severe untreated sores, or wounds.
* Developmental delay without any other clear cause.
* Lack of social responsiveness.
* Self-stimulating behaviours such as head banging or rocking (note that some children with special needs may exhibit this behaviour due to their disability, but this should also be evaluated for context).
* Repeated failure by parents/carers to prevent injury.
* Consistently inappropriately clothed for the weather.
* Hazardous living conditions.
* Poor attendance/a pattern of lateness.

### Physical Abuse

### Bruises

The following bruises may be signs of physical abuse:

* Bruising in or around the mouth (especially in small babies).
* Grasp marks on legs and arms - or chest of a small child.
* Finger marks (e.g., you may see three or four small bruises on one side of the face and one on the other).
* Symmetrical bruising (especially on the ears).
* Bruising behind the ears.
* Outline bruising (e.g., belt marks, handprints).
* Linear bruising (particularly on the buttocks or back).
* Bruising on soft tissue with no obvious explanation, e.g., the inner aspect of the thigh.
* Multiple bruises of different ages; some lighter yellow/purple and some darker black/blue.
* Bruises to:
  + Back of legs, buttocks, and along the spine.
  + Mouth, cheeks, and behind the ear.
  + Stomach, chest.
  + Under the arm.
  + Genital or rectal area.
  + Neck.

**Scars**

Children may have scars, but notice should be taken if a child has a large number of scars of different ages (especially if coupled with current bruising), unusually shaped scars (e.g., round ones from possible cigarette burns) or large scars that are from burns or lacerations that did not receive medical treatment.

**Fractures**

The most common non-accidental fractures are of the long bones in the arms and legs, and ribs. It is very rare for a child under one year to sustain a fracture accidentally. Fractures also cause pain, and it is very difficult for a parent to be unaware that a child has been hurt.

**Burns/Scalds**

It can be very difficult to distinguish between accidental and non-accidental burns; however, burns or scalds with clear outlines are suspicious, as are burns of uniform depth over a larger area.

**Bites**

These can leave clear impressions of the teeth. Human bites are oval or crescent-shaped. If the impression of the bites is more than 3 cm across its width, they must have been caused by an adult or older child with permanent teeth.

**Other injuries which may be deliberately caused**

* Poisoning.
* Ingestion or other application of damaging substances, e.g., bleach.
* Administration of drugs to children where they are not medically indicated or prescribed.
* [Female Genital Mutilation](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/a_fgm.html) (FGM) and Breast Ironing are Physical Abuse and criminal offence regardless of cultural or other reasons. FGM is illegal in the UK, and it is the responsibility of any Playbarn staff member to report to the Police any evidence of FGM occurring, whether it is recent, historical, or may happen to the child in the future.
* Injuries caused as a result of a parent fabricating or inducing illness in a child.

### Sexual Abuse

Indicators that a child has been sexually abused include:

* Changes in behaviour, including becoming more aggressive, withdrawn, and clingy.
* Problems in school, difficulty concentrating, drop off in academic performance.
* Sleep problems or regressed behaviours, i.e., bed wetting/soiling when previously dry.
* Frightened of or seeking to avoid spending time with a particular person.
* Knowledge of sexual behaviour/language that seems inappropriate for their age.
* Physical symptoms include pregnancy in adolescents where the identity of the father is vague or secret, STIs, discharge or unexplained bleeding.
* Injuries and bruises on parts of the body where other explanations are not available, especially bruises, bite marks or other injuries to breasts, buttocks, lower abdomen, or thighs.

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

* Being very secretive about how a child is spending their time, including when online.
* Having an older boyfriend or girlfriend or significantly older friends.
* Having money, mobile phones or expensive items the child can't or won't explain.
* Underage drinking or drug taking.
* Spending more or less time online or on their devices.
* Being upset, withdrawn or distressed.
* Sexualised behaviour, language or an understanding of sex that's not appropriate for their age.
* Spending more time away from home or going missing for periods of time.

**Emotional Abuse**

Behaviour in a child which may indicate emotional abuse includes:

* Very low self-esteem, often with an inability to accept praise or to trust.
* Lack of any sense of fun, over-serious or apathetic.
* Excessive clingy or attention-seeking behaviour.
* Over-anxiety, either watchful and constantly checking or over-anxious to please.
* Developmental delay, especially in speech.
* Substantial failure to reach potential in learning is linked with a lack of confidence, poor concentration, and a lack of pride in achievement.
* Self-harming; compulsive rituals; repetitive stereotypic behaviour.
* Unusual pattern of response to others showing emotions.

### Cyber Bullying, Harassment, or Sexual Abuse

Cyberbullying and online harassment/ sexual abuse are abuse that takes place using technology. Whether on social media sites, through a mobile phone, or on gaming sites, the effects can be devastating for the young person involved.

Cyber abuse can quickly spiral out of control due to the sharing of information through the use of public-facing software. Children and young people who bully, harass, and abuse others online do not need to be physically stronger, and their methods can often be hidden and subtle.

Cyber abuse may consist of online sexual and/or emotional abuse, as outlined above.

Signs of cyberbullying and online harassment/sexual abuse vary but may include the following:

* Being emotionally upset during or after using the Internet or the phone.
* Being very secretive or protective of one's digital life.
* Spending more time than usual alone.
* Withdrawal from or lack of interest in family members, friends, and activities.
* Avoiding school or group gatherings.
* Slipping grades and "acting out" in anger.
* Changes in mood, behaviour, sleep, or appetite.
* Suddenly wanting to stop using the computer or device.
* Being nervous or jumpy when getting a message, text, or email.
* Avoiding discussions about computer or phone activities.

# Policy

## Principles

The Playbarn will:

* Create and embed a culture of openness, trust and transparency where:
  + our values and expectations around behaviour are monitored and reinforced constantly;
  + our stakeholders feel confident enough to raise any concerns they have regarding safeguarding or child welfare;
  + our stakeholders know where to seek support and assistance;
  + we take action to ensure that our policy is adhered to; and
  + we are clear about what we do and why we take the action we take.
* Be alert to potential indicators of abuse or neglect.
* Be alert to the risks which individual abusers, or potential abusers, may pose to children.
* Work with the relevant agencies and complete any necessary actions that are needed to safeguard and promote a child’s welfare.
* Assist the authorities and specialist services to analyse information so that an assessment can be made of a child’s needs and circumstances where there is a concern.
* Take part in regularly reviewing the outcomes for a child against specific plans.
* Work cooperatively with parents/guardians unless this is inconsistent with ensuring the child’s safety.

## Safe Staffing

Please refer to our Recruitment Policy for information on how we ensure staff suitability.

## Staff Training

All The Playbarn staff having contact with children will hold at least level 2 safeguarding children training.

The DSL will hold the relevant level of Safeguarding training for the position (Level 3).

All staff will undertake PREVENT training: <https://www.elearning.prevent.homeoffice.gov.uk/edu/screen1.html>

In-house training, which includes reading and understanding this policy and attending safety and safeguarding briefings, is also undertaken regularly.

## Safeguarding Staff Code of Conduct

It is the policy that all staff must, whilst working for or on behalf of The Playbarn must:

* Work safely and responsibly and take responsibility for their own actions, omissions, and behaviour.
* Ensure that they understand their role, duties, and limitations under this policy.
* Ensure that they are aware of the local safeguarding policies, procedures, and contact details of the local authorities.
* Keep up to date with training.
* Respect confidentiality - do not talk about service users, their parents or guardians, or colleagues or give out personal or sensitive information to individuals outside of the organisation unless there is a legal and/or legitimate reason.
* Avoid any conduct towards children which would lead any reasonable person to question their motivation and intentions – this includes becoming over-familiar, giving or asking for personal favours, gifting items or money.
* Not make physical contact with any children or young people unless necessary for the role or required in the situation, for example, to provide first aid or steady a child when using the play area.
* Never give personal contact details to children or befriend them on social media.
* Not share lewd or indecent images with children.
* Not use profane or inappropriate language or make comments or jokes which may cause offence.
* Not take photographs of service users on personal devices or on company devices without the permission of their parents/guardians.
* Respect the dignity and privacy of others.
* Be professional and act respectfully when dealing with safeguarding concerns.
* Dress appropriately - dress in a way that:
  + Is unlikely to be viewed as offensive, revealing, or sexually provocative; and
  + Does not distract, cause embarrassment, or give rise to misunderstanding.

## Early Help

Any child may benefit from early help, but The Playbarn staff should be particularly alert to the potential need for early help for a child who:

* Is disabled or has certain health conditions and has specific additional needs.
* Has special educational needs (whether or not they have a statutory Education, Health and Care Plan).
* Has a mental health need.
* Is a young carer.
* Is showing signs of being drawn into anti-social or criminal behaviour, including gang involvement and association with organised crime groups or county lines.
* Is frequently missing/goes missing from care or from home.
* Is at risk of modern slavery, trafficking, sexual or criminal exploitation.
* Is at risk of being radicalised or exploited.
* Has a family member in prison or is affected by parental offending.
* Is in a family circumstance presenting challenges for the child, such as drug and alcohol misuse, adult mental health issues and domestic abuse.
* Is misusing alcohol and other drugs themselves.
* Has returned home to their family from care.
* Is at risk of ‘honour’-based abuse such as Female Genital Mutilation or Forced Marriage.
* Is a privately fostered child.
* Is persistently absent from education, including persistent absences for part of the school day.

Where early help may be beneficial, the staff member should inform the DSL, who will make a referral where appropriate.

## Support For Those Who Report Abuse

All those making a complaint or allegation or expressing concern, whether they are service users, parents, guardians, staff, student learners, or members of the general public, should be reassured that:

* They will be taken seriously.
* Their comments will usually be treated confidentially but may be shared if there is a legal and legitimate reason.
* They will be given support.
* That the allegation or concern will be acted on at the earliest possible opportunity.
* If staff have acted as whistleblowers, they will be afforded protection under the law.
* The Playbarn will contact emergency or other support services where we consider it necessary or appropriate to do so.

# Procedures

## What to do if you have concerns about a child or young person

You may have concerns about a child because of something you have seen or heard, or a child may choose to disclose something to you.

The following process is further detailed below; however, in short, all staff must:

1. Accept the disclosure and/or record any concerns/red flags noted without a disclosure in the Safeguarding Book after informing the manager or senior worker (the Safeguarding Book is available from a locked cabinet in the manager’s office).
2. In an emergency – call the Police on 999 and continue with the process as appropriate.
3. If a child or young person has a physical injury or otherwise requires medical assistance, this should be sought immediately by phoning for an ambulance.
4. Ask for consent if appropriate (see below).
5. Inform the DSL immediately, who may, in turn, discuss the matter with the LADO, local authority, and/or Police to seek guidance on how to act.
6. The DSL will provide support, liaise with the safeguarding partners, if appropriate, inform the parents/guardians, and complete any internal actions required.
7. The LADO, local authority, and/or Police will manage any investigation but may ask for more information from the staff member(s) and DSL.

## Accepting a disclosure

If a child or young person discloses information to you, you should:

* If you are with the individual - make the area safe and call the Police if necessary.
* Not promise confidentiality; you have a duty to share this information and refer it to the local authority and/or the Police under certain circumstances.
* Listen to what is being said and accept it as fact without displaying shock or disbelief.
* Reassure the child, but only as far as is honest, do not make promises you may not be able to keep, e.g., 'Everything will be alright now', 'You'll never have to see that person again'.
* Reassure and alleviate guilt if the child refers to it.
* Ask open questions.
* Not ask the child to repeat the information to another member of staff.
* Explain what you have to do next and who you have to talk to.
* Take notes if possible, or write up your conversation as soon as possible afterwards.
* Record the information collected; date, time, place, and non-verbal behaviour and the words used by the child (do not paraphrase).
* Record statements and facts and not interpret a situation or make assumptions.
* Ask the young person (16/17 years of age) if they consent to a report being made (the section below outlines the need for consent in certain circumstances).

**Whatever the nature of your concerns, you do not need consent, and you MUST discuss them with a DSL as soon as possible,** who will then decide whether the share the information outside of The Playbarn and make a referral where appropriate.

## Do you need consent to report abuse or a concern?

* You DO NOT need the permission of a child under the age of sixteen or over the age of sixteen who lacks the mental capacity to consent, to report genuine suspicions or allegations of abuse or neglect to the DSL and the Local Authority and/or Police.
* You DO NOT need the permission of anyone to report a crime or any situation where there is a concern that a child and/or children is/are in immediate danger to the Police.
* You DO need to try and obtain the consent of a person aged sixteen or seventeen to share the information outside of The Playbarn if you believe that the victim has the mental capacity to consent. However, if consent is not given, you may still share the information with the local authority and/or Police if it is in the public interest, if there is a legal basis for sharing the information, or if a child or children are at risk of significant harm, for example, their life in danger or a crime is/has been committed against a child.

A person lacks mental capacity where they have a reduced ability to make informed decisions “in the moment”. This may be transient (e.g., due to fear, shock, injury, or illness) or long-term (e.g., due to learning differences, disability, or mental health issues). Staff should always try and use plain language and aid the young person wherever possible to understand the concern, weigh up the pros and cons of the situation and give or refuse their consent.

Whilst capacity to consent is a complex issue. It should not get in the way of genuine concerns going unreported. Staff should seek the help of the DSL or contact the local authority LADO in an emergency for advice if they are unsure whether an individual has capacity.

## Investigating Suspected Harm or Significant Harm

Where harm has occurred, there are suspicions, or where allegations are made, the DSL will ensure they understand the local authority arrangements for managing allegations or concerns relating to harm or significant harm.

Where any investigation is undertaken, the DSL will:

* Know what information the LADO will require when an allegation is made against a staff member before contacting them.
* Follow the law on data protection.
* Conduct enquiries and share information on a need-to-know basis.
* Know the local procedure for establishing the facts to help the local authority determine whether there is any foundation to the allegation, for example, determining:
  + where the individual was at the time of the allegations
  + whether the individual came into contact with the child
  + whether there are any other related concerns
  + whether there are any witnesses
  + whether there is any CCTV footage
  + any other significant evidence.
* Be careful not to jeopardise any future Police/authority investigation.
* Arrange for all information to be documented and stored in a secure location.
* Where appropriate, take any necessary action to prevent further harm from occurring.

## Should I tell the parents/guardians?

Best practice shows that parents/guardians should be notified of the intended referral, although only if doing so would not put the child or young person at further risk of harm. Advice on whether to inform the parents or guardians must be sought from the DSL and Local Authority; however, the following are circumstances where disclosure to the parent, guardian or responsible adult is **not** appropriate:

* Where sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or organisational abuse is suspected.
* Where Fabricated or Induced Illness is suspected.
* Where Female Genital Mutilation or Forced Marriage is the concern.

## Seven Golden Rules on Information Sharing

1. Remember that the Data Protection Act is not a barrier to sharing information but provides a framework to ensure that personal information about living persons is shared appropriately.

2. Be open and honest with the person (and/or their family where appropriate) from the outset about why, what, how and with whom the information will or could be shared, and seek their agreement unless it is unsafe or inappropriate to do so.

3. Seek advice if you are in any doubt, without disclosing the identity of the person where possible.

4. Share with consent where appropriate and, where possible, respect the wishes of those who do not consent to share confidential information. You may still share information without consent if, in your judgement, that lack of consent can be overridden in the public interest. You will need to base your judgement on the facts of the case.

5. Consider safety and well-being: Base your information-sharing decisions on considerations of the safety and well-being of the person and others who may be affected by their actions.

6. Necessary, proportionate, relevant, accurate, timely and secure: Ensure that the information you share is necessary for the purpose for which you are sharing it, is shared only with those people who need to have it, is accurate and up to date, is shared in a timely fashion, and is shared securely.

7. Keep a record of your decision and the reasons for it – whether it is to share information or not. If you decide to share, then record what you have shared, with whom and for what purpose.

## Where to report concerns or request help

Whether to make a safeguarding referral is a decision made by the DSLs and LADO.

**However, all staff must be aware that the Police or an ambulance should be contacted on 999 immediately and that they DO NOT need consent to make this call:**

* If a crime is being committed.
* If life is at risk.
* If a child or young person is in immediate danger or is at risk of significant harm.
* If a child is seriously injured.

**Contacting the Local Authority**

If The Playbarn is required to make the referral to the local authority, the safeguarding concerns or request for early help should be referred immediately to:

**The Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership (for all concerns)**

Tel: 0116 454 1004 (24-hour service)

Website: <https://www.lcitylscb.org/>

**The LADO (for concerns relating to staff)**

**Leicester City Council LADO based within the safeguarding Unit**

Tel: 0116 454 2440

Email:[**Lado-allegations-referrals@leicester.gov.uk**](mailto:Lado-allegations-referrals@leicester.gov.uk)

**Leicestershire County Council LADO**

LADO Allegations Line 0116 305 4141

LADO Allegations Email: [CFS-LADO@leics.gov.uk](mailto:CFS-LADO@leics.gov.uk)

**Early Help**

For more information, call 0116 454 1004, send an email to [early-help@leicester.gov.uk](mailto:early-help@leicester.gov.uk) or read [Use One Number](https://www.leicester.gov.uk/media/182445/one-number-leaflet.pdf) (PDF).

## Record Keeping

We keep and maintain up-to-date information on children accessing our service, including where and with whom the child is living, attainment, attendance, referrals to and support from other agencies. The record will also include up-to-date contact details for adults who have day-to-day care of the child and any safeguarding concern known to us.

Safeguarding records must be legible, factual, timely and accurate to demonstrate transparent, defensible decision-making and should include information in relation to the date, the time, the place where the alleged abuse happened, your name and the names of others present, the name of the complainant and, where different, the name of the individual who has allegedly been abused (if known), the nature of the alleged abuse, a description of any injuries observed, and the name of the person at the agency to whom the concern was passed onto (if relevant).

If consent was requested, the records must reflect if it was or was not obtained and why the concern was or was not reported if consent was withheld. Records should also note who you informed of your concerns/the disclosure, what their advice was and what was done.

We keep copies of all referrals to the Local Authority and any other agencies related to safeguarding children.

Electronic records will be password protected with access strictly controlled in the same way as paper records and maintained in the same format as paper records (i.e., with well-maintained chronologies etc.) so that they are up to date if/when printed, if necessary, e.g., for court.

Any paper files will be secured in a locked filing cabinet inside a locked management office to which only the DSL, Chair of the Management Committee, and manager have access.

## Sharing Records and Information

Files should only be transferred electronically if there is a secure system in place.

Where child protection/safeguarding files are passed on by hand or sent by courier or special delivery, there should be written evidence of the transfer (such as a form or slip of paper signed and dated by the member of staff at the receiving organisation).

Online forms should be filled in directly on the organisation’s website.

All telephone calls should be made in a private place, and details of what was discussed should be recorded and securely stored.

## Confidentiality

All documentation relating to incidents or allegations of people being harmed, or placed at risk of harm, must and will be kept and treated confidentially and in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) and UK GDPR 2021.

## Managing Allegations Against Staff

Where there are legitimate concerns for the safety and well-being of a child or where allegations are made against staff members, consideration must be given to the following three strands:

1. The Police being informed of a possible criminal offence; and/or
2. A referral being made to the LADO; and/or
3. Suspension or change of duties of the staff member being accused.

**Investigation**

All concerns and allegations will be investigated and, as a minimum, will involve an initial process to establish the facts and decide whether a formal investigation is warranted.

The DSL will advise on the investigative process and appoint an appropriate person to carry out any investigation.

Where appropriate, the Police and LADO may also be involved in any investigation and will be privy to its findings.

**Referral or Report**

The safety and welfare of children must also be the paramount concern, and therefore, the DSL will make referrals or reports as necessary where harm or serious harm is suspected or proven.

**Adjustments to Role/Suspension**

From the outset of the investigation, consideration must be given as to whether the staff member is able to continue in their normal duties or whether adjustments should be made to their role to protect them and/or others.

Adjustments may include:

* Changing their role to temporarily remove them from having direct contact with children without supervision; or
* Temporarily suspending them from working.

Making an adjustment to a role does not in any way imply guilt. It is purely an action designed to allow an investigation to be carried out as quickly as possible while minimising risk.

All staff facing such accusations will be offered appropriate support by The Playbarn.

## Managing Allegations Against a Child

All concerns or disclosures of peer abuse must be reported to the DSL immediately.

The DSL will report the concerns to the local safeguarding team and decide what immediate actions are required to ensure the ongoing safety of the child and, where relevant, other children.

Where there is a concern that the child poses a risk to the safety and well-being of other children in our care, the DSLs will contact the parents or legal guardians of the child implicated in the concern.

Plans will be agreed upon as to if and how the child will be separated from others during the investigation and, where appropriate, return home early and/or be suspended from attending the service.

During any investigation and segregation, the child about whom the allegation has been made will be provided with support from The Playbarn.

# Whistleblowing

Whistleblowing is usually when a worker raises a concern about wrongdoing within their organisation. An example of whistleblowing is reporting another individual in your organisation for breaching safeguarding policy or acting inappropriately.

The wrongdoing you report must be in the public interest, and you are protected by law if you report any of the following:

* a criminal offence, for example, fraud
* a concern that someone's/a group’s health and safety are in danger
* the risk or actual damage to the environment
* a miscarriage of justice
* a company for breaking the law; for example, it does not have the right insurance
* someone covering up wrongdoing.

If you (a staff member) are concerned about the behaviour of another individual working for or on behalf of The Playbarn or a partner organisation, you should report these concerns by speaking to the manager or DSL and discussing the matter. This concern will then be logged, and the matter will be investigated by the DSL.

If you cannot report your concern to the manager or DSL for any reason or if you feel that the matter was not investigated properly, you may, by law, contact one of the prescribed persons or bodies below or seek help from Protect or the Police:

* Various UK prescribed persons as per the UK Gov website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/blowing-the-whistle-list-of-prescribed-people-and-bodies--2>
* Protect Advice Line - Public Concern at Work: <https://protect-advice.org.uk/>
* Calling the Police if a crime has been committed.

The Playbarn will fully support any member of staff who raises a whistleblowing concern and will assist by taking the appropriate action to investigate the claim, work with the relevant authorities and put sanctions and safeguards in place where appropriate.

# Complaints

Any complaint about the way The Playbarn has managed a particular safeguarding issue will be logged through our Complaints Policy**.**

If the complaint concerns sensitive or confidential information or information which is the subject of an ongoing investigation, it may be referred to the manager, who will discuss it with the relevant people on a need-to-know basis and respond to the complaint as appropriate, having established the facts and bearing in mind the competing interests that may be at stake.

If the complaint relates to the manager, it will be redressed by the Management Committee Chair.

# Failure to Comply

Where The Playbarn finds that a job applicant has applied for a regulated role or a current staff member in a regulated role is barred from engaging in regulated activity working with children and/or vulnerable adults, the appropriate authorities will be informed.

All abuse against children and vulnerable individuals is a disciplinary offence and is considered gross misconduct.

# Monitoring and Reviewing

This policy should be reviewed annually, at a minimum, by the DSLs to ensure that it remains compliant with current legislation, meets best practices, and is not discriminatory.

Monitoring will include reviewing the number and type of safeguarding concerns and whistleblowing complaints to assess how our procedures are working in practice. During reviews, the DSL will also review whether procedures were followed and whether the actions of The Playbarn were in line with best practice and Local Authority guidance.

Children (service users) are encouraged to contribute to the development of policies and share their views.

Where we identify the need for modification of policy, they will be implemented, and additional controls will be put in place and reflected in an updated version of this policy document.

The version number on new policies is always 1.0 and should be increased by one whole number each time the policy is edited other than to make simple changes, where they may increase in increments of 0.1.

# Related Policies

* Recruitment Policy
* Complaints Policy