



MINISTRY OF STORIES

Safeguarding Policy

Last updated May 2026

MINISTRY OF STORIES SAFEGUARDING POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

This Policy demonstrates Ministry of Stories' commitment to safeguard children and vulnerable people who engage with our services from harm. The Policy provides staff and volunteers, as well as children and their families, with the overarching principles that guide our approach to safeguarding.

While the primary responsibility for the care of children rests with their parents or guardians, everyone working with children has a responsibility for their wellbeing and protection, including staff members, freelance contractors, volunteers and trustees at Ministry of Stories. We have a collective responsibility to ensure that the children we work with are encouraged and helped in their creative work and that this should take place in a safe and protected environment.

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

We recognise that the welfare of children is paramount in all the work we do and in all the decisions we take. All children, regardless of age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation, have an equal right to protection from all types of harm or abuse. Some children are additionally vulnerable because of the impact of previous experiences, their level of dependency, communication needs or other issues.

Children need to know that adults are fully committed to their welfare. They will be reassured in this if they feel:

- You are prepared to listen to them, especially when they are telling you something that is difficult for you to hear and to believe
- You value and support them as individuals
- You have taken steps to ensure the physical environment is safe
- You praise them
- You trust them

This Policy contains the Ministry of Stories policy and guidelines for child protection and promotes codes of behaviour so that everyone is aware of the standards of behaviour required of both children and adults. This Policy applies to anyone working on behalf of Ministry of Stories, including staff, freelance contractors, the board of trustees, volunteers and students.

This Policy is underpinned by the following legislation and statutory guidance: The Children Act of 1989 and 2004, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024, and the Charity Commission's guidance, 'Safeguarding and Protecting People for Charities and Trustees'. This Policy is also underpinned by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children's (NSPCC's) Safeguarding Standards and Guidance.

This Policy is applied alongside the Ministry of Stories' **Health and Safety Policy**. See also **Code of Behaviour (Appendix 1)**, related to our delivery of safe, respectful and inclusive services.

This Policy will be reviewed a minimum of once a year. We will additionally review this Policy following every serious safeguarding incident.

2. TERMS OF REFERENCE

"Child" refers to anyone under the age of 18 years. This policy applies to all children whether they are a visitor, participant, work experience placement student or other.

"Child Protection" literally means protecting children from abuse and neglect, whereas **"safeguarding"** widens practice around their needs to encompass creating an environment where the welfare of children and young people is actively promoted. Promoting welfare is about helping children and young people achieve their potential and ensuring that they are safe and adequately cared for. **"Safeguarding"** is the term adopted by Ministry of Stories.

"Vulnerable adult" means a person aged 18 or over who has a condition of the following type a) a learning or physical disability; b) a physical or mental illness, chronic or otherwise, including an addiction to alcohol or drugs; or c) a reduction in physical or mental capacity.

"Disclosure of abuse" is the statement a child, young person or vulnerable adult makes to another person that describes abuse. Further details relating to this can be found in Appendix 2.

"DBS Disclosure" is the term used for a check with the Disclosure and Barring Service for any past convictions held by an individual who is seeking to work with children, young people or vulnerable adults.

"Designated Safeguarding Lead" is a person who has specific responsibility for ensuring effective safeguarding procedures. Their responsibilities include acting as a source of information on child protection matters, coordinating action within the organisation and liaising with health, children's services and other agencies about suspected or actual cases of abuse.

3. PRINCIPLES

- Children's welfare is paramount.
- All children without exception have the right to protection from abuse, regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or beliefs.
- This Policy is approved and endorsed by the board of trustees.
- Children, teachers and parents must be informed of this Policy, code of behaviour and procedures.

- All concerns, and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously by trustees, staff and volunteers and responded to appropriately - this may require a referral to children's services and, in emergencies, the Police.
- The Ministry of Stories is committed to safe recruitment, selection and vetting.
- This Policy is applied alongside the Ministry of Stories' Health and Safety Policy.

4. DESIGNATED SAFEGUARDING LEADS

Rob Smith, Director (Designated Safeguarding Lead)

rob@ministryofstories.org

020 7729 4159 | 079 6771 4238

Laura Perkins, Deputy Director (Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead)

laura@ministryofstories.org

020 7729 4159 | 07887 601505

Rebecca Hanna-Grindall, Chair (Safeguarding Champion for the Ministry of Stories Board)

rebecca.hanna-grindall@southbankcentre.co.uk

07730 528 059

The Designated Safeguarding Lead will have overall responsibility for the direction of this Policy and securing resources for effective implementation. The Designated Safeguarding Lead will report to the Business and Programme Sub Committee of the Board quarterly including 'near misses'.

The Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead will support the overall implementation of this Policy and be the point of contact for complaints or concerns in the absence of the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

The Safeguarding Champion for the Ministry of Stories Board will oversee the implementation of this Policy, this will include reviewing the safeguarding incident log quarterly and providing assurances to the wider Board. They will also act as the first point of contact for a complaint or concern about the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Role of the Designated Safeguarding Lead:

- To be the first internal point of contact in the case of a report about the Code of Behaviour being breached.
- To make arrangements for the conduct of inquiries when there has been a breach of the Code of Behaviour.
- To report suspicions and allegations of child abuse to the statutory authorities where necessary, i.e., Children's Social Care and the Police.
- To liaise between Ministry of Stories staff, children and the statutory authorities where necessary.
- To create and maintain links with the statutory authorities and other relevant agencies and resources groups.

- To provide support to any victim, volunteer, or employee making a referral and also to the person against whom the allegation has been made.
- To advise the organisation, members, or staff on individual cases as necessary and appropriate.
- To advise on good practice.
- To organise and/or facilitate training and workshops on guidelines in child protection.
- To keep up to date on current developments regarding provision, practice, support services, legal obligations/requirements and policy.
- To keep records in compliance with Data Protection Act requirements.

5. DBS DISCLOSURE REQUIREMENTS

The Ministry of Stories is committed to safely recruiting, training and supporting staff, freelance contractors and volunteers in a manner that prioritises the safeguarding of children.

5.1 Employees

Enhanced DBS disclosure is required for all employees of the Ministry of Stories. DBS certificates will be checked annually via the update service.

5.2 Freelance Contractors and Volunteers

Enhanced DBS disclosure is required for all freelance contractors and volunteers of the Ministry of Stories. DBS certificates will be checked annually via the update service, or renewed within two years. We will accept DBS certificates processed by a third party organisation where the original has been viewed, checked and recorded alongside personal ID. It is the responsibility of the Volunteer Administrator to identify when this is necessary by use of the database. DBS disclosure forms are scanned and saved on the database in order to ensure confidentiality. This allows us to provide individual forms to third parties, such as schools, upon formal request. Additionally we require details of two referees. Freelance contractors and volunteers are also requested to provide their passport in order that we can verify their right to volunteer/work within the UK. Any visa limitations such as expiry date or maximum hours are noted on the database.

5.3 Trustees

Enhanced DBS disclosure is required for all trustees of the Ministry of Stories, and should be obtained before that trustee has access to sensitive data or unsupervised access to children. Repeat DBS disclosures will be required every two years for trustees who are not registered on the update service.

6. SAFER RECRUITMENT PROCEDURE

6.1 Pre-employment Checks

The requirement for Enhanced DBS disclosure will be clearly stated in the recruitment advertisement. The line manager will coordinate an application for DBS disclosure with the

new employee at the offer stage and best efforts will be made to ensure that clearance is received before the start date.

6.2 Application Form

Applicants will be asked to give a full account of their employment history and any voluntary experience on their application form, giving details of posts, names, addresses and contact numbers and reasons for leaving. The form must be signed and dated confirming that the information is true, that the candidate gives permission for the Ministry of Stories to approach previous employers, and that there is nothing in the applicant's personal or professional background that would preclude them from working with children. While electronic applications are accepted by the organisation, candidates must be able to produce signed copies at interview.

6.3 Disclosure of Criminal Convictions/Prosecutions

Applicants will be asked to declare all convictions/prosecutions whether spent or otherwise in the application form. Any disclosures will be treated in strict confidence. The information disclosed will not necessarily disqualify the application. The DSL will make a decision as to whether the information disclosed is relevant to the post. Applicants will have the opportunity to speak to the DSL, in confidence, about this aspect of the recruitment process should they wish to do so.

6.4 Interview

At least one member of the senior management team will be trained in Safer Recruitment practices. Selected candidates will be interviewed by a panel in accordance with the usual recruitment procedures. Applicants will be asked to account for any gaps on their application forms and to give details of any time not in employment or volunteering.

6.5 Verification of Identity

Applicants must be able to produce a document at the offer stage that can confirm their full name, date of birth and signature. Candidates also need to be able to produce a document that confirms their right to work in the UK as part of the Ministry of Stories' recruitment checks.

6.7 References

When a provisional offer of employment is made and assuming the applicant has work or volunteer experience, at least two references will be requested. One of these must be the applicant's most recent employer or voluntary role.

7. TRAINING, SUPPORT AND MONITORING FOR STAFF, FREELANCE CONTRACTORS AND VOLUNTEERS

7.1 Staff, Freelance Contractors and Long-term Volunteers

Line managers will ensure that every new staff member, freelance contractor and volunteer:

- Receives a copy of this Safeguarding Policy
- Understands the Code of Behaviour (Appendix 1)
- Receives training and guidance in relation to children, vulnerable adults and families during their induction
- Is provided with a regular and appropriate level of supervision, support and review of work practice, according to their role in the organisation
- Receives a safeguarding update annually, and access to an annual refresher training

7.2 One-off or Sessional Volunteers, Writers and Artists

Writers and artists will be contracted. Volunteers doing one-off or sessional work will be issued with an information pack. All will be required to sign a copy of the Code of Behaviour.

All volunteers will agree to abide by the Ministry of Stories' Safeguarding Policy.

7.3 Designated Safeguarding Leads

In addition to the Safeguarding training and guidance provided to all staff, Designated Safeguarding Leads and Deputies will:

- Receive Safeguarding Lead training during their induction delivered by the NSPCC or equivalent
- Receive refresher Safeguarding Lead training delivered by the NSPCC or equivalent every two years
- Complete Safer Recruitment training (Designated lead and at least one deputy)

8. DISCLOSURES AND SUSPECTED ABUSE

All children and young people in our programmes should know that they have a right to be and feel safe. They should know where they can get support, and who they can talk to if they feel they need to.

Programme managers inform the children of their right to feel safe as part of their first introduction with the organisation - typically at the first session of each term. We also share a 'What to expect at Ministry' document with parents / their children before they start also containing this information. Children are advised that they can talk to the programme leader or any other adult if they have any concerns.

Information is displayed around the workshop space about free and confidential support services for children and young people.

Children, young people and vulnerable adults can be abused either through someone inflicting harm or failing to act to prevent harm. It is not always easy to recognise abuse,

which can take many forms. Appendix 2 provides guidance on what to look for. However, if you have any concerns relating to the treatment of a child, your first point of contact should be the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

The Ministry of Stories has a Designated Safeguarding Lead to deal with disclosures of abuse. However, if a child, young person or vulnerable adult discloses abuse to you, you have certain responsibilities and guidance on how to deal with such situations is detailed in Appendix 2.

9. CONFIDENTIALITY

All children, young people and adults are entitled to privacy and confidentiality of personal information. However, when there are concerns about the safety or welfare of a child, young person or vulnerable adult, those concerns and the necessary personal information will need to be shared with relevant authorities who can act to safeguard that child, young person or vulnerable adult.

10. BULLYING

The Ministry of Stories promotes an environment where all children and young people are treated appropriately and with respect and does not condone bullying inflicted on or by children or young people. This is classed as emotional abuse.

11. PHOTOGRAPHY & FILMING

Photography and filming allows children and young people, families, schools and Ministry of Stories to celebrate and record the achievements of young writers. But children and their parents and carers should be able to make free and informed decisions about whether and how their image will be taken and shared.

Ministry of Stories will explain how photographs and film footage will be taken and used. Ministry of Stories will explain the potential risks of sharing images of children, including that once published it may not be possible to delete them. All photographs and film footage of children and young people participating in Ministry of Stories projects will be obtained with the child's, parent's or carer's (and, where relevant, school's) written permission. The images will be kept securely on a password-protected server that is only accessible to members of the Ministry of Stories' staff team.

Photography and filming in public events with large numbers of participants will only be allowed with clear signage in place to inform the public that if they enter the space they are agreeing to the possibility of being photographed or filmed.

Photography and filming when chosen for publication should provide a respectful image of children and vulnerable adults. Imagery chosen should always be clear, dignified, authentic

and balanced. Imagery should avoid revealing identifying information about individual children.

Any photographers taking photographs of children for Ministry of Stories should sign a self-disclosure form and an agreement regarding ownership, use and storage of photos.

12. CONSENT

Before a child attends our community writing programme sessions, their parent / guardian is required to complete our registration process. Information supplied during the registration process is used to register the child with our programme, to understand their needs and to keep them safe while in our care, and to promote and evaluate the performance of our programme.

Children attending our programmes are re-registered every year to ensure all contact and health information is kept up to date.

13. DIGITAL AND ONLINE PROJECTS

Where initiating digital projects involving children, special care should be taken to minimise the risks of:

- bullying
- exposure to inappropriate or harmful content
- involvement in illegal content
- posting of personal information that could identify or locate the child offline
- theft of personal information
- sexual exploitation or abuse through exposure to strangers online

"Children should be just as clear about what is expected of them online as offline".

Protective action to minimise these risks could include using child-friendly filters on search facilities, ensuring that sites clearly signpost their content and who it is appropriate for, ensuring that site advertising is suitable for children, limiting opportunities for posting personal details or photos, restricting personal information given for registration purposes, ensuring safety advice is prominent and available in a child-friendly format, confirming that content moderation is in place on interactive sites, chat rooms etc and checking that there are clear procedures for reporting incidents or complaints. Further guidance and advice can be sourced through <http://www.childnet-int.org>.

14. WORKING WITH PARTNERSHIP ORGANISATIONS

Ministry of Stories often works in partnership with external organisations such as schools and youth groups.

When working in partnership, whether on site or in a partner setting, the school/youth group are responsible for the protection of the children in their care and must follow their own Child Protection policy.

The 'supervising adult', usually a teacher, youth worker or member of support staff, is therefore the Designated Safeguarding Lead for the participants and should always be present at the sessions. This should be clearly articulated in a contract or partnership agreement.

15. PREVENT

Prevent is part of the UK's Counter Terrorism Strategy known as CONTEST. Even very young children may be vulnerable to radicalisation by others, whether in the family or outside, and display concerning behaviour. If a child shows changes in behaviour which could indicate that they may be in need of help or protection that indicates they may be at risk of radicalisation, staff should refer this to the DSL. See [governmental guidance](#) for more details.

16. LOST CHILD POLICY

If a child is separated from their parent/carer or supervising adult onsite, not collected at the end of the visit, or unsure where to meet their parent/carer, the following procedures should be followed. A child should never be left alone at the Ministry of Stories centre, and no child should be allowed to leave at the end of a session unless parental permission has been given for the child to travel alone.

16.1. Management of After School / Weekend Sessions

A nominated volunteer or staff member is always on duty by the entrance to our writing centre, to welcome children, sign them in and establish what time they will be picked up and by whom. When adults arrive to collect children, the nominated volunteer or staff member will check that they are the named adult and fetch the child. If it is a different adult, the child should be asked to identify them. If there is doubt, a volunteer or staff member will phone the child's parent or carer to check.

16.2. School Visits on Site at Ministry of Stories

A contact mobile phone number for the lead teacher will be taken in case of any child from the group being missing. School staff remain responsible for the children in their care, and for contacting parents and carers.

17. DATA AND RECORD KEEPING

The Deputy Director is responsible for the management of data relating to employees, volunteers and those on internship placements. They also oversee management of records

of DBS disclosures for volunteers and staff members as well as personal details for children and vulnerable adults participating in the Ministry of Stories' activities.

17.1 Management of DBS Disclosure Information

The Ministry of Stories complies fully with the DBS Code of Practice, Data Protection Act 2018 and other relevant legislation pertaining to the correct handling, use, storage, retention and disposal of Disclosures and Disclosure information.

- **Storage and access:** Disclosure information is kept securely on our password-protected server, with access strictly controlled and limited to those who are entitled to see it as part of their duties.
- **Usage:** Disclosure information is only used for the specific purpose for which it was requested and for which the applicant's full consent has been given.
- **Retention:** Once a recruitment (or other relevant) decision has been made, the Ministry of Stories does not keep Disclosure information for any longer than is necessary. This is generally for a period of up to twelve months, to allow for the consideration and resolution of any disputes or complaints.
- **Disposal:** Once the retention period has elapsed, the Ministry of Stories will ensure that all copies of Disclosure information are destroyed by secure means. While awaiting destruction, Disclosure information will be kept secure. The Ministry of Stories may keep a record of the date of issue of a Disclosure, the name of the subject, the type of Disclosure requested, the position for which the Disclosure was requested, the unique reference number of the Disclosure and the details of the recruitment decision taken.

17.2 Management of Personal Information on Children or Vulnerable Adults

All personal information relating to children participating in Ministry of Stories projects must be kept securely in a password-protected folder or on our database (Salesforce) that only designated members of the Ministry of Stories team can access. Personal information will be kept in line with our UK GDPR Policy.

18. BREACHES OF THE CODE OF BEHAVIOUR BY STAFF, FREELANCE CONTRACTORS AND VOLUNTEERS

18.1 Allegations Involving Staff

Any breaches of the Code of Behaviour will be raised with the individual concerned. In the case of staff, serious breaches of the code or policy will be dealt with under the disciplinary procedure and could result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

18.2 Allegations Involving Freelance Contractors

In the case of freelance contractors, serious breaches of the code or policy will be dealt with under the terms of the contract of employment, and could result in the termination of the contract.

18.2 Allegations Involving Volunteers

In the case of volunteers, serious breaches of the code or policy will be dealt with under the complaints against volunteers' procedure in the Volunteer Policy and could result in disciplinary action up to and including a termination of the volunteering relationship.

18.3 Procedure for Allegations Involving a Member of Staff / Freelance Contractor / Volunteer

If you have a safeguarding complaint or concern you can speak to the primary Designated Safeguarding Lead. The Designated Safeguarding Lead will seek advice from the MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) and follow up any further referrals or actions as agreed.

If the allegation relates to the Designated Safeguarding Lead, the complaint or concern should be reported to the nominated Safeguarding Champion Trustee.

Any allegation will be investigated confidentially to protect the rights of the person against whom allegations have been made. Investigations will be carried out quickly to see whether a prima facie case (accepted as correct unless proved otherwise) is established. If so, the issue will be handled according to the disciplinary procedure.

If not, the complainant will be told the outcome of the investigation and that the matter will not be taken any further. The individual will retain the right to pursue the matter under the complaints procedure, or grievance procedure as appropriate.

Following a complaint, the handling of the complaint will be subject to a review by an independent, external third party to ensure that all complaints are dealt with in line with best possible practice. During the course of such a review, all names and identifying details will be removed.

18.4 Referral to DBS

Ministry of Stories has a legal duty to refer a staff member to DBS if we have dismissed them because they harmed a child or vulnerable adult, or might have harmed one – or if we were planning to dismiss them, but they resigned first. More information here: <https://www.gov.uk/report-unfit-work-children-vulnerable-adults>.

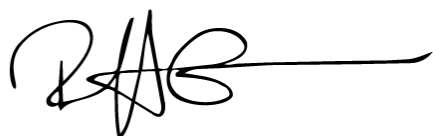
This is not necessarily about whether something was proved in court but that we, as an employer, felt that their conduct warranted dismissal subject to our internal investigation processes.

We would make the referral in accordance with this guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dbs-referrals-form-and-guidance/dbs-paper-referral-form-guidance>

This Policy was last reviewed in May 2026

This Policy statement should be read alongside our organisational policies, procedures, guidance and other related documents.

Updated policy approved by the Board and signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized initials 'RHG' followed by a long horizontal line.

Rebecca Hanna-Grindall, Chair

Date: May 2026

To be reviewed annually. Date of next review: May 2027

APPENDIX 1: STAFF, FREELANCE CONTRACTOR AND VOLUNTEER CODE OF BEHAVIOUR

We expect everyone working with children and young people in a paid or voluntary capacity for the Ministry of Stories to look at the way they operate and to take every possible precaution to safeguard children and to avoid situations that could be misinterpreted or lead to false allegations of abuse.

By setting out appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, this code helps to protect children and also staff, freelance contractors and volunteers.

Conduct with Children and Young People

- Freelance Writing Facilitators in external settings and volunteers are not expected to be solely responsible for managing behaviour; ensure that a supervising adult is present at all times.
- Respect a child's right to personal privacy.
- Encourage children and adults to feel comfortable enough to point out attitudes and behaviour they do not like.
- Be aware of situations that present risks and manage these situations to minimise risk.
- Ensure that language, conversation and materials are appropriate when working with, talking to or within hearing distance of children or young people.
- Remember that the child or young person might not know the context of a flippant, overheard remark.
- Always treat children and young people equally and with respect and dignity. Their welfare must always be put before achieving the goals of the project, performance or placement.
- Recognise that caution is required for one-to-one situations, even in sensitive situations such as dealing with bullying or when children are very upset.
- Avoid being left alone with a single child or young person. Plan your time with them to be in open plan space, or with other colleagues; avoid private or unobserved situations.
- Where it is possible, ask parents/guardians/carers to be responsible for children - this would typically only apply in community settings.
- Provide feedback that is constructive and, where possible, enthusiastic.
- Do not initiate any physical contact with children or young people. If a child or young person initiates any physical contact (e.g. approaches you for a hug) deflect them where possible (e.g. offer them a hand to shake).
- Only physically restrain a child or young person if it becomes absolutely essential in order to prevent the infliction of injury to the child or young person or others
- Do not make sexually suggestive comments in any context in the presence of a child.
- Never shout at a child or young person.
- Avoid showing favouritism to any individual and never give gifts.
- Avoid providing personal care for others (such as managing their toilet needs or eating) unless it is necessary in an emergency. If you have to, try to ensure another adult is present.
- Do not permit peer on peer behaviours, such as bullying.

- If you suspect that a child or young person is being abused in any way (including if they make a disclosure of abuse to you, or you suspect abuse), follow the procedure set out in [Appendix 2 of the Safeguarding Policy].
- When working on a project, performance or placement with a child or young person, do not give your personal mobile phone number or other personal details, or exchange social networking contacts (e.g. Facebook friends).
- Ministry of Stories may have signed permissions to photograph / record certain children or young people within good practice guidelines. Please refer to the lead staff member at the Ministry of Stories if you are considering this.
- Ministry of Stories will find a structured way to keeping contact with the child or young person after the project is over and communicate it to all involved. If a child or young person makes contact with you after the project, or you want to get in touch with them, please discuss this with Ministry of Stories staff.
- If you feel any way uncomfortable about the behaviour of a student please discuss this with the supervising adult.

Conduct with other Adults (including Ministry of Stories employees, freelance contractors and school/setting staff)

- Know who the supervising adult is when working directly with students.
- Ensure that you and all other adults know your specific roles and responsibilities.
- Be professional and treat other adults with respect.
- Agree the use of school/setting/Ministry of Stories and personal equipment and materials in advance.

Buildings and workspaces

- Please sign in and out of the premises where requested.
- Please wear a visitors badge at all times where requested.
- Be aware of where emergency exits are and procedures for evacuation.
- Report any breakages or accidents to the supervising adult.
- Any equipment or work in progress that needs to be stored on premises during the project must be highlighted to all staff and appropriate arrangements made.
- Always use staff toilets and rooms.
- Do not smoke on school/setting premises or when with a group of students.

General

- Value and respect different racial origins, special needs, sexual orientations, genders, religions and cultures.
- Do not promote your own political or religious beliefs.
- Be aware of how your online activity or social media presence may be perceived from a professional perspective or if seen by students.
- Consider environmental impact when planning or undertaking any sessions. Aim to keep these to a minimum when planning the use of materials, equipment and transport.
- Have the hard copy of your DBS certificate along with photo ID with you at all times (freelance contractors)
- Strive to plan and deliver work that meets the needs of all learners.

The above guidelines apply equally to any off site visits or activities with children and young people.

Failure to comply with this Code of Behaviour may result in disciplinary action under our disciplinary and complaints procedure and may result in action up to and including the termination of your employment, contract or volunteer role.

APPENDIX 2 – RECOGNISING ABUSE AND HOW TO DEAL WITH A DISCLOSURE AND SUSPECTED ABUSE

Recognising Abuse

Children and young people can be abused either through someone inflicting harm, or failing to act to prevent harm. Any child from any culture, faith or background can be at risk from abuse. Abuse can take place in a family, in an institution or community setting, by telephone or on the internet. Abuse can be carried out by someone known to the child or by a complete stranger.

It is not always easy to recognise abuse and many of the indicators listed can have reasonable explanations and are not necessarily down to abuse.

Physical Abuse

May involve hitting, shaking, throwing, burning, scalding and suffocating as well as other forms of physical abuse. It can also result when a parent or carer deliberately cause ill health of a child. This is described as fabricated or induced illness.

Signs that can indicate physical abuse include:

- Bruising in or around the mouth, eyes, back or buttocks
- Scars of different sizes and ages or large scars from untreated injury
- Fractures to arms, legs or ribs in a small child
- Burns and scald marks with clear outlines, small round burns that might be caused by a cigarette
- Bites
- Fingermark bruising or grasp mark on the limbs of a small child

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse happens when a child's need for love, security, praise and recognition are not met. It usually coexists with other forms of abuse, but can occur alone. Emotionally abusive behaviour occurs if a parent, carer or authority figure is consistently hostile, rejecting, threatening or undermining. Children who witness or experience domestic abuse are subject to emotional abuse.

Signs can include:

- Excessively clingy or attention seeking behaviour
- Very low self esteem
- Fearfulness or excessively withdrawn behaviour
- Despondency
- Constantly seeking to please
- Lack of appropriate boundaries with strangers
- Anxiety
- Eating disorders/various mental health problems

Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and or psychological needs, causing damage to their health and development. It may include a parent or carer failing to

provide adequate food, warmth, shelter, clothing or stimulation. It includes failure to protect a child from harm or danger or failure to seek medical care where needed.

Signs can include:

- Inadequate supervision, being left alone for long periods of time.
- Lack of stimulation, social contact or education
- Inadequate nutrition
- A child who is constantly hungry, stealing or gorging food
- Failure to provide adequate standards of personal hygiene, clothing and comfort in the home.
- Failure to seek or follow medical advice so that a child's life or development is endangered.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or coercing a child or young person to take part in sexual activity whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. This may also include physical contact, from inappropriate touching to full penetration, and also non-contact activity such as looking at pornography. Under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, sexual activity with any child under the age of 16 is a crime.

Signs of sexual abuse can include:

- Genital soreness or discomfort
- STDs, urinary infections
- Sexualised play or behaviour
- A child who is being sexually inappropriate towards adults (e.g. provocative or seductive)
- Nightmares or other disturbances
- Eating disorders
- Going missing from home / school
- Self-harm
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Depression and other forms of mental health problems

Abuse based on cultural beliefs

Some individuals hold beliefs that may be common within particular cultures but are against the law. The Ministry of Education does not condone any practices that are harmful to children and employees should contact a DSL if they are aware of any of the following:

- **Forced Marriages:** No faith supports the idea of forcing someone to marry without consent. This should not be confused with an arranged marriage between two consenting adults.
- **Under-age Marriages:** In England and Wales currently a young person cannot legally marry until they are 16. Marriages of 16- and 17-year-olds can be coerced by family and may represent a safeguarding concern.
- **Age of Consent:** In the UK the age of consent for sexual relationships is 16. Underage sexual relationships may be caused by abuse and exploitation. **Female Circumcision / Female Genital Mutilation:** This is a form of physical abuse and is against the law,

although some communities see it as a cultural requirement. This is an extremely harmful and dangerous practice that carries a severe penalty of imprisonment. It is also illegal for someone to arrange for a child to go abroad with the intention of having her circumcised.

- Ritualistic Abuse: Some people believe that spirits and demons can possess children and that they need to be driven out. Physical violence or other abusive practices in response to this belief is unlawful and harmful to children.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment, such as sexual comments, remarks, jokes and online sexual harassment, which may be stand-alone or part of a broader pattern of abuse.

Upskirting, which typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without them knowing, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress or alarm.

Sexting (also known as youth produced sexual imagery) and initiation/hazing type violence and rituals.

Serious Violence

This policy focuses emphasis and awareness on the requirement to refer children to the joint targeted area inspection team (JTAI)

- who are at risk of, or who are experiencing sexual exploitation
- who are at risk of, or who are experiencing criminal exploitation

Contextual Safeguarding

Contextual safeguarding is about considering an individual or cohort of children and identifying who may be influencing them and the degree of that influence at any given stage of their development.

RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURES OF ABUSE AND SUSPECTED ABUSE

1. WHAT TO DO IF A CHILD DISCLOSES ABUSE

- Keep calm
- Look at the child directly.
- Listen to the child and closely observe their presentation and behaviour
- Accept what the child says.
- Be aware that the child may have been threatened.
- Reassure the child and tell them they are not to blame.
- Do not press for information.
- Reassure the child they are right to tell you and that you take what they say very seriously.
- Do not attempt to question or interview the child as this could jeopardise a police investigation.
- Do not promise to keep the information they have disclosed a secret.
- Let them know what you are going to do next, who you are going to tell and why, and roughly what will happen.
- Finish on a positive note by reassuring the child.
- As soon as possible afterwards, make hand written notes of exactly what the child said and the date and time and sign this record. Where possible, you should use the Incident Reporting Form.

2. WHAT YOU SHOULD DO NEXT:

Inform the Writing Facilitator or Designated Safeguarding Lead of your concerns immediately.

Reporting suspicions or disclosures of abuse:

a) Ministry of Stories-led activity

If at a Ministry of Stories-led activity, for example, on site at our regular Community Writing Labs or Holiday Programmes, the first point of contact will be the Writing Facilitator or Ministry of Stories Designated Safeguarding Lead.

b) School settings

If in a school setting then the school's supervising adult, usually the class teacher, will be the first point of reference, usually via the Writing Facilitator and/or the Project Manager.

c) Community settings

If in a community setting then the community centre's named Designated Safeguarding Lead will be the first point of reference, usually via the Writing Facilitator.

In ALL cases, any suspicions or disclosures must ALSO be reported to:

Rob Smith – Designated Safeguarding Lead:

rob@ministryofstories.org

020 8709 5295 | 07967 714238

You should only discuss disclosures or suspected abuse with the relevant people identified above, and you should not discuss them with others.

3. WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT

The Designated Safeguarding Lead will consult with the relevant bodies to discuss what action, if any, should be taken. This may include a decision to inform the relevant local authority MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) of the disclosure. MASH will liaise with the relevant departments on a need-to-know basis and will, if appropriate, inform the police. It is the responsibility of the authorities to determine whether abuse has occurred.

Contact Details

HACKNEY

Hackney MASH

Tel: 020 8356 5500 (MON to FRI: 9am - 5pm)

Hackney MASH - Out of Hours

Tel: 020 8356 55166 (Out of hours, bank holidays or weekends)

Email: MASH@hackney.gov.uk

Web: hackney.gov.uk/child-protection

TOWER HAMLETS

Tower Hamlets MASH

Tel: 020 7364 5006 option 3 (MON to FRI: 9am - 5pm)

Tower Hamlets MASH - Out of Hours

Tel: 020 7364 4079 (Out of hours, bank holidays or weekends)

Email: Mash@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Web:

www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/health_social_care/children_and_family_care/Multi-Agency-Safeguarding-Hub-MASH.aspx

NSPCC Helpline on **0808 800 5000**

Police **999** (emergency). **101** (non emergency)

Whistleblowing

In the event that any member of staff, trustee or volunteer suspects any other member of staff, trustee or volunteer of abusing a child or young person, it is their responsibility to bring these concerns to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Should there be a concern whilst on a school premises, staff, trustees or volunteers can also contact the NSPCC's helpline: [NSPCC's website](https://www.nspcc.org.uk). Staff can also call 0800 028 0285 from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday or email help@nspcc.org.uk

4. SUMMARY OF THE COURSE OF ACTION:

If there are any concerns that a child may be at risk of immediate harm, the police should be contacted by dialling 999.

In all other instances, the course of action is:

1. Record Incident or Concern (see Appendix 3 – Incident Reporting)
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Who? > Staff member, freelance contractor, volunteer or intern
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2. Report incident to Supervising Adult / Designated Safeguarding Lead (School or Community)

AND Designated Safeguarding Lead (Ministry of Stories - Rob Smith, Director)

Who? > Staff member, freelance contractor, volunteer or intern
--

3. Contact the Hackney - MASH (020 8356 5500) or that of the relevant Local Authority
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Who? > Designated Safeguarding Lead (School, Community or Ministry of Stories)
--

4. No further action required OR advised to refer to relevant body (Social Services, Police, Health Professional etc)
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Who? > Designated Safeguarding Lead (School, Community or Ministry of Stories)
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APPENDIX 3: INCIDENT REPORTING FORM

Date:

Time:

Place:

Type of incident, e.g. disturbance, disclosure, theft, accident:

Staff and/or volunteer involved:

Persons involved in the incident **(including full name, address and date of birth where known)**:

Description of incident – include the time, those involved, clearly and logically:

Name and addresses of witnesses:

Action taken:

Prepared by:

Date:

Signature: