

GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN FOR VOLUNTEERS ON STUDENT-LED PROJECTS

Purpose

Students' Union UCL Volunteering Service is committed to the safeguarding of children and young people who participate in activities that we support.

This handout gives important information on how to safeguard children. If you are a volunteer on a Student-Led Projects, please make sure you read it thoroughly. If you have any questions, please speak to your project leader or get in touch with any member of the [Student-Led Projects team directly](#).

Our full policy is available on our [webpages](#).

Definitions

We use the term 'child' to refer to anyone under the age of 18. Your project might use a different term, such as 'young person' or 'school student'. If your volunteering brings you into contact with anyone under 18, you must familiarise yourself with this guidance.

Before you start volunteering

You must get a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check if your project requires you to do so. The Volunteering Service will process this application for you. You can find information on how to apply for a DBS check at studentsunionucl.org/volunteering/get-started/what-happens-next/DBS-checks

You will be unable to volunteer on the project until the Volunteering Service have seen your DBS Certificate.

If you are working with children or young people you must attend the Volunteering Service's 'Volunteering with Children' training.

Your behaviour

You must:

- Respect the rights, sensitivities, culture and worth of all children participating in the project.
- Place the well-being and safety of the children you work with above any educational or other objective.
- Be publicly open when working with children. Avoid situations where you and an individual child are completely unobserved. For one-to-one meetings, keep the meeting room door ajar. Make sure that staff at the school or project are aware of where and when one-to-one meetings take place.

- If physical contact is necessary, do so openly, e.g. while coaching a child. Avoid situations where actions may be misinterpreted.
- Establish clear boundaries and let children know if their behaviour or language is inappropriate, in consultation with a teacher or other relevant staff member.

You must not:

- Allow or engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games, including horseplay.
- Allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching.
- Allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged.
- Make sexually suggestive comments about or to a child, even in fun.
- Allow allegations made by a child to go unchallenged or unrecorded.
- Do things of a personal nature for children that they can do for themselves.
- Invite or allow children to visit or stay at your home.
- Exchange personal contact details, e.g. Home address, telephone number, email address with any of the children that you are working with.
- Agree to keep a secret or promise with a child.
- Indulge in over-enthusiastic physical contact, e.g. Face-to-face hugging or kisses.
- Show favouritism to children.
- Ignore abuse of younger or weaker children by older or stronger children through bullying or other cruel or humiliating behaviour.
- Interact with children via your personal social media accounts – for example, you should not become a child's 'friend' on Facebook. Do not invite children to link with you on social media nor accept invites from children.

Under the Sexual Offences Act (2003) it is an offence for a person in a position of trust to have any form of sexual contact or to conduct a sexual relationship with a child, even if the relationship appears to be consensual and the child is over the age of 16.

Confidentiality

- In general, you should not share information (such as names of children or information they may have imparted) with anyone who does not need to know – and certainly with no one outside the project.
- Project leaders who have written information about children on their project – such as registration forms or data consent slips – must take these documents to the Volunteering Service or the Community Partner as soon as possible where they will be securely stored. Such information – including names and contact details – must not be passed onto any third party.
- Any digital information should be stored securely on password protected files on secure servers.
- Although information shared between volunteers and children on the project is confidential, volunteers should not promise children to keep secrets.
- If a child discloses a safeguarding concern to a volunteer, we may have to breach their confidentiality in order to protect them from harm.
- Do not take photos of children unless written permission has been given by their parents / guardians. The Volunteering Service can provide guidance, and employs photographers who you can book to take photographs of your activities.

Recognising Abuse

You may not be sufficiently familiar with working with vulnerable groups to be 100% confident in recognising abuse, but you may come across something which concerns you or just 'does not seem quite right'. Abuse can take different forms and includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse as well as neglect and bullying. Abuse can have serious and long term effects in terms of development, health and wellbeing including to self-esteem and self-image.

Some common signs that there may be something concerning happening in a child's life include:

- Unexplained changes in behaviour or personality
- Becoming withdrawn
- Seeming anxious
- Becoming uncharacteristically aggressive
- Lacks social skills and has few friends, if any
- Poor bond or relationship with a parent
- Knowledge of adult issues inappropriate for their age
- Running away or going missing

- Always choosing to wear clothes which cover their body.

The NSPCC has further information on recognising abuse at www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/spotting-signs-child-abuse/

Handling Allegations

- be supportive, but DO NOT promise confidentiality - explain to the person there are some things you would have to tell someone else about in order to help;
- remain calm and take the person seriously;
- reassure the person that they have done the right thing by telling someone;
- use language the vulnerable person understands;
- do not ask leading questions or express any opinions about what you are told;
- explain to the person what will happen next (i.e. you will need to contact someone else about what they have told you);
- Write down immediately afterwards what was said, including the time, place and any other observations. Sign and date the record;
- Pass on your concerns and the written details immediately to the appropriate person;
- Do not attempt to investigate the allegation yourself;
- Do not discuss what you have been told with anyone other than the appropriate officer;

Remember that you may need to seek advice and support for yourself to cope with what you have heard or seen. Please speak to the Volunteering Service so we can help arrange support for you.

Other things to report

You should also let the safeguarding lead at the partner organisation – or the Volunteering Service – know if any of the following things happen:

- There is a concern that a relationship is developing which may be an abuse of trust.
- You are worried that a vulnerable person is becoming attracted to you.
- You are worried that a vulnerable person is becoming attracted to a colleague who supervises or works with them.
- You think a vulnerable person has misunderstood or misinterprets something you have done.
- You have been required to physically restrain a vulnerable person to prevent them from harming themselves or another or from causing significant damage to property.
- You have concerns about safeguarding practice or about more general health and safety.

If a vulnerable person is accidentally hurt whilst they are under your supervision or care, you should report the incident as quickly as possible to the Project Leader.

Recording allegations or suspicions of abuse

In any case where an allegation is made, or a volunteer has a safeguarding concern, a record should be made. You should do this as soon as possible.

Here is a check list of examples of details to note and questions you could ask yourself in making such a record. *Please note that you DO NOT HAVE TO ask these questions, they are examples only!*

- Name of child
- Age
- Any special factors
- Name of parent/s
- Home address and phone numbers if available
- Are you expressing your own concerns or passing on those of somebody else?
- What has prompted the concerns? Include dates, times, etc. of any specific incidents.
- Any physical signs? Behavioural signs? Indirect signs?
- Has anything been alleged to be the abuser? If so, record details.
- Has anyone else been consulted? If so, record details.

Keep your notes clear and concise

Use straight-forward language, and use the child's own words where you can.

Report facts only, not your opinions or allegations.
You should sign and date your record.

Reporting your concerns

It is not up to you to make a judgment about whether abuse has occurred; this is the remit of Social Services. However, you have a duty to report any concerns. You should not assume that someone else will report the concern.

In most instances, you should report your concerns to the Safeguarding Lead at the community partner organisation (for example the school) where your project takes place. If you're unsure who this is, please contact the Volunteering Service.

The Safeguarding lead will then respond to your concern in line with their own safeguarding policy.

If you're unhappy with their response, or you do not wish to raise the concern with the Safeguarding Lead directly, please do contact us at the Volunteering Service.

Whatever you do, you should contact the Volunteering Service to let us know you have raised a concern. We will not necessarily need to know the particular details of the issue you've raised. We will be able to offer you support.

Useful Numbers

Students' Union UCL Volunteering Service 020 3549 5341 or volunteering@ucl.ac.uk

Your Project Leader or the Volunteering Service can tell you who the Safeguarding Lead on your project is.

NSPCC helpline 0808 800 5000 or help@nspcc.org.uk

Childline 0800 1111 or online 24 hours a day at www.childline.org.uk

Camden Children's Social Care 020 7974 3317 (out of hours: 020 7974 4444)