

Healthwatch North Tyneside policies and procedures

Safeguarding children and young people

July 2026

1. Policy

Healthwatch North Tyneside (HWNT) values and encourages the involvement of young people in its work. We are committed to promoting their wellbeing ensuring the protection of their health, safety and general welfare while in the company or care of our staff or volunteers.

Protecting people and safeguarding is a priority for HWNT. We recognise that in the course of our activities, our representatives may come into contact with children who may be experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect.

Everybody has the right to be safe no matter who they are or what their circumstances. Abuse and neglect can have devastating effects on individuals, families and wider society. Protecting children from maltreatment; preventing impairment of children's health or development; ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes will permeate our conduct. A child or young person may also be unable to protect themselves from harm or exploitation due to many reasons, including their mental or physical incapacity, sensory loss or physical or learning disabilities.

Therefore, we will:

- make sure that trustees, employees, volunteers and other staff know about safeguarding and young people protection and act on concerns. They will be asked to complete safeguarding adults and children training appropriate to their role
- ensure that children and young people are safeguarded whilst working for, volunteering or interacting with us
- have appropriate procedures in place
- check that people are suitable to act in their roles
- know to spot and refer or report concerns

- have a clear system of referring or reporting to relevant organisations as soon as they suspect or identify concerns
- set out risks and how they will manage these in a risk register, which is regularly reviewed
- be quick to respond to concerns and comply with the North Tyneside safeguarding and child protection procedures, in particular the section 11 duties of the Children Act 2004, set out in the 'Shared Responsibilities' section of the procedures.
- treat failure to address safeguarding issues as a very serious matter
- in line with Charity Commission requirements, review this policy every year.

2. Guiding principles

In welcoming and working with children and young people we will:

- Provide a friendly welcome to them and promote their general welfare, maintaining a culture of listening to children and taking account of their wishes and feelings.
- Recognise their rights as individuals and treat them with dignity and respect.
- Consistently apply fair and objective methods of selecting employees, volunteers and contractors.
- Plan activities involving children and young people with care to minimise risks to their health and safety.
- Raise awareness of the dangers to which children and young people may be susceptible.
- Apply appropriate procedures for responding to incidents, allegations, suspicions or disclosures of abuse.

3. Procedure

3.1 Selection of staff, trustees and volunteers

We will take all available steps to ensure unsuitable people are prevented from working with children and young people.

A thorough selection procedure for positions, both paid and unpaid, which could involve unsupervised contact with a children or young people, will be implemented to assess a person's suitability. This includes an enhanced DBS check where relevant to the role.

Applicants for positions that may involve contact with children and young people must provide:

- Details of previous experience with children and young people, either voluntary or paid.

- Two references, one being from their current or most recent employer or, if they have no employment history, from a lecturer, teacher or other appropriate professional.
- Vetting checks
- Details of any 'unspent' convictions.
- Details of 'spent' convictions, where the role necessitates a DBS check
- Consent for a criminal record check to be undertaken.

Shortlisting will be carried out by two people and applicants for posts, whether paid or unpaid will be offered an interview at which information contained in the application form will be probed. In particular, we will question any previous job or volunteering history connected with children and young people and determine why applicants left. Any gaps in work history will be probed and motives for working with children and young people discussed fully. We reserve the right to contact referees if we have concerns about any claims made by applicants or suspicions about omissions.

Applicants will be asked to provide two forms of identification, for example a driving licence, passport, or other form of identification plus a recent utility bill. HWNT also reserves the right to carry out Right to Work checks if appropriate.

During the first 6 months a new employee or volunteer will be supervised closely, especially if they have never worked with children or young people before. They will not be left unsupervised or be working alone with children or young people over an extended period during the first 6 months.

3.2 Working with children and young people

Where children or young people are involved with HWNT as volunteers or staff, HWNT recognises that the welfare of the child or young person is paramount. That all children and young people regardless of race, gender, religious belief, disability, age, sexual orientation or identity, have a right to equal protection from harm.

HWNT is committed to:

- Providing a welcoming, secure and comfortable environment
- Keeping them safe from harm while working with other staff or volunteers
- Complying with relevant statutory requirements
- Supporting and protecting the interests of staff and volunteers who interact with children and young people in the course of their work.

3.3 Minimising risk

HWNT will identify the risks for safeguarding and how it will manage them in a risk register which is regularly reviewed.

Specific risks in relation to the safeguarding of children and young people that employees need to be aware of include:

- sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation
- negligent treatment
- physical or emotional abuse
- bullying or harassment (including cyber)
- grooming
- health and safety
- commercial exploitation
- extremism and radicalisation
- forced marriage
- child trafficking
- female genital mutilation
- discrimination on any of the grounds in the Equality Act 2010
- people may abuse a position of trust they hold

HWNT representatives must consider Health and safety requirements when planning and carrying out activities involving young people and follow HWNT's Health and Safety Policy.

In addition, when planning activities that involve children and young people, HWNT representatives must consider additional risk issues including:

- carefully planning to ensure the maximum protection is always provided.
- arrangements for supervision and support, depending on the nature of the activity, the number and age range of the people involved and whether anyone involved has any special needs
- when working with young people, at least two workers should be present to protect workers from allegations of abuse. Wherever possible, both female and male employees/volunteers should be present when working with mixed gender groups
- must be aware that some actions, no matter how well-intentioned, may be easily misinterpreted and so leave all parties vulnerable
- being alert to any potential harm or inappropriate behaviour by young people
- respect individuals' rights to privacy
- providing access for young people to discuss any concerns they may have
- In the event of an accident to an individual, first-aid should be administered, preferably by a trained first-aider and the situation managed to ensure the welfare of the individual and the safety of others.

The emergency services should be called for where appropriate. An Accident or Incident Report Form should be completed.

Employees **must not**:

- arrange to see young people in circumstances unconnected with work
- be alone for substantial periods of time with a child or young person.
Where one-to-one work is necessary you should inform a staff member where you are going, with whom and for how long
- share personal contact details, or agree to add them to personal Facebook accounts, or similar platforms
- take photos of any child or young person attending an event or activity unless prior written permission is sought from a person with parental responsibility
- permit abusive behaviour by others or engage in it yourself (such as ridiculing and bullying)
- show favouritism to, or become too closely associated with an individual
- allow or engage in suggestive remarks, gestures or touching of a kind
- promise to keep secrets
- do anything which might undermine HWNT's good reputation for providing a safe environment
- hesitate to share concerns on any of these matters with the appropriate HWNT representative.

3.4 Definitions and indicators of abuse

Abuse can take many forms: physical, sexual, emotional and neglect. The Department for education has defined them in the following way:

Physical abuse Occasions where parents, carers, staff, volunteers etc. deliberately inflict injuries or knowingly do nothing to prevent such injuries happening. This may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. This may also include where a parent or carer fabricates or induces the symptoms of an illness in a child.

Emotional abuse The persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child causing severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development, often by making them:

- feel they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person.
- age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children, causing children frequently to feel frightened.
- The exploitation or corruption of children.

Neglect The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in serious impairment of the child's health or development, such as failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing, failure to provide appropriate medical care or treatment or neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs. It is also important to note that neglect may take place during pregnancy as a result of substance misuse.

Sexual abuse Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (e.g. rape or buggery) or non-penetrative acts. They may include involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. It is important to remain mindful that sexual abuse is not only perpetrated by adult males, as women and other children also commit acts of sexual abuse.

Grooming The preparing of a young person for abuse through inappropriate language (written or verbal) images or behaviour.

Possible abuse may become apparent in several ways:

- A child or young person may tell you.
- A third party may have reported an incident or may have strong suspicion.
- You may have a suspicion that child abuse is occurring or a risk of it occurring.
- You may witness an inappropriate incident occurring.

It is the responsibility of those working for HWNT to follow all procedures where there are any concerns that child abuse may be occurring by informing the appropriate authority

3.5 Acting on concerns

HWNT's Confidentiality Policy allows personal information of an individual to be shared with the police or other safeguarding agency, when there is a risk of significant harm or abuse. Please see the policy for further details.

If you think a child is in immediate danger, call 999.

For other concerns, employees and volunteers should contact the Director or Board Safeguarding lead in the first instance. If unavailable, contact North Tyneside Council's Children Front Door in confidence on 0345 2000 109 (office hours) or (0191) 200 6800 (evenings and weekends) or make an online referral <https://my.northtyneside.gov.uk/category/488/are-you-worried-about-child>

Do not:

- Agree to keep anything 'secret'
- Panic
- Assume or guess what has happened
- Do not investigate only ask questions to ascertain what the child is telling you. The law is very strict and child abuse cases have been dismissed by courts if it appears that the child has been led into saying something
- Ask a child to show you any injuries
- Make the child repeat the story unnecessarily
- Change the language used to a more formal style when writing up the disclosure
- Delay
- Take sole responsibility for further action
- Pass judgement or make personal opinions known
- Do not discuss with parents if this will place the child in more danger
- Do not interfere with the collection of evidence or delay referral.

If you can, record accurately what the person has said using the proforma at <https://my.northtyneside.gov.uk/category/488/are-you-worried-about-child> for recording disclosures or signs of abuse witnessed. Or note the following:

1. For the child/young person:

First name

Surname

Date of birth (if known)

Siblings names and ages (if known)

The parents/guardians' names (if known)

Their address (if known)

2. The nature of your concern(s)

3. Your details:

Name and contact details.

Notify the HWNT Director or Board Safeguarding Lead, giving them the completed proforma or written information. The Director must make the Board of Trustees aware that a concern has been raised as soon as possible, though must not communicate personal details by email.

4. Other relevant policies, guidance and information

This policy should be implemented in conjunction with other policies, information and guidance:

- HWNT induction and Training Policy and Procedure
- HWNT Conduct Policy and Procedure
- HWNT Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
- HWNT Grievance Policy and Procedure
- HWNT Comments, Complaints and Compliments Policy and Procedure
- HWNT Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Procedure
- HWNT Equalities Policy
- HWNT Volunteer Policy
- HWNT Disclosure and Barring Policy
- HWNT Whistleblowing Policy
- HWNT Risk Management Policy
- North Tyneside Local Safeguarding Children Board's safeguarding and child protection procedures

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