

The Nextdoor Nature Hub

Working With Under-18s

If your group includes people under the age of 18, you need to think carefully about safeguarding. Learn about consent, risk assessments, policies and procedures in this article and video.

- Safeguarding is about ensuring everyone is kept safe from abuse and neglect.
- We must take all reasonable steps to protect the people in our care.
- Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. It applies to all groups whether you are formal (constituted) or not.

A culture of safeguarding

Whatever you're doing, everyone needs to feel safe. If you're organising an event, you have to do everything you can to make sure it's all as safe as possible. Everyone needs to be trained to spot problems, and to know what to do.

If your group has a safe, welcoming feeling, you may find that young people are more likely to open up to you or someone in your group. If an allegation is made, you have a duty to report it – see below. But this can also include cases where a young person just wants to talk about difficult things, like death or war, especially if it's in the news. You can find support and help for those tricky chats at [the NSPCC's website here](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/how-to-have-difficult-conversations-with-children?). (<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/how-to-have-difficult-conversations-with-children?>)

But also remember that you and your group are not mental health experts. Use the resources section below to make sure people can be pointed to the right help for them.

You must ensure that you have set clear boundaries and everyone is aware of them. There is a difference between being friendly – which you should be – and being friends – which is not appropriate. Think about how people can contact you. It might be best to have a separate email address for the group.

Remember, you can never promise to keep a secret. If someone tells you something which shows that someone is at risk of harm, you must act. Follow what is set out in your policies – in urgent cases when that risk of harm is immediate, phone the police.

Never allow under 11s to be unsupervised.

Never allow someone under 18 to supervise another young person.

Clearly designate which adults are responsible and make sure they are visible and easy to find. Your ratios – which means how many adults take care of how many young people – should be noted in your risk assessments.

There is no law which sets out how many adults should work with children. The NSPCC advises this:

- 4 - 8 years - one adult to six children
- 9 - 12 years - one adult to eight children
- 13 - 18 years - one adult to ten children

But there should always be at least two adults with any group, as a minimum, whatever the size of the group. If the group has boys and girls, there should be one male and one female adult, to assist with toilet visits.

All adults that will be alone with young people must be vetted appropriately, dependent on the role (see below). And a trained First Aider is recommended.

General social media advice

Make sure you have guidelines as part of your written code of conduct. These guidelines might include:

Only communicate with young people using the shared/group email address and avoid one to one contact.

Never give out personal information.

Never accept friend requests from young people.

When sharing group activities on social media, you must have consent from everyone shown. See [here for a consent form. \(https://www.nya.org.uk/safeguarding-asset/consent-form-template/\)](https://www.nya.org.uk/safeguarding-asset/consent-form-template/) There is separate [guidance on consent here. \(https://www.nya.org.uk/safeguarding-asset/informed-consent/\)](https://www.nya.org.uk/safeguarding-asset/informed-consent/) Remember that you will also need to consider the Data Protection Act if you are storing personal information. See [the ICO's website here. \(https://ico.org.uk/for-the-public/\)](https://ico.org.uk/for-the-public/)

Your policies and procedures

You should have a Safeguarding Policy and Procedure as well as a code of conduct which outlines your expected standards. The NSPCC provide templates for these, [which can be found here. \(https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/templates/example-safeguarding-policy-statement\)](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/templates/example-safeguarding-policy-statement).

Your documents will include what your policy is on working alone with young people and out of hours support.

They will also include what to do if an allegation is made – usually this is a flowchart with the responsible people named and their contact details should be up to date.

You will need separate plans, which might be called welfare plans or risk assessments, for any activities or events you want to do. This will include what to do if a child is lost, or something happens. See our related guide about [Risk Assessments online here. \(https://nextdoornaturehub.org.uk/guides/risk-assessments\)](https://nextdoornaturehub.org.uk/guides/risk-assessments) Also look at the [government's guidance on running events here. \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/can-do-guide-for-organisers-of-voluntary-events/the-can-do-guide-to-organising-and-running-voluntary-and-community-events\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/can-do-guide-for-organisers-of-voluntary-events/the-can-do-guide-to-organising-and-running-voluntary-and-community-events) and gaining consent for different activities [on the NSPCC website here. \(https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/templates/example-consent-form\)](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/templates/example-consent-form) which includes safeguarding as well as legislation.

Your people

Groups have a responsibility to ensure that they have the right people working with them to keep children and adults at risk safe. Some roles in your group might need someone to have a DBS check (criminal record check), or references. This differs between England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, so [check the government website here. \(https://www.gov.uk/request-copy-criminal-record\)](https://www.gov.uk/request-copy-criminal-record).

You might need to train some people. This will be in your code of conduct. Find more help in the links in the resources below or here on the [NSPCC's training site here. \(https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/training/introductory-basic-courses\)](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/training/introductory-basic-courses)

Avoid using private cars to transport young people. You may need to set up a system or encourage parents/carers to make private arrangements with one another.

The [NSPCC also has advice here about events \(https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/safer-activities-events\)](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/safer-activities-events) and activities with young people, including more about transport and staying overnight.

All your written documents need regular reviews. Make sure they are dated, and you have marked in the calendar when they need to be looked at and updated.

Further resources

The National Youth Agency's Safeguarding and Risk Management Hub here (<https://www.nya.org.uk/skills/safeguarding-and-risk-management-hub/>), should be the first place you look. It has guides and advice on everything, including lone working, policies, training and procedures.

Voluntary Impact Northamptonshire's website here (<https://voluntaryimpact.org.uk/community/training-resources/>) has some accessible podcasts about safeguarding.

RoSPA's guide for adventurous visits, online here, (<https://www.rospa.com/rospaweb/docs/advice-services/school-college-safety/school-visits-guide.pdf>) is for schools but contains useful information for activities that might carry more risk.

The NSPCC has guidance on safeguarding standards here (<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/2019/safeguarding-child-protection-standards>), specifically for community and voluntary groups.