

Oxford Mutual Aid Safeguarding Policy

(updated 15/11/2024)

What is safeguarding? Safeguarding means protecting an adult's right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect.

Background

Oxford Mutual Aid works with individuals in the community experiencing a number of challenges, including mental health difficulties, homelessness, domestic abuse, child abuse, and physical health problems, both directly and indirectly. The work we do strives to ensure that adult at risk is an empowering rather than a dis-empowering term, and that we use it to uphold the rights and dignity of those who may be at greater risk of abuse or exploitation

All work undertaken at OMA will be carried out in line with our [Code of Conduct](#)

In line with our general support principles and mutual aid ethos, crisis situation work should be:

- **Empowering:** working with people to help them find solutions which are meaningful to them, rather than imposing solutions on them.
- **Conducted in good faith:** taking seriously what people tell us about their situations
- **Collective:** decisions about support are taken collectively, both with the PIN, and within the case management team
- **Consistent:** we offer the same kind of support to all, regardless of their background, power, or our own personal feelings towards them
- **Respectful:** not using derogatory or judgemental language about PINs or their needs
- **Reflective:** examining our own biases, -isms, and emotional reactions to ensure these are not affecting the support we are delivering

General statement:

- **There is a moral obligation and legal duty of care** that we do whatever is reasonably practicable to ensure the safety and wellbeing of anyone, including children, young people and vulnerable adults, with whom we work.
- **There is an obligation of confidentiality.** Identities, personal information, or identifying information of Collective users and members is not to be disclosed to anyone outside of our Collective, including other users.
- **All children, young people and vulnerable adults**, regardless of age, disability, gender, racial heritage, religious belief, sexual orientation or identity, **have the right to equal protection from all types of harm or abuse.**

Safeguarding Policy

Oxford Mutual Aid will not tolerate the abuse of adults in any of its forms and is committed to safeguarding adults with care and support needs from harm.

This policy outlines the steps Oxford Mutual Aid will make to safeguard an adult with care and support needs if they are deemed to be at risk or at risk. This policy sets out the roles and responsibilities of Oxford Mutual Aid in working together with other professionals and agencies in promoting the adult's welfare and safeguarding them from abuse and neglect.

Safeguarding should be person-led and outcome-focused. The individual should be involved in identifying how best to respond to their safeguarding situation by giving them more choice and control, recognising that quality of life, wellbeing and safety mean different things to different people. Adults should be supported to make their own choices wherever possible, and included in any decision making.

Oxford Mutual Aid should ensure that the safeguarding action agreed is the least intrusive response to the risk.

Oxford Mutual Aid will also ensure that safe and effective working practices are in place, so that volunteers have the support they need to implement this policy (Coordinator, Case Manager or Oversight Committee member as appropriate).

The key objectives of this policy are for all volunteers of Oxford Mutual Aid to:

- have an overview of adult safeguarding
- be clear about their responsibility to safeguard adults
- ensure the necessary actions are taken where an adult with care and support needs is deemed to be at risk
- we are not currently insured to take under 18s as volunteers, hence why this overview does not mention a safeguarding for children policy.

All volunteers are expected to follow this policy, which will be available on the Oxford Mutual Aid website

What is Adult Safeguarding?

'Safeguarding means protecting an adult's right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect. It is about people and organisations working together to prevent and stop both the risks and experience of abuse or neglect, while at the same time making sure that the adult's wellbeing is promoted including, where appropriate, having regard to their views, wishes, feelings and beliefs in deciding on any action. This must recognise that adults sometimes have complex interpersonal relationships and may be ambivalent, unclear or unrealistic about their personal circumstances.'

Care and Support Statutory Guidance, Department of Health, updated February 2017

Who do adult safeguarding duties apply to?

The Care Act 2014 sets out that adult safeguarding duties apply to *any* adult who:

- has care and support needs, and
- is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse and neglect, and
- is unable to protect themselves from either the risk of, or the experience of abuse or neglect, because of those needs.

OMA and its volunteers will seek to safeguard vulnerable adults at all times by:

- Providing a safe enough physical environment
- Always keeping safety and welfare at the centre of what we do
- Listening to participants, taking account of their views and promoting inclusion
- Recruiting and training volunteers in safeguarding where appropriate
- Identifying the abuse of vulnerable adults where it is occurring and responding effectively to any concerns, formal or informal complaints or expressions of anxiety
- Liaising with appropriate services and agencies in the event of a safeguarding issue
- Managing confidentiality and data protection issues appropriately
- Risk assessing activities. Reading, understanding, and agreeing to risk assessments.
- Following, monitoring and updating this Safeguarding policy at regular intervals or as needed in line with updates to appropriate legislation, so our policy is in line with the law

Dealing with abuse discovered, disclosed or alleged:

Volunteers at Oxford Mutual Aid who have any adult safeguarding concerns should:-

Respond and make safe

- Take emergency action if someone is at immediate risk of harm/in need of urgent medical attention. Dial 999 for emergency services. Please see our Crisis Management Policy
- Get brief details about what has happened and what the adult would like done about it, but do not probe or conduct a mini-investigation
- Seek consent from the adult to take action and to report the concern. Consider whether the adult may lack capacity to make decisions about their own and other people's safety and wellbeing. If you decide to act against their wishes or without their consent, you must discuss this with at least two members of the case management team where a collective decision is made. You must then record this and your reasons for doing so.
- Explain to the person that you will share this information with the relevant agencies only
- Do not disturb or destroy articles that could be used in evidence. Where an assault of some kind is suspected, do not wash the person unless this is associated with first aid treatment necessary to prevent further harm and in this case only wash the area that needs immediate treatment.
- Reassure them that they have done the right thing and give them time to talk without probing, pushing or asking leading questions. Investigation is the responsibility of the relevant agencies
- Avoid making promises you will be unable to keep, including that discussions are confidential

Report

- If the allegation is against one of Oxford Mutual Aid members, volunteers, trustees or directors, as first port of call you can report cases to casemanagers@oxfordmutualaid.org
Daniel Cairney - daniel.cairney@oxfordmutualaid.org - is the staff safeguarding lead and will respond as soon as it is noted either on the [casemanagers@](mailto:casemanagers@oxfordmutualaid.org) or their personal email, but given not working at all times [casemanagers@](mailto:casemanagers@oxfordmutualaid.org) is the best option for a quick response as others can appropriately escalate in Daniel's absence.
- If the allegation is against one of the staff members, you can report cases directly to one of our directors who will then escalate and respond appropriately.
The contacts as of the date of this review are:
Louise Cowen - louise.cowen@oxfordmutualaid.org
Lex Spasic - lex@oxfordmutualaid.org
- Do not discuss the allegation of abuse with other volunteers, group members, parents/guardians or the alleged perpetrator.

- Report to a Coordinator or one of the directors if a volunteer is involved in the allegation or concern, or they have been witnessed behaving in a way that caused or could cause harm, as they must be removed from the activity immediately and suspended from volunteering whilst an investigation takes place. The member of staff or volunteer should be treated fairly and honestly with reassurance that this removal does not imply any guilt, but is to protect them as much as the person making the allegation. The relevant agencies will take responsibility for investigations.

Record

- As far as possible, records should be written contemporaneously, dated and signed.
- Keep records about safeguarding concerns confidential and in a location where the alleged abuser will not have access to the record. Access should not be given to any unauthorised person for accessing confidential information including the sharing of passwords. See OMA Privacy Policy
- Pass your notes to the Case Manager who will enter them on to the client record

Refer

In making a decision whether to refer or not, the case management team should take into account:

- the adult's wishes and preferred outcome
- whether the adult has mental capacity to make an informed decision about their own and others' safety
- the safety or wellbeing of children or other adults with care and support needs
- whether there is a person in a position of trust involved
- whether a crime has been committed

and should keep a record of the reasons for referring the concern or reasons for not referring.

Oxford Mutual Aid expects all members and volunteers to maintain confidentiality at all times. In line with Data Protection law, Oxford Mutual Aid does not share information if not required. It should however be noted that information should be shared with authorities if an adult is deemed to be at high risk of immediate harm. Sharing the right information, at the right time, with the right people can make all the difference to preventing harm. For further guidance on information sharing and safeguarding see:

<https://www.scie.org.uk/care-act-2014/safeguarding-adults/sharing-information/keymessages.asp>

- If there is a safeguarding concern or disclosure that is demanding of urgent attention, contact the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) team in the first instance immediately on: 0345 0507666. The duty worker will advise on the next steps and the volunteer may be asked to fill in a referral form. An example of an urgent situation might be:
 - A vulnerable adult discloses physical or sexual abuse

- If there are signs of physical abuse e.g. injury
- A vulnerable adult presents as very different/scared to go home/anxious and you are aware home could be risky
- Only contact the police if it is thought a crime has just been committed or the vulnerable adult is in immediate danger of abuse or an assault is taking place.
- Providing the volunteer who has handled the disclosure has followed the procedures above, they should keep all information about the disclosure confidential or on a “need to know” basis with other members of the group, in order to protect the vulnerable adult.
- Volunteers who have handled the disclosure may find this distressing and should have access to support. In addition to the OMA support available and described on the next page, you can also support through the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board - <https://www.osab.co.uk/how-to-report-concerns/> . You can raise a concern over the phone by calling 0345 050 7666 during office hours or the Emergency Duty Service number (0800 833 408) outside of those hours.

The local authority will decide on who will lead on a safeguarding enquiry should it progress to that stage. The named organisation should not conduct its own safeguarding enquiry unless instructed to do so by the local authority.

Incidents of abuse may be one-off or multiple and may affect one person or more. Volunteers should look beyond single incidents to identify patterns of harm. Accurate recording of information will also assist in recognising any patterns.

Oxford Mutual Aid will ensure that adults are involved in their safeguarding arrangements and each individual is dealt with on a case by case basis. As adults may have different preferences, histories and life styles, the same process may not work for all. The case management team will be responsible for this.

The case management team are responsible for:

- providing acknowledgement of the referral and brief feedback to the person raising the original concern. Feedback should be given in a way that will not make the situation worse or breach the Data Protection Act. If the police are involved, they should be consulted prior to giving feedback to the referrer to ensure any criminal investigation is not affected.
- ensuring that the safeguarding adults policies and procedures are in place and up to date. They will ensure a safe environment is promoted for volunteers and adults accessing the service. The case management team. will ensure they are up to date with their safeguarding adults training.

What should I do if I am concerned?

Debriefing service:

- A one on one session with an experienced volunteer, to discuss any issues which may have arisen whilst volunteering with OMA
- A safe, supportive, non-judgemental, listening space; advice is not given.
- Open to all volunteers
- Nothing is too big or too small to talk about

You can request a debriefing session here -

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe87Os8TYY612vOFnoPXvg5koIAfIFEJcUF23qilSn3VpdT0g/viewform>

Case Management Referral:

The Case Management Team has experience working with people who have complex needs. We do not offer counselling, mainly signposting to other resources and organisations

When to refer to the Case Management Team

- if you are concerned about a vulnerable adult
- if a vulnerable adult has disclosed any sensitive information to you
- if you are unsure just ask, best to be cautious

The team can be contacted through an email to casemanagement@oxfordmutualaid.org

Training, awareness raising and supervision

Oxford Mutual Aid ensures that all volunteers receive basic awareness training on safeguarding adults where appropriate as they may come across adults with care and support needs who may be at risk of abuse. Those adults may report things of concern to staff or volunteers who should be equipped with the basic knowledge around safeguarding adults and be confident to identify that abuse is taking place and action is required. All staff and volunteers should be clear about the core values of Oxford Mutual Aid and commitment to safeguarding adults.

It is useful to discuss training with volunteers who have attended training sessions to ensure they are embedding this in practice.

Do discuss with your Coordinator if you need to talk through something that happened on your shift. Or book a debriefing session to talk something through it at greater length. And team meetings are a good place to talk through any issues that have come up from safeguarding events, maybe someone else in your team has had a similar situation.

Voluntary organisations (including volunteers) who support adults with care and support needs can access the basic awareness safeguarding adults training provided by Oxford's Adult and Child Safeguarding Board. Free on-line training is also available. See here:

[Introduction to Safeguarding Course](#)

Appendix 1

What are the types of safeguarding adults abuse?

The Care and Support statutory guidance sets out the 10 main types of abuse:

- Physical abuse
- Neglect
- Sexual abuse
- Psychological
- Financial abuse
- Discriminatory
- Organisational
- Domestic violence
- Modern Slavery
- Self-neglect

However, you should keep an open mind about what constitutes abuse or neglect as it can take many forms and the circumstances of the individual case should always be considered. For more information, read section 14.17 of the Care and Support Statutory Guidance.

What are the possible signs of abuse?

Abuse and neglect can be difficult to spot. You should be alert to the following possible signs of abuse and neglect:

- Depression, self-harm or suicide attempts
- Difficulty making friends
- Fear or anxiety
- The person looks dirty or is not dressed properly,
- The person never seems to have money,
- The person has an injury that is difficult to explain (such as bruises, finger marks, 'non-accidental' injury, neck, shoulders, chest and arms),
- The person has signs of a pressure ulcer,
- The person is experiencing insomnia
- The person seems frightened, or frightened of physical contact.
- Inappropriate sexual awareness or sexually explicit behaviour
- The person is withdrawn, changes in behaviour

You should ask the person if you are unsure about their well-being as there may be other explanations to the above presentation.

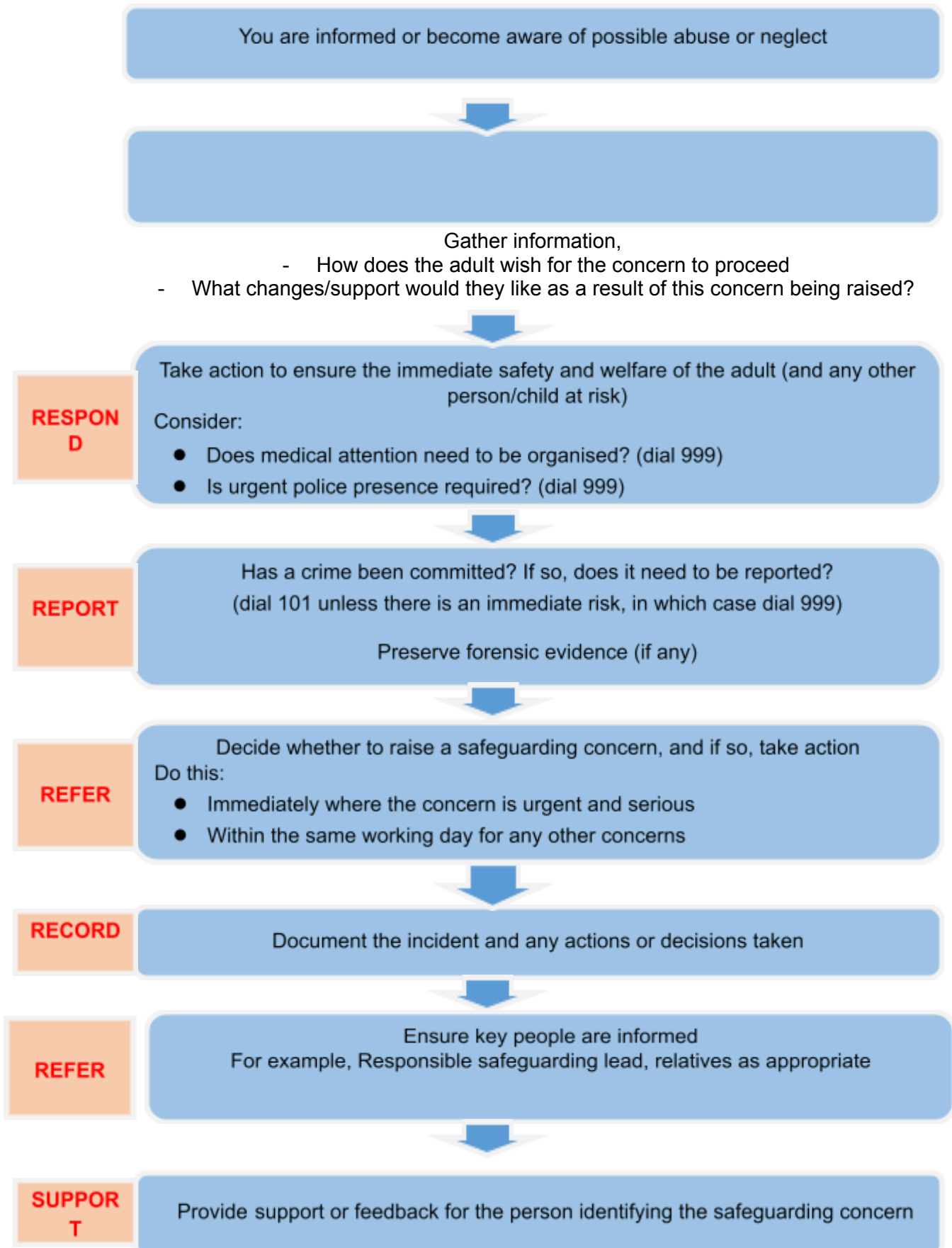
Who abuses and neglects adults?

Abuse can happen anywhere, even in somebody's own home. Most often abuse takes place by others who are in a position of trust and power. It can take place whether an adult lives alone or with others. Anyone can carry out abuse or neglect, including:

- partners;
- other family members;
- neighbours;
- friends and acquaintances;
- local residents;
- people who deliberately exploit adults they perceive as vulnerable to abuse;
- paid staff or professionals;
- and volunteers and strangers

Appendix 2

Raising a safeguarding concern



Abuse at work/while volunteering on the phones:

Telephone verbal abuse is not always seen as a serious issue but any abusive behaviour, including verbal abuse, can have serious long term effects on the health and wellbeing of staff.

Verbal abuse is never acceptable and will not be tolerated.

Some triggers for telephone rage include:

- Calls not being answered timeously
- Being treated impersonally
- Lack of authority
- Rudeness of staff
- Denied access to a member of staff

If, when you are on the telephone, you feel you are being verbally abused, you should take the following steps:

- Do not panic
- Try not to lose your temper or be tempted to react with a similar response
- Try not to take the remarks personally
- Clearly state to the caller you are not willing to be spoken to in an abusive manner, and although you would like to assist, you will be unable to do so should the abuse continue, and will have no option but to terminate the call
- If the abuse continues, end the call
- Ensure the incident is reported and inform your manager or an appropriate member of the team in their absence

Staff and volunteers should be assured that terminating a call is not viewed as lack of ability and will not be penalised for ending abusive calls.

If abusive/ malicious calls persist within a particular area, calls should be monitored.

A short message prior to calls being answered can be recorded, detailing the zero tolerance for abuse policy

Persistent malicious calls will be escalated for Police response.