



Safeguarding Policy

Introduction:

Everyone has a responsibility to ensure the safety of others. It is important to recognize the signs of potential abuse or harm and to report the issue when necessary. The safeguarding issue should not be delved into or intervened into except to ensure the safety of the person and protect the evidence.

Our mission at **Spina Warriors** is to promote the best practice and protect children and adults who are at risk. A company's directors are responsible for making sure that those who benefit from or work for the company are not harmed. It is their legal duty to act prudently, and they must take all reasonable steps to ensure this. In addition to knowing the relevant law and how it applies to their organisations, directors are expected to comply with it, if necessary. In addition to directors, staff and volunteers, this policy applies to all individuals involved in **Spina Warriors**. We carefully select, train, and supervise all our staff and volunteers, and they are familiar with our safeguarding policy and procedures. There are many factors that increase the risk of abuse or harm to people with disabilities, including stereotyping, discrimination, isolation, inability to protect themselves or communication difficulties.

Spina Warriors Responsibilities:

Spina Warriors is committed to always empowering its members, and any individual with spina bifida, hydrocephalus, or associated conditions will be treated with dignity and respect.

For the protection of children and adults at risk, **Spina Warriors** will:

- Implement our safeguarding policy and procedure for children and adults at risk, and review them every two years
- Information about child and adult abuse, safeguarding, and good practice should be shared with staff, volunteers, and directors.
- Information about any concerns will be shared with appropriate agencies, and parents, children and adults at risk will be appropriately involved.
- Follow recruitment and selection procedures carefully, including mandatory DBS/ACCESS NI disclosures when necessary.
- Manage staff and volunteers effectively through one-on-ones, training, and support.
- On appointment, all new staff who are responsible for safeguarding children and adults at risk will undergo DBS/ACCESS NI checks and receive training; regular checks and training will be provided.
- Respond appropriately to safeguarding issues for children and adults at risk.
- Maintain accurate and timely records regarding safeguarding and protection issues, which are monitored and audited regularly in accordance with Spina Warriors' retention policy.

When staff or volunteers observe evidence of abuse or potential harm in their routine work, **Spina Warriors** will ensure that appropriate services are notified if the line manager involved, considers it appropriate.

If a situation is life-threatening, immediate involvement of emergency services is required. It will then be determined if the policy needs to be applied.

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Indicators:

The safety of children and adults at risk must be recognised and recognised by everyone who works with them or has contact with them. It is hard to recognise abuse or harm when there are other explanations: recognising the signs and symptoms is not easy. However, it is important to be alert to the indicators.

Here are some examples of indicators:

- Disclosures of events or actions that appear to indicate potential abuse or harm by an individual or a third party.
- The inability to access one's own money/having to ask permission to handle one's finances.
- Paying rent or bills suddenly becomes impossible.
- Unexpected injuries such as bruising, cuts, or burns, particularly if they occur on parts of the body that are not normally prone to them.
- A change in behaviour that is unexplained, such as withdrawal, anger, sadness, etc.
- Engaging in sexually inappropriate behaviour, engaging in inappropriate sexual awareness, or using sexualised language.
- There is a distrust of adults, especially those with whom one would normally expect a close relationship.
- Being prevented from attending social events or socialising.
- Unexpected weight loss
- Poor personal hygiene or appearing increasingly unkempt.

There are many other factors that can influence behaviour and presentation in people with spina bifida and/or hydrocephalus in addition to those listed above.

Staff or volunteers at **Spina Warriors** may discover a child or adult at risk of harm or abuse through a variety of means. Here are some examples:

- As part of a home visit
- As part of an event
- Via email
- Through our social media network
- From a phone call or conversation
- Being a colleague at **Spina Warriors** with an adult at risk
- Contacts with parents/carers or other third parties

Definitions:

Harm includes any form of ill treatment, or impairment of health, safety, or development (including physical, intellectual, financial, emotional, social, and behavioural development), whether self-inflicted (i.e., self-harm) or inflicted by others.

Health refers to both mental and physical well-being.

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Ill treatment includes physical and non-physical ill treatment. The Care Act defines an adult at risk of abuse or neglect as someone who has needs for care and support, who is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect and because of their care needs is unable to protect themselves. A further definition of an adult at risk can be defined as a person aged 18 or over, whose exposure to harm through abuse, exploitation or neglect may be increased by their personal characteristics and/or life circumstances. Note: different definitions may apply in different counties.

Types of abuse/harm

Physical abuse/harm is the deliberate injury of a child or adult at risk or failure to prevent physical injury or suffering.

Financial or 'material' abuse includes theft, fraud, exploitation, pressure in connection with wills, property or inheritance or financial transactions, or the misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions, or benefits.

Psychological/emotional abuse is persistent emotional ill treatment causing severe and persistent adverse effects on the person's wellbeing. It may involve making the person feel worthless, inadequate, or only valued for what they can do for another person. It may also involve making the person feel frightened or in danger or exploiting or corrupting them.

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a person to take part in sexual activities which they can't or don't consent to, even if the child or adult at risk concerned is not aware of what is happening. It includes either being the subject of or being forced to watch sexually explicit images/videos.

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet the child or adult at risk's basic physical or psychological needs and is likely to seriously impair the person's health or development.

Institutional abuse is the maltreatment of a person (often children or older adults) from a system of power. Institutional abuse occurs within emergency care facilities such as foster homes, group homes, kinship care homes, and pre-adoptive homes.

Bullying is deliberate hurtful behaviour, sometimes repeated over a period, where it is difficult for the victims to defend themselves.

Self-harm is to deliberately injure oneself, which is sometimes (but not always) a sign of a person being at higher-than-normal risk of suicide - either intentional or not.

Exploitation is the improper use of a child or adult at risk for another's profit or advantage.

Domestic abuse is any incident of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence, or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or who have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. Where there is a possibility that children or adults at risk of seeing or hearing domestic violence, you have to consider that they may be harmed as a result and treat this as a safeguarding concern.



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Research shows that families/members with disabilities are especially at risk due to vulnerabilities that are associated with their disability, for example, an increased dependency on personal care, reduced social contact and activities, and possible communication or learning difficulties. This is especially important when supporting families/members with a disability.

Investigation of cases of Child and Adult at risk of harm or abuse

Identifying what constitutes 'significant harm' and warrants investigation is the most important aspect of safeguarding children and adults at risk.

To decide what, if any, further action must be taken, contacting the line manager and other employees involved is the first and most important step. This must be done immediately.

Remember - it is the local authorities (HSCT in Northern Ireland) who are responsible for safeguarding children and adults at risk.

While **Spina Warriors** does not investigate allegations of abuse, employees should take part in strategy discussions, case conferences, and safeguarding plans when invited and when appropriate. Additionally, they may be able to provide support to children, adults at risk, and families.

Sharing information with those who have parental responsibility

If **Spina Warriors** acts in response to allegations, it will inform those with parental responsibility and offer support to them and the child or adult at risk. However, they may not be notified initially in the following situations:

- The alleged perpetrator may be the person with responsibility.
- If the child is intimidated, he or she may remain silent.
- There is a possibility that the child will be in more immediate danger as a result.
- Evidence could be destroyed in a very likely scenario.
- At that stage, the child is competent to make that decision without involvement from the person with parental responsibility.

In the case of adults at risk, consent would have to be given by the adult member before parents and/or primary caretakers are notified (the issue of capacity may need to be considered). Information will only be shared on a need-to-know basis and will remain confidential.

Procedure

It is not possible to provide definitive instructions on how to behave if you become aware of or suspect abuse or harm when staff/volunteers encounter children or adults at risk in every situation. Our staff and volunteers are expected to meet certain standards when it comes to children and adults at risk, as described below.

Always:

- Ensure that children and adults at risk are always treated with respect and dignity.
- Respect the privacy and confidentiality rights of children and adults at risk, except when a need-to-know basis exists.

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- Whenever possible, establish a partnership with parents, carers, and other services to safeguard children and adults at risk, while maintaining a focus on the child's or adult's interests.

The following should never be done by any employee or volunteer:

- Engage in inappropriate touching of any kind, keeping in mind that even 'innocent' touches may be inappropriate for the individual child or adult.
- Taking photos or recording recordings without permission.
- The use of physical restraints by a child or adult at risk is not permitted unless they are intended to prevent injury to others, property damage or criminal activity. To avoid being regarded as an assault, any physical restraint must be appropriate and reasonable.
- Discriminate against children or adults at risk by making racist, sectarian, sexist, or disparaging remarks.
- Engage in rough play or physical activity that is inappropriate.
- Children and adults at risk should not be exposed to bad language.
- Verbally threaten, abuse, or threaten an adult or child.
- Children and adults at risk should not hear or be exposed to sexually suggestive comments.
- Do anything of a personal nature that the individual can do for themselves or that a parent or carer can do for them.
- You should never manage a member's finances or handle their money.

Please do listen and reassure, if you are managing a disclosure:

- Reassure the person that they did the right thing by telling you.
- Allegations should always be taken seriously.
- You are not responsible for investigating or proving abuse has taken place - do not make children or adults at risk repeat information.
- Be careful not to pass judgement on the alleged abuser or victim, or to make any derogatory remarks.
- While you should respect the trust that has been placed in you, explain that it must be told to another member of **Spina Warriors**.
- Make no promises about keeping the matter confidential.

The line manager/Director will make the decision about whether the threshold is met to report the incident and will advise and support staff and volunteers. After completing a preliminary assessment, it will be decided whether to refer the matter to a third party (local authority/HSCT) or to meet with the other parties involved or **Spina Warriors** employees to discuss the issue.

The member of staff who became aware of the incident is responsible for reporting all concerns regarding abuse to Safeguarding teams, which, in turn, will notify the police. A line manager is responsible for reporting concerns of abuse to Safeguarding teams if they have been reported by a volunteer. Members of staff are advised to contact Safeguarding at a local level to discuss concerns and clarify referrals. They must then maintain contact regarding the progress of any investigation until it has been satisfactorily resolved. The Directors will support them throughout this process.

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Recording and reporting procedures

When a concern is raised, a line manager must conduct an initial assessment within twelve hours of the concern being raised. When immediate steps need to be taken to ensure the alleged victim's protection, the timeframe is especially important.

When a line manager is uncertain whether a matter referred to them should be formally referred to the local authority or HSCT, they should consult the Directors, as well as the local authority/HSCT, for guidance. Safeguarding will either make a referral or provide other advice; such advice should be accurately recorded in the database.

Alternatively, you can contact the NSPCC Child Protection Helpline on 0808 800 5000 for advice or consult the local Safeguarding department if needed.

In this stage and in every subsequent stage, information, correspondence, and communications must be accurately recorded. All documentation must be stored on the **Spina Warriors** database and will be retained in accordance with **Spina Warriors'** document retention policy. Original evidence will be turned over to the local authority/HSCT.

As soon as a volunteer raises a safeguarding concern, the line manager should get in touch at a local level to discuss concerns and clarify when a referral will be made and maintain contact until the investigation has been completed satisfactorily.

Dealing with allegations made against staff or volunteers regarding inappropriate actions with children or adults at risk

It is possible for those who work with vulnerable children or adults to abuse them. Staff or volunteer allegations of abuse must be handled sensitively and expeditiously by the Directors, or if they are not available, another member of Senior Management Team. Children or adults at risk must be always given careful consideration. Their views and wishes should always be respected, and they should receive appropriate support.

There are three related, but independent strands that can run parallel in investigations into alleged abuse by employees or volunteers:

1. Safeguarding children and adults at risk and reporting to appropriate agencies.
2. Investigation of an alleged crime by the police.
3. Disciplinary procedures where it appears that the allegations may amount to misconduct or gross misconduct on the part of staff or volunteers.

A member of staff or volunteer who is witnessed or evidenced to have committed abuse or assault will be placed on precautionary suspension until further investigations have been completed.

Their access to online accounts and telephone should be suspended, and they should not be able to contact family/members.



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In the event **Spina Warriors** discovers that a staff member or volunteer under precautionary suspension works for another organisation with children or adults at risk (either as a staff member or volunteer), it will notify the other organisation of the suspension and its outcome. As the investigation progresses, **Spina Warriors** should communicate with the local authority/HSCT and the police.

When a criminal investigation is completed and insufficient evidence exists to pursue a criminal prosecution, or if a local authority/HSCT investigation has been completed and insufficient evidence exists, a disciplinary investigation will be conducted to determine if the incident occurred on the basis of the balance of probabilities. In some cases, children or adults at risk can retain a loyalty to those who care for or are responsible for them, which makes it difficult for them to criticise them. If a person refuses to file a police complaint or withdraws a complaint previously filed, **Spina Warriors** remains responsible for conducting an internal disciplinary enquiry to determine if any disciplinary action needs to be taken.

If a staff member or volunteer is found to have abused a child or adult at risk, **Spina Warriors** will follow the following disciplinary procedures:

- Implement appropriate disciplinary measures.
- Ensure that DBS/ACCESS NI and the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) registers are notified.

Whenever concerns are investigated internally through disciplinary procedures and are not substantiated, the line manager should explain the outcome to the child or adult at risk and their family and, where appropriate, offer the opportunity to make a complaint.

In its duty of care to its staff and volunteers, **Spina Warriors** seeks to ensure that anyone accused of abuse is treated fairly and honestly. The staff/volunteers should be kept informed about the progress of the investigation and supported to understand why the concern has arisen. It is important for management to provide advice and support to staff/volunteers during a precautionary suspension and inquiry since it may cause stress for the suspected abuser. We will always make clear that precautionary suspensions are not disciplinary actions.

Review of Policy and Procedures

We will review this policy and its procedures every two years or when the following circumstances arise:

- Changes in legislation
- Any other significant change or event that affects government guidance.

Staff and volunteers must adhere to the Spina Warriors Safeguarding Policy and Procedures at all times. Staff and volunteers who violate these procedures may face disciplinary action.

Policy to be reviewed: March 2025