

Safeguarding – Protecting Children from Abuse Policy

1 Our approach to protecting children from abuse and harm

1.1 The welfare of children is paramount, and all children have the right to live safe from harm and abuse. To protect children (aged under 18) at risk who live in one of our homes or use one of our services, we put preventative measures in place, report allegations of abuse to the relevant authorities, and work with partner agencies to stop the abuse and put the right support in place. We will ensure that:

- We value, listen to and respect the child concerned and their family
- All Octavia employees and volunteers recognise the signs of abuse and understand the different ways a child might try to share what they have experienced
- Suspected or allegations of abuse are reported quickly
- Support is arranged for the child concerned
- We work closely with investigating and support agencies to protect the child from further abuse

1.2 This policy applies to anyone working on behalf of Octavia, including senior managers and the board of trustees, paid staff, volunteers, contractors and agency staff.

1.3 This policy complies with London Child Protection Procedures and the Children Act (1989 and 2004) and the General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

2 What we mean by

2.1 **Child:** A person under the age of 18.

2.2 **Safeguarding:** the term ‘safeguarding’ refers to the process of protecting children (and adults) from harm. This includes all procedures designed to prevent harm to a child.

2.3 **Child Abuse:** Child abuse happens when a person or persons – adult or child – harms a child, or fails to act to prevent harm. It can be physical, emotional, sexual, psychological or financial but can also involve neglect, and a lack of love, care and attention. Modern slavery or exploitation are also forms of child abuse. Child abuse can take place in person, online, via technology devices offline remotely or through a combination of some or all of these methods.

2.4 **Types of abuse:** Per the NSPCC guidelines, the 4 main types of abuse children are at risk of are:

I. **Physical Abuse:** Physical abuse is when someone hurts or harms a child or young person on purpose. It includes:

- hitting with hands or objects
- slapping and punching
- kicking

- shaking
- throwing
- poisoning
- burning and scalding
- biting and scratching
- breaking bones
- drowning

It is important to remember that physical abuse is any way of intentionally causing physical harm to a child or young person. It also includes making up the symptoms of an illness or causing a child to become unwell.

- II. **Emotional Abuse:** Emotional abuse (sometimes called ‘psychological abuse’) is any type of abuse that involves the continual emotional mistreatment of a child. Emotional abuse can involve deliberately trying to scare, humiliate, isolate or ignore a child.

Emotional abuse is often a part of other kinds of abuse, which means it can be difficult to spot the signs or tell the difference, though it can also happen on its own.

- III. **Sexual Abuse:** When a child or young person is sexually abused they are forced or tricked into sexual activities. They might not understand that what is happening is abuse or that it is wrong. The child might also be afraid to tell someone. Sexual abuse can happen anywhere; and it can happen in person or online.

It is never a child's fault they were sexually abused; it is important to make sure children know this.

- IV. **Neglect:** Neglect is the ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs and the most common form of child abuse². A child might be left hungry or dirty, or without proper clothing, shelter, supervision or health care. This can put children and young people in danger. And it can also have long term effects on their physical and mental wellbeing.

2.5 Signs of Abuse

2.5.1 Children who suffer abuse may struggle to find the words to speak out, so it is vital that anyone working with children or young people is vigilant for signs of abuse.

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

- Sudden or unexplained changes in behaviour or personality
- Becoming withdrawn
- Seeming anxious

- Becoming uncharacteristically aggressive and emotional
- Lacking social skills and having few friends or being socially isolated
- Having a poor bond or relationship with a parent or guardian
- Knowledge of adult issues inappropriate for their age
- Running away or going missing or not attending activities they would normally be expected to without notice
- Always choosing to wear clothes that cover their body

2.5.3 While this is not a conclusive list, and they do not necessarily mean that a child is being abused and can be due to other issues in their lives, but they can help assess a situation and understand when it might be appropriate to observe, investigate or inquire about a situation further.

2.5.4 Abuse can happen to a child regardless of their age, gender, race, sexuality, religion or ability.

3 What you can expect from our service

- Where Octavia believe a child is being abused or neglected, we will respond to immediate risks and alert appropriate emergency services and social services as soon as possible.
- If a crime is alleged, we will contact the police as soon as possible following disclosure, and will secure the area of the alleged crime.
- We will alert the relevant line manager to the safeguarding concern at the earliest opportunity.
- We will take appropriate measures to continue to safeguard the child; where they live in an Octavia property this may include moving the child and their family to temporary or alternative accommodation.
- We will conduct our own investigation and work with social services and the police to undertake any multi-agency enquiry.
- We will share relevant information from our own investigations throughout the course of any social services or police enquiry to ensure appropriate action is taken at all stages to protect and support the child. We will only share information on a 'need to know' basis and in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- Where an alert concerns an Octavia employee, the line manager will review implications of the alert on staff. If any concerns or risks are identified, the line manager will alert the HR department and agree appropriate action in line with Octavia's disciplinary policy. Where an alert concerns a volunteer, the volunteer's mentor will review the volunteer's position with Octavia and take appropriate action.
- We have safe recruitment and vetting processes for all Octavia employees and volunteers. All staff who have unaccompanied contact with children as part of their work, are checked using the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) before they are confirmed in post.
- We ensure all of our staff and volunteers receive regular safeguarding training relevant to their roles, and managers support them to understand their safeguarding responsibilities and to follow the safeguarding policy and procedure.

3.1 What you can expect from our service during a public health incident or emergency

- Managers will keep up-to-date with the latest government and local authority information and advice.
- We will deliver our services remotely, for example online or by phone, to ensure the safety of staff and children who use our services.
- Managers, staff and safeguarding champions will keep up-to-date with national and local safeguarding resources to identify additional risks of abuse or neglect that may arise or be more prominent during these periods.
- We will signpost children and, where appropriate, their families to support and resources that are available.
- We will only resume face-to-face services once appropriate safety measures and advice and guidance have been implemented.

4 How we will seek to keep children and young people safe

- 4.1 All Octavia employees have a duty to act upon and report actual, suspected or allegations of abuse.
- 4.2 We have appointed safeguarding champions, our Youth Programme Manager, Conor Lynch (email: conor.lynch@octavia.org.uk; tel: 07985 692 369) and our Assistant Director of Care and Support, Neil McCarthy (email: neil.mccarthy@octavia.org.uk; tel: 020 8354 5586) who lead on advising staff about what to do when safeguarding concerns are raised.
- 4.3 We respond to any allegations of or suspected abuse by Octavia employees or volunteers through our internal procedures.
- 4.4 When we are unable to work with children and young people in person, for example during a public health emergency, we will keep in touch online and on the phone. We will continue to look out for signs of abuse and neglect. We will talk sensitively with the child about the situation, what life is like for them, and what support is available.
- 4.5 We will keep up to date with changing legislation, advice and guidance from government, local authorities and partner agencies. We will consider information and advice from relevant scientific bodies, such as the World Health Organisation and Public Health England and review our services as situations develop. We will put in place appropriate safety measures to help keep our staff, and children who use our services safe.
- 4.6 We ensure all of our staff and volunteers receive safeguarding training relevant to their roles and support them to understand when and how to identify and report safeguarding issues.
- 4.7 We raise safeguarding awareness amongst all Octavia employees and volunteers, and share best practice in training, inductions, supervision, staff meetings and informal settings.

- 4.8 We coordinate our approach through information and guidance in our support schemes, our Safeguarding Coordination group meetings, focused campaigns, annual review of our safeguarding policy and procedure, and annual safeguarding report to the Board.

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5 What will happen when you contact us to report concerns about a child's welfare

