

Harrow Nature Conservation Forum

Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy

The welfare of children and vulnerable adults is everyone's responsibility, particularly when it comes to protecting them from abuse. This Policy document is not intended to impose an additional burden of compliance on the behaviour of Forum members. Rather, it formalizes what should be, and we believe is, our existing behaviour towards children and vulnerable adults.

In this policy the category of children and vulnerable adults is taken to comprise three groups:

- Children aged 15 years and under, henceforth referred to as children.
- Young people aged 16 and 17 years old, henceforth referred to as 16-17 year olds.
- Adults, that is, people 18 years old or more, whose mental state renders them unusually vulnerable.

The majority of this document is concerned with the Forum's interactions with children. Our policies regarding 16-17 year olds and vulnerable adults are described at the end of this document.

The policy assumes that the Forum will run brief activities for children, usually lasting two to three hours and at most a full day. Teachers, parents or carers will always be present and they will retain responsibility for supervising the children under their control.

This document should be read in conjunction with the Forum's Risk Assessments and Safety Notes, in particular the pages on CHILDREN AGED UNDER 16 YEARS AT WORKING PARTIES and USE OF VOLUNTEERS AGED 16-17 YEARS.

The policy is based on the following principles:

- All children, whatever their age, culture, disability, sex, language, racial origin, socio-economic status, religious belief and/or sexual identity have the right to protection from abuse.
- It is everyone's responsibility to report any concerns they may have regarding abuse.
- All incidents of alleged poor practice, misconduct and abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.
- All personal data will be processed in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.
- Safety takes priority over all other policies in this document. If a warden or other Trust members sees a child using a tool or otherwise acting in a way that risks injury to themselves or another, they should act as appropriate to remove the risk, even if this means physically restraining the child. As noted above, the parent or carer will be present close by and as soon as the immediate danger is over will resume responsibility for the child. The Trust member should explain to the child and their parent or carer why what the child was doing was dangerous and the correct way to behave/use the tool.

1. Responsibilities

We will :

- Promote the health and welfare of children by providing opportunities for them to safely take part in our activities.
- Respect and promote the rights, wishes and feelings of children.
- Promote and implement appropriate procedures to safeguard the well-being of children and protect them from abuse.
- Require our staff and volunteers to adopt and abide by this Children and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy and any accompanying procedures.
- Respond to any allegations of misconduct or abuse of children and vulnerable adults in line with this Policy as well as implementing, where appropriate, the relevant disciplinary and appeals procedures.
- Review and evaluate this Policy and its Procedures on a regular basis.

2. Recruitment and Employment of Staff and Volunteers

All reasonable steps will be taken to ensure unsuitable people are prevented from working with children and vulnerable adults.

All wardens, together with anyone else who supervises working parties or other Forum events, will be briefed on this policy and asked to sign that they have read it and agree to implement it while they are doing the Trust's work.

3. Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults

This code of conduct details the types of practice required by all members of the group when in contact with children or vulnerable adults. The types of practice are categorised into good practice; practice to be avoided and practice never to be sanctioned.

Suspensions or allegations of non-compliance of the Code by a member will be dealt with through the Disciplinary Procedure for misconduct of our parent charity, the Harrow Heritage Trust.

4. Good practice

Even more than in activities with adults, it is important to have a clear idea of the nature and timescale of the activity and to explain to the children, and to their parents and carers, what the Forum activity will entail so that they can enjoy and fully participate in the activity.

Forum members do not normally provide transport for members of the public attending our activities. Where we do, it will be for a small group where the adult responsible for the children is clearly identified (that is, usually, a parent and one or two children). That adult remains absolutely responsible for the children and for ensuring, for example, that they children sit in the rear seats if the vehicle and wear seat belts. Any vehicles used must be correctly insured.

5. Practices to be avoided

- having 'favourites' - this could lead to resentment and jealousy by other children or vulnerable adults and could lead to false allegations.
- spending time alone with children out of sight of their parents or carers.
- taking children or vulnerable adults to your home.
- where possible, doing things of a personal nature for children or vulnerable adults that they can do for themselves.

Important Note:

It may sometimes be necessary for members to do things of a personal nature for children or vulnerable adults, particularly if they are very young. These tasks should only be carried out with the full understanding and consent of the child or vulnerable adult and where possible their parents/guardians. It is important to respect their views. If a person is fully dependent on you, talk with them about what you are doing and give choices where possible, particularly so if you are involved in any dressing or undressing of outer clothing, or where there is physical contact, lifting or assisting a child or vulnerable adult to carry out particular activities. Do not take on the responsibility for tasks for which you are not appropriately trained.

6. Practices never to be sanctioned

Forum members must never...

- engage in sexually provocative games, including horseplay.
- engage in rough or physical contact except as permitted within the rules of the game or competition.
- form intimate emotional or physical relationships with children.
- allow or engage in touching a child in a sexually suggestive manner.
- make sexually suggestive comments to a child, even in fun.
- reduce a child to tears as a form of control.
- allow allegations made by a child to go unchallenged, unrecorded or not acted upon.
- invite or allow children or vulnerable adults to stay overnight with them at their home.

7. Photographing, Videoing and Filming of Children and Vulnerable Adults

It is normal for the organizers of Forum events to take images of events that they organize. Where these photographs show children, permission should be sought before publishing the images in documents or on the web. Individual children should not be identified in the accompanying text and figure legends, rather if any identification is required, the group name should be given. Usually, a person organizing the event from the children's side, such as a teacher or youth leader, can be approached and will in turn get permission from all the parents and carers. Where this does not occur permission would have to be sought from the individual parent or carer – in practice, this would be so time consuming as to mean that we would not try to publish the image.

8. Reporting

The nature of Forum activities means that the person responsible for dealing with concerns involving a child will almost always be the child's parent or carer, who will have been present throughout. Where this is not the case, and in particular where a Forum member is concerned about the behavior of a parent or carer towards a child, they should report their concerns as soon as possible to the appropriate authority, such as the police.

9. 16-17 year olds

As outlined in the Forum Risk Assessment document, 16-17 year olds are welcome to join working parties on their own but will be more closely supervised than are adults.

Certain actions and interactions that would be appropriate with adults are inappropriate with 16-17 year olds. Wardens and other adults in Forum activities should never act in the following ways with 16-17 year olds:

- engage in sexually provocative games, including horseplay.
- engage in rough or physical contact except those clearly relevant to the work or other Forum activity being performed by the group.
- form intimate emotional or physical relationships with a 16-17 year old.
- allow or engage in touching a 16-17 year old in a sexually suggestive manner.
- make sexually suggestive comments to a 16-17 year old, even in fun.
- invite or allow a 16-17 year old to stay overnight with them at their home.

Wardens and other adults in Forum activities should never reduce anyone to tears as a form of control, this includes 16-17 year olds.

10. Vulnerable adults

Adults with a history of mental illness or other cognitive problems should not be automatically discriminated against or prevented from joining any Forum activity. An adult who presents themselves for attendance at a Forum activity and describes themselves as suffering from a mental illness or other cognitive problem, but in a form of words that implies that they are nevertheless capable of fully participating in a Forum activity, should be welcome and treated like any other adult. However if a warden or other Forum member responsible for an activity suspects, either immediately or as an activity proceeds, that any adult is not capable of acting in a way appropriate to the activity they must act to maintain the safety of all people participating in the activity; this may require cutting short the working party or other activity and/or banning the person in question from future Trust activities.

Where a warden or other Forum member responsible for an activity is contacted by the carer of another adult with reference to that other adult joining in a Forum activity then the Forum member should question the carer as to the adult's abilities and possible problems and then decide whether the adult in question can join the Forum activity without the carer's presence. If the adult in question is identified as vulnerable by virtue of mental illness or other cognitive problems we would insist that the carer accompany and retain responsibility for the vulnerable adult on the Forum activity. The policies and practices described in this document as applying to our interactions with children would then apply to our interactions with the vulnerable adult. In the case of working parties where tools are used we would normally err on the side of caution and not allow the adult in question to join the Forum activity even with a carer present.

11. Review

This Policy will be regularly monitored and reviewed at least annually.

This policy was adopted at a meeting held on 17th January 2012

Signed on behalf of the Forum by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen Boksen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Chairman, Harrow Nature Conservation Forum

I have read the Harrow Nature Conservation Forum Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy as adopted at the Forum meeting on 17th January 2012 and agree to implement it while I am doing the Trust's work.

Signed.....

Date.....