

Guidance on Identifying Abuse

This advice note is based on the RYA safeguarding guidance, statutory guidance supporting the implementation of the Care Act 2014, and prior CUYC safeguarding guidance notes.

The following is not intended to be an exhaustive list of types of abuse or exploitation, but an illustrative guide as to the sort of behaviour which could give rise to a safeguarding concern.

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1. Identifying abuse towards adults

Adults at risk may be abused by a wide range of people including family members, professional staff, care workers, volunteers, other service users, neighbours, friends, and individuals who deliberately exploit vulnerable people. Abuse may occur when an adult at risk lives alone or with a relative, within nursing, residential or day care settings, hospitals and other places assumed to be safe, or in public places.

Terminology

The term 'adult at risk' has replaced the term 'vulnerable adult'. The term 'adult at risk' is detailed in the new Care Act 2014 and focuses on the situation causing the risk, rather than the characteristics of the adult concerned.

Safeguarding duties apply to any adult (18 years and over) who meet the following criteria:

- Has needs for care and support (whether the local authority is meeting any of those needs)
- Is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect.
- Because of those care and support needs, is unable to protect themselves from either the risk of, or the experience of, abuse or neglect.

Examples of adults at risk

- People who have a physical disability, whether from birth or acquired through injury, illness or advancing age, ranging from those who can sail independently but need some assistance getting afloat, to those who depend on others for physical care and support.
- People who are blind or visually impaired, who may need to be guided around the site and when getting on board, and sail with sighted crew.
- People who are deaf or hearing impaired, whose needs are largely connected to communication and inclusion.
- People who have learning disabilities or who for some other reason (for example, brain injury and dementia) may not have the capacity to make independent decisions or to assess risk.

- People who are neurodivergent (for example, individuals on the autism/Asperger spectrum).
- People who are experiencing mental illness.

The Care Act 2014 recognises 10 categories of abuse that may be experienced by adults

Physical Abuse: This includes assault, hitting, slapping, pushing, kicking, restraint, and misuse of medication. It can also include inappropriate physical sanctions.

Domestic Abuse: This includes psychological, physical, sexual, financial, and emotional abuse perpetrated by anyone within a person's family. It also includes so-called "honour" based violence. Whilst this may not occur at a club/centre, there could be concerns about a participant's home situation.

Discriminatory Abuse: Discrimination is abuse that centres on a difference or perceived difference, particularly with respect to race, gender, disability, or any of the protected characteristics of the Equality Act.

Sexual Abuse: This includes rape, indecent exposure, sexual harassment, inappropriate looking or touching, sexual teasing or innuendo, sexual photography, subjection to pornography or witnessing sexual acts, indecent exposure and sexual assault, or sexual acts to which the adult has not consented or was pressured into consenting.

Emotional or Psychological Abuse: This includes threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, isolation, or withdrawal from services or supportive networks. In a club context, this might include excluding a member from social activities.

Neglect and Acts of Omission: This includes ignoring medical or physical care needs and failing to provide access to appropriate health, social care or educational services. It also includes the withdrawing of the necessities of life, including medication, adequate nutrition, and heating. In a water-sports context, it includes failing to ensure that the person is adequately protected from the cold or sun, or properly hydrated while on the water.

Self-neglect: This covers a wide range of behaviour, but it can be broadly defined as neglecting to care for one's personal hygiene, health, or surroundings. An example of self-neglect is behaviour such as hoarding. Self-neglect might indicate that the person is not receiving adequate support or care, or could be an indication of a mental health issue such as depression.

Modern Slavery: This encompasses slavery, human trafficking, forced labour, and domestic servitude. Traffickers and slave masters use whatever means they have at their disposal to coerce, deceive and force individuals into a life of abuse, servitude and inhumane treatment.

Organisational Abuse: This includes neglect and poor care practice within an institution or specific care setting, such as a hospital or care home, or in relation to care provided in one's own home. Organisational abuse can range from one off incidents to ongoing ill-treatment. It can be through neglect or poor professional practice because of the structure, policies, processes and practices within an organisation.

Financial or Material Abuse: This includes theft, fraud, internet scamming, and coercion in relation to an adult's financial affairs or arrangements, including in connection with wills, property, inheritance or financial transactions. It can also include the misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions, or benefits. People with learning disabilities or dementia are particularly vulnerable to this type of abuse. An example might be encouraging

someone to book and pay for training courses that are inappropriate for their level of ability, or to purchase sailing clothing or equipment they don't need.

Four additional types of harms

There are four additional types of harm that are not included in the Care Act 2014, but they are also relevant to safeguarding adults.

Bullying: Bullying is deliberately hurtful behaviour, usually repeated or sustained over a period of time, where it is difficult for those being bullied to defend themselves. The bully may be another vulnerable person. Although anyone can be the target of bullying, victims are typically shy, sensitive and perhaps anxious or insecure. Sometimes they are singled out for physical reasons – being overweight, physically small, having a disability - or for belonging to a different race, faith or culture.

Cyber Bullying: Cyber bullying occurs when someone repeatedly makes fun of another person online, or repeatedly picks on another person through emails or text messages. It can also involve using online forums with the intention of harming, damaging, humiliating, or isolating another person. It includes various types of bullying, including racist bullying, homophobic bullying, or bullying related to special education needs and disabilities. The main difference is that, instead of the perpetrator carrying out the bullying face-to-face, they use technology to do it.

Forced Marriage: This is a term used to describe a marriage in which one or both of the parties are married without their consent or against their will. A forced marriage differs from an arranged marriage, in which both parties' consent to the assistance of a third party in identifying a spouse. The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 make it a criminal offence to force someone to marry.

Mate Crime: A "mate crime" is when "vulnerable people are befriended by members of the community who go on to exploit and take advantage of them" (Safety Network Project, ARC). It may not be an illegal act, but it still has a negative effect on the individual. A mate crime is carried out by someone the adult knows, and it often happens in private. In recent years there have been several Serious Care Reviews relating to people with a learning disability who were seriously harmed, or even murdered, by people who purported to be their friend.

Radicalisation: The aim of radicalisation is to inspire new recruits, embed extreme views and persuade vulnerable individuals to the legitimacy of a cause. This may be direct through a relationship, or through social media.

Other safeguarding considerations

Domestic Abuse: Women's Aid define domestic abuse as an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in most cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer. It is very common. In most cases, it is experienced by women and is perpetrated by men. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021¹ is a new legislation which looks to raise awareness and understanding about the impact of domestic abuse on victims and their families. It will work to further improve the effectiveness of the justice system in providing protection for victims of domestic abuse and bringing perpetrators to justice and strengthen the support for victims of abuse by statutory agencies.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-factsheets/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-overarching-factsheet>

Extremism: Extremism is vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. (HM Government Prevent Strategy 2011²).

Non-recent Abuse: Abuse that occurred a period of time ago is sometimes referred to as non-recent. For example, an adult might speak about abuse that took place in their childhood.

Self-Harm: Self-harm is when someone deliberately hurts themselves. It can include cutting, burning, hitting or bruising, poisoning, scratching, hair-pulling or overdosing. Adults who self-harm aren't usually trying to commit suicide or looking for attention (although self-harming can result in accidental death). Often, it is a way for the person to deal with overwhelming or distressing feelings and emotions. Self-harming can be an indication of abuse, as some people use self-harm to cope with anxiety, stress and overwhelming emotions.

Gangs & County Lines: County lines is a form of criminal exploitation where urban gangs persuade, coerce or force children and young people to store drugs and money and/or transport them to suburban areas, market towns and coastal towns (Home Office, 2018). It can happen in any part of the UK and is against the law and a form of child abuse. Children and young people may be criminally exploited in multiple ways. Other forms of criminal exploitation include child sexual exploitation, trafficking, gang and knife crime.

Forced Marriage: A forced marriage is where one or both people do not or cannot consent to the marriage and pressure or abuse is used to force them into the marriage. Forced marriage is illegal in the UK and is a form of domestic abuse and a serious abuse of human rights.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)³: FGM is when a female's genitals are deliberately altered or removed for non-medical reasons. It's also known as 'female circumcision' or 'cutting' but has many other names. In the UK, this practice is illegal, but sadly still occurs and religious, social and cultural reasons are given to justify this practice.

2. Identifying abuse towards children and young people⁴

Neglect: Neglect is not meeting a child's basic physical or psychological needs. It can have a long-lasting impact on a child's health or development.

In sport, examples of neglect could include a coach or supervisor repeatedly:

- Failing to ensure children are safe.
- Exposing children to undue cold, heat or extreme weather conditions without ensuring adequate clothing or hydration.
- Exposing children to unnecessary risk of injury by ignoring safe practice guidelines.
- Failing to ensure the use of safety equipment.
- Requiring young people to participate when injured or unwell

Physical Abuse: When someone deliberately hurts a child causing physical harm it is called physical abuse. It may involve hitting, kicking, shaking, pushing, poisoning, burning, biting, scalding, drowning or any other method of causing non-accidental harm.

In sport, physical abuse may occur:

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance/revised-prevent-duty-guidance-for-england-and-wales>

³ Definition taken from the NSPCC Website

⁴ The definitions of harm were obtained from the Child Protection in Sport Unit Website: <https://thecpsu.org.uk/help-advice/introduction-to-safeguarding/child-abuse-in-a-sports-setting/>

- If the nature and intensity of training or competition exceeds the capacity of the child's immature growing body.
- Where coaches encourage the use of drugs or harmful substances to enhance performance or delay puberty.
- If athletes are required to participate when injured.
- If the sanctions used by coaches involve inflicting pain.

Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse is when a child is forced or persuaded to take part in sexual activities. This may involve physical contact or non-contact activities and can happen online or offline. Children and young people may not always understand that they are being sexually abused.

In sport, coaching techniques which involve physical contact with children can create situations where sexual abuse can be disguised. An abusive situation can also develop if a person in a position of authority, such as a coach, was to misuse their power.

Contacts made within sport and pursued through other routes, such as social media, have been used to groom children for abuse. Sexual abusers can also groom protective adults and organisations to create opportunities for abuse to take place.

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a type of sexual abuse. When a child or young person is exploited, they're given things, like gifts, drugs, money, status and affection, in exchange for performing sexual activities. Children and young people are often tricked into believing they are in a loving and consensual relationship. This is called grooming. They may trust their abuser and not understand that they are being abused.

Emotional Abuse: Emotional abuse is the emotional maltreatment of a child, which has a severe and persistent negative effect on the child's emotional development.

In sport, emotional abuse may occur if:

- Children are subjected to repeated criticism, sarcasm, name-calling or racism.
- A child is ignored or excluded.
- Children feel pressure to perform to unrealistically high expectations.
- Children are made to feel like their value or worth is dependent on their sporting success.

Bullying: Bullying is when individuals or groups seek to harm, intimidate or coerce someone who is perceived to be vulnerable. It can involve people of any age and can happen anywhere, including at home, school, sports clubs or online.

Bullying encompasses a range of behaviours which are often combined. It might include physical, verbal or emotional abuse, or online cyberbullying.

In sport, bullying can occur based on a young person's sporting ability, body size or shape. It might include name-calling, offensive hand gestures, physical assault or exclusion from team activities.

3. Patterns of abuse

Patterns of abuse vary and include:

- Serial abusing in which the perpetrator seeks out and 'grooms' individuals. Sexual abuse sometimes falls into this pattern as do some forms of financial abuse.
- Long-term abuse in the context of an ongoing family relationship, such as domestic violence between spouses or generations or persistent psychological abuse.
- Opportunistic abuse, such as theft occurring because money or valuable items have been left lying around.

4. Signs and indicators of abuse

Signs and indicators that may suggest someone is being abused or neglected include:

- Unexplained bruises or injuries.
- Lack of medical attention when an injury has occurred.
- Someone losing or gaining weight.
- An unkempt appearance.
- A change in behaviour or confidence.
- Self-harming.
- A person's belongings or money going missing.
- The person is not attending, or no longer enjoying, their sports sessions.
- A person has a fear of a particular group or individual.
- A direct disclosure – someone tells you or another person that they are being abused.

5. If you are concerned

If there are concerns about abuse taking place in the person's home, talking to their carers might put them at greater risk. If you cannot talk to the carers, consult your organisation's designated Welfare Officer or the person in charge. It is this person's responsibility to make the decision to contact Adult Social Care Services. It is NOT their responsibility to decide if abuse is taking place, BUT it is their responsibility to act on your concerns.

Social care professionals involved in taking decisions about adults at risk must take all of the circumstances into account and act in the individual's best interests. You are not expected to be able to take such decisions.

The following six principles inform the way in which professionals and other staff in care and support services and other public services work with adults:

- **Empowerment:** People being supported and encouraged to make their own decisions and informed consent.
- **Prevention:** It is better to take action before harm occurs.
- **Proportionality:** The least intrusive response appropriate to the risk presented.
- **Protection:** Support and representation for those in greatest need.
- **Partnership:** Local solutions through services working with their communities. Communities have a part to play in preventing, detecting and reporting neglect and abuse.
- **Accountability:** Accountability and transparency in delivering safeguarding.

Some instances of abuse will constitute a criminal offence, for example assault, sexual assault and rape, fraud or other forms of financial exploitation and certain forms of discrimination. This type of abuse should be reported to the Police.

6. Safeguarding legislation and associated policies – England

Safeguarding is governed by several different legislations and guidance. This will vary depending on the country within the UK. The following applies to England:

Key legislation for adults at risk

- [The Care Act 2014](#)
- [Care and Support Statutory Guidance \(especially chapter 14\) 2014](#)

Key legislation for children and young people

- [The Children Act 1989](#)
- [Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024](#)
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#)
- [Children and Families Act 2014](#)
- [The United Nations convention on the Rights of the Child 1992](#)