

Safeguarding policy

Introduction

Reading Food Growing Network (RFGN) is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and adults at risk. RFGN is a membership organisation where some of the members are themselves organisations. This policy applies where RFGN is directly engaged in providing a service. Where a member organisation is providing a service their own Safeguarding policy shall apply. RFGN does not have oversight responsibility for members' safeguarding policies. Where RFGN is running a specific event or service it will review and amend this policy as appropriate.

The purpose of this policy is to outline the duties and responsibilities of committee members, volunteers and anyone working on behalf of RFGN in a freelance capacity in relation to the protection of children and adults at risk from abuse. This might arise where RFGN is directly delivering a project or service or where a child or adult at risk is working as part of, or with RFGN, e.g. as a volunteer or employed person or self-employed contractor or committee member.

The key objectives of this policy are:

- To explain the responsibilities RFGN and its committee members, volunteers and freelance workers have in respect of child and adult at risk protection.
- To provide committee members, volunteers and freelance workers with an overview of child and adult at risk protection
- To provide a clear procedure that will be implemented where protection issues arise, and
- Overall to ensure that RFGN responds to concerns appropriately.

The first priority should always be to ensure the safety and protection of adults at risk and children. All children and adults have the right to be safe from harm and should be able to live free from fear of abuse, neglect and exploitation. To this end it is the responsibility of all to act on any suspicion or evidence of abuse or neglect and to pass on their concerns to a responsible person/agency.

Context - Adults at risk

For the purpose of this document 'adult' means a person aged 18 years or over. Some adults are less able to protect themselves than others, and some have difficulty making their wishes and feelings known. This may make them vulnerable to abuse. The broad definition of an adult at risk is a person who has needs for care and support that may make them more vulnerable to abuse or neglect.

Context – Children

For the purpose of this document a child is defined as a person under the age of 18. The term ‘young people’ varies in its meaning depending on the context, so this document uses ‘child’ and ‘adult’ at risk and thus covers all ages.

The six safeguarding principles

These are: Empowerment, prevention, protection, proportionality, partnership and accountability. For detail, see

<https://www.scie.org.uk/safeguarding/adults/introduction/six-principles>

What is abuse?

The Care and Support statutory guidance identifies 10 kinds of abuse. They are: physical, domestic violence/abuse, sexual, psychological/emotional, financial/material, modern slavery, discriminatory, organisational/institutional, neglect or acts of omission, and self neglect. See this link for detail:

<https://www.scie.org.uk/safeguarding/adults/introduction/types-and-indicators-of-abuse>

It is important that adults at risk and children are protected from abuse. All complaints, allegations or suspicions must be taken seriously.

Procedure in the event of a disclosure

In the event of an incident or disclosure:

DO

- Make sure the individual/child is safe
- Assess whether emergency services are required and if needed call them
- Listen
- Offer support and reassurance
- Ascertain and establish the basic facts
- Make careful notes and obtain agreement on them. This should include information in relation to the date, the time, the place where the alleged abuse happened, your name and the names of others present, the name of the complainant and, where different, the name of the person who has allegedly been abused, the nature of the alleged abuse, a description of any injuries observed, the account which has been given of the allegation.
- Ensure notation of dates, time and persons present are correct and agreed
- Take all necessary precautions to preserve forensic evidence
- Explain areas of confidentiality (see below)

- Report the suspicion, allegation or incident of abuse to the RFGN Chair the same day.
- Explain the procedure to the individual making the allegation if appropriate.

DON'T

- Confront the alleged abuser
- Be judgmental or voice your own opinion
- Be dismissive of the concern
- Investigate or interview beyond that which is necessary to establish the basic facts
- Disturb or destroy possible forensic evidence
- Consult with persons not directly involved with the situation
- Ask leading questions
- Assume Information
- Make promises
- Ignore the allegation
- Elaborate in your notes
- Panic

It is important to remember that the person who first encounters a case of alleged abuse is not responsible for deciding whether abuse has occurred. This is a task for the professional adult protection agencies.

The RFGN Chair will take the following actions depending on the nature of the disclosure:

- Contact the emergency services if this is necessary and has not already been done
- Telephone and report the matter to the appropriate local social services duty social worker
- Take steps for the support of the person making the allegation as appropriate
- Take steps for the support of the person to whom the allegation has been made

Whistleblowing statement

It is vital that committee members, volunteers and freelance workers notify the RFGN Chair about their concerns. It is the responsibility of the Chair to take reporting action, not the individual committee member, volunteer or freelance worker. If a person is concerned that the Chair is not available, is not taking sufficient action, or is the person about whom an allegation is being made, that person should notify the RFGN Secretary.

Confidentiality

RFGN's DP and confidentiality policy applies.

In the particular context of safeguarding:

Committee members, volunteers and freelance workers have a professional responsibility to share relevant information about protection with other professionals, particularly investigative agencies and social services.

All personal information will be kept confidential. All written records will be kept in a secure area for a specific time as identified in the data protection policy.

If a child or adult at risk confides in a committee member, volunteer or freelance worker, and requests that the information is kept secret, it is important that that person tells the child or adult sensitively that they have a responsibility to refer cases of alleged abuse to the appropriate agencies and so it may not be possible to keep information confidential. Within that context, the child or adult should, however, be assured that the matter will be disclosed only to people who need to know about it.

Where possible, consent should be obtained from the child or adult before sharing personal information with third parties. In some circumstances obtaining consent may be neither possible nor desirable as the safety and welfare of the child or adult is the priority.

The adult's or child's involvement in the process of sharing information should be fully considered and their wishes and feelings taken into account.

Policy approved by RFGN 30 September 2026, to be reviewed September 2027.