



Safeguarding Children Policy

Version 1

Approved by: Executive Team

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 We take all concerns and allegations of abuse, neglect and harm seriously and respond appropriately. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Doing nothing is not an option.
- 1.2 We know abuse against children occurs in society and children from all communities are at risk of abuse. We recognise there are large numbers of children at risk living in our homes.
- 1.3 Abuse can take many different forms. It may occur via neglect, by inflicting harm or failing to act to prevent harm. This can happen in a family, institution or community setting. In line with the statutory framework, whatever the form of abuse or neglect, practitioners should put the needs of children first when determining what action to take.
- 1.4 Safeguarding is about preventing and stopping both the risks and experience of abuse or neglect, while at the same time making sure we promote the Child's wellbeing. This Policy outlines our commitment to Safeguarding children, in line with the [Care Act 2014](#) and [Children Act 2004](#).
- 1.5 In all Safeguarding matters, we will endeavour to provide a child centred approach. This means keeping the child in focus when making decisions about their lives and working in partnership with them and their families. The focus is on the person, not the process.
- 1.6 Our primary role is as 'alerters'. We are responsible for **reporting** safeguarding concerns to the relevant agencies such as the Local Authority, Hospital, the Police, and Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs).
- 1.7 This Policy relates to all children living in Optivo homes, as well as children that are non-residents but come into contact with services provided by Optivo.

Please read alongside [Working Together to Safeguard Children: Statutory Framework](#) and [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#).

2.0 Aims of this policy

2.1 The aims of this Policy are to make sure we:

- Report safeguarding concerns about children (see [section 4.0](#) for definitions) living in our properties and using our services
- Comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements and best practice, including the [Care Act 2014](#) and [Children Act 2004](#)
- Protect staff, volunteers, contractors and agents who have a responsibility toward children at risk
- Raise awareness of the different types of abuse and signs to look out for
- Raise awareness of the action we'll take on suspecting, witnessing or discovering abuse or inappropriate conduct
- Have a zero tolerance approach towards abuse and take immediate action
- Improve partnership working around safeguarding
- Work in line with our safeguarding partner's policies and procedures.

2.2 We will achieve our aims by:

- Protecting the rights of the children living within our homes by enabling them to live in an environment free from abuse and neglect.
- Having a nominated Strategic lead and Operational lead for Safeguarding
- Ensuring our Safeguarding leads provide clear lines of accountability for reporting abuse
- Working within, and keeping up to date with, Government legislation, guidance and regulation
- Ensuring when in contact with people at risk, all necessary Health and Safety risk assessments are carried out by appropriately trained staff
- Having a safeguarding monitoring group in place to oversee strategic objectives for safeguarding children.
- Having Safeguarding Champions available to staff within each region, to offer support and guidance with raising Safeguarding alerts.

3.0 Our approach

3.1 Our Policy adopts the six safeguarding principles in the statutory guidance for the [Care Act 2014](#):

Empowerment

Interventions must support people to make decisions and have a say in their care. Presumption of person-led decisions and informed consent.

Protection

Supporting victims and allowing them to have a say. This includes support and representation for those in greatest need.

Prevention

It is better to take action before harm occurs. Interventions for people at risk should focus on preventing care and support needs from developing.

Proportionality

Interventions must represent the least intrusive response appropriate to the risk presented.

Partnership

Local solutions from services working within the community have a part to play in preventing, detecting and reporting neglect and abuse. Housing providers, their contractors and residents all have a role to play.

Accountability

Safeguarding practice and arrangements should be accountable and transparent to the public. There should be a lead Safeguarding Officer that is known and available to staff ([see 5.1](#)).

4.0 Definitions

4.1 **A child** is any person under 18 years of age. Safeguarding children is defined in [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#) as:

- Protecting children from maltreatment
- Preventing impairment of children's health and development
- Ensuring children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care and
- Taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.

4.2 **Abuse** – for this Policy, we define abuse as *'the violation of an individual's human and civil rights by another person or persons'*.

Abuse is behaviour that either deliberately or unknowingly causes harm or endangers life or infringes on rights. It may be a single or repeated act. It may be deliberate neglect or a lack of appropriate action. It can also be where the person is persuaded to do something which they have not consented to or cannot consent to. Abuse causes harm or distress to a person and is often a crime. It often occurs where there is an expectation of trust.

4.3 Abuse cannot be excused for any cultural or religious reason and should always be reported.

5.0 Responsibilities

5.1 We have a designated strategic lead on safeguarding for Optivo, supported by a Safeguarding Coordinator as operational lead. The Strategic Lead via the Executive Team is responsible for making sure lessons learnt are communicated to all relevant staff. Where necessary, supporting policies, procedures and guidance will be amended.

5.2 All staff, Board members, volunteers, agents and contractors are responsible for understanding the different [types of abuse](#) and reporting concerns or suspected abuse.

6.0 Reporting Abuse

6.1 We record all safeguarding reports and alerts relating to our residents on a central database.

When notifying the local authority of a child safeguarding concern we are not obliged to seek consent from the parent/ guardian, but we will discuss our concerns with the parent/ guardian when appropriate.

Reporting abuse – Residents

6.2 We work in partnership with external agencies to prevent abuse. Where we suspect imminent harm or abuse, we'll take immediate action.

6.3 We must report safeguarding concerns to the relevant agencies such as the Local Authority, University, Hospital, the Police and Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs).

6.4 We will raise awareness of how to report safeguarding concerns and the support we can offer to residents. And we will work with customers to manage risks and enable the appropriate level of support.

Reporting abuse - Non-residents (including staff, Board members, volunteers, agents and contractors)

6.5 If a staff member is concerned about a child, we have a duty of care. They should:

- Contact the local authority direct to raise the alert immediately.
- Inform their line manager of the situation.

7.0 Information sharing

7.1 Sharing information is essential. When sharing information about people at risk all staff must follow the [Optivo Data Protection Policy](#).

8.0 Ensuring we have properly vetted, trained and supported colleagues

8.1 The Disclosure and Barring Service, (DBS) helps prevent unsuitable people from working or volunteering with people at risk. Human Resources will make any referrals to the DBS and ensure all staff and volunteers are employed according to DBS regulations (see [DBS Policy](#) for more details).

8.2 All Optivo staff, volunteers and Board members will complete mandatory safeguarding e-learning training as part of induction. This will be repeated at intervals appropriate for their role.

Frontline staff will attend mandatory workshops every three years providing detailed safeguarding information and use of in-house reporting systems.

- 8.3 We recognise the emotional impact on staff of working with vulnerabilities and having to recognise and deal with safeguarding concerns. Employees should inform their manager if they are reporting an incident or concern. Managers should support employees affected by an incident.

Employees also have access to a specialist stress counsellor provided through our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).

- 8.4 Contractors and agents providing frontline services on our behalf need to make sure their staff:

- Are suitable to provide frontline services
- Comply with our [Supplier Code of Conduct & Expected Behaviours Code](#)
- Are aware of who to contact with any safeguarding concerns in an Optivo property.

Contractors must also:

- Notify us of all safeguarding concerns
- Fully co-operate with any investigation into received allegations
- Have adequate systems in place to take appropriate disciplinary action.

We support our main contractors by:

- Offering 'Safeguarding Tool Box Talks' annually
- Supplying 'Safeguarding Awareness' cards with contact details of our Safeguarding Coordinator for guidance and support, and the direct line to raise the alert immediately.

- 8.5 Staff, contractors and agents are prohibited from knowingly entering a property where the sole occupant is or appears to be under 16 years of age. If this is the case, they should withdraw from the premises and advise Optivo immediately. Appointments must be re-arranged to a time where an appropriate adult is present.
- 8.6 Any breach of this Policy will be dealt with under the [Disciplinary Policy](#) or [Breach Procedure for Governance Members](#).

9.0 Review

- 9.1 The Executive Team will report to Board where there have been incidents of significant abuse reported to statutory agencies. All reports go to Board will be anonymised to hide the identities of those involved.

- 9.2 The strategic lead and safeguarding monitoring group will meet quarterly to monitor performance against safeguarding duties and discuss lessons learnt from safeguarding cases. The strategic lead will also advise the group of any changes to legislation and/or guidance at these meetings.
- 9.3 We will review this Policy annually to address legislative, regulatory, best practice or operational issues.