Alnwick Area Friends of the Earth

Safeguarding Statement

Safeguarding: what is it and what responsibility does our group hold?

Safeguarding means protecting children from maltreatment; preventing impairment of health or development; ensuring they are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and taking action to enable them to have the best outcomes. It also means protecting the rights of adults to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect. Some adults are considered more "at risk" or vulnerable to abuse than others and these groups are protected by law.

It is the responsibility of every individual to do what they can to prevent harm to vulnerable groups, and to report any suspicions as soon as possible to the relevant authorities.

National Friends of the Earth expects all local groups to operate in accordance with their guidance, including following the key prevention behaviours, reporting any safeguarding concerns to Friends of the Earth. If we intend to do any significant work with children or vulnerable adults at risk, we will inform Friends of the Earth and appoint a Safeguarding Lead.

Any failure to follow this guidance could lead to an expulsion from the Friends of the Earth network.

Reporting a safeguarding concern

If any group member suspects that a young person or vulnerable adult attending our group meeting or activity is at risk of harm or is the victim of abuse, they must report it as soon as possible.

In the first instance, unless someone is at immediate risk of harm, all safeguarding concerns should be reported to the **Friends of the Earth Safeguarding Team** by emailing safeguarding@foe.co.uk. This should be done **within 24 hours** of the incident or concern being raised. They will then work with us to identify appropriate next steps – including contacting our local authority and/or Childline. All safeguarding concerns will be treated seriously.

If someone is at immediate risk, call 999 straight away and then report it to the Friends of the Earth Safeguarding team.

What constitutes abuse?

Safeguarding applies to both children and vulnerable adults. In order to recognise when to report a safeguarding concern, we need to understand the main types of abuse, and their main signs and symptoms.

Children tend to be at risk from four main types of abuse:

- Neglect
- Physical abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Sexual Abuse

See https://www.highspeedtraining.co.uk/hub/signs-abuse-children/ which provides a more detailed outline of different forms of abuse and the signs to look out for in children.

Definition of a Vulnerable adult

An adult might be considered at risk if they are aged 18 years or over and:

- have needs for care and support (whether or not the local council is meeting any of those needs) and;
- are experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect; and
- as a result of those care and support needs are unable to protect themselves from either the risk of, or the experience of abuse or neglect

An adult at risk may be a person who:

- Is elderly and frail due to ill health
- Has a learning disability
- Has a physical disability and/or a sensory impairement
- Has mental health needs including dementia or personality disorder
- Has a long-term illness /or condition
- Misuses substances or alcohol
- Is unable to make their own decisions and is in need of care and support
- Is a young adult, over the age of 18, who has care and support needs and is 'in transition' from children's to adult's services
- Is a carer (looking after another person with care and support needs)

If you are in doubt as to whether an adult should be considered at risk, we will record our concerns and contact safeguarding@foe.co.uk at the earliest opportunity. If anyone at our event or activity is at immediate risk of harm, we will dial 999.

In adults, there are ten recognised forms of abuse:

- Neglect
- Physical abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Domestic violence
- Modern day slavery
- Discriminatory abuse
- Financial or material abuse
- Organisational or institutional abuse
- Self-neglect

See https://www.scie.org.uk/safeguarding/adults/introduction/types-and-indicators-of-abuse which provides a more detailed outline of different forms of abuse and the signs to look out for in adults.

Note that poor mental health and/or self-harm do not come under the legal safeguarding framework. However, if any group member has a concern about an adult or a young person that they come into contact with, in the course of the group activities, they can contact the Safeguarding Team. If someone is in immediate danger dial 999.

How we will conduct our group activities

Direct work with children and vulnerable adults can include;

- Working in coalition with young activists
- Supporting a Young Friends of the Earth group in our area
- Welcoming children and young people to participate in our group (anyone under 16 must be accompanied by a responsible adult
- Working in schools or colleges
- Organising a project or event outside of the above that is specifically targeting young people or vulnerable adults.

If our group plans to work directly and/or extensively with young people, we will contact safeguarding@foe.co.uk.- where we will be required to do a risk assessment for the event or activity planned. We will also make ourselves aware of and abide by the safeguarding procedures of the organisation we are working with (e.g. a school)

Key behaviours for prevention

A key element of safeguarding at any activity or event is prevention. To ensure everyone feels safe and risk of harm is minimised, we should always adhere to the following behaviours and practices. If you are ever unsure if a young person is under 18 and you are unable to ask, please act as if they are.

Never work alone. Ensure that you are never in an enclosed or isolated space alone with children, young people or adults at risk. Always work in pairs if possible or take your activity into a shared or public space.

Keep room doors open if possible, especially when working with a young person or adult at risk.

Maintain appropriate boundaries.

- Physical contact with young people should be of the kind that they can initiate or cease whenever they wish (high fives rather than hugs)
- Remain fully clothed at all times (the minimum clothing required at Friends of the Earth events is a vest/singlet and shorts). Do not change your clothes in view
- If you need to show a young person to the toilet, remain outside
- Do not single out a young person for special treatment or individual attention
- Do not give a young person gifts or money, even to access transport or buy food at your event
- Do not arrange to meet a young person alone outside of the event or activity
- Do not offer a young person a lift in a private car

Procedure when Contacting Under 18s

- When contacting Under 18s on our mailing list or Under 18s involved in any FoE activity we will always contact them from our group email account – or, if this is not possible, we will always cc another group member into any communication
- Alternatively, if we need to keep in touch with a young person who is connected with Friends of the Earth nationally this should be done through a member of the Youth and Families team – info will be available from our regional team (contact your regional staff contact in the first instance)
- We will not contact or hold any details of anyone Under 13 – if anyone Under 16 wishes to join our mailing list we will first obtain parental permission by asking for an email confirmation from a responsible adult. If we do not receive this, we'll remove the person in question from our list
- We will accept 16- and 17-year-olds onto our mailing list but will undertake risk assessments if inviting them to any online or face to face activities

- We will ask that anyone under 16 attending any of our activities be accompanied by a responsible adult – *or* we will first seek guidance from National FoE Safeguarding team

If a situation arises where the question of consent or seeking of parental permission falls into a grey area, or where a young person questions the above practice, we will seek guidance and support from the National Friends of the Earth Safeguarding team

If contacting someone over 18 and who may be considered as 'vulnerable', we will try to adhere to the guidance above. We will always cc: another group member into any communications with them and in all cases ensure that we are complying with GDPR guidance.

We will not provide alcohol for under 18s. If there are unaccompanied under 18s at our events it is best practice to make any refreshments alcohol-free or have a means of clearly identifying under 18s.

We will not fundraise from under 18s or adults at risk.

Group meetings

When planning meetings, we will consider the following to prevent any safeguarding concerns from arising. We will;

- Check whether anyone attending is under 18 **or** has any other risk factors. If in doubt it is generally sensible to assume that there are vulnerable people in the room.
- Set clear ground rules - where everyone has the chance to be heard
- Appoint a facilitator or chair for the meeting who is confident to implement the ground rules and keep the meeting to time
- Appoint a safeguarding lead within the group. *Where possible,* this person will have been subject to a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check

Other events and activities

- We will fill out a risk assessment prior to an event or activity to be sure that everyone is clear what to do if certain incidents occur
- Any event publicity will welcome all (as appropriate) but will clearly state that children must be accompanied and supervised at all times by a responsible adult
- If organizing an event or activity with another organisation (for example a school) we will ascertain who is the safeguarding lead for that organisation and come to an agreement on who has principle safeguarding responsibility for the event or activity
- We support *lawful* campaigning activity and recognise this is especially important for young and vulnerable people – we will adhere to this when partaking in wider

movement events where other groups may share different tactics – for example, in actions which may involve civil disobedience

Digital communications

- If we use digital communications such as webinars and Zoom, particularly with young people, we will adhere to the key behaviour guidance above
- When working with under 18s we will ask for permission to use their digital images from their parent or responsible adult – we will do this using a photo permission form that needs to be signed by their responsible adult

- We will avoid private communications with Under18s. including on social media, and private messaging on platforms such as Whatsapp and within the chat on webinars

Guidance on recording abuse

If a safeguarding concern comes to your attention it is important to remain calm and objective - record as much factual information about what has happened as you can. Under no circumstance tell someone that you will keep a disclosure a secret, as you have a legal obligation to report any concerns that you have.

- Be truthful – never tell a lie to make someone feel better
- Frame it positively – use constructive, positive, peaceful language
- Be consistent
- Be compassionate – use appropriate tone of voice and body language
- Explain – keep them informed of positive developments so they have ownership over their part in the situation
- Offer a drink of water or juice (no food unless they are with you for an extended period of time)
- Do not have physical contact – regardless of whether it seems appropriate or not, it is best to refrain from physical contact to maintain a professional boundary. This is especially important as you may not know the extent of a person's vulnerability, and to maintain a bond of trust your behaviours must be completely professional
- Work as a pair with another member of your group or trusted adult
- Support but don’t give advice
- Avoid commenting on what they have told you
- Try to reassure the child or vulnerable person you are dealing with

Recording and reporting on any incident or disclosure

You may need to record an incident that you have observed or that someone else has reported or note down a disclosure prior to notifying Friends of the Earth's Safeguarding Team.

Note the following guidelines

- Never promise that you will keep it a secret. Ensure you inform anyone about to give you information that you will share it with the relevant people to ensure the safety of everybody involved. If this means that they then do not tell you something, you must accept this. Please record the incident anyway and report it to Friends of the Earth
- Listen attentively, and if you are unsure about any details someone is telling you, ask for clarification
- Listen and record information in chunks
- If applicable, repeat the record you've taken back so the person giving the information can check the accuracy

The key information to record is;

- The date, time and location your notes were taken
- The identity of the person supplying the information, or the identity/description of the subject of your observations
- The name and contact details if possible, of anyone else present during the record taking
- Record as much factual information as possible of the incident, report or concern
- Record any action that you took as a result of the report or observation