

SAFEGUARDING POLICY



Youth Talk is committed to promoting the safety and wellbeing of young people and their families in all that we do. The policy below outlines how we will safeguard those we work with and those that work on our behalf.

1. Policy statement

Youth Talk provides a confidential, self-referral counselling service for Young People between the ages of 13 – 25 years of age in St Albans and surrounding areas. We are committed to creating and maintaining the safest possible environment for children and young people who self-refer for counselling/psychotherapy or group work and are committed to promoting the safety and wellbeing of young people in all that we do.

Our safeguarding framework, policy, procedures and guidance outline how we will fulfil our duty of care to safeguard those we work with and those that work on our behalf including staff, counsellors, volunteers, trustees and any partner agencies.

2. Purpose of this policy

Everybody has the right to be safe and to thrive no matter who they are or what their circumstances. We believe that our staff, counsellors, trustees, other volunteers and consultants have both an individual and organisational responsibility for safeguarding. We aim to embed a safeguarding ethos and practice which is both proactive and responsive towards issues of safety and wellbeing.

We understand that where abuse, neglect or wrongdoing does occur, it can have devastating effects on individuals, families and wider society. Our commitment to safeguarding in its widest sense is therefore vital.

This policy and the accompanying procedures provide clear standards and processes for all our staff, counsellors, volunteers (including trustees and young people) and partners. This ensures that everyone is clear about their roles, individual and organisational responsibilities, and the procedures to follow in order to protect children and adults at risk from harm.

3. Scope

This policy is informed by the Care Act 2014, Children Act 1989 and 2004, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 as well as relevant statutory guidance and sector best practice.

This policy applies to all employees, counsellors, volunteers, trustees, independent advisors, contracted counsellors and associates and unpaid staff working on behalf of Youth Talk in any capacity and any setting. Youth Talk requires that our partners, current or in future, share our commitment to safeguarding.

In this document, as in the Children Acts 1989 and 2004, 'a child' is anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. The fact that a child has reached 16 years of age, is living independently or is in further education does not change his or her status or entitlement to services or protection under these Acts.

A 'vulnerable adult' is any person aged 18 or over who 'is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental state or disability, age or illness' and 'who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.' (Care Act, 2014). People with learning disabilities that make it difficult for them to protect themselves from harm will come within this definition. This policy and procedures have been developed to be pro-active in responding to Child and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Legislation.

While Youth Talk's primary service is one-to-one and group counselling for young people, our safeguarding responsibilities extend to all organisational activities, including but not limited to:

- Fundraising events in the community
- Volunteer activities, including those involving contact with the public
- School talks and outreach events
- Partnerships with external venues or organisations

For these activities, we assess potential safeguarding risks and put in place proportionate measures (e.g., risk assessments, volunteer briefings, codes of conduct).

4. Our commitment to safeguarding

Youth Talk's Safeguarding Framework sets out the standards which we are committed to upholding throughout our work. Youth Talk believes that:

- The safety, welfare and best interests of the child, young person and/or adult are paramount in all considerations about their welfare and protection.
- Safeguarding must be embedded throughout our governance, leadership and culture.
- That everyone with a role in working with vulnerable children/young people has a responsibility to safeguard and promote a child's welfare particularly when it comes to protecting children from abuse.
- Young people must be valued, empowered and supported to inform and shape our activities, including decision-making, risk-identification and review of our safeguarding practices.
- No-one must be discriminated against on the grounds of age, ethnicity, religious belief, race, faith, nationality, class, sexual orientation, gender or disability. All individuals have an equal right to protection from abuse and neglect.
- Special care is needed in dealing with vulnerable children/young people whose age, inexperience or physical or mental state makes them particularly vulnerable to abuse.
- Our recruitment, induction, training, supervision and appraisal procedures must ensure that staff, contractors and volunteers are suitable and supported to implement safeguarding best practice.
- Our physical and online environment should be safe and secure and promote enjoyable and positive experiences.

- We must have clear policies and procedures for reporting, acting-upon, referring on and following-up safeguarding concerns, which are monitored and regularly reviewed to identify learning and/or implications for policy and practice.
- It is right to insist upon high standards in safeguarding practice from all of our staff, counsellors, volunteers and partners.
- We must proactively care for our staff, counsellors and volunteers. Individuals should be encouraged to take personal responsibility for their own wellbeing as well as feeling empowered to seek support when necessary.
- Learning, sharing and creating networks to champion best practice is beneficial for all children, young people and adults at risk as well as our staff and volunteers
- Our safeguarding policy and related documents should be publicly available and will extend across all facets of the charity's work (including fundraising, working with volunteers etc).

5. Principles of reporting concerns (the 5 Rs)

Youth Talk offers distressed or disturbed young people aged 13 – 25 the opportunity to have counselling/therapy according to their need. People who find their way to Youth Talk are likely to have experienced difficulties in their lives that may include some form of significant harm. The effects of this harm may be ongoing and/or the potentially harmful situation may still be a reality. It is within this framework that the psychological work must be carried out.

These are potential situations that could occur in the course of the work of the organisation:

1. A young person (a 'child') discloses to their counsellor/ psychotherapist information about current or historic abuse or neglect
2. The counsellor/psychotherapist perceives a child to be at risk of significant harm from abuse or neglect.
3. The young person feels they are being abused by their counsellor/ psychotherapist.
4. A member of the reception team believes that a young person is displaying signs of abuse/neglect.
5. A Youth Talk employee, contractor or volunteer has concerns about the conduct of a member of the organisation towards a young person, or another member of staff, volunteer or donor.

As a consequence, concern for the protection of such individuals is part of the everyday work of the organisation and our reporting principles will follow the five R's:

- **Recognise** concerns that a child or adult is being harmed or might be at risk of harm.
- **Respond** appropriately to a child or adult who is telling you what is happening to them.
- **Refer** the concerns initially to the designated safeguarding lead and/or CEO and if appropriate, to children's or adult social care or the police.
- **Record** the concerns appropriately and any subsequent action taken; ensure there is no delay in passing on concerns. Timescales noted are the maximum allowed and nothing should prevent a more speedy response if this is required.
- **Resolution and escalation** – take responsibility to ensure that referrals made are followed up and take further action if not satisfied with the response.

6. Roles & responsibilities

Where there are concerns about the well-being of a child or vulnerable adult, Youth Talk's Safeguarding policy will be followed, and information will be shared with the relevant agencies in order to protect those affected.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Everyone should understand that safeguarding affects all aspects of the organisation and they must be aware of this policy and the procedures to follow. However, in order to ensure all concerns or allegations are handled appropriately, Youth Talk has a number of designated positions and specific job roles as follows:

6.1 Trustees

The Charity Commission expects that safeguarding should be a key governance priority for trustees. It is part of their duty of care to ensure Youth Talk:

- acts in the best interests of the children, young people and adults at risk, as well as all staff, contracted counsellors, volunteers, donors and visitors.
- takes all reasonable steps to prevent any harm to them
- assesses and manages risk
- puts safeguarding policies and procedures in place
- undertakes ongoing monitoring and reviewing to ensure that safeguards are being implemented and are effective
- responds appropriately to allegations of abuse and whistleblowing cases.

In addition, at least one Designated Trustee for Safeguarding (DTS) is identified who will:

- Chair the Safeguarding Sub Committee and report at each meeting of the Board
- Work with and support the CEO to set, develop and promote a culture that puts safeguarding at its heart
- Be suitably experienced and trained in safeguarding
- Meet with the CEO, Operations Manager and Clinical Supervisors every six months to maintain an overview of all safeguarding measures across Youth Talk
- Ensure that Trustees are fully informed of safeguarding issues across the organisation and contribute to maintaining safe practice across all our operations.

6.2 Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

At Youth Talk our Operations Manager (Kaz Underwood), three clinical Supervisors (Sally Sayers, Dean Reddick, Georgie Gee) and the CEO (David Barker) are all trained as Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL). However, ultimate responsibility will be retained by the CEO, David Barker (david.barker@youthtalk.org.uk 01727 868684) and the Board of Trustees. The Operations Manager and Safeguarding Sub Committee are charged with:

- Alerting the CEO of any safeguarding concern, contributing to decision-making and ensuring appropriate follow-up to manage and reduce risk.
- Ensuring staff and counsellors have access to appropriate safeguarding guidance, advice and support.
- Checking that safeguarding referrals, incident reports and actions taken are recorded, fully reviewed, and logged in a restricted file.

- Appraising the training needs on a regular basis ensuring that all counsellors and staff have relevant and up to date safeguarding training.
- Keeping up to date with relevant law, guidance and case examples.
- Providing oversight and supporting Youth Talk to enable young people and adults to be aware of Youth Talks safeguarding procedures.
- Supporting the CEO in providing an update on any safeguarding issues at each meeting of the Board of Trustees.
- Proactively engage with other agencies and external experts to ensure that Youth Talk's approach is informed by and contributes to best practice within the sector.
- Providing advice and guidance on safer recruitment to those recruiting staff or volunteers, including the induction period.
- Ensuring that all new staff and volunteers are fully inducted/trained to the appropriate level in safeguarding practices.

6.3 Staff, Counsellors, Contractors & Volunteers

Key responsibilities are:

- To raise with the DSL, Operations Manager or CEO immediately, any safeguarding concerns they identify.
- To be familiar with and adhere to the safeguarding procedures as outlined in this policy and other related policies and procedures.
- To be familiar with the potential signs of abuse and neglect.
- To complete the necessary safeguarding training required for their role.
- Seek support from the DSL over any concerns or worries they may have concerning children or vulnerable adults.
- To undertake refresher training every three years.
- To ensure appropriate recruitment and selection processes are followed and where relevant ensure DBS Clearance.
- To ensure appropriate due diligence is undertaken on any partners or funders we work with

7. Making a safeguarding referral

A referral involves giving Social Care Services or the Police information about concerns relating to an individual or family in order that enquiries can be undertaken by the appropriate agency and followed by any necessary action. Further information on Youth Talk procedures can be found in Appendix 2.

- In certain cases, the level of concern will lead straight to a referral without external consultation being necessary.
- An accurate record of concerns should be made at the time – in the Safeguarding Log.
- These concerns should be put into writing to Children's Services within 48 hours of the referral.

- The agreed action (or the agreement to take no further action) must be accurately recorded and the reasons for this decision given (in the Safeguarding Log).

Confidentiality:

- It is a general principle at YT that we must exercise our Duty of Care by keeping an accurate official YT log of sessions and a summary of content for each session (in the Client Information Pack).
- Any record made in relation to a referral will be kept confidentially and in a secure place.
- Information in relation to child protection concerns will be shared only on a 'need to know' basis.
- Social Care Services will give advice re concerns without requiring personal details.
- Generally speaking, any assessment, case history or ending summary which appears in the Client Information Pack will be written as far as is reasonable in such a way as to protect the client should the information ever be brought into the public domain.

8. Recruitment, Selection and DBS Clearance

Youth Talk has effective recruitment and selection procedures with regard to safeguarding:

- All staff, counsellors, contractors and volunteers working directly, or indirectly with children/vulnerable adults within Youth Talk must have undergone Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks at the enhanced level prior to the commencement of their duties.
- Safeguarding training is a mandatory part of training for all staff, counsellors and Trustees.
- Counsellors will be expected to be able to evidence their safeguarding training (up to Level 3).
- Responsibilities for safeguarding are defined in all job descriptions or contracts for services.
- Two references/testimonials must also be sought following a face-to-face interview with potential employees or contractors. References/testimonials must be in written/email form and each must be followed up by telephone in order to confirm that the references/testimonials are correct.
- References/testimonials are an essential part of the recruitment process that aid the assessment of a candidate's suitability to work with children/vulnerable adults.

9. Useful Reading

- **BACP – guidance for working with young people**
<https://www.bacp.co.uk/media/4319/bacp-working-with-children-young-people-cag-gpia046-sep18.pdf>
- **NICE Guidance** - <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/health-and-social-care-delivery/safeguarding>

10. Public Access to Policy

This safeguarding policy is publicly available:

- On our website
- In hard copy in our reception area
- By email on request

This policy has been overseen by our Safeguarding Sub Committee and approved by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs). They are responsible for ensuring it is implemented, monitored, and reviewed.

Signed: 

David Barker
Chief Executive

Date: 12th August 2025

APPENDIX 1 - Terminology

For the purposes of Youth Talk's policy, procedures and guidance, the following terms and definitions apply:

- Abuse: A form of maltreatment of a child or adult. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child or adult by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm.
- Child: Legally, a child includes babies, children and young people from pre-birth until their eighteenth birthday (at 18, they are legally an adult) in England and Wales. In Scotland, in most situations, a child is someone who is under 18. However, in some contexts, for example child protection orders, a child is defined as a person under 16 years of age.
- Adult at risk: Any person who is aged 18 years or over and who is at risk of abuse or neglect because of their needs for care and support (Care Act 2014 [England]).
- Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and adults: Protecting individuals from maltreatment; preventing harm to health or development; ensuring children grow up with the safe and effective care; and taking action to enable individuals to have the best outcomes.
- Child or adult protection: Refers to the activity that is undertaken to protect specific children or adults who are suffering, or at risk of suffering, significant harm.
- Significant harm: Is the threshold which justifies compulsory intervention in the best interests of the child or adult. This may refer to a single traumatic event or, more often, the cumulative effect of incidents and/or behaviours over time which significantly impairs an individual's physical and psychological development.
- Early identification and help: Statutory guidance stresses the importance of children and adults having the opportunity of early help and support in order to avoid child or adult protection intervention at a later time.
- DSL – Designated Safeguarding Lead
- DTS – Designated Trustee for Safeguarding

APPENDIX 2 – PROCEDURES & CONSIDERATIONS

Procedures for the protection of children, young people/adults who are Clients at Youth Talk

Staff, Contractors & Volunteers:

- All staff are subject to an interview process by a management panel.
- Evidence of appropriate training, qualifications and references are required.
- All employees – counsellors/therapists, outreach workers/ reception staff & administrators/group trainers/ volunteers and trustees are subject to Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.
- All Youth Talk Counsellors/psychotherapists are required to adhere to the British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists Code of Ethics for Professional Practice (or equivalent).
- All Youth Talk employees and volunteers must attend regular Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedure updates normally organised by the YT every three years or less.
- Counsellors/psychotherapists must take responsibility for their own professional insurance.
- All trustees are subject to an interview process and must adhere to a Trustee's Charter and undergo the NSPCC Safeguarding for Trustees training.
- All staff are made aware of Safeguarding policies and Child Protection procedures during induction and will be involved in policy reviews.

New Clients:

- Allocations are made on the basis of the availability of client and counsellor and, sometimes, on the basis of gender if this have been requested by the client.
- All clients are required to sign a client agreement before commencement of their counselling outlining the confidentiality and data protection policies of YT.
- Clients have the right, subject to clinical judgements, to request to interface with a different member of staff than originally allocated.
- At the first session a psychometric questionnaire will give a measure of risk to self or others.
- The counsellor/psychotherapist will establish with the young person that should s/he feel that the client is at risk of significant harm to themselves or to/from others then, where possible with the client's knowledge, the therapist will make contact with the appropriate referral agency and/or the General Practitioner.
- A Client Information Leaflet and data protection information is emailed or sent to all new service users before they begin their session– it explains all the procedures including the CORE psychometric questionnaire and its purpose.
- The address for the British Association of Counselling & Psychotherapy (BACP) is given as the formal professional body for the organisation to which concerns and complaints can be made.
- A Safeguarding Policy is available in the waiting area and/via email and on our website.

Abuse and/or Neglect as a presenting symptom:

- The assessment process involves recording disclosed abuse and/or neglect – whether past, current or potential and any concern about the risk to the client of 'significant harm' - by themselves or from others.

- In some instances the client may be involved with other statutory agencies (which will also be recorded). Some young people may have been referred by social workers, or other professional agencies, and may already be under the protection of the Local Authority.

Responding to allegations of abuse/neglect:

These are potential situations that could occur in the course of the work of the organisation

1. A young person (a 'child') discloses to their counsellor/ psychotherapist information about current or historic abuse or neglect
2. The counsellor/psychotherapist perceives a child to be at risk of significant harm from abuse or neglect.
3. The young person feels they are being abused by their counsellor/ psychotherapist.
4. A member of the reception team believes that a young person is displaying signs of abuse/neglect.
5. A Youth Talk employee, contractor or volunteer has concerns about the conduct of a member of the organisation towards a young person, or another member of staff, volunteer or donor.

Consultation and Referral procedures:

- If anyone has any concerns about the conduct of any member of the organisation, this should be raised in the first instance with one of the Designated Safeguarding Leads (Operations Manager of Clinical Supervisors) and/or the CEO. In Youth Talk the person ultimately responsible for Safeguarding matters is The Chief Executive.
- The purpose of a consultation is to discuss concerns in relation to a child/young person and decide what action is necessary. Consultation is not the same as making a referral but should enable a decision to be made as to whether a referral to Social Care or the Police should progress.
- A summative record of this process will be kept in a 'Safeguarding Log' which will be held in a secure place.
- The Designated Safeguarding Lead and the Chief Executive will be responsible for referring allegations or suspicions of neglect or abuse to the statutory authorities (i.e. Children's Services 0300 123 4043).
- In the absence of the Child Protection Officer - or the concerns relate to the Officer - the concerns should be reported to one of the following numbers:
 - The Police: 999 – if child is at risk of immediate harm.
 - Children's Services (including out of hours): 0300 123 4043
 - The Child Abuse Investigation Unit: 0845 33 00 222. This is a specialist team that is a department within the police with countywide responsibility for undertaking child protection investigations.
 - You can also ring the NSPCC helpline on 0808 800 5000.
 - Herts SARC (Sexual Assault Referral Centre) provides help and support to men, women and young people living in the Hertfordshire area, who have been raped or sexually assaulted. Contact on freephone number 0808 178 4448 or email Herts.SARC@nhs.net
- A referral involves giving Social Care Services or the Police information about concerns relating to an individual or family in order that enquiries can be undertaken by the appropriate agency and followed by any necessary action.

- In certain cases the level of concern will lead straight to a referral without external consultation being necessary.
- An accurate record of concerns should be made at the time – in the Safeguarding Log.
- These concerns should be put into writing to Children's Services within 48 hours of the referral
- The agreed action (or the agreement to take no further action) must be accurately recorded and the reasons for this decision given (in the Safeguarding Log).

Professional containment of 'at risk' clients.

Clinical Supervision:

- All counsellors/therapists receive a clinical supervision session every two weeks from the In-House Clinical Supervisor who is also the Designated Safeguarding Lead.
- Weekly whole team meetings are held with the organisation's clinical supervisor in attendance. All clients, their needs and treatment are held in mind by the whole team.
- Professional development meetings are held regularly to review, extend and update professional expertise. The content of these meetings may well be driven by the material presented by clients or by categories of concern.

At risk clients:

- 'At risk' clients, (i.e. ones about whom there is a concern for their physical, emotional, sexual safety, their mental and psychological health and their capacity to self-harm) are discussed on a weekly basis and their records placed in the 'red zone' until such time as this concern is deemed to have passed. This practice increases the clinical awareness of all the organisation's practitioners, maximising the protection of clients.

Clinical Considerations

- Central to the function of the service is the potential to work with the 'dangers' that form part of the child's psyche. Crucial to this task is the need to engage with children/clients and to form a therapeutic alliance.
- The child's place within the exclusivity of this relationship is protected by the Ethical Framework for the BACP Code of Professional Practice in Counselling & Psychotherapy which includes high levels of 'confidentiality'.
- At the point of initial contact counsellors/therapists explain to clients that they retain the right to disclose confidential material without permission where it is felt to be in the client's best interest.
- It is a matter of best practice that this step is taken only when it is felt that consultation with the client is impossible or unwise and the client is thought to be in serious danger.
- Where some kind of abuse or neglect is disclosed during the counselling process judgments about appropriate referral will be made with the benefit of clinical supervision (and team discussion, where time permits).
- If a child is felt to be in acute danger immediate action will be taken through contact with the relevant agency – Social Services or Police (see above contact numbers). Otherwise a considered response will be made.

An evaluation process:

- All clients are invited to complete an evaluation form.

Safeguarding Policy last updated: 12/08/25

Next Review date: 12/01/26

- There are opportunities on this form to feedback any concerns with the service and its practitioners.