

# Mutual Aid Groups



# Safeguarding

# Safeguarding for Mutual Aid Groups

There are lots of different elements to safeguarding for mutual aid groups and each group works slightly differently. This document is intended to give you the knowledge you need to create your own safeguarding procedures and to feel confident with the precautions your group takes. Each group will have slightly different resources, so will need a slightly different plan.

This training document will discuss:

- What is safeguarding and why is it important
- Safeguarding principles for mutual aid groups
- Inappropriate referrals
- Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults
- Advice on handling shopping
- Financial advice for food shopping
- Advice for picking up prescriptions
- Creating systems for accountability
- How to create a risk assessment

This document is not focusing on how to prevent infection, though there is a section on how to deliver things as safely as possible. For advice on preventing infections see the [NHS website.](#)

# What is safeguarding and why is it important?

Safeguarding is:

- Assessing risk
- Taking precautions
- Creating systems to report, review and ensure accountability

Safeguarding is the mitigation of risk. It can include financial risk, the reputational risk of an organisation, risk to employees and risk to individuals. Generally, it's used to refer to risks that come from the interactions between people.

All interactions between people carry risk. Safeguarding is both for volunteers and for the people they're helping. Everyone should think through the risks of their actions when working with others.

Applying safeguarding principles to the work of mutual aid groups is different to a charity or other organisation. The boundaries of the spaces you are working in can be huge. It is not about a building where you meet together, it is about individuals in their homes and online. Who is responsible is also different. You're not working as hierarchical organisations with a clear path to escalate incident reports, you may be working as wide and borderless groups with little or no clear hierarchy.

However, the basic principles remain the same. Think through the risks of any plan you make, use your common sense, trust your gut and be kind.

# Safeguarding principles for mutual aid groups

For Mutual Aid groups specifically there are two principles we recommend you stick to:

## **1. Any sharing of details should be hyper local**

Do not recommend anyone share their details with anyone beyond a few streets unless managed by an organisation with the infrastructure to protect those people.

The Information Commissioners Office, the people in charge of looking out for data management, have said that street level groups will not be investigated, so it's fine to share data on a street level as long as you're careful.

## **2. Do not promise anything you can't guarantee**

Don't recommend people contact an organisation unless you have personally made sure they can provide the support you think they can. It's not kind to send people on a wild goose chase and it could be dangerous to suggest people are covered by support when in reality they aren't.

# Creating safeguarding practices for your group

The safeguarding practices in your group will probably look a bit different to other networks, because your resources will be different. As well as the principles outlined above, there are a few things all your safeguarding practices should consider.

## **Data protection**

Essentially, you need to make sure that only the right people see personal information. Don't create public documents with lists of names and addresses. Contact information should only be shared among small street groups with learning, resources and best practice shared through the umbrella network.

## **Reporting system for incidents**

Within small, street wide groups you can share concerns, specific problems and specific instances, if the victims of said incidences are happy with the specifics being shared. In the larger village and town groups you can share general information about instances and what actions you are taking to prevent them in future.

## **Process for preventing future incidents**

This might include blocking people from Whatsapp groups so they can no longer see that information. It might include sharing information about things to look out for, such as scams you've discovered.

## **Keep up with guidance as it comes out**

Make sure to keep up with the NHS and public health guidance and share this widely. Be careful about sharing other sources of information on the spread of the disease.

# Inappropriate Referrals

Individuals may be signposted or referred to you from the Council, Southern Brooks, a Social Prescriber or another organisation or professional.

If someone is referred to your group and you feel that they need support that you are unable to give them, refer them back. Mutual Aid groups can and should signpost to other services but it is not your responsibility to assess a person's needs and arrange a range of support for them. This is the responsibility of the professional /organisation.

If you are concerned about an individual's level of need or you are worried about their mental health you can refer them to the social care team.

For adults: The First Contact Team will assess which service is most appropriate

**First Contact Team: CSODesk@southglos.gov.uk or Tel: 01454 868007 (01454 615165 out of hours)**

For children: The Action and Response Team is the single front door for all targeted children and family support. They will assess what service is required, including preventative services below.

**Contact ART 01454 866000 (01454 615165 out of hours) or accessandresponse@southglos.gov.uk**

Add a subheading

# Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults

It is important that if you identify a child or vulnerable adult who is being abused, that you tell someone so that they can help. This could be physical, emotional, financial or sexual abuse or neglect.

If someone comes to you with information, stay calm, reassure them they will be listened to but explain that if you think they are in danger, you will need to pass on the information they give you, to ensure they are kept safe. Explain that you cannot keep what they tell you confidential if it relates to abuse of a child or vulnerable adult. Where possible, make a note of what they tell you, in their own words.

**If you are concerned about a child, call 01454 866000 in office hours, or 01454 615165 out of hours or at weekends. In an emergency call 999.**

**If you are concerned about an adult, call 01454 868007 in office hours, or 01454 615165 out of hours or at weekends. In an emergency call 999.**

For more information about safeguarding vulnerable adults:

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/safeguarding/safeguarding-adults>

For more information about safeguarding children:

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/2019/introductory-guide-safeguarding-child-protection>

# Basic precautions for handling shopping

Here are a few basic precautions for handling shopping that we recommend. You may want to include these in your safeguarding practices.

- Don't go into any houses. Leave food / goods outside the doorstep. Communicate to the person in isolation that you have delivered via message or phone call. Get confirmation that the person has received it before you leave.
- Check the safety of the products delivered. Check any packaging is sealed and the temperature of product on delivery e.g. If it's meant to be frozen, is it still frozen?
- Recommend that recipients wash shopping wherever possible and wash their hands after touching it.
- Remember to wash hands before and after deliveries. Where possible wash for 20 seconds with soap and water. When out and about keep a bottle of alcohol hand sanitiser to hand.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing and sneezing. If no tissue, cough and sneeze into the crook of your arm.
- Volunteers should ensure they have a low chance of becoming infected. Where possible follow social distancing protocol and don't take unnecessary risks.
- Public transport should be avoided where possible. In cases where taking public transport is unavoidable, disinfection of the items delivered should be carried out.
- Take care when handling any items which may be given to people who may have compromised immune systems. The virus can live on inanimate surfaces for up to 24 hours.
- Disinfect any surface that will be touched by the person you are delivering to.



# Financial precautions when arranging food shopping

Taken from Covid-19 Mutual Aid UK:

We strongly encourage volunteers not to accept credit/debit cards from people asking for help in order to buy resources on their behalf as this is a safeguarding risk.

To reduce the risk of fraud, we recommend that wherever possible you do your shopping and come back with a receipt before asking for money from people in self-isolation. We also recommend that volunteers not make purchases larger than £30 for any one person or family in self-isolation.

You should keep a central record of any payments made. There should also be a central record of any concerns raised in respect of payments and make people aware of how they can raise a concern.

Where possible payments should be made by bank transfer or paypal to minimise the risk of passing on the virus, but if that's not possible then you can disinfect any cash you receive using soapy water.

You should also:

Ask them to give you a shopping list via phone call or text message before you go to the shop.

Agree whether or not they will accept substitutions.

Ask if they have any allergies or dietary requirements.

# Prescriptions

Many groups are helping to pick up prescriptions. This could be really important for people but it is also a risky thing to do. Some of the prescriptions that volunteers may end up collecting have a potentially high street value.

If there is someone in your area who doesn't know anyone who can collect their prescription it's best to help them to arrange for the pharmacy to deliver it to them. Pharmacies do provide these services though they may be overstretched.

If there is no other option, Mutual Aid groups should step up only if they follow this guidance from Disabled People Against Cuts:

- Prescriptions should be picked up in pairs.
- Volunteers collecting prescriptions should message organisers when they have collected prescriptions and when they have delivered them
- Organisers should message the requester to confirm they have had their delivery before deleting the request.
- If you collect a prescription, do not advise on doses, preparation or administration of medication even if you have a relevant qualification. This should only be done by the prescriber.
- The same is true of over-the-counter medications, such as paracetamol and ibuprofen. No advice should be given by volunteers, no matter what you've read. The person requesting over the counter meds must take all responsibility for their request. If over the counter then only buy and deliver the maximum amount which can be purchased by one person (ie only 16 paracetamols and not boxes and boxes. If they need boxes then this should be prescribed).

# Creating systems for accountability

For a safeguarding practice to function there needs to be accountability. This means that if someone goes against the safeguarding practice something happens to ensure they understand the problems and risks they've caused and makes sure they can't do this again.

Again, this is a little different in a non-hierarchical group. There isn't a single person responsible for accountability processes, there's no boss or leader. It is everyone's responsibility.

There should be different steps to accountability depending on the severity of the harm someone has caused.

For example, if on Facebook someone posts something against the guidelines, such as an article about how holding your breath proves you don't have the virus, you can simply report the post to the group admins for them to approve, and send them a private message telling them why you've done this.

If someone does that in Whatsapp you can also send them a private message to ask them not to in future and explain why.

If someone repeatedly goes against the guidance they can be removed from the group and told that they can rejoin after committing to the guidelines.

Deleting people from Facebook and WhatsApp groups is ok to do even if you're not sure they did the thing it's reported they did. A Facebook or Whatsapp group is not a place of employment. No one has the right to stay in an online messaging group.

# Creating systems for accountability, cont.

For serious cases, such as someone reporting that money was taken for shopping that never appeared, a more serious response is needed.

There are two risks with a more serious safeguarding incident report. The victim may not want it shared that something happened to them. This is pretty likely. You can mitigate this risk by never sharing the names of victims, nor any identifying information, such as where they live. Instead, share things like, “this happened and this is what we’ve done to make sure it doesn’t happen again”

The incident may not have occurred and this may be a libellous claim. This is pretty unlikely but you do still have to be aware of it. If you have to share the identity of the person accused only share it with the people who absolutely need to know. These will be only the people who might come into physical contact with the person. For example, if someone may have stolen money from someone the other people asking them to do shopping need to know. No one else should be told their name.

# Risk Assessments

It is good practice to complete a risk assessment for your group and consider accountability as part of that assessment. Accountability is a part of the process of mitigating risk, it's one crucial way to prevent incidents being repeated.

This is a system designed to help make sure you've considered all the aspects of a risky situation. It helps you decide what actions you should take, with appropriate precautions, and which you should avoid altogether.

In order to properly take responsibility as a group you could make and share a risk assessment together, or even make multiple ones and compare them. You can use these assessments to come up with your guides for best practice.

This is an example of a [standard risk assessment template](#).

Across the top you have three ways of describing each activity, three ways to describe the riskiness of the activity, and the control measures you'll put in place. The likelihood and severity values are 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high. You then times them by one another to get the value for risk.

## Low Risk

Numbers 1 and 2 are very low risk. These activities should go ahead with the precautions.

Low risk activities might include posting uplifting images online or ringing your friends and relatives to check in on them.

# Risk Assessments, cont.

Numbers 3-9 are fairly low risk. You should think through the precautions carefully and make sure they're well publicised so that they can be widely followed.

Low risk activities might include posting a note to a neighbour offering to help if they need.

## **Medium Risk**

10-15 are medium risk. These actions should only be taken if the precautions are carefully followed and you must ensure everyone taking the action knows how to do this.

Sharing the invite for a local WhatsApp group is an example of a medium risk activity. You should do it, but only if you're careful about where you post it and you have members in the WhatsApp group looking out for people who might abuse it.

## **High Risk**

16-20 are high risk actions and should not be done except in extreme circumstances when the risk of not doing them is higher.

Entering the house of someone in self-isolation is one of these.

25 is for an action that must never be taken.

Entering the house of a vulnerable person when you believe you have the virus is an action that must never be taken.

# Support and Useful Links

If you are not able to offer support to an individual and do not know where to direct them, you can refer them to Southern Brooks.

**The Southern Brooks helpline is available on 0333 577 4666 between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday.**

For support where an individual has to isolate due to test and trace or because of being Extremely Clinically Vulnerable, they can receive support from the council by contacting their Covid-19 team.

**Covid-19 enquiries: 0800 953 7778**

**Email: [covid.support@southglos.gov.uk](mailto:covid.support@southglos.gov.uk)**