

SAFEGUARDING GUIDELINES

Current from January 2026; renewable January 2027

OVERVIEW

The purpose of the Spiritual Companions Trust's guidelines on safeguarding is to:

- State the responsibilities of the Spiritual Companions Trust (hereafter called 'The Trust') in relation to working safely in the best interest of children and vulnerable adults
- Enable Companions to work within the current government legislation: Children's Act 1989 and 2004, the Education Act 2002, the Equality Act 2010 and 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (HM Government 2015), Keeping Children Safe in Education- Statutory Guidance for Schools and Colleges 2016, Safeguarding Children and Young People (Charities Commission 2014) and the Care Act 2014
- State the responsibilities of the Trust in relation to the protection of Adults at Risk in response to 'No Secrets' (Department of Health 2000)
- These guidelines will be reviewed and ratified by the Trust's Trustee Board on an annual basis

1. Who the Spiritual Companions Trust works with

Companions are not trained to work with children under 18, however it is accepted that adult clients may raise issues related to the safety of their own children, or those of others. In these cases, these guidelines will come into effect.

Adult clients may or may not disclose issues that would mean that they could be seen as a vulnerable adult at that moment in time. Where a client discloses a need within the definition of a vulnerable adult these guidelines will come into effect.

In line with the Charities Commission Guidance (Safeguarding Children and Young People 2014) the Trust and Companions will report to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) the NSPCC, or the police.

2. Definitions

A '**child**' is defined as a young person under the age of 18 (Education Act 2002 section 175/ Children's Act 1989/2004).

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 defines safeguarding as:

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

A '**vulnerable adult**' is defined as (Home Office/Dept. of Health, 'No Secrets', and 2000):

A person over 18 who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of learning disability or mental health need, age or illness, and who may need support to protect themselves from significant harm or exploitation.

And updated to: An adult at risk is any person who is aged 18 years or over and at risk of abuse or neglect because of their needs for care and or support

3. Key Principles

- It is the responsibility of all adults to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults
- Adults who work with children and vulnerable adults are responsible for their own behaviour and should avoid conduct which may lead to any reasonable person questioning their motivation and intentions
- The abuse of children and adults at risk is a clear infringement of human rights and in many cases may be a criminal offence
- The same professional standards apply regardless of culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, religious belief and/or sexual identity
- The protection of children and adults at risk is a shared agency responsibility and Spiritual Companions will report concerns about children and vulnerable adults to the appropriate agency

4. Safe Working

- All Spiritual Companions working with the public will have achieved a Level 3 Diploma in Practical Spirituality and Wellness, or Professional Practice in Spiritual Practice and Companionship. Safeguarding procedures are covered within the training. All Companions will be insured
- If working with a child (someone under the age of 18) it is required that all Spiritual Companions have a clear DBS certificate (standard or enhanced).

- The Trust has a public complaints procedure, and has a system to investigate any complaint made against a Spiritual Companion
- Where appropriate a Spiritual Companion will complete a risk assessment where any client presents a disclosed risk
- A Spiritual Companion will never make their own diagnosis of a client's condition unless they are separately trained to do so

5. Relevant Legislation and Publications

Children's Act 1989

Human rights Act 1998

Protection of Children Act 1999

Sexual Offences Act 2003

Children's Act 2004

Mental Capacity Act 2005

Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006

Mental Health Act 2007

Equality Act 2010

Protection of Freedoms Act 2012

Safeguarding children and young people, and vulnerable young people - Ofsted 2015

6. Relevant Publications

Birchard Report 2006

Child Protection: Safeguarding Unsuitable People from working with Children and Young Person's in the Education Service DfES 2002

Every Child Matters 2004

Guidance for Safer Working Practice for Adults who work with Children and Young People DCSF 2007

Handling cases of Forced Marriage Home Office 2009

No Secrets: Guidance on developing and implementing multi-agency policies, and procedures to protect vulnerable adults from abuse DoH 2000

Protection of Children in England: A progress report March 2009

Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan DoE 2012

Tackling Extremism in the UK 2013

The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006

Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the well-being of children 2015

7. What is Abuse?

The definition of abuse is broad, but includes:

1. *Abuse by a person in a position of trust:* involves a person in a position of authority encouraging and engaging in an inappropriate relationship with a child or vulnerable adult
2. *Abuse by other young people:* children and young people may experience bullying, coercion and threatening or sexual intimidation from other young people as well as from adults
3. *Abuse related to Faith or Culture:* This may occur where practices are seen as acceptable within a faith or cultural group but in fact break the law
4. *Begging:* children or vulnerable adults asking for money or selling sexual favours in order to pay for their basic needs and/or lifestyle
5. *Bullying and Coercion:* threatening a vulnerable person that something will happen if they do not comply with a specific request. This might include demands to hand over money, a mobile phone or other possessions. The threat may include alienation or physical punishment, the threat of withdrawal from services or support networks. Bullying may commonly occur amongst peer groups, and may take place on-line or using mobile technology as well as face to face
6. *Cyber-Bullying:* inappropriate text and images sent via mobile phones and email or posted on the internet, including social networking sites such as Facebook. A new crime of Malicious Communication can now result in a custodial sentence
7. *Discriminatory Abuse:* This includes discrimination involving any of the protected characteristics including race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation or gender status, relationship status and equality in parental responsibility
8. *Domestic Violence:* children or vulnerable adults who experience effects from witnessing domestic violence, or parental/carer use of drugs or alcohol
9. *Emotional Abuse:* persistent emotional ill treatment such as conveying that a child or vulnerable adult is worthless, unloved or inadequate. It may involve feeling constantly frightened or in danger

10. *Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)*: there are various levels of FGM which may be carried out at varying times in childhood, or adulthood. Parents found to be responsible for having FGM carried out on their children may be subject to a prison sentence/ **(statutory duty to report)**
11. *Financial Abuse*: this includes theft, fraud, exploitation, pressure in connection with wills, property, enduring power of attorney, or inheritance or financial transactions, or the inappropriate use, misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits
12. *Forced marriage*: forced marriage is different to arranged marriage and refers to a female or male who is forced to be married against their wishes. The Home Office have a specialist Forced Marriage Unit and helpline
13. *Gang Membership and Group Violence*: children and young people may join a gang as a way of feeling that they belong to a peer group. Gang members may often be as vulnerable as the people who are subject to gang or group violence
14. *Honour based violence*: violence towards a child or vulnerable adult when it is believed that the child has brought shame to the family
15. *Lone/unaccompanied children*: children in the country without parents who are in the care of siblings, friends of the family, or who are unrelated. Children who have no one to care for them
16. *Missing from home or care*: when the whereabouts of the child are not known. If the child is found the police or social care may decide not to inform the parents if there is an associated risk
17. *Neglect*: failure to keep a child or vulnerable adult from harm, failing to provide care including proper diet, hygiene, safety and emotional support, withholding essential medication
18. *Parents in Prison*: children may have inappropriate care or face stigma
19. *Physical Abuse*: includes shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, hitting, scalding, drowning, suffocating or failing to protect from physical harm
20. *Radicalisation and violent extremism*: where a young or vulnerable person is exposed to extreme views that discriminate against other groups, and is convinced to plan and or carry out acts of violence. **(statutory requirement to report)**
21. *Self-harming and suicidal behaviour*: where a child or vulnerable adult can be seen to be self-harming or discloses self-harm or a wish/intention to commit suicide
22. *Self-Neglect*: this is not a direct form of abuse but Companions need to be aware of it in the general context of risk assessment/ risk management and to be aware that they may owe a duty of care to a vulnerable individual who places him/herself at risk in this way

23. *Sexual Abuse*: forcing or enticing a vulnerable person to be involved with sexual activities. Activities may be physical and include penetrative or non-penetrative acts, or they may involve non-physical activities such as looking at pornographic material. Sexual abuse may involve use of on-line material and grooming activities carried out using the internet and social network sites. Sexual abuse can occur between people of the same sex and it can also occur within a marriage or any long-term relationship
24. *Sexual Exploitation*: is a form of sexual abuse where vulnerable people may be given gifts or coerced, threatened or drugged before an assault takes place by an individual or group of abusers
25. *Spirit possession or witchcraft*: the belief within the family or community that a child is possessed by spirits
26. *Substance Misuse*: this can include children under the influence of alco-pops or other alcohol, or drugs
27. *Taking a person out of the country against their will*: taking a child or vulnerable adult out of the country when the person has a fear that they will not be able to come back

8. Some possible signs of vulnerability

1. Allowing sexual images to be taken of themselves
2. Arriving at activities under the influence of drugs or alcohol
3. Change in behaviour/increased anxiety or fear
4. Drowsiness or confusion
5. Expressing radical views, or trying to convert or influence others
6. Lack of food, money, clothing, self-care
7. Masturbation in public
8. Over sexual behaviour
9. Running away from home/not wishing to go home
10. Sharing sexual images, or allowing others to share them
11. Unexplained change in dress or attitude
12. Unexplained fractures, sprains, bruises, self-harm

9. Responsibilities

In line with the Charities Commission requirement (Safeguarding Children and Young People 2014) the Spiritual Companions Trust has a named person, William Bloom, Spiritual Companions Trust Director,

responsible for safeguarding matters and who acts as the Trust's Safeguarding Contact. William Bloom can be contacted at william@spiritualcompanions.org. William Bloom will report in writing to the Trustees Board on a tri-annual basis.

Accredited Spiritual Companions are not employed by the Trust, and may work independently as Companions, or integrate Companionship skills into their regular paid employment.

Where Companions are employed by an organisation they will abide by the safeguarding requirements of that organisation. Where a Companion works independently using explicit companionship skills they will abide by these guidelines.

A Companion has responsibility to report any situation where they believe that a client, or a client's child, may be at risk.

10. What to do when there may be a safeguarding concern

A Companion should make it clear to clients that the companion relationship is confidential. However, should an issue be identified that raises concern, the Companion should inform the client that they will need to make a report to statutory services.

It is good practice to gain consent from the client before making a report, however where a child or adult is at risk a report must be made, with or without that consent. In the case of vulnerable adults, the issue of capacity must be considered before making a report.

Report Protocol

1. Make a record of what has been said using the client's words. Do not interpret what has been said.
2. Look up the details for Children's or Adult Services for the district where the client lives, and telephone, ask for guidance, and ask whether a report is required. Most areas now have a triage service which provides a first contact service. If the issue involves a crime, call the 101 police number and make a report. If there is an immediate and serious concern of harm to self or others, call 999.
3. Notify the Spiritual Companions Trust Contact and email a copy of the details of the report that has been made. The Contact may provide further guidance.

11. Professional Practice and Personal Safeguarding Protocol

It is important that Companions also safeguard themselves. Any complaint against a Companion could result in a ban from working with the public if upheld.

Companions will:

1. Report all safeguarding concerns to the Spiritual Companions Trust Director within seven days of the concern arising
2. Avoid physical contact with clients unless this is part of another therapy that is explicitly contracted and accepted. This includes hugging
3. Report any concerns about another professional including another Companion
4. Seek assistance if a client is taken unwell during a session
5. Be mindful that clients may become infatuated with a Companion or person working in a professional capacity. The Companion will maintain professional boundaries at all times
6. Maintain their own safety when lone working
7. Strictly conform to the Spiritual Companions Code of Conduct at all times

Companions will not:

- Accept any gifts from clients other than small value thank you gifts e.g. flowers
- Make sexually suggestive comments to clients.

NB: Offences committed under the Sexual Offenders Act 2003 will lead to barring through the Independent Safeguarding Authority. Barring will prohibit an individual from working in any direct public service.

For any questions on the Safeguarding Guidelines please contact the course tutor – contact details available on the Spiritual Companions Trust website – or the Spiritual Companions Trust administrator at diana@spiritualcompanions.org

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