



# **SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN**

## **POLICY**

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## **1. STATEMENT OF INTENT**

Tree Tops Children's Occupational Therapy acknowledges the duty of care to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, both physical and emotional whilst in our care.

This mandatory policy sets out a clear and consistent framework for delivering this promise in line with safeguarding legislation and statutory guidance for staff, volunteers and agency workers. It will be achieved by:

Creating a culture of safe recruitment by adopting procedures that help deter, reject or identify people who may pose a risk to children.

Identifying and making provision for any child that has been subject to abuse.

Ensuring that employees understand their responsibility, under safeguarding legislation and statutory guidance, to be alert to the signs of child abuse and refer to concerns to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Ensuring employees, students and volunteers are only appointed when all the appropriate checks have been satisfactorily completed.

A link to the safeguarding policy is given to clients when they start intervention.

A child centred approach is fundamental to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of every child. A child centred approach means keeping the child in focus when making decisions about their lives and working in partnership with them and their families.

Children may be vulnerable to neglect and abuse or exploitation from within their family and from individuals they come across in their day-to-day lives. These threats can take a variety of different forms, including: sexual, physical and emotional abuse; neglect; domestic abuse, including controlling or coercive behaviour; exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups; trafficking; online abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation. Whatever the form of abuse or neglect, practitioners should put the needs of children first when determining what action to take.

Anyone working with children should see and speak to the child: listen to what they say; take their views seriously; and work with them and their families collaboratively when deciding how to support their needs. Special provision can be put in place to support dialogue with children who have communication difficulties, unaccompanied children, refugees and those children who are victims of modern slavery and/or trafficking.

This child centred approach ensures all practitioners follow the principles of the Children Acts 1989 and 2004 - that state that the welfare of children is paramount and that they are best looked after within their families, with their parents playing a full part in their lives, unless compulsory intervention in family life is necessary.

A co-ordinated approach – safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility and everyone who works with children has a responsibility for keeping them safe. No single practitioner can have a full picture of a child’s needs and circumstances and, if children and families are to receive the right help at the right time, everyone who comes into contact with them has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action.

## **2. CONTEXT**

The policy recognises that the welfare and interests of children are paramount in all circumstances. It aims to ensure equal rights to protection that regardless of age, ability or disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation, socio-economic background, all children will:-

Have a positive and enjoyable experience of assessment etc at Tree Tops Children’s Occupational Therapy in a safe and child centred environment.

Children are protected from abuse whilst participating in the assessment, treatment and programmes.

Tree Tops Children’s Occupational Therapy acknowledges that some children, including disabled children and young people or those from ethnic minority communities, can be particularly vulnerable to abuse and we accept the responsibility to take reasonable and appropriate steps to ensure their welfare.

## **3. DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE**

The following are definitions based on the Working Together to Safeguard Children and Keeping Children Safe in Education:

- (a) Abuse – maltreatment of a child. Someone may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may also be abused in the family environment, community setting or institutional setting by those known to them or by others (ie internet). They may be abused by an adult(s) or another child(ren).

- (b) Physical abuse – involves hitting, throwing, shaking, burning/scalding, poisoning, drowning, suffocating or any form of causing physical harm to a child. It can also be caused by a parent/carer fabricating symptoms of or deliberately inducing the illness of a child.
- (c) Emotional abuse – persistent emotional maltreatment of a child to cause severe and persistent effects on the child’s emotional development involving:
- Conveying to children that they are worthless, inadequate, unloved or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person.
  - Imposing age or developmentally inappropriate expectations on children including, interactions that are beyond the child’s developmental capability as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning or even preventing the child participating in normal social interaction.
  - Seeing or hearing ill-treatment of another member of the family (domestic or violent abuse).
  - Bullying – causing a child to feel frightened or in danger.
  - Exploiting and corrupting children.
- (d) Sexual abuse – involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, and whether or not the child is aware of what is happening to them. These activities may involve physical contact, assault (rape or oral sex) or masturbation, kissing, touching/stroking/rubbing. It also includes non-contact such as looking pornographic materials, producing such material, grooming. Sexual abuse can be committed by both men and woman and other children. Sexual exploitation, penetrative sex (under 16) and rape. (See Sexual Offences Act 2003).
- (e) Neglect – persistent failure to meet the child’s basic psychological or physical needs which impacts on the child’s health and/or development. Neglect may also occur when someone is pregnant (substance misuse, mental health, learning difficulties etc).

Neglect of a child when born can involve:

- Not providing adequate food, clothing, shelter.
- Protecting the child from emotional harm and danger.
- Inadequate supervision.
- No access to appropriate medical care and treatment.
- Unresponsive to a child’s basic emotional, educational and social needs.

When responding to concerns, the following definition (2013) should be considered from The Home Office.

"Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence and abuse between those aged 16 or over, who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender and sexuality".

This includes but is not limited to the following types of abuse:

- Sexual.
  - Psychological/emotional.
  - Financial.
  - Physical.
- (f) Controlling behaviour - acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from support, exploiting resources for personal gain, depriving of independence, resistance and regulating daily behaviour.
- (g) Coercive behaviour – a pattern of acts of assault.

Safeguarding children is defined in Working together to safeguard children (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>). As part of our safeguarding policy Tree Tops Children's Occupational Therapy will:-

- (a) Promote and prioritise the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.
- (b) Protecting children from maltreatment.
- (c) Preventing impairment of children's health or development.
- (d) Ensure children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care.
- (e) Taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes. Promoting equal rights to protection.
- (f) Direct/indirect disclosure – provide any support required.

#### **4. STAFF & VOLUNTEERS**

- (a) Tree Tops carries out safe recruitment checks on all employees who work for us. All roles require an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service Check along with references before joining the team. These are renewed every three years.
- (b) Ensure everyone understands their roles and responsibilities in respect of safeguarding and is provided with appropriate learning opportunities to recognise, identify and respond to signs of abuse; neglect other safeguarding concerns relating to children and young people.

- (c) Tree Tops is committed to ensuring that all employees understands their safeguarding responsibilities and keeps their knowledge up to date. All employees must complete a safeguarding training package at induction which is repeated every three years or in accordance with any changes in legislation, being constantly under review.
- (d) Ensure robust safeguarding arrangements and procedures are in operation. The policy and procedures will be widely promoted and are mandatory for everyone involved in Tree Tops Children's Occupational Therapy. Failure to comply with the policy and procedures will be addressed without delay and may ultimately result in dismissal/exclusion from the organisation.

## 5. **RESPONDING/RECOGNISING CONCERNS**

Tree Tops have a responsibility to make sure that concerns about children and vulnerable adults are passed to the agency that can help them without delay.

- Be alert to potential indicators of abuse or neglect.
- Be alert to the risks which individual abusers or potential abusers may pose to children.
- Be alert to the impact on the child of any concerns of abuse of maltreatment.
- Be able to gather and analyse information as part of an assessment of the child's needs.

Tree Tops child protection procedures will include the following:

- Identify potential or actual harm to children.
- Discuss and record concerns with the Practice Manager.
- Analyse concerns by completing the Expression of Concern Form.

If any practitioners are concerned that a child or vulnerable adult is at risk of being abused or neglected, they should not ignore their suspicions and should not assume that someone else will take action to protect that person.

Concerns about children should be referred to the children's social care department of the Local Authority within **one working day** where the child lives. Similarly, concerns about vulnerable adults should be referred to local authority adult services. If urgent action is required the Police and Local Authority should be notified immediately.

## 6. **ALLEGATIONS AGAINST STAFF OR VOLUNTEERS WHO WORK WITH CHILDREN**

If an allegation or concern arises about a member of staff, or outside of their work with children, and this may present a risk of harm to child(ren) for whom

the member of staff is responsible, the general principles outlined in the above procedure will still apply. Any employee who has concerns about the behaviour of a colleague must also raise this with the Practice Manager/Director as quickly as possible.

A discussion or meeting should decide whether the concern justifies:

- Approaching the member of staff for further information in order to assess the level of risk of harm, and/or,
- A further discussion or meeting to discuss dealing with the possible risk of harm.
- Discussion with the Local Authority if an allegation is made **within one working day** and prior to any investigation taking place.
- The Local Authority will advise Tree Tops whether or not informing the parents of the child(ren) involved will impede the disciplinary or investigative process. If agreed that the information can be shared, Tree Tops should inform the parent(s). In some circumstances, this may be conducted immediately (for injuries or medical treatment required).
- The Local Authority, Police or Social Services will guide Tree Tops as to how much information should be disclosed to the person subject to the allegation.
- Subject to restrictions on the information that can be shared, Tree Tops should inform the accused person about the nature of the allegation, how enquiries will be conducted and the possible outcome (disciplinary action, dismissal and/or referral to the DBS regulatory body).

The person subject to the allegation should be:

- Treated fairly and honestly.
- Helped to understand the concerns expressed and processes involved.
- Kept informed of the progress and outcome of any investigation.
- Kept informed of the implications for any disciplinary or related process.
- If suspended, updated regularly on events at Tree Tops.

If the member of staff lives in a different authority area to that which covers their workplace, liaison should take place between the relevant agencies in both areas and a joint strategy meeting / discussion convened.

In some cases, an allegation of abuse against someone closely associated with a member of staff (eg partner, member of the family or other household member) may present a risk of harm to child(ren) for whom the member of staff is responsible. In these circumstances, a strategy meeting/discussion should be convened to consider:

- The ability and/or willingness of the member of staff to adequately protect the child(ren).
- Whether measures need to be put in place to ensure their protection.



- Whether the role of the member of staff is compromised.

## 7. PROCESS

- (a) **Alert** – the practitioner may raise an alert as a result of a disclosure, an incident, or other signs or indicators. This would be discussed with a specified Tree Tops safeguarding officer (Practice Manager).
- (b) **Recognise** - the practitioner will complete the safeguarding form (Expression of Concern Form) to document the incident/information.
- (c) **Respond** - the safeguarding officer will meet with the head OT (Director) and practitioner to formulate the most appropriate course of action and identify the priority of the alert.
- (d) **Report-three courses of action:**
  - File and document onto child's file and safeguarding file - alert added to child's file for less serious cases and speak to parent to discuss issue raised.
  - Contact police in the event of urgent action needed in 24 hours.
  - Contact local safeguarding team or Local Authority for less urgent cases and to record the incident.
  - Await outcome from agency.

It is important that all practitioners should not assume that someone else will pass on information that they think may be critical to keeping a child safe. If a practitioner has concerns about a child's welfare and considers that there may be a child in need or that the child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm, then they should share the information with Tree Top safeguarding officer who will initiate the appropriate process. All practitioners should be particularly alert to the importance of sharing information when a child moves from one local authority into another, due to the risk that knowledge pertinent to keeping a child safe could be lost

## 8. SEEKING CONSENT TO SHARING INFORMATION

Parents/carers should be given the opportunity to decide whether they agree to the child's personal information being shared (unless doing so would put the child at risk of harm).

A clear and legitimate purpose for sharing a child's personal information is important. Keep a record of the reasons why you are sharing/requesting information about the child/family.

## **8.1 SHARING INFORMATION**

Effective sharing of information between practitioners and local organisations and agencies is essential for early identification of need, assessment and service provision to keep children safe. Understanding the significance of sharing information in a timely manner can have severe consequences for the safety and welfare of children.

Practitioners should be proactive in sharing information as early as possible to help identify, assess and respond to risks or concerns about the safety and welfare of children, whether this is when problems are first emerging, or where a child is already known to local authority children's social care (eg they are being supported as a child in need or have a child protection plan). Practitioners should be alerted to sharing important information

If consent is still not given, the information can still be shared with other relevant professionals under certain circumstances ie protecting a child from significant harm.

You **do not** need consent to share personal information if there is a safeguarding issue. It is one way to comply with the data protection legislation but not the only way. The GDPR provides a number of bases for sharing personal information. It is not necessary to seek consent to share information for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of a child provided that there is a lawful basis to process any personal information required.

The legal bases that may be appropriate for sharing data in these circumstances could be 'legal obligation', or 'public task' which includes the performance of a task in the public interest or the exercise of official authority. Each of the lawful bases under GDPR has different requirements. It continues to be good practice to ensure transparency and to inform parent/ carers that you are sharing information for these purposes and seek to work cooperatively with them.

## **8.2 WHISTLEBLOWING, COMPLAINTS, SOCIAL MEDIA**

- (a) Whistleblowing is when someone reports wrongdoing on the basis that it is in the public interest for the wrongdoing to be brought to the attention of someone. It may be wrongdoing that happened in the past, present or future.
- (b) Complaints – see Complaint Policy.
- (c) Internet – strict guidelines must be followed. See Social Media Policy.

## **9. STORING INFORMATION**

All documentation is completed online and stored on a secure server which is password protected by the following methods:

- (a) The expression of concern is noted on the child's file and safeguarding folder.
- (b) An expression of concern form (also password protected) is completed and handed to the Practice Manager which is signed then forwarded to the Director after which a meeting of the practitioners involved will immediately take place.
- (c) Contact will be made to Social Services if appropriate and agreed action noted on the form but for urgent referrals, the Local Authority should be contacted within one working day.
- (d) Practitioners are kept informed.

## **10. MONITORING THE POLICY**

The policy will be reviewed a year after development and then every two years or in the following circumstances:-

- (a) Changes in legislation and/or government guidance.
- (b) As a result of any other significant change or event.
- (c) Ensure appropriate action is taken in the event of incidents/concerns of abuse and support provided to the individual/s who raise or disclose the concern.
- (d) Ensure that confidential, detailed and accurate records of all safeguarding concerns are maintained and securely stored.

## **11. ROLES & RESPONSIBILITY**

The procedures should be used by all adults who work with who with or on behalf of the children and young people or come into contact with them through their work.

Our safeguarding officer:

Practice Manager ([business@treetopsot.co.uk](mailto:business@treetopsot.co.uk)).

Lead Office Administrator ([hello@treetopsot.co.uk](mailto:hello@treetopsot.co.uk)).

In the absence of the safeguarding officers:

Director ([dawn@treetopsot.co.uk](mailto:dawn@treetopsot.co.uk)).

The Local Authority has an assigned Designated Officer to:

- (a) Receive reports about allegations and to be involved in the management/oversight of cases.
- (b) Provide advice and guidance to employers and voluntary organisations/agencies.
- (c) Liaise with Police and other agencies.
- (d) Monitor the progress of cases to ensure they are dealt with accordingly and fairly.
- (e) Maintain information in relation to concerns and allegations.
- (f) Provide advice and guidance to employers to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and other regulated bodies (GMC, Ofsted etc).

## **11. IMPORTANT LINKS**

- (a) Local Authority - usually first contact is open from 8.30am – 5.00pm (Monday to Thursday) and then 8.30am – 4.30pm (Friday). If it is an emergency, still contact the designated telephone number and a duty officer working outside these hours will take the call. They will decide on the level of response needed. An Early Help Assessment to inform what happens next may be giving the employer appropriate advice and guidance. A referral to preventative services such as One Point with a team around the family and a lead professional may be given. A statutory referral

assessment and intervention teams due to safeguarding concerns with a team around the family and a lead professional may also be another option.

- (b) NSPCC Helpline 0808 800 5000.
- (c) Call the Police on 999.
- (d) Childline 0800 1111 (free)
- (e) <https://www.gov.uk/data-protection>
- (f) <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/>
- (g) [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/942454/Working together to safeguard children inter agency guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/942454/Working_together_to_safeguard_children_inter_agency_guidance.pdf)
- (h) Whistleblowing Advice Line 0800 028 0285.
- (i) Contact local child protection service.
- (j) Contact local Social Services.

All the above contact details are held in the safeguarding file and are updated regularly or when there are any changes in guidance.