

Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults – Policy and Procedures

Updated May 2026 reflecting: • KCSIE Sept 2025 • Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 • Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership policies and procedures April 2026 • Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 • Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 • Legal References & Further Guidance • Detailed info/guidance weblinks	
Review Cycle	Annual or when there is a change in statutory guidance or legislation
Next Review Date	May 27

Introduction

YMCA Taunton's policy on Safeguarding Children and Young People makes reference to the DfE document Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026, a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, which was prepared as a code of practice for safeguarding the welfare of children and young people (up to the age of 18) in voluntary organisations in England and Wales (see appendix 2 of the accompanying Guidance Notes for a summary of its key provisions) and is central to delivering on the strategy set out in Stable homes, built on love (Strategy and Guidance 2023), which outlines the Government's commitment to support every child to grow up in a safe, stable and loving home.

The policy recognises the obligations and duty of care on organisations working with children and young people as covered in The Children Act (2004). This Act defines children and young people as anyone up to age 18. The policy is applicable to all workers, staff and volunteers.

The policy also recognises the Somerset Safeguarding Adults Policy and Procedure, Safeguarding Adults 2026. For the purposes of this policy, an adult at risk is a person aged 18 or over who has needs for care and support, is experiencing or is at risk of abuse or neglect, and as a result of those needs is unable to protect themselves from abuse, neglect or exploitation in accordance with the Care Act 2014.

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined for the purposes of this guidance as:

- protecting children from abuse
- preventing impairment of children's health or development
- ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and
- taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes



Here for young people
Here for communities
Here for you

YMCA enables people to develop their full potential in mind, body and spirit. Inspired by, and faithful to, our Christian values, we create supportive, inclusive and energising communities, where young people can truly belong, contribute and thrive.

FAMILY & YOUTH WORK

HEALTH & WELLBEING

HOUSING

TRAINING & EDUCATION

SUPPORT & ADVICE

Key points: –

- safeguarding is everyone's responsibility: for services to be effective each professional and organisation should play their full part; and
- a child-centred approach: for services to be effective they should be based on a clear understanding of the needs and views of children.

Also -

- Professionals should, in particular, be alert to the potential need for early help for a child who:
 - is disabled and has specific additional needs
 - has special educational needs
 - is a young carer
 - is showing signs of engaging in anti-social or criminal behaviour
 - is in a family circumstance presenting challenges for the child, such as substance abuse, adult mental health problems and domestic violence
 - has returned home to their family from care; and/or
 - is showing early signs of abuse and/or neglect

The policy is designed to encourage the development of good practice within YMCA Taunton to prevent the abuse of children, young people and vulnerable adults while they are in the care of YMCA Taunton. It stresses the responsibility of all workers to be alert to signs of abuse and provides for a prompt and effective reporting procedure should abuse be suspected, disclosed or discovered, regardless of the setting in which the abuse has taken place. The policy is also intended to protect those who work with children, young people and vulnerable adults from unfounded accusations or from behaving in ways which may be well-intended but inadvisable, and to enable YMCA Taunton to fulfil the "duty of care".

The policy consists of:

- Policy Statement
- Procedures of the Policy
- Implementation of the Procedures
- How to deal with instances, allegations or suspicions of abuse

There are cross references to the following publication within this document.

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026

'What to do if you are worried a child is being abused' (HMG 2015)

Care Act 2014

NB: Failure to observe the provisions of "The Children Act (2004)" can result in the withdrawal of licensing and permission for certain types of children's activities and may lead to civil and criminal prosecution of Association Trustees. It may also affect YMCA Taunton's insurance cover.

YMCA Taunton will monitor and implement relevant safeguarding requirements arising from the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 and associated statutory guidance as these are introduced. We also adhere to the EYFS Safeguarding and Welfare requirements.

Policy Statement

Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults

As one of its major activities YMCA Taunton seeks to serve the needs of service users, promoting holistic development. In doing so, YMCA Taunton takes seriously the welfare of all children, young people and vulnerable adults who come onto its premises or are receiving a service within the wider community.

YMCA Taunton aims to ensure that they are welcomed into a safe, caring environment with a happy and friendly atmosphere. YMCA Taunton is committed to a 'culture of safety' in which children, young people and vulnerable adults are protected from abuse and harm in all areas of its service delivery. YMCA Taunton recognises that it is the responsibility of each one of its staff and volunteers to prevent abuse of children, young people and vulnerable adults and to report any abuse discovered or suspected.

YMCA Taunton recognises its responsibility to implement, maintain and regularly review procedures, which are designed to prevent and to be alert to such abuse. YMCA Taunton is committed to supporting, resourcing and training those who work with children, young people and vulnerable adults and to providing supervision and observation of staff.

YMCA Taunton is committed to maintaining good links with the statutory and other agencies working with children, young people and vulnerable adults and to ensure staff have a good working knowledge of the remit and responsibilities of other agencies. The organisation is committed to creating a safe environment in which young people can feel safe and secure while engaging in any of YMCA Taunton's programmes and activities.

NB: A 'young person' is defined as 16–18-years-old and up to the age of 25 years with SEND. In an early years setting, they may be a student, worker, or parent. A 'vulnerable adult' (see guidance to the Care Act 2014) as: 'a person aged 18 years or over, who is in receipt of or may need community care services by reason of 'mental or other 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'. In early years, this person may be a service user, parent of a service user, or a volunteer.

Procedures of the Policy

Plan the work of YMCA Taunton to minimise situations where the possibility of abuse of children, young people and vulnerable adults and young people may occur.

Have policies and procedures on the management and supervision of all activities and provide training on the implementation of them.

- a) Appoint a Designated Safeguarding Lead. Should the Designated Safeguarding Lead be a staff member, the YMCA Taunton Board of Trustees will inform all other staff of the appointment
- b) Give all workers, staff and volunteers, clear roles
- c) Carry out a full recruitment procedure for all workers, staff and volunteers in line with Safer Recruitment practice. This should include:
 - obtain a completed application form
 - undertake DBS checks
 - explore during the interview the applicant's experience of working or having contact with children and young people
 - follow up references to check on the suitability of the individual for working with children and young people
 - undertake the appropriate checks to verify the background and suitability of the individual – follow the recommended procedures detailed in Employment in the YMCA manual which is administered by the Admin Dept.

- at least one interviewer will be trained in Safer Recruitment and present at the interview
- d) Use supervision and observation of staff as a means of protecting children, young people and vulnerable adults
- e) Establish a system whereby children and young people may talk with an independent person
- f) Implement and issue guidelines to all workers with children, young people and vulnerable adults on how to deal with abuse or suspected abuse. Give training on the use of these guidelines
- During induction week hold internal safeguarding meeting with the Designated Safeguarding Lead to cover YMCA Taunton Safeguarding Policy
 - External Training secured within 0-3 months to deliver “Basic Awareness” training. Formal safeguarding training will be refreshed at least every three years. In addition, safeguarding updates, briefings and learning from local and national safeguarding reviews will be shared regularly to ensure safeguarding knowledge remains current and effective.
- The guidelines and training to include:
- a reminder of the worker’s duty, both to prevent abuse and to report any abuse discovered or suspected
 - guidance on what constitutes abuse and how to recognise it
 - specific instructions on who to inform if abuse is disclosed or discovered, where identified, the name and address / telephone number of the independent person, in case it should be suspected that the abuser is someone holding a position of responsibility within YMCA Taunton
 - some indication of what might happen if the abuse is reported
 - guidance on how to support the abused child, young person or vulnerable adult
- g) Confirm with groups / organisations, who work with children and young people and wish to hire YMCA Taunton premises, that they undertake to follow the Home Office code of practice “Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026”

Related Documentation

- Complaints Procedure
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Volunteers Code of Conduct
- Disciplinary Policy
- Equal Opportunity & Diversity Policy
- Harassment Policy
- Whistle Blowing Policy
- Lone Working Policy

Lead responsibility

C.E.O. (Nominated Individual)

Adopted by YMCA Taunton Board of Trustees on:

Date: 20th May 2026



Signed: Nick Low

For and on behalf of YMCA Taunton Board of Trustees

Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults – Implementation of the Procedures

4.1 Plan the work of YMCA Taunton so as to minimise situations where the abuse of children, young people and vulnerable adults may occur.

- arrange that, as far as possible, an adult is not left alone with a child or young person where there is little or no opportunity of the activity being observed by others. This may mean groups working within the same large room or working in an adjoining room with the door left open. This good practice can be as much benefit to the adult as to the child or young person
- always have at least two adults present when working with a group of young people or facilitating an activity on YMCA premises
- always ensure appropriate ratios of leadership to attendees are observed according to age and gender when working with a group or facilitating an activity on YMCA premises
- never take a group off the premises with fewer than two adults*
- think about the use of premises, e.g. do not expect children, young people or vulnerable adults to have to walk along a dark unsupervised path/ car park in order to enter YMCA Taunton premises
- it is good practice to keep a record of each activity / session. This record should include a register of children and staff and details of any significant incidents
- where children and young people have to be transported by car or minibus, arrange as far as possible, to have more than one passenger in the vehicle and that children are seated in the back seats of the vehicle
- ensure that children leaving the premises do so only in the presence of adults known to have permission to do so
- there may be occasions when a worker has to work individually with a child, young person or vulnerable adult and therefore all staff induction should include a thorough understanding of YMCA Taunton's Lone Working Policy and procedures

* ratios of adults to young people / children should always be appropriate to the scale and nature of the activity, especially residential activities.

4.2 Have policies and procedures on the management and supervision of all activities and provide training on the implementation of them

- ensure that clear management guidelines exist for each activity and that appropriate training is provided
- ensure that a Risk Assessment is developed for each activity and service user which addresses safeguarding as well as other safety issues
- ensure that working links are maintained with local Children's Social Care and Local Safeguarding Partners and that they both have a copy of your policy and procedures
- appoint a Designated Safeguarding Lead within YMCA Taunton. This person will be given responsibility for overseeing the policy and the way it is put into practice. This person will also be responsible for ensuring that safeguarding issues are reported to the relevant authorities
- In the absence of the appointed Designated Safeguarding Lead this responsibility will go to the C.E.O. when present during office hours and the duty manager at other times

4.3 Appoint a Designated Safeguarding Lead

A Designated Safeguarding Lead should be appointed from within the Association to have responsibility for the coordination and implementation of the Association's Safeguarding Policy and procedures.

Guidelines for the appointment of a Designated Safeguarding Lead:

- a) the appointment should be ratified by the Board
- b) the person should be a senior member of staff or senior lay person with experience of working in children / youth / social services context
- c) the person must be capable of being sympathetic to but objective in the pursuance of their task – with an ability to cope with the shock and upset abuse allegations may produce
- d) the person must be able to act confidentially, speedily and decisively, relating well to statutory authorities, parents / carers etc.
- e) the person must be willing to undergo training in procedures and be prepared to brief staff and the Board, on appropriate local policies, procedure development and review their effectiveness
- f) the person must have clear lines of accountability to the Board, and have clear links with other staff
- g) the person must have freedom to act when dealing with abuse cases
- h) the person must be available to report cases including out of normal office working hours

4.4 Give all staff clear roles

- abuse of children, young people and vulnerable adults is most easily concealed where there is confusion amongst staff about roles and responsibilities for the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults. The recommended job description format can be found in the YMCA Manual
- All workers should be aware that their contact with children, young people and vulnerable adults in the course of their work with YMCA Taunton puts them in a relationship of trust (i.e. in a position of power or influence over another by virtue of their work or the nature of the activity, both within and outside of working hours)
- Staff guidelines should include directions on acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in “out of hours” situations stressing that no relationships should be encouraged in which either the young person or worker could be at risk, or which provides opportunity for ambiguity and misunderstanding or where the relationship / activity is unsupervised and contravenes good practice

4.5 Carry out the full recruitment procedure for all workers – staff and volunteers**Application Form**

As part of the recruitment procedure all workers, paid or unpaid, should complete an application form. All situations which involve work with children and young people are exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. Therefore, all applicants should be asked to disclose information about criminal convictions. The application form asks the applicant to give details of criminal convictions and informs them that the YMCA reserves the right to carry out a Disclosure and Barring Service check. Failure to return this form should end the recruitment process.

Any convictions will be reported to the Early Years & Young People Manager and C.E.O. who will arrange to meet with staff member/volunteer to discuss and make an assessment on suitability to employ. All staff are made aware that employment is subject to satisfactory references and DBS check.

Candidate's contacts with children and young people

It is important that the nature of the candidate's contacts with children, young people and vulnerable adults are thoroughly explored at interview. These may be through previous work in the YMCA, through family contacts, through work with a voluntary organisation or in other ways. If there is any doubt about the suitability of the candidate this should be explored further through searching questions.

References

Two suitable references will be obtained. If the worker has moved frequently from one organisation to another it would be advisable to find out why. References should be sought in writing. It must be made clear that the person is to work with children, young people and vulnerable adults and that it is their views on the applicant's suitability for this work which are being invited. If replies are vague or ambiguous it may be necessary for them to be followed up in person or by telephone. It is vital that equal opportunities are taken into consideration.

Criminal background / suitability check

YMCA Taunton currently process all DBS checks through the YMCA England & Wales online portal. The DBS Disclosure is completed and submitted online via the applicant/YMCA Taunton and the results are advised electronically to the C.E.O. The DBS certificate is sent directly to the applicant which should then be provided to the C.E.O. or Administrator for verification and recording of the DBS reference number.

4.6 Use supervision, observation, team meetings and training as a means of protecting children, young people and vulnerable adults

Effective individual team working and communication is essential to the prevention of abuse

- Line managers have responsibility for ensuring the thorough induction of new staff in accordance with the agreed induction process
- Line managers have responsibility for ensuring training needs are established and training provided internally or externally to ensure effectiveness
- Line managers have responsibility for ensuring regular opportunities are made for workers to meet together to review and plan their work, to share their experiences, to receive external specialist training and to talk about their relationships with service users. Special attention should be paid to any situation in which a child, young person or vulnerable adult is being either highly favoured or harshly treated as these could be signs of abuse
- All staff will work to develop a culture which encourages open, honest dialogue and an opportunity to reflect on situations to ensure continued development of team and practice
- All staff will work as part of a team to impact upon the projects, the values and aims and purposes of YMCA Taunton and will develop and maintain relationships with full and part time staff, the Management, Board of Trustees and visitors to the project to ensure effective communication and operation
- Line Managers will be alert to and deal with staff that are not participative within meetings, are defensive, do not communicate effectively with colleagues; to ensure an effective exchange of information at all times
- Line Managers will periodically carry out observation of staff in their direct working with service users, one to one supervision sessions and team meetings. In addition will carry out interviews with service users.
- Line managers will work to develop effective working relationships with staff and be proactive in discussing any areas of concern about workers' interaction with service users. The importance of good induction of new staff and ongoing direction from line managers is essential to develop staff in accordance with YMCA Taunton policies and procedures.
- Staff will develop effective working relationships with colleagues to ensure effective handover of information.

Specific Safeguarding Training

- The organisation will require relevant staff to attend a basic safeguarding course which will be renewed every 3 years.
- YMCA Taunton will require the Designated Safeguarding Lead and appropriate managers to attend further training to ensure more in-depth knowledge and understanding.
- The Designated Safeguarding Lead will provide internal training to all staff on Safeguarding policy and procedure.

4.7 Establish a system whereby children, young people and vulnerable adults may talk with an independent person

- arrange for a person to be available for children young people and vulnerable adults to talk to if they feel they have been abused in any way. The person should be totally independent of the activities the children, young people or vulnerable adults are participating in, but should be someone to whom they could relate. It may be necessary or appropriate to ask someone from a different YMCA or organisation to undertake this role.
- if this is done, the appointed person must be given clear, written guidelines as to what actions to take to stop any abuse disclosed by a child or young person, otherwise they may unwittingly permit the abuse to continue. It is strongly recommended that contacts should be by telephone rather than face to face. Consider ways of letting the children young people and vulnerable adults know that such a person is available for them to talk to.
- display the telephone number of Childline 0800 1111 and Somerset Direct 0300 123 2224, on a notice board, which is regularly seen by children, young people and vulnerable adults in YMCA Taunton building
- make sure that all adults working with children, young people and vulnerable adults know the name of a suitable person or agency with whom they could put the child, young person or vulnerable adult in contact, or to whom they could turn for help

In addition, Line Managers should consider the need also to provide opportunities for workers to talk to independent people about any difficulties or anxieties in relation to their work.

4.8 Implement and issue guidelines to all workers with children and young people on how to deal with abuse. Give training on the use of these guidelines.

Ensure that **relevant** staff receive a copy of this document. Training resources are available. Information and assistance can be obtained from Somerset Children's Social Care. **The flow chart (appendix 3) demonstrates the procedure to be followed where abuse is suspected, disclosed or discovered.**

4.9 Confirm with group / organisations who work with children or young people and who wish to use YMCA Taunton premises, that they undertake to follow the Home Office Code of Practice "Working Together to Safeguard Children"

When contemplating hiring YMCA Taunton premises to groups/organisations whose work involves children or young people they will be notified that the following clause should be added to licenses/room booking information.

"The Licensee/room hirer confirms that he / she is familiar with the Home Office Code of Practice "Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026" (see appendix 2), has an understanding of it and undertakes to follow the Code of Practice contained therein in relation to work with children and young people under the age of 18 years". Room bookings are the responsibility of the Duty Centre Managers at YMCA Taunton.

5. How to deal with suspicious instances and allegations of abuse

5.1 Duty both to prevent abuse and to report abuse

It is YMCA Taunton's duty both to prevent abuse and to report any abuse discovered or suspected. The normal rule of client confidentiality cannot be observed when abuse is discovered or suspected. When workers suspect, discover or are told / learn about abuse occurring in or outside the YMCA setting, they should follow the reporting procedures outlined in the paragraph entitled Reporting Abuse (see 5.4) – suspected, disclosed or discovered.

5.2 Types of abuse

Workers should be given guidance on what constitutes abuse and how to recognise it. The following definitions of abuse are taken from Working Together to Safeguard Children (DfE 2026) *and* Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026:

Physical	Actual or likely physical injury to a child, or failure to prevent physical injury (or suffering) to a child, including deliberate poisoning, drowning, hitting, shaking, throwing, suffocation. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces illness in a child or vulnerable adult.
Sexual	Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, including prostitution, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (e.g. rape, buggery or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual online images, watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate way.
Emotional	The persistent emotional abuse of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person, it may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploitation of learning, or preventing the child from participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying, causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.
Neglect	The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to: • provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment) • protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger • ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers)

	ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness, to, a child's basic emotional needs.
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The following is a non-exhaustive list of potential indicators of abuse:

Physical	unexplained injuries or those which have received no medical attention, hidden injuries, signs of neglect.
Sexual	allegations made by the child or young person, preoccupation with sexual matters, sexual activity through words, play or drawings, severe sleep disturbances with fears and phobias, being sexually provocative with adults.
Emotional	regression in behaviour, nervousness, sudden under-achievement, inappropriate relationships with peers / adults, attention seeking, running away / stealing / lying, looking uncared-for.
Neglect	being smelly or dirty, being hungry, having unwashed clothes, having the wrong clothing such as no warm clothes in winter, having frequent and untreated nappy rash in infants, a change in behaviour, family or housing issues such as having no heating.

Further information and guidance is available to all staff via Educare, our online training platform.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Definition of FGM

"Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) comprises of all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs whether for cultural or non-therapeutic reasons" (World Health Organisation – 1997).

"FGM is considered child abuse in the UK and a grave violation of the human rights of girls and women. In all circumstances where FGM is practised on a child it is a violation of the child's right to life, their right to their bodily integrity, as well as their right to health. The UK Government has signed a number of international human right laws against FGM, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child".

Female circumcision is illegal in the UK and it is an offence to take UK nationals abroad to aid, abet or carry out FGM. All agencies have a statutory responsibility to safeguard children from being abused through FGM. If there are concerns that a girl is at risk or a known case of FGM this is a child protection issue and must be documented and reported to Somerset Children's Social Care via Somerset Direct and/or the police.

Some warning signs that *may* indicate a girl is at risk of FGM include:

- Parents requesting an extended leave from school on top of school holidays
- If a girl comes from a country that has high prevalence of FGM
- Mother and other siblings have already undergone FGM
- Child may indicate that they are going for a special event

County Lines

The UK Government defines county lines as:

"County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of "deal line".

They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons".

County lines activity and the associated violence, drug dealing and exploitation has a devastating impact on young people, vulnerable adults and local communities.

Signs to look out for

A young person's involvement in county lines activity often leaves signs. A person might exhibit some of these signs, either as a member or as an associate of a gang dealing drugs. Any sudden changes in a person's lifestyle should be discussed with them. Some potential indicators of county lines involvement and exploitation are listed below, with those at the top of particular concern:

- *persistently going missing from school or home and / or being found out-of-area;*
- *unexplained acquisition of money, clothes, or mobile phones*
- *excessive receipt of texts / phone calls and/or having multiple Handsets*
- *relationships with controlling /older individuals or groups*
- *leaving home / care without explanation*
- *suspicion of physical assault /unexplained injuries*
- *parental concerns*
- *carrying weapons*
- *significant decline in school results / performance*
- *gang association or isolation from peers or social networks*
- *self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being.*

Factors that heighten and individual's vulnerability:

- *Having prior experience of neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse*
- *Lack of a safe/stable home environment, now or in the past (domestic violence or parental substance misuse, mental health issues or criminality, for example)*
- *Social isolation or social difficulties*
- *Economic vulnerability*
- *Homelessness or insecure accommodation status*
- *Connections with other people involved in gangs*
- *Having a physical or learning disability*
- *Having mental health or substance misuse issues;*
- *being in care (particularly those in residential care and those with interrupted care histories)*
- *being excluded from mainstream education, in particular attending a Pupil Referral Unit.*

Child Criminal Exploitation

Child Criminal Exploitation is common in county lines and occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual.

Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology. Criminal exploitation of children is broader than just county lines, and can include for instance children forced to work on cannabis farms or to commit theft.

Cuckooing

'Cuckooing' is the term used to describe the practice where professional drug dealers take over the property of a vulnerable person and use it as a place from which to run their drugs business. Cuckooing often but not always has links to County Lines, some of the factors of vulnerability will be the same as above but will relate to individuals who have access to or their own accommodation.

Human Trafficking

Human Trafficking is the recruitment, harbouring, transportation, transferring or receipt of a person for the purpose of exploitation, using such means as threats, force, coercion, abduction, fraud or deception. People are trafficked for many different forms of exploitation including forced labour, domestic servitude and forced

prostitution. Trafficking and modern slavery is a multi-billion pound industry, blighting most countries worldwide, whether they are the place origin, destination or transit.

Who is at risk?

Whilst there is no single characteristics of a trafficking victim, recruiters often identify the most vulnerable in society – those with mental health, alcohol, drug related issues, the poor or homeless, people with disabilities and children. However, victims can come from any walk of life. They are seen by their abusers as commodities, to be bought, sold and exploited.

There are generally three elements of human trafficking:

- the act – recruitment transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a person or people.
- the means – threat or use of force, fraud, deception, coercion, abduction, vulnerability, abuse of power.
- the purpose – the exploitative end result for the victim e.g. prostitution, organ removal, forced labour etc.

A network usually involves the following structure:

- recruiters
- transporters or traffickers
- exploiters

Recruitment methods vary and can include:

- abduction/kidnap
- coercion – can be subtle or overt, physical or psychological
- befriended (boyfriend/girlfriend or friend)
- recruitment agencies
- stranger
- family – potentially being ‘sold’
- internet (increasingly popular with offers of jobs/travel etc.)
- newspapers adverts
- shop window adverts

Many victims are provided with free drugs and alcohol as an initial inducement. Once recruitment has taken place and the victim is under a degree of control, they are ‘marketed’ and transported to a place of work. Perpetrators use varying methods to exercise control over their victims. Many are refused access to what are basic human rights – food, clothing and warmth. Victims can be kept in isolation, movement restricted and contact with family and the outside world prevented.

Passports, other identity documents, money, access to monies and pay can be withheld. These forms of control are underpinned with the use of violence, threats of violence against their family and psychological intimidation, such as being told that if they don’t comply, they will be exposed to the authorities as illegal immigrants. Victims are brainwashed into believing that if they fall into the hands of the authorities, they will be treated badly, imprisoned and deported. This creates a deep distrust of police, social care and other agencies.

Contextual Safeguarding

Contextual Safeguarding is recognition of the fact that young people experience harm beyond their families and recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people’s experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships.

Contextual Safeguarding recognises that children and young people's risk experiencing significant harm in extra-familial contexts, and it is our responsibility to be aware of and mindful of these contexts to aid in prevention, identification, assessment and if necessary safeguarding intervention.

For more detailed information, please see:

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/news/2019/october/what-is-contextual-safeguarding>

Child-on-Child Abuse

YMCA Taunton recognises that children can abuse other children and that such abuse can occur both inside and outside YMCA settings, including online.

Child-on-child abuse may include:

- bullying (including cyberbullying)
- physical abuse
- sexual violence
- sexual harassment
- coercive or controlling behaviour
- initiation or hazing-type behaviours
- image-based abuse
- online abuse and exploitation
- upskirting and other harmful sexual behaviours

Child-on-child abuse should never be dismissed as:

- banter
- part of growing up
- having a laugh
- boys being boys

All concerns will be taken seriously and managed through safeguarding procedures.

Online Safety and Digital Safeguarding

Safeguarding concerns may occur both online and offline.

Online safeguarding risks may include:

- online grooming
- cyberbullying
- online sexual abuse
- sharing of nude or semi-nude images
- exploitation through social media
- radicalisation
- coercive or controlling behaviour through digital communication
- AI-generated indecent imagery
- exposure to harmful online content

Staff should remain vigilant to signs of online harm and report concerns in accordance with this policy. Any safeguarding concern identified through digital technology will be treated as seriously as concerns arising in person.

It is also important to consider and understand that many of the people YMCA Taunton work with will be more vulnerable to an abuse of power, exploitation and coercion.

NB: Physical abuse and neglect are difficult to hide. Sexual abuse can be almost impossible to identify and prove. Many symptoms of distress can point to abuse but there may be other explanations. It is important, therefore, that the above signs are not taken as indications that abuse has taken place. They should make us stop and think, but not necessarily jump to conclusions.

Considering family needs in the context of early help

Assessments for early help should consider how the needs of different family members impact each other. This includes needs relating to education, mental and physical health, financial stability, housing, substance use and crime.

Specific needs should be considered such as disabilities, those whose first language isn't English, fathers or male carers, and parents who identify as LGBTQ.

Early help services may focus on improving family functioning and developing the family's capacity to establish positive routines and solve problems. Where family networks are supporting the child and parents, services may take an approach that enables family group decision making, such as family group conferences.

Harm outside the home

Practitioners should consider the needs, experiences and vulnerabilities of the individuals or groups who are experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing, harm outside the home – including from criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation or serious violence.

Practitioners should work with relevant partner agencies to consider the influence of groups or individuals perpetrating the harm.

Professionals should assess whether a child who is experiencing, or is at risk of experiencing, harm outside the home is in need under section 17 or 47 of the Children Act 1989.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Mental health concerns can be an indicator that a child, young person or vulnerable adult has suffered, or is at risk of suffering, abuse, neglect, exploitation or other harm.

Staff are not expected to diagnose mental health conditions but should remain alert to behaviours, presentation or disclosures that may indicate an individual requires additional support or safeguarding intervention.

Concerns relating to mental health or emotional wellbeing should be recorded and discussed with a Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Preventing Radicalisation

YMCA Taunton recognises its duties under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 and the Prevent Duty Guidance.

Staff should remain alert to indicators of radicalisation including:

- extremist views
- intolerance towards others
- concerning online activity
- isolation from peers
- fixation on extremist narratives

Concerns should be reported to a Designated Safeguarding Lead and managed through safeguarding procedures.

Domestic Abuse

Children may be harmed through witnessing, experiencing or being exposed to domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse may involve:

- physical abuse
- emotional abuse
- sexual abuse
- psychological abuse
- coercive or controlling behaviour

Exposure to domestic abuse can significantly affect a child's wellbeing, safety and development.

Missing Children and Young People

Children who go missing from home, education or care may be at increased risk of abuse, exploitation, criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation and trafficking.

Repeated episodes of going missing should always be treated as a safeguarding concern.

5.3 Reacting to abuse

You may suspect abuse, you may discover or witness abuse or someone may report abuse to you. However if you become aware of abuse, it is important that you follow the below guidance:

- do not delay
- do not confront the person who is alleged to be responsible for the abuse
- record any observations and keep an account of what you have been told by staff or the child, young person or vulnerable adult. These records must be accurate and factual. See Safeguarding Report Form **Appendix 1**
- it is not your role to investigate – concentrate on presenting information clearly
- pass on your information to the appropriate person – see Safeguarding Concern Reporting Pathway **Appendix 2** dealing with instances, allegations or suspicions of abuse
- do not discuss with anyone other than the person to whom you should report the matter

If a child, young person or vulnerable adult wants to talk about abuse:

- accept what the child, young person or vulnerable adult says, keeping calm and looking at them directly

- let them know that you need to tell someone else, do not promise confidentiality, even when a child, young person or vulnerable adult has broken a rule they are not to blame
- be aware that the child, young person or vulnerable adult may be being threatened
- never push for information
- reassure the child, young person or vulnerable adult they were right to tell you and you believe them
- let the child, young person or vulnerable adult know what you are going to do next and that you will let them know what happens
- make notes as soon as possible, writing down exactly what was said and when he / she said it. Record dates and times of these events and keep the handwritten record, even if these are subsequently typed up, for an indefinite period
- if it is considered that the person making the disclosure is likely to be at risk by returning home, immediate contact should be made with the Somerset County Council or the Police

5.4 Reporting abuse – suspected, disclosed or discovered

- All staff should be aware of the appropriate reporting procedure – this process is illustrated by the Safeguarding Concern Reporting Pathway (**Appendix 2**)
- Workers should inform their Line Manager and the Designated Safeguarding Lead appointed within YMCA Taunton
- It is the responsibility of the Designated Safeguarding Lead to ensure that cases of abuse are reported. It is normal procedure to contact Somerset Children's Social Care via Somerset Direct in the first instance. If the child, young person or vulnerable adult is in immediate danger the Police should be contacted. The number of local Children's Services Team should be readily available.
- The NSPCC can be contacted for advice – the help-line is open 24 hours a day, the number is **0800 800 5000**.
- Any worker, staff or volunteer, can bypass the procedures and share concerns with an outside agency – Somerset Children's Social Care, NSPCC – if they feel that their Line Manager or management team / committee are not dealing with their concern or are implicated in some way.
- In every area there are procedures for investigating cases where a child is at risk. Somerset Children's Social Care has the main responsibility and will normally set up a case conference carried out by social workers and Police. YMCA Taunton may be asked to attend, either to give information or to support the parent / family. It is important to clarify in what capacity YMCA Taunton has been invited and how you want to be seen by the family or young person e.g. as a member of the conference or as a support.

Consideration should be given, on a case by case basis, to the support which can be given to an abused child or young person, recognising that the support needs to be non-judgemental, appropriate and long term. External help, available through Somerset Children's Social Care or other Counselling agencies, may be advisable.

5.5 Low-Level Concerns About Staff and Volunteers

YMCA Taunton is committed to maintaining an open and transparent safeguarding culture in which concerns about behaviour can be identified, raised and addressed promptly and appropriately.

A low-level concern is any behaviour by a member of staff, volunteer or contractor that is inconsistent with the YMCA Taunton Code of Conduct but does not meet the threshold for referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).

Examples include:

- over-familiar behaviour
- favouritism
- inappropriate comments
- inappropriate social media use
- unnecessary one-to-one contact
- breaches of professional boundaries

All low-level concerns should be reported promptly to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or CEO/Nominated Individual.

Patterns of low-level concerns may indicate increased safeguarding risk and will be reviewed collectively.

5.6 Dealing with allegations or suspicions of abuse by YMCA workers – staff

When a report is received it is important to react immediately. All complaints and allegations must be made to the Designated Safeguarding Lead in the first instance. The Designated Safeguarding Lead should clarify the information received, by interviewing the informant and record the following information.

- details of the service user and family
- nature of the allegation and the alleged perpetrator
- dates and times of the incident
- anyone else involved

The allegation should then be reported to Somerset Direct / the LADO (tel **0300 123 2224**) along with the details obtained. If the person making the complaint is not the child's usual "carer" (e.g. parent, guardian), they should be contacted by a senior member of staff – C.E.O. or EYYP Manager– with the consent of the Somerset Children's Social Care to keep them informed of the situation.

If the allegation is made against the Designated Safeguarding Lead, the C.E.O. (Nominated Individual) should be contacted to whom the allegation can be reported and an interview with the informant recorded. The allegations should then be reported to Somerset Direct /Local Authority Designated Officer by the C.E.O. If allegations are made against both the Designated Safeguarding Lead and the C.E.O. (Nominated Individual) then it should be reported to the Chair of the Board of Trustees. It should be normal practice to suspend the worker and inform Somerset Direct / the LADO / Police that you intend to take this action. This in no way implies blame but is a measure to protect the service user and the staff member. This should be made clear at the point of suspension.

Refer also to the YMCA Taunton Whistleblowing Policy.

Advice may also be sought from the NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line 0800 0280285 or help@nspcc.org.uk or for adults: Adult Social Care on tel 0300 123 2224 or email adults@somerset.gov.uk

5.7 Escalation and Challenge

Staff and volunteers have a responsibility to escalate safeguarding concerns where they believe appropriate action has not been taken.

Staff may:

- consult another DSL
- contact the CEO / Nominated Individual

- contact Somerset Direct directly
- contact Adult Social Care directly
- contact the Police directly
- utilise the Whistleblowing Policy
- seek advice from the NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line

No member of staff or volunteer will suffer detriment for raising safeguarding concerns in good faith.

YMCA Taunton encourages professional challenge where decisions made by partner agencies do not appear to adequately address safeguarding risks.

5.8 Professional Curiosity

YMCA Taunton expects all staff and volunteers to exercise professional curiosity when working with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

Professional curiosity involves:

- respectfully asking questions
- seeking clarification
- exploring inconsistencies
- considering wider circumstances
- remaining professionally inquisitive where concerns remain

Staff should not accept explanations at face value where indicators of abuse, neglect, exploitation or harm are present.

5.9 Records & Retention

This section specifically relates to records where there are concerns about a child's welfare and safety, and/or concerns about possible risks posed by people working or volunteering with children. Records about the children and/or adults that take part in our services or activities, should be kept in accordance with UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018 and relevant amendments introduced through the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 in accordance with current Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) guidance. If we retain records for child protection reasons, we do not necessarily need to obtain consent from the adults and/or children concerned. If anyone in our organisation has concerns about a child or young person's welfare or safety, it's vital all relevant details are recorded. This should be done regardless of whether the concerns are shared with the police or children's social care. The report must be factual. Any interpretation or inference drawn from what was observed, said or alleged should be clearly reported as such. The record always be signed and dated by the person making the report.

Child protection records may be electronic or paper-based, should be kept confidential and stored securely. Electronic files should be password protected and stored on computers with protection against hackers and viruses.

Information about child protection concerns and referrals should be kept in a separate child protection file for each child, rather than in one 'concern log'. The child protection file should be started as soon as you become aware of any concerns.

Child protection files should be passed on to any new school a child attends (Information and Records Management Society (IRMS), 2019; Department for Education (DfE), 2023).

Recording concerns about adult behaviour

Sometimes concerns might be raised about an adult who works or volunteers with children. This could be because they've:

- behaved in a way that has harmed, or may have harmed, a child
- committed a criminal offence against, or related to, a child
- behaved in a way that indicated they are unsuitable to work with young people.

We will retain clear and comprehensive records of all allegations made against adults working or volunteering with children, including:

- what the allegations were
- how the allegations were followed up
- how things were resolved
- any action taken
- decisions reached about the person's suitability to work with children

Keeping these records will enable us to give accurate information if we are ever asked for it. For example:

- in response to future requests for a reference
- if a future employer asks for clarification about information disclosed as part of a vetting and barring check
- if allegations resurface after a period of time

Records relating to concerns about an adult's behaviour should be kept in the person's confidential personnel file (not in a central 'concerns log') and a copy should be given to the individual. If concerns have been raised about an adult's behaviour around children, the rule for the education sector is that records will be retained in their personnel file at least until they reach normal pension age or for 10 years – whichever is longer (IRMS, 2019; Department for Education, 2023). This applies to volunteers and paid staff.

Records will be retained for the same amount of time regardless of whether the allegations were unfounded. However, if the allegations are false we will destroy the record immediately.

Information will be retained even if the person stops working or volunteering for the YMCA Taunton.

When records are being kept for longer than the recommended period, files should be clearly marked with the reasons for the extension period.

Sharing records

Consent is not always needed to share personal information.

Wherever possible, we will seek consent and be open and honest with the individual from the outset as to why, what, how and with whom, their information will be shared. We will seek consent where an individual may not expect their information to be passed on. When we gain consent to share information, it must be explicit, and freely given.

There may be some circumstances where it is not appropriate to seek consent, either because the individual cannot give consent, it is not reasonable to obtain consent, or because to gain consent would put a child or young person's safety or well-being at risk. Where a decision to share information without consent is made, a record of what has been shared will be kept.

Personal information collected by one organisation can be disclosed to another organisation unless the information is to be used for a purpose incompatible with the purpose it was originally collected for. In the case of children in need, or children at risk of significant harm, it is difficult to foresee circumstances where information law would be a barrier to sharing personal information with other practitioners.

Practitioners looking to share information should consider which processing condition in the Data Protection Act 2018 is most appropriate for use in the particular circumstances of the case. This may be the safeguarding processing condition or another relevant provision.

Destruction of child protection records

When the retention period is finished, confidential records should be incinerated or shredded in the presence of a member of the organisation or entrusted to a firm specialising in the destruction of confidential material. At the same time, any electronic versions of the record must be purged.

If not shredded immediately, all confidential records should be held in a secured bag, labelled as confidential and locked in a safe, cupboard or other secure place; or placed in a confidential waste bin.

If the YMCA Taunton is closed down, we will make arrangements for the ongoing management of records.

Safeguarding Governance and Quality Assurance

The Board of Trustees retains overall responsibility for safeguarding governance.

The CEO / Nominated Individual and Designated Safeguarding Leads will provide safeguarding reports to the Board as appropriate.

Safeguarding incidents, referrals, training compliance, low-level concerns, trends and lessons learned will be reviewed periodically to support continuous improvement.

YMCA Taunton is committed to maintaining a culture of vigilance, transparency, accountability and continuous safeguarding improvement.

Legal references

Primary legislation

Children Act 1989 – s 47

Protection of Children Act 1999

Care Act 2014

Children Act 2004 s11

Children and Social Work Act 2017

Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006

Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015

UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)

Data Protection Act 2018

Modern Slavery Act 2015

Sexual Offences Act 2003

Serious Crime Act 2015

Criminal Justice and Court Services Act (2015)

Human Rights Act (1998)

Equality Act (2010)

Freedom of Information Act (2000)

Online Safety Act 2023

Further Guidance

Working Together to Safeguard Children (HMG 2026)

Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework 2025

What to Do if You're Worried a Child is Being Abused (HMG 2015)

Prevent Duty guidance for England and Wales (HMG 2023)

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026

Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted 2023)

The framework for the assessment of children in need and their families (DoH 2000)

Department for Education (2023) Stable homes: built on love: strategy and consultation

Department for Education (2023) Improving practice with children, young people and families

Information Sharing Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services for children, young people, parents and carers (May 2024)

Early Help Assessment (EHA)

Multi-Agency Statutory Guidance on Female Genital Mutilation (HMG. 2020)

Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) (Ministry of Justice, National Offender Management Service and HM Prison Service 2023)

National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief (DfE 2012)

Safeguarding Children in whom Illness is Fabricated or Induced (HMG 2023)

Safeguarding Disabled Children: Practice Guidance (DfE 2009)

Safeguarding Children who may have been Trafficked (DfE and Home Office 2011)

Child sexual exploitation: definition and guide for practitioners (DfE 2017)

Handling Cases of Forced Marriage: Multi-Agency Practice Guidelines (HMG 2023)

Community Activities, After-School Clubs and Tuition: Safeguarding Guidance for Providers (DfE 2023)

Safeguarding for Charities and Trustees (Charity Commission 2021)

Safeguarding and Protecting People for Charities and Trustees (Charity Commission 2022)