Last updated: December 2025

Next review date: December 2026

Safeguarding adults at risk policy – Scotland

This policy applies to all paid staff and volunteers, including the Joint Leadership Team and the Board of Trustees, volunteers and sessional workers, agency staff, associates, students, or anyone else working on behalf of Contact.

Purpose of policy

- To protect adults at risk who receive, or whose families receive support, advice or services from Contact.
- To provide staff and volunteers with overarching principles that guide our approach to enable them to contribute to the prevention of abuse of adults at risk through raising awareness and providing a clear framework for action when abuse is suspected.

It is aimed at protecting the vulnerable adult and the worker, also recognizing the risks involved in lone working.

Contact staff and volunteers will often find themselves in situations, either individually or collectively where they are meeting vulnerable adults e.g. through groups and workshops, parent forums, helpline enquiries and one-to-one support. If staff have concerns that they are dealing directly with a vulnerable adult who might need support, then this policy will help shape how that concern can be addressed.

You can find our external safeguarding statement on the Contact website Safeguarding | Contact

Legislation and guidance that underpin this policy

The Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007 and code of practice seeks to protect and benefit adults at risk of being harmed. The Act requires councils and a range of public bodies to work together to support and protect adults who are unable to safeguard themselves, their property and their rights:

The Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007

It provides a range of measures which they can use. The public bodies are required to work together to take steps to decide whether someone is an adult at risk of harm, balancing the need to intervene with an adult's right to live as independently as possible.

Each local authority area across Scotland has an Adult Protection Committee that sets the strategic direction for multi-agency working at the local level in accordance with the Act.

The Act respects the rights we have in law.

All adults – including those considered to be at risk – have the same rights. This means they can refuse to discuss anything regarding their private life, refuse to show any documentation and refuse to seek medical advice.

When the Local Authority is dealing with someone it is worried about, it must take account of:

- The wishes and feelings of the adult at risk (past and present).
- The views of others, such as the adult's nearest relative or others with an interest in the person's well-being.

The Local Authority must:

- Abide by the principles of the Act to ensure what they do is: of benefit to the adult; the least restrictive option; and takes into account the views of the adult and their family/carers. The Local Authority must also provide the information needed to keep the adult involved in any decision, recognizing their background and treating them equally as the council would treat others.
- Make inquiries about anyone who they know or believe is at risk of harm who might require their support.
- Consider independent advocacy and support services.
- Take any necessary action.

The Local Authority must make all necessary checks to make sure the adult is being properly looked after and is not being exploited.

To get a clearer understanding of what is going on, the Local Authority may want to talk to other organizations involved in the adult's care. These may include:

- The Mental Welfare Commission.
- The Care Inspectorate.
- Health Improvement Scotland.
- The Public Guardian.
- Other councils.
- The police.
- The relevant health board.

The Local Authority have a duty to consider the need for independent advocacy. This is someone out with the service who can be brought in to support the adult and help communicate their wishes.

If it becomes evident that an adult is at risk, then the Local Authority must take action. Often, that action can be as simple as making sure the adult is getting enough support; for example, receiving home care.

Where the adult is struggling to protect themselves and a more formal approach is needed, the Local Authority may consider – with the adult – the need to apply to the courts for a Protection Order.

This policy should be read alongside Contact's policies, procedures and guidance on:

- Role of the Designated Safeguarding Officers (DSO) and safeguarding review group guidance.
- IT security and acceptable use policies.
- GDPR policy.
- Recruitment Policy and Procedure.
- Safer Recruitment Policy.
- Equality and Diversity Policy.
- Compliments and Complaints Policy.
- Whistleblowing Policy.
- Health and Safety Policy.
- Lone Working Policy and Procedure.
- Confidentiality Policy and Procedure.

Contact's responsibilities

Contact must ensure all staff, volunteers and anyone else working on behalf of Contact are aware of the Safeguarding Adults at Risk policy. All Contact staff are required to follow Contacts internal referral safeguarding procedures.

Contact will ensure that all staff and volunteers have had adequate training. This training is provided via e-learning. Additional revision e-learning should take place at least after every two years, this will be organised by HR. Freelance workers will be expected to provide updated proof of refresher training.

Additional process training may be provided by the Contact Designated Safeguarding Officers (DSO) for operational teams where appropriate. In addition, operational staff may access training through the local authority where they are based or through other appropriate national or local providers.

Contacts Board of Trustees review this policy annually. The Board has appointed a designated safeguarding lead who periodically meets with the safeguarding review team lead executive director.

Contact's other responsibilities are:

- To notify the appropriate agencies if abuse is identified or suspected.
- To ensure that all referrals to services contain all relevant information we have in relation to identified risk and vulnerability.
- Recruiting staff and volunteers safely ensuring all necessary checks are made, including through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) or nations equivalent.

Responsibilities of Contact employees, volunteers and other representatives:

- To be familiar with the safeguarding adult at risk/vulnerable adults policy and procedures.
- To take appropriate action in line with the Safeguarding vulnerable/Adult At Risk policy.
- To declare any existing or subsequent convictions. Failure to do so will be regarded as gross misconduct, possibly resulting in dismissal.

Support for those who report abuse

All those making a complaint or allegation or expressing concern, whether they be staff, volunteers, service users, carers or members of the general public, should be reassured that:

- They will be taken seriously.
- Their comments will usually be treated confidentially, but their concerns may be shared if they or others are at significant risk.
- Both staff and service users reporting abuse will be given support as needed.

The at risk adult has the right:

- To be made aware of this policy.
- To have alleged incidents recognised and taken seriously.
- To receive fair and respectful treatment throughout.
- To be involved in any process as appropriate.
- To receive information about the outcome.

Definition of an at risk adult

Adults at Risk

Everybody has the right to be safe and well-looked after. The Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007 (the Act) is there to protect adults vulnerable to harm/abuse.

Local councils have a legal duty to step in if they think someone is being harmed or is at risk of harm, as described by the Act.

The Act, defines adults at risk as individuals, aged 16 years or over, who:

Are unable to safeguard themselves, their property, rights or other interests;

- Are at risk of harm; and
- Because they are affected by disability, mental disorder, illness or physical or mental infirmity, are more vulnerable to being harmed than others who are not so affected.

The presence of a particular condition does not automatically mean an adult is an "adult at risk". Someone could have a disability but be able to safeguard their well-being etc. It is important to stress that all three elements of this definition must be met. It is the whole of an adult's particular circumstances which can combine to make then more susceptible to harm than others.

What is meant by harm?

For the purposes of the Act, 'harm' includes all harmful conduct and, in particular, includes:

- Conduct which causes physical harm;
- Conduct which causes psychological harm (e.g. by causing fear, alarm or distress);
- Unlawful conduct which appropriates or adversely affects property, rights or interests (e.g. theft, fraud, embezzlement or extortion); and
- Conduct which causes self-harm.

Definition of Abuse

"Abuse is the harming of another individual usually by someone who is in a position of power, trust or authority over that individual. The harm may be physical, psychological, or emotional or it may be directed at exploiting the vulnerability of the victim in more subtle ways (for example, through denying access to people who can come to the aid of the victim, or through misuse or misappropriation of his or her financial resources). The threat or use of punishment is also a form of abuse. …. In many cases, it is a criminal offence"

Centre for Policy on Ageing

Types of Abuse

Physical abuse

- Bodily assaults resulting in injuries e.g., hitting, pushing, kicking, misuse of medication, restraint, inappropriate sanctions.
- Bodily impairment e.g., malnutrition, dehydration, failure to thrive.
- Medical/healthcare maltreatment.

Sexual abuse

- Rape, incest, acts of indecency, sexual assault.
- Sexual harassment or sexual acts to which the vulnerable adult has not consented or could not consent or was pressured into consenting.
- Sexual abuse might also include exposure to pornographic materials, being made to witness sexual acts and encompasses sexual harassment and non-contact abuse.

Psychological/emotional abuse includes:

- Including threats of harm, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, enforced isolation or withdrawal from services or supportive networks.
- Humiliation.
- Bullying, shouting, swearing.

Neglect

- Including ignoring medical or physical care needs, failure to provide access to appropriate health, social care or educational services.
- The withholding of the necessities of life, such as medication, adequate nutrition and heating.

Self-neglect

Types of self-neglect include:

- Lack of self-care to an extent that it threatens personal health and safety.
- Neglecting to care for one's personal hygiene, health or surroundings.
- Inability to avoid self-harm.
- Failure to seek help or access services to meet health and social care needs.
- Inability or unwillingness to manage one's personal affairs.

Financial or material

- Including theft, fraud, exploitation, pressure in connection with wills, property or inheritance or financial transactions, or the misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits.

Discriminatory abuse

Unequal treatment based on age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex or sexual orientation (known as 'protected characteristics' under the Equality Act 2010

- Verbal abuse, derogatory remarks or inappropriate use of language related to a protected characteristic.
- Denying access to communication aids, not allowing access to an interpreter, signer, or lip-reader.
- Harassment or deliberate exclusion on the grounds of a protected characteristic
- Denying basic rights to healthcare, education, employment, and criminal justice relating to a protected characteristic.
- Substandard service provision relating to a protected characteristic.
- Including racist, sexist, or based on a person's disability, and other forms of harassment, slurs, or similar treatment.

Modern slavery

Modern Slavery is the exploitation of people who have been forced, deceived, or coerced into a life of labour and servitude. It is a crime hidden from society where victims are subjected to abuse, inhumane and degrading treatment. Examples of enslavement include:

- A person who is forced to work or serve – through fear and threats of violence.
- Is owned or controlled by an 'employer' who uses mental or physical abuse to exercise control.
- Dehumanised, treated as a commodity or bought and sold as 'property'.
- Being kept in substandard working/living conditions.
- Physically constrained or has restrictions placed on his/her freedom of movement.
- Modern Slavery is linked to Human Trafficking, but not all victims of modern slavery have necessarily been trafficked.

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is the partial or total removal of external female genitalia for non-medical reasons. It's also known as female circumcision or cutting.

Religious, social, or cultural reasons are sometimes given for FGM. However, FGM is abusive, dangerous and a criminal offence.

There are no medical reasons to carry out FGM. It doesn't enhance fertility and it doesn't make childbirth safer. It is used to control female sexuality and can cause severe and long-lasting damage to physical and emotional health.

Radicalisation

Radicalisation is a process by which an individual or group comes to adopt increasingly extreme political, social, or religious ideals and aspirations that reject or undermine the status quo or reject and/or undermine contemporary ideas and expressions of freedom of choice. Extremism is vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including

democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. It includes calls for the death of members of the British armed forces (HM Government, 2011).

The process of radicalisation may involve:

- Being groomed online or in person.
- Exploitation, including sexual exploitation.
- Psychological manipulation.
- Exposure to violent material and other inappropriate information.
- The risk of physical harm or death through extremist acts.

Vulnerability factors:

Anyone can be radicalised but there are some factors which may make a person more vulnerable. These include:

- Being easily influenced or impressionable.
- Having low self-esteem or being isolated.
- Feeling that rejection, discrimination or injustice is taking place in society.
- Experiencing community tension amongst different groups.
- Being disrespectful or angry towards family and peers.
- Having a strong need for acceptance or belonging.
- Experiencing grief such as loss of a loved one.

These factors will not always lead to radicalisation.

Domestic abuse

Domestic violence and abuse includes any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. It also includes so called 'honour' -based violence, female genital mutilation and forced marriage. Coercive or controlling behaviour is a core part of domestic violence.

Online abuse

Online is any type of abuse that happens on the web, whether through social networks, playing online games or using mobile phones.

Adults can be at risk of online abuse from people they know, as well as from strangers. Online abuse may be part of abuse that is taking place in the real world (for example

bullying or grooming). Or it may be that the abuse only happens online (for example persuading children to take part in sexual activity online).

Abusers can contact adults at any time of the day or night, the abuse can come into safe places like their bedrooms, and images and videos can be stored and shared with other people.

Any form of abuse could all lead to vulnerable adults or adults at risk going missing. Scotland have updated the framework for national missing people in Scotland in 2025. Please see further information via the link below.

https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-missing-persons-framework-scotland-2025/

Signs and symptoms of abuse

It is important to remember that an adult at risk may suffer or be at risk of suffering from one or more types of abuse and that abuse may take place on a single occasion or may occur repeatedly over time. There is no absolute criterion on which to rely when judging what constitutes significant harm.

Information on signs of adult abuse from the Social Care Institute for excellence

Contact's internal safeguarding referral process

Guidance and documentation around Contact's incident reporting process, including process flowcharts, the safeguarding incident form and descriptions of the role of the designated safeguarding officers (DSO), are located on the intranet.

Designated Safeguarding Team

Designated Safeguarding Officers (DSOs)

- Angie Fenn
- Tom Bobbin
- Harriet Squirrell
- Catherine McGee

Trustee lead

- Jamileh Tufail

Please email the safeguarding team on:

safeguarding@contact.org.uk

Out of office hours:

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