

Policy on the Protection of Vulnerable Adults – Guidance for YMWCH staff

The intention of this policy is to establish the roles and responsibilities of all YMWCH trustees and staff (including any person, whether paid or not, who is engaged by or carries out functions on behalf of YMWCH) in relation to the protection of vulnerable adults with whom they come into contact.

YMWCH will take all reasonable steps (including consistent relevant recruitment procedures and DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks (formerly CRB) as appropriate to ensure as far as practicable that unsuitable persons are prevented from being employed by YMWCH and coming into contact with vulnerable adults.

Where appropriate YMWCH will procure suitable training for relevant staff.

The Secretary, Lynwood Manager and Regional Trust Administrator, on behalf of the trustees, will ensure that all staff who may come into direct or indirect contact with vulnerable adults are aware of this policy and understand what is expected of them in relation to the protection of such persons.

1. Definitions - Who is a vulnerable adult?

People aged 18 or over who are, or may be, in need of community care services. They will find it difficult to take care of themselves because they will be affected by one or more of the following:

- a) A physical disability
- b) A learning disability
- c) They are deaf or blind
- d) They have an age-related disability
- e) Mental illness
- f) Physical illness

‘Abuse is a violation of an individual’s human and civil rights by any other person or persons.’ Violation can be an act of neglect or an omission to act or by persuading a vulnerable person to enter into a financial or sexual transaction to which he or she has not or cannot consent. Abuse may be intentional or unintentional following a single or repeated act or omission resulting in harm.

2. What is abuse?

Abuse is ill treatment by one or more people causing physical harm or emotional distress. It may be a deliberate offensive act or a result of neglect. Anyone could be an abuser, a stranger, a member of staff, a family member, someone an adult can have previously thought to have been a friend. There are many different types of abuse and they are listed below:-

Physical abuse: Hitting, slapping, pushing, kicking, misuse of medication, forms of restraint eg being tied to a bed or chair, burning or pinching.

Indicators: An injury inconsistent with explanation, bruises found in different states of healing. Small clusters indicating finger marks, friction burns from a carpet, outline burns eg radiator. Reluctance to seek medical help.

Sexual abuse: Includes rape and any sexual act to which a vulnerable person has not consented, is unable to consent to or does not understand. This also includes non-contact abuse, such as exposure to pornographic material.

Indicators: Bruises and bleeding around rectal and vaginal area, stained or torn underclothes and nightwear, 'love-bites, overt sexual behaviour or language not previously used, or conversely, fear of any type of physical contact.

Financial or material abuse: Theft, fraud, unreasonable pressure to change wills etc, exploitation of a vulnerable person's generosity or lack of understanding of the value of money or goods.

Indicators: Sudden inability to pay bills or purchase necessities, unexplained withdrawals from savings.

Neglect and acts of omission: Disregard to a person's physical or care needs, failure to provide health, social care, leisure and education. Failure to provide medication, nutrition and heating.

Indicators: Lack of attention to personal care needs, rashes, pressure sores, lice, being left alone for long periods, dirty and wet, failure to ensure privacy and personal dignity.

Psychological and emotional abuse: Threats of harm, abandonment, humiliation, blaming, controlling, harassment and verbal abuse.

Indicators: Symptoms of stress, onset of bed-wetting, anxious, tearful, low self-esteem, unexplained paranoia, lack of eye contact.

Discriminatory abuse: Victimisation in relation to race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religious and cultural background. Discriminatory abuse may take the form of slurs and harassment or denial of rightful opportunity, provision of goods and services based on the above.

Indicators: Fear and anxiety, withdrawal from activities, agoraphobia and depression.

Institutional abuse: Where groups of people are exposed to similar maltreatment due to institutional practices.

Indicators: Lack of privacy around toileting and bathing, lack of choice of food, bedtime, communal clothing and toiletries etc.

3. What to do if you discover abuse.

1. If the beneficiary is in immediate danger, call the emergency services and allow them to manage immediate safety issues. Do not jeopardise your own safety by your actions.
2. Where possible, gather information by interviewing the person making the report or the beneficiary directly. Write down what you have witnessed. Record what's been said to you using the beneficiary's own words not your own. A report should be factual. When recording and reporting abuse, it is important to include what you saw, what you heard and what you know to be true. A word for word account of what was said is vital in considering the context and meaning of what was said and this will be of value should further investigation occur.
3. Always inform the manager at the Lynwood. Even if your suspicion of abuse is slight. The manager should then report directly to the CISWO Personal Welfare Team at Pontefract with a copy of such a report being provided to the secretary/regional trust administrator to ensure that the reporting of the incident is followed through and that appropriate action is taken.
4. After investigation and where appropriate the CISWO Personal Welfare Team will refer the matter to social services as a matter of priority. Discussions with them at an early stage will assist in gaining clarity concerning further action.

4. Confidentiality

Staff may feel uncomfortable about having to override beneficiary confidentiality. However, in adult protection you may have a duty in regards a person's safety to:-

- a. Report a criminal offence
- b. Where you think someone is at risk of serious harm
- c. Others could also be at risk of serious harm

Staff should advise a beneficiary or carer of the need to share information and with whom. Information may be shared on a 'need to know' basis only and should always be shared in the best interest of the beneficiary.

5. Capacity

Some people will have the capability to make a decision to report what has happened to them. In all cases concerns need to be reported and investigated.

If there is any doubt about capability then decisions need to be taken by a medical practitioner.

Where people have the capability to make a decision they may choose to have no action taken about the abuse that they are experiencing. If it is thought to be a serious criminal offence then it should be reported to the police in all circumstances.

6. Review of this policy

This policy is to be the subject of an annual review by trustees to ensure service practice is developing in line with current good practice guidance.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- ACCEPT IT HAPPENS
- BE ALERT TO SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS
- CONSIDER THE RISK FACTORS
 1. The vulnerability of the individual
 2. The nature and extent of the abuse
 3. The length of time it has been occurring
 4. The impact on the individual
 5. The risk of repeated or increasingly serious acts involving this or other vulnerable adults
- LISTEN
- BE CLEAR REGARDING ISSUES OF CONFIDENTIALITY
- DISCUSS IT WITH YOUR LINE MANAGER
- REPORT AND RECORD

Remember, on contacting social services, action will be handled sensitively and discreetly. It is vital to consult and seek advice from those experienced in dealing with such matters.

Further information can be obtained from

The Department of Health publication 'No secret's offers direction and guidance to social services departments to help protect 'vulnerable adults' at risk of abuse.

The Department of Health also publishes a 'practical guide to the Protection of Vulnerable Adults (POVA) scheme', which includes changes to the requirement for Criminal Records Bureau Disclosures.

'The Commission for Social Care Inspection' is responsible for setting standards and inspecting care homes and care agencies, and any concerns about abuse in care homes or by social care agencies should be reported to them.

An online version of the 'Sexual Offences Act' is available on the Office of Public Sector Information website.

'Action for Elder Abuse' provides information about the abuse of older people and offers information and support.