

Common Ground Suffolk

Safeguarding Policy

Protecting Children and Vulnerable Adults

Version: 1.0

Date adopted: [Date to be inserted]

Date of next review: [Date to be inserted — recommended annually]

Designated Safeguarding Lead: [Name and contact details to be inserted]

Deputy Safeguarding Lead: [Name and contact details to be inserted]

This policy should be read alongside the Society's Code of Conduct and Health and Safety Policy. It applies to all directors, volunteers, contractors, and anyone else acting on behalf of Common Ground Suffolk.

1. Our Commitment

Common Ground Suffolk is committed to the safety and wellbeing of every person who comes into contact with our activities. We believe that all children and vulnerable adults have the right to be protected from harm, abuse, and exploitation, and that this right is unconditional and applies to everyone regardless of age, disability, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic.

This policy sets out how we will fulfil that commitment in practice. It applies to all directors, volunteers, contractors, and any other person acting on behalf of the Society in any capacity. Compliance with this policy is mandatory. Any person who does not comply with it will be subject to the Society's disciplinary procedures and may be reported to the relevant statutory authorities.

Common Ground Suffolk recognises that its activities, which include working with people in private gardens, running group growing sessions, partnering with schools and care providers, and supporting people who may be unable to manage their own growing spaces, bring volunteers and staff into regular contact with children and vulnerable adults in a variety of settings. This makes a robust safeguarding culture not merely a legal requirement but a fundamental expression of the Society's values.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- all directors and officers of the Society;
- all volunteers, whether regular or occasional;
- any contractors or self-employed individuals engaged by the Society;
- any student placements or interns; and
- any other person acting in an official capacity on behalf of the Society.

This policy covers all activities carried out by or on behalf of Common Ground Suffolk, including:

- one to one volunteer visits to private gardens and growing spaces;
- group growing sessions in community spaces, allotments, or shared gardens;
- educational activities in schools or other settings involving young people;
- partnerships with health and care providers and associated activities;
- any online or digital communications with beneficiaries; and
- any other activity carried out in furtherance of the Society's objects.

3. Definitions

Child. For the purposes of this policy, a child is any person under the age of 18, in accordance with the Children Act 1989 and the Children Act 2004.

Vulnerable adult. A vulnerable adult is any person aged 18 or over who has needs for care and support, whether or not those needs are being met, and who is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect as a result of those care and support needs. This definition follows the Care Act 2014 and includes, but is not limited to, older people, people with physical or learning disabilities, people with mental health conditions, and people experiencing domestic abuse or substance dependency.

Abuse. Abuse is a violation of an individual's human and civil rights by another person or persons. The main categories of abuse are set out in Section 4 of this policy.

Safeguarding lead. The designated person within the Society responsible for coordinating safeguarding activity, receiving and acting on concerns, and liaising with statutory agencies.

DBS check. A Disclosure and Barring Service check, which provides information about a person's criminal record and whether they are barred from working with children or vulnerable adults.

4. Recognising Abuse and Neglect

All volunteers and directors should be able to recognise the signs of abuse and neglect. The main categories are as follows.

4.1 Physical Abuse

Physical abuse involves causing physical harm to a person. Signs may include unexplained injuries, bruising, burns, or fractures; injuries that are inconsistent with the explanation given; flinching at sudden movements; or wearing clothing designed to cover injuries.

4.2 Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse involves persistent emotional maltreatment causing severe and persistent effects on a person's emotional development. Signs may include low self-esteem, withdrawal, anxiety, or significant changes in behaviour. In children it may also manifest as delayed development or speech problems.

4.3 Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not they are aware of what is happening. Signs may include inappropriate sexual knowledge or behaviour, physical symptoms, withdrawal, or sudden changes in behaviour.

4.4 Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a person's basic physical or psychological needs to the extent that their health or development is seriously damaged. Signs may include poor hygiene, inappropriate clothing, hunger, tiredness, untreated medical conditions, or a person being left alone or unsupervised when they should not be.

4.5 Financial Abuse

Financial abuse involves the unauthorised use of a person's funds, property, or assets. This is particularly relevant when working with elderly or vulnerable adults and may include theft, fraud, exploitation, or pressure relating to financial decisions.

4.6 Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse includes any incident of controlling, coercive, or threatening behaviour, violence, or abuse between those who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.

4.7 Self-neglect

Self-neglect covers a wide range of behaviour including neglecting personal hygiene, health, or surroundings. Where a volunteer has concerns about a beneficiary's ability to care for themselves, this should be reported to the safeguarding lead.

4.8 Online Abuse

Online abuse includes cyberbullying, grooming, exploitation, and exposure to harmful content through digital channels. Any online communications between volunteers and beneficiaries must comply with the guidelines in Section 7 of this policy.

5. Our Safeguarding Principles

Common Ground Suffolk will operate according to the following principles in all its activities:

- the welfare of the child or vulnerable adult is always the primary consideration;
- all children and vulnerable adults, regardless of their background or circumstances, have equal rights to protection;
- we will work in partnership with statutory agencies, families, and communities to protect children and vulnerable adults;
- we will listen to and take seriously the views and wishes of children and vulnerable adults;
- we will act promptly and proportionately on any concern, suspicion, or allegation of abuse;
- we will maintain appropriate confidentiality while sharing information with those who need it to keep people safe; and
- we will create a culture in which volunteers and directors feel confident to raise concerns without fear of retaliation.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

6.1 Designated Safeguarding Lead

The Society will appoint a Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) who is responsible for:

- being the first point of contact for all safeguarding concerns;
- receiving and recording all concerns raised by volunteers, directors, or beneficiaries;
- deciding whether to refer concerns to statutory agencies including Suffolk Children's Services, Suffolk Adult Social Care, or the police;
- liaising with the NSPCC, Ann Craft Trust, or other specialist bodies as appropriate;
- maintaining confidential records of all safeguarding concerns and actions taken;
- ensuring all volunteers and directors receive appropriate safeguarding training;
- reviewing and updating this policy at least annually; and
- reporting to the board on safeguarding matters at each quarterly general meeting.

The DSL must be a director or senior volunteer with sufficient authority to act on concerns. A deputy DSL must also be appointed to cover absences. The DSL and deputy DSL must complete appropriate safeguarding training before taking up the role and refresh this training at least every two years.

6.2 All Directors

All directors are responsible for:

- reading, understanding, and complying with this policy;
- ensuring the Society's activities are designed and delivered in a way that minimises safeguarding risks;
- reporting any safeguarding concerns to the DSL immediately;
- supporting a culture of openness and transparency around safeguarding; and
- ensuring that safeguarding is considered in all decisions about the Society's activities and partnerships.

6.3 All Volunteers

All volunteers are responsible for:

- reading, understanding, and complying with this policy before beginning any activity on behalf of the Society;
- completing any safeguarding training required by the Society;
- reporting any concerns, suspicions, or allegations to the DSL immediately;
- never placing themselves in a situation that could give rise to a safeguarding concern;
- following the safe working practices set out in this policy; and
- maintaining appropriate professional boundaries with all beneficiaries at all times.

7. Safe Working Practices

7.1 One to One Settings

Where a volunteer is working alone with a beneficiary in a private garden or other one to one setting, the following practices must be followed:

- wherever possible, a second volunteer or a family member or carer of the beneficiary should be present;
- where a one to one visit is unavoidable, the volunteer must inform the DSL or another director of the visit in advance, including the address and expected duration;
- volunteers must never take a child or vulnerable adult to a private location without the explicit prior consent of their parent, carer, or responsible adult;
- volunteers must ensure they are visible and not obscured from view wherever reasonably possible;
- all one to one visits must be logged with the Society including date, time, address, and the name of the beneficiary; and
- any unusual incident during a one to one visit must be reported to the DSL on the same day.

7.2 Group Settings

In group settings such as community growing sessions, the following practices must be followed:

- there must always be at least two adults present at any session involving children or vulnerable adults;
- the ratio of adults to children should be appropriate to the age and needs of the group, following guidance from relevant statutory bodies;
- no child or vulnerable adult should be left unsupervised at any point during a session;
- session leaders must carry out a risk assessment before each session covering the physical environment, tools and equipment, and any known needs of participants; and
- a register of attendees must be kept for every session.

7.3 Physical Contact

Volunteers should avoid unnecessary physical contact with children and vulnerable adults. Where physical assistance is required, for example helping someone use a tool safely, volunteers should:

- explain what they are going to do before doing it;
- seek the consent of the person and, where appropriate, their carer;
- use the minimum contact necessary; and
- report any incident involving physical contact that felt uncomfortable or ambiguous to the DSL.

7.4 Photography and Images

No photographs or video recordings of children or vulnerable adults may be taken during Society activities without the prior written consent of the individual or, in the case of a child, their parent or guardian. Consent forms must be held on file by the Society. Images must not be shared on social media or other public platforms without explicit consent. Volunteers must not take photographs on personal devices; any photography must be carried out on Society-approved equipment.

7.5 Online and Digital Communications

Volunteers must not communicate with child beneficiaries through personal social media accounts, messaging apps, or email. All digital communications with beneficiaries must be through official Society channels. Where a beneficiary is an adult, digital communications should be kept professional and transparent. Volunteers should not accept friend or follow requests from beneficiaries on personal social media accounts.

7.6 Gifts and Personal Relationships

Volunteers must not give personal gifts to individual beneficiaries or their families. Small tokens such as surplus seeds or produce given as part of the Society's normal activities are acceptable, but individual gifts are not. Volunteers must not enter into

personal or financial relationships with beneficiaries. Any situation that could give rise to a conflict of interest or a perception of favouritism must be reported to the DSL.

8. DBS Checks

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check is a key safeguarding tool. Common Ground Suffolk will require enhanced DBS checks for all volunteers and directors who have regular, unsupervised contact with children or vulnerable adults.

For the purposes of this policy, regular unsupervised contact means any activity where a volunteer is alone with a child or vulnerable adult, or has repeated contact with the same child or vulnerable adult over time, in connection with the Society's activities.

The following applies to DBS checks:

- no volunteer may undertake unsupervised work with children or vulnerable adults until a satisfactory DBS check has been received;
- DBS checks must be renewed at least every three years, or sooner if there is a reason to believe the check may no longer be current;
- the DSL is responsible for maintaining a record of all DBS checks held and their renewal dates;
- where a DBS check reveals relevant information, the DSL will assess the risk in consultation with the board and determine whether the volunteer is suitable to continue in their role; and
- volunteers who are already DBS checked through another organisation may be able to use that check through the DBS Update Service, subject to the DSL's assessment.

Volunteers whose role does not involve unsupervised contact with children or vulnerable adults do not require a DBS check, but must still comply with all other aspects of this policy.

9. Recruitment and Induction

Common Ground Suffolk will take a safeguarding approach to the recruitment and induction of all volunteers, regardless of the role they are taking on.

- all volunteers must complete a volunteer application form before beginning any activity on behalf of the Society;
- references must be taken up for all volunteers who will have contact with children or vulnerable adults;
- all volunteers must read and sign this policy before beginning any activity;
- all volunteers must complete the Society's safeguarding induction, which covers this policy, safe working practices, and how to report concerns; and
- the DSL must be satisfied that a volunteer is appropriate for their role before they begin working with beneficiaries.

The Society will not engage any person on the DBS barred list in any activity that brings them into contact with children or vulnerable adults. This is a legal requirement and cannot be waived under any circumstances.

10. Training

All directors and volunteers must complete safeguarding training appropriate to their role before beginning any activity involving children or vulnerable adults. The minimum training requirements are as follows:

- all directors and volunteers must complete a basic safeguarding awareness course covering the recognition of abuse and reporting procedures;
- the DSL and deputy DSL must complete a more advanced safeguarding training course and refresh this at least every two years;
- volunteers undertaking one to one work in private settings must complete specific training on lone working and safe practice; and
- any volunteer working primarily with children must complete child-specific safeguarding training.

The Society will seek to provide or fund appropriate training for all volunteers. Free online training is available from the NSPCC and Ann Craft Trust and will be signposted to all volunteers as a minimum requirement.

11. How to Report a Concern

11.1 If You Are Concerned About a Child or Vulnerable Adult

If any volunteer or director has a concern about the welfare of a child or vulnerable adult, whether arising from something they have observed, something that has been disclosed to them, or a general feeling that something is wrong, they must:

- not ignore the concern or assume someone else will deal with it;
- not investigate the matter themselves or ask leading questions;
- not promise confidentiality to the person disclosing the concern;
- listen calmly and carefully to whatever is said;
- make a written record of what was observed or said, using the person's own words where possible, and note the date, time, and location; and
- report the concern to the DSL as soon as possible and in any case on the same day.

11.2 If the Concern Involves the DSL

If the concern involves the DSL, or if the DSL is unavailable, the concern must be reported to the deputy DSL or to the Chair of the board. The concern must still be reported and acted upon; it must not be held back because the normal reporting channel is unavailable or compromised.

11.3 What Happens Next

On receiving a concern, the DSL will:

- assess the nature and urgency of the concern;
- decide whether to contact statutory agencies immediately, including Suffolk Children's Services (for concerns about children), Suffolk Adult Social Care (for concerns about vulnerable adults), or the police where there is immediate risk of harm;
- record all actions taken and decisions made;
- keep the reporting volunteer informed of the outcome where appropriate and lawful; and
- report the matter to the board at the next meeting, in appropriately anonymised form.

Where there is immediate risk of serious harm to any person, the DSL or any volunteer or director present may contact the emergency services directly without waiting to consult the DSL. The safety of the individual always takes priority.

11.4 Referral to Statutory Agencies

The DSL will refer concerns to statutory agencies where there are reasonable grounds to believe a child or vulnerable adult is at risk of harm or has been harmed. The relevant contacts in Suffolk are:

- Suffolk Children's Services MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub): 0345 606 1499
- Suffolk Adult Social Care: 0808 800 4005
- Police (non-emergency): 101
- Emergency services: 999
- NSPCC helpline: 0808 800 5000
- Ann Craft Trust: 0115 951 5400

12. Allegations Against Volunteers or Directors

If an allegation is made against a volunteer or director of Common Ground Suffolk, the Society will take it seriously and act promptly. The following procedure applies:

- the person receiving the allegation must report it to the DSL immediately, or to the Chair if the allegation involves the DSL;
- the volunteer or director against whom the allegation is made must be informed that an allegation has been received and that the Society is required to investigate it;
- the volunteer or director must be suspended from all activities involving children or vulnerable adults pending the outcome of the investigation;
- the DSL will consult with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) in Suffolk, who must be notified of all allegations against adults who work with children, regardless of whether the allegation is considered credible;

- the Society will cooperate fully with any statutory investigation; and
- a decision about whether the volunteer or director can return to their role will be made following the conclusion of any statutory investigation and the Society's own internal review.

The suspension of a volunteer or director pending investigation is a neutral act and does not imply guilt. The Society will treat all parties fairly and with dignity throughout the process.

The LADO for Suffolk can be contacted through Suffolk County Council Children's Services. The DSL must make this referral within one working day of receiving the allegation.

13. Confidentiality and Information Sharing

Safeguarding information is sensitive and must be handled with care. The following principles apply:

- all safeguarding concerns and records are confidential and must not be shared except on a need to know basis;
- information will be shared with statutory agencies where required to protect a child or vulnerable adult, regardless of whether the person has consented to the sharing;
- volunteers must not promise confidentiality to someone disclosing a concern, but should assure them that information will be shared only where necessary to keep them or others safe;
- safeguarding records must be stored securely, separately from other Society records, and accessible only to the DSL, deputy DSL, and Chair; and
- records must be retained for a minimum of seven years or, in the case of concerns relating to children, until the child reaches the age of 25, whichever is longer.

The sharing of information to protect a child or vulnerable adult is lawful under the UK General Data Protection Regulation where it is necessary to protect the vital interests of the individual. Concerns about data protection must never be used as a reason to withhold information from statutory agencies where a person is at risk.

14. Whistleblowing

Any volunteer or director who has concerns about the Society's safeguarding practices, or about the conduct of the DSL or another person in a position of responsibility, may raise those concerns under the Society's whistleblowing policy without fear of retaliation. Concerns may also be raised directly with the NSPCC whistleblowing helpline on 0800 028 0285 or with the Charity Commission if the Society has charitable status.

The Society will not penalise any person who raises a genuine safeguarding concern in good faith, even if that concern turns out to be unfounded.

15. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed by the DSL and the board at least annually, and following any safeguarding incident or significant change in the Society's activities, staffing, or legal obligations. Any significant changes to the policy will be communicated to all volunteers and directors and will require them to re-sign their agreement to comply.

The most recent version of this policy will be published on the Society's website and made available to all volunteers, directors, partners, and any member of the public on request.

16. Related Policies and Documents

This policy should be read alongside the following Society documents:

- Code of Conduct
- Health and Safety Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Volunteer Handbook (when produced)
- Rules of the Society

External guidance and legislation referenced in this policy includes:

- Working Together to Safeguard Children (Department for Education, 2023)
- The Care Act 2014
- The Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004
- The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
- UK General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018
- NSPCC guidance for voluntary organisations
- Ann Craft Trust guidance on safeguarding adults at risk

Policy adopted by the board of Common Ground Suffolk

Date: _____

Signed (DSL): _____ Signed (Chair):
