Person(s) Responsible For Dealing with Safeguarding Issues:

Eileen McMaster (Trustee & Senior Safeguarding Lead)

Michelle Chirnside (Project Manager & Safeguarding Lead)

Eric Hall (Shop Manager & Safeguarding Lead)

0191 4778337

Child Protection Policy Statement

The purpose of this policy statement is:

- to protect children and young people of adults who use our services from harm
- to provide staff and volunteers, as well as children and young people and their families, with the overarching principles that guide our approach to child protection. This policy applies to anyone working on behalf of Foundations Furniture, including senior managers and the board of trustees, paid staff, volunteers, sessional workers, agency staff and students.

Scope of Policy Statement

Foundations Furniture is a registered charity that helps to alleviate the effects of unemployment and poverty in Gateshead. We provide a community furniture service that helps residents in receipt of Benefits or on low income to establish and sustain safe, settled and stable tenancies.

Foundations supports around 2000 people each year, from over 900 households experiencing hardship, of which 40% tend to be children living in the household. Our social value report recognises the positive changes that families with children experience, and the benefits that rebuilding and maintaining a place fit to call home has on the wellbeing of children. Our organisation therefore values the children from the households we support, and we welcome them to our showroom with their parents and carers while they select their furniture. We have a number of practices in place to ensure the safety of children while they are visiting Foundations.

On a daily basis, households who visit our charity for help are often accompanied by small children and babies during term time, and older children during school holidays. Children are also often present at the homes of our beneficiaries when we deliver their items, and from local residents who we collect donated furniture from.

We have a number of practices in place to ensure the safety of children while they are visiting Foundations or when our staff and volunteers are collecting or delivering furniture to their homes. We recognise the following needs of the children that we come into contact with:-

- Safe and comfortable furniture and home items, including bedroom storage, beds and mattresses, dining tables and chairs and sofas.

Gateshead Children's Services for advice about referrals during office hours. Call 0191 433 2653
Gateshead Emergency Duty Team outside of office hours. Call 0191 477 0844
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- Accessible facilities at our showroom including a safe route through the showroom for parents with small children or babies in pushchairs or prams
- Supervision from parents/carers to avoid injury in our showroom (falls, bumps, catching dingers when closing drawers or door) and when we deliver furniture (injury associated with moving and handling furniture and with moving tail lifts on our van)
- We are aware that there are risks faced by children and young people in their every day lives, such as a family situation or within the community.

Legal framework

This policy has been drawn up on the basis of legislation, policy and guidance that seeks to protect children in England (Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026). A summary of the key legislation is available from gov.uk.

We believe that:

- children and young people should never experience abuse of any kind
- we have a responsibility to promote the welfare of all children and young people, to keep them safe and to practise in a way that protects them.
- We recognise that:
- the welfare of children is paramount in all the work we do and in all the decisions we take
- all children, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation have an equal right to protection from all types of harm or abuse
- some children are additionally vulnerable because of the impact of previous experiences, their level of dependency, communication needs or other issues

We will seek to keep children and young people safe by:

- valuing, listening to and respecting them
- appointing a nominated child protection lead for children and young people, a deputy and a lead trustee for safeguarding
- adopting child protection and safeguarding best practice through our policies, procedures and code of conduct for staff and volunteers
- providing effective management for staff and volunteers through supervision, support, training and quality assurance measures so that all staff and volunteers know about and follow our policies, procedures and behaviour codes confidently and competently
- recruiting and selecting staff and volunteers safely, ensuring all necessary checks are made
- recording, storing and using information professionally and securely, in line with data protection legislation and guidance
- sharing information about safeguarding and good practice

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- making sure that children, young people and their families know where to go for help if they have a concern
- using our safeguarding and child protection procedures to share concerns and relevant information with agencies who need to know, and involving children, young people, parents, families and carers appropriately
- using our procedures to manage any allegations against staff and volunteers appropriately
- creating and maintaining an anti-bullying environment and ensuring that we have a policy and procedure to help us deal effectively with any bullying that does arise
- ensuring that we have effective complaints and whistleblowing measures in place
- ensuring that we provide a safe physical environment for our children, young people, staff and volunteers, by applying health and safety measures in accordance with the law and regulatory guidance
- building a safeguarding culture where staff and volunteers, children, young people and their families, treat each other with respect and are comfortable about sharing concerns.

Supporting documents

This policy statement should be read alongside our organisational policies, procedures, guidance and other related documents, including:

- Role description for the designated safeguarding officer
- Dealing with disclosures and concerns about a child or young person
- Managing allegations against staff and volunteers
- Recording concerns and information sharing
- Child protection records retention and storage
- Code of conduct for staff and volunteers
- Recruitment and Selection Policy
- Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Managing complaints
- Whistleblowing
- Health and safety
- Induction, training, supervision and support

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Child Protection Procedures: Responding to Concerns about a Child's Welfare

Introduction

It can be very hard for children and young people to speak out about abuse. Often they fear there may be negative consequences if they tell anyone what's happening to them.

Some may delay telling someone about abuse for a long time, while others never tell anyone, even if they want to.

It's vital that children and young people are able to speak out and that whoever they tell takes them seriously and acts on what they've been told.

Even if a child doesn't tell someone verbally about what's happened to them, there may be other indicators that something is wrong. People who work with children need to be able to recognise the signs and know how to respond appropriately.

This procedure outlines best practice for recognising and responding to abuse and some of the issues which may arise when working with children who have been abused.

Identifying concerns

Disclosure - Definition: the process by which children and young people start to share their experiences of abuse with others.

Key Points

- Children may disclose directly or indirectly and sometimes they may start sharing details of abuse before they are ready to put their thoughts and feelings in order

- all disclosures should be taken seriously

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- It takes courage for a child to go through the journey of disclosing abuse
- It is vital that staff and volunteers at Foundations provide support to anyone making a disclosure

How Disclosure Can Happen

- directly– making specific verbal statements about what's happened to them
- indirectly – making ambiguous verbal statements which suggest something is wrong
- behaviourally – displaying behaviour that signals something is wrong (this may or may not be deliberate)
- non-verbally – writing letters, drawing pictures or trying to communicate in other ways.

Children and young people may not always be aware that they are disclosing abuse through their actions and behaviour.

Sometimes children and young people make partial disclosures of abuse. This means they give some details about what they've experienced, but not the whole picture. They may withhold some information because they:

- are afraid they will get in trouble with or upset their family
- want to deflect blame in case of family difficulties as a result of the disclosure
- feel ashamed and/or guilty
- need to protect themselves from having to relive traumatic events.

When children do speak out it is often many years after the abuse has taken place

Barriers to disclosure that makes young people and children reluctant to seek help

- feeling that they do not have anyone to turn to for support
- They may have sought help in the past and had a negative experience, which makes them unlikely to do so again.

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- feel that they will not be taken seriously
- feel too embarrassed to talk to an adult about a private or personal problem
- worry about confidentiality
- lack trust in the people around them (including parents) and in the services provided to help them
- fear the consequences of asking for help
- worry they will be causing trouble and making the situation worse
- find formal procedures overwhelming
- do not realise that they are experiencing abuse

Taking Action

- never wait until a child or young person tells you directly that they are being abused. This can mean that the abuse carries on and they or another child are put at further risk of harm
- ask if a child is ok or discuss concerns with your safeguarding lead, or the NSPCC helpline

Responding to disclosures

- show you care, help them open up
    - Give your full attention to the child or young person and keep your body language open and encouraging.
    - Be compassionate
    - be understanding and reassure them their feelings are important
    - Phrases such as ‘you’ve shown such courage today’ help.
- **take your time, slow down**
    - Respect pauses and don’t interrupt – let them go at their own pace
    - Recognise and respond to their body language
    - remember that it may take several conversations for them to share what’s happened to them.
- **show you understand, reflect back:**
    - Make it clear you’re interested in what the child is telling you
    - Reflect back what they’ve said to check your understanding – and use their language to show it’s their experience.

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- **Offer Reassurance**
  - reassure them that they've done the right thing in telling you.
  - Make sure they know that abuse is never their fault.

Never talk to the alleged perpetrator about the child's disclosure. This could make things a lot worse for the child.

Making notes

It's important to keep accurate and detailed notes on any concerns you have about a child. You will need to share these with your child protection lead or senior child protection lead.

Include:

- the child's details (name, age, address)
- what the child said or did that gave you cause for concern (if the child made a verbal disclosure, write down their exact words)
- any information the child has given you about the alleged abuser.

When to share information

- someone from another agency has asked for information about a child or family
- someone in the family has asked to be referred for further help
- a statutory duty or court order requires information to be shared
- you are concerned that a child or a member of their family may be at risk of significant harm
- you think a serious crime may have been committed or is about to be committed which involves someone in the family.

Checklist for Sharing Information

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- you have a clear and legitimate purpose for sharing a child's personal information.

- You have a record of the reasons why you are sharing or requesting information about a child or their family.

- You are not putting a child's safety and wellbeing at risk by sharing information about them.

- You have sought consent to share information about a child and their family (if consent isn't given, you can still share information with relevant professionals under certain circumstances, for example if you are protecting a child from significant harm.). Tips for gaining consent include:-

    - be open and honest
    - make sure the person you're asking for consent understands what information will be shared and why
    - explain who will see the information and what it will be used for
    - make sure the person you're asking for consent understands the consequences of their information not being shared
    - get the consent in writing, in case there are any disputes in the future. If it's only given verbally, make a written record of this
    - make sure the person knows they can withdraw consent at any time.

- Information has been shared quickly (immediately if an emergency, or within 4 hours of identifying the risk)

- Language used is clear and precise

- Information is accurate, making clear what is factual and what is based on opinion (yours or other people's)

If you're sharing information without consent keep a written record explaining:

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- what steps you took to get consent
- the person's reasons for not giving consent (if known)
- why you felt it was necessary to share information without consent.

Pass a copy of this record on to the agency/agencies you're sharing the information with.

Confidentiality

Never promise a child that you will keep the things they're telling you a secret. Explain that you need to share what they've told you with someone who will be able to help.

If a child or young person needs confidential help and advice direct them to Childline. Calls to 0800 1111 are free and children can also contact Childline online.

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Child Protection Procedures: Managing Allegations Against Staff or Volunteers

Introduction

Any allegation or concern that an employee or volunteer of Foundations has behaved in a way that has harmed, or may have harmed, a child must be taken seriously and dealt with sensitively and promptly.

Depending on the situation, an appropriate response may involve:

- the police investigating a possible criminal offence
- local child protection services making enquiries and/or assessing whether a child is in need of support
- Foundations following the relevant disciplinary procedures with individuals concerned.

You should also make sure any children involved are given appropriate support. The following guidelines share best practice for a managing allegations or concerns about abuse by someone who works of volunteers and comes in to contact with children when they visit our charity with their parents/carers or when we deliver/collect furniture from the homes where children are present.

Our Procedures

Foundations has clear procedures for dealing with allegations of abuse, complaints or concerns about a member of staff or volunteer as part of our safeguarding policies and procedures.

All staff and volunteers should read and understand them.

Roles and Responsibilities

Foundation's senior safeguarding lead is our Trustee, Eileen McMaster, and our safeguarding lead within Foundations is Shop Manager Eric Hall. They are responsible for dealing with allegations or suspicions of abuse about someone who works for Foundations that comes into contact with children. Their contact details are:-

Eileen: 0191 4900945

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Eric: 0191 4778337
If there is a concern about one of our safeguarding leads, or senior safeguarding lead, it should be reported to a different lead or another senior manager.

Eileen and Eric are fully trained in managing allegations against, or concerns about, abuse by a member of staff or volunteer and is aware of who to contact if concerns are raised within Gateshead Council.

Criminal record checks

It is Foundations' policy to require applicants to disclose any convictions, cautions, reprimands or final warnings that are not 'protected' as defined by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 (as amended in 2013) as part of their application. The amendments to the Exceptions Order 1975 (2013) provide that certain spent convictions and cautions are 'protected' and are not subject to disclosure to employers, and cannot be taken into account. However certain types of posts, particularly those that involve working with children or adults in a vulnerable position or other positions of trust or sensitive areas, are exempt from these provisions, and in these cases all convictions, cautions, reprimands or final warning that will not be filtered in line with the current guidance must be declared.

The Disclosure and Barring Service makes decisions about who will be barred from working with children and vulnerable adults. If a manager believes that the appointee to a vacancy will be working in a 'regulated' position s/he will require an enhanced criminal records check before commencing employment. Applicants must be made aware early in the recruitment process that a criminal records check will be required of the appointee.

Appointees to such positions involving regulated activity must be briefed on their responsibilities towards safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.

Whistleblowing

Foundations has a Whistleblowing Policy in place so that staff and volunteers feel confident about challenging the behaviour of others and voicing concerns. If you feel unable to report an incident within Foundations, you can make a report to the police or local child protection services directly.

Responding to Concerns and Allegations

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1) Foundations must take any concerns raised about staff or volunteers seriously, regardless of who the person is or how long they've been involved with the organisation.
2) Foundations will not attempt to investigate the matter, but will gather the facts of the case and keep written records
3) If an allegation is made that a staff member of volunteer has:
    a. Behaved in a way that has harmed, or may have harmed a child
    b. Committed a criminal offence against, or related to, a child
    c. Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they are unsuitable to work with children.

    Foundations must report this **immediately** to the relevant agencies (for example the NSPCC helpline on **0808 800 5000**, your local child protection services or the police).
4) Foundations will liaise with local child protection services and the police to ensure that we are responding appropriately

Resignations and 'Settlement Agreements'

If someone resigns from their post or refuses to cooperate with the process, this will not prevent an allegation being followed up.

'Settlement agreements' (where a person agrees to resign and the employer agrees not to pursue disciplinary action) **will not be used** in cases of alleged abuse.

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Confidentiality and Support

Foundations will make every effort to maintain the confidentiality of all parties while an allegation or concern is being investigated. Everyone involved in the investigation will be reminded of this so that they understand the importance.

Foundations will support the children involved, their parents or carers, and individuals who have had an allegation made against them. This may include:

- telling parents or carers and the employee or volunteer concerned about the allegation as soon as possible (as long as this does not place any children at further risk of harm)
- telling them how you are going to manage the allegation
- keeping everyone informed about the progress and outcomes of the case.

Record Keeping

It's important to keep a clear and comprehensive summary of:

- all allegations that have been made
- details of how allegations have been followed up and investigated
- decisions made about the allegation and actions taken.

For more information, please see Foundations Child Protection Policy – Records Retention and Storage procedures.

Reporting

If Foundations decides to remove a member of staff or volunteer from working with children because they pose a risk of harm (or if we would have removed the person, but the person has resigned or left), Foundations has a **legal duty** to inform the relevant disclosure and barring agency. **Failure to do this is a criminal offence**.

We will also make a report to the appropriate regulatory bodies including the Charity Commission.

Learning Lessons

If an allegation is substantiated it is vital to think about lessons that can be learnt. This should include:

- considering any factors that may have contributed to or failed to prevent abuse occurring
- reviewing safeguarding and child protection measures to ensure ongoing vigilance

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- making changes to organisational policies and procedures as necessary.

In some cases, a case review may be appropriate. This means an independent reviewer will speak to all the agencies involved and consider the case. They will consider whether there are lessons that should be shared more widely to improve safeguarding practice.

Further Legislation and Guidance on Managing Allegations

In **England**, the national guidance is **Working together to safeguard children**. (Department for Education, March 2026).

Local safeguarding partners will also have child protection procedures.

There is separate statutory guidance for schools in England: Keeping children safe in education: statutory guidance for schools and colleges (Department for Education, September 2026).

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Child Protection Procedures: Records Retention and Storage Guidelines

Guiding Principles of Records Management

According to Data Protection principles, records containing personal information should be:

- adequate, relevant and not excessive for the purpose(s) for which they are held
- accurate and up to date
- only kept for as long as is necessary (Information Commissioner's Office, 2019).

Foundations must:

- know the reason why we keeping records about children and/or adults (for example, because they relate to child protection concerns)
- assess how long you need to keep the records for
- have a plan for how and when the records will be destroyed
- keep personal information secure by:-
    - compile and label files carefully
    - keep files containing sensitive or confidential data secure and allow access on a 'need to know' basis
    - keep a log so you can see who has accessed the confidential files, when, and the titles of the files they have used.

Please refer to Foundations Data Protection and GDPR policy for further information about the records that Foundations keeps for those who access our services, why we hold them, where information is stored, retention periods and methods of disposal, and our policy for sharing information.

When creating and keeping records for child protection reasons, Foundations don't necessarily need to get consent from the adults and/or children concerned.

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Concerns about Children's Safety and Wellbeing

If anyone at Foundations has concerns about a child or young person's welfare or safety, it's vital all relevant details are recorded. This must be done regardless of whether the concerns are shared with the police or children's social care.

Keep an accurate record of:

- the date and time of the incident/disclosure
- the date and time of the report
- the name and role of the person to whom the concern was originally reported and their contact details
- the name and role of the person making the report (if this is different to the above) and their contact details
- the names of all parties who were involved in the incident, including any witnesses
- the name, age and any other relevant information about the child who is the subject of the concern (including information about their parents or carers and any siblings)
- what was said or done and by whom
- any action taken to look into the matter
- any further action taken (such as a referral being made)
- the reasons why the organisation decided not to refer those concerns to a statutory agency (if relevant).
- make sure the report is factual. Any interpretation or inference drawn from what was observed, said or alleged should be clearly recorded as such.
- the record should always be signed and dated by the person making the report.

Storage of Child Protection Records

Whether child protection records are electronic or paper-based, they need to 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.

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- It's good practice to keep child protection files separate from a customers' general records. You should mark the general record to indicate that there is a separate child protection file.
- If you need to share records (within your own organisation or externally), make sure they are kept confidential. Use passwords and encryption when sharing electronic files.
- If your staff and volunteers use personal computers to make and store records, you need a clear agreement to ensure the records are being stored securely.
- If the person responsible for managing child protection records leaves your organisation, we will arrange for a proper handover to whoever takes on the responsibility.

Recording Concerns About Adult Behaviour

Sometimes concerns might be raised about an adult who works or volunteers who comes into contact with children who visit our charity with parents/carers or at the homes that we deliver furniture to or collect furniture from where children are present. 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.

Foundations must keep 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

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Gateshead Emergency Duty Team outside of office hours. Call 0191 477 0844
NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) 24 hour helpline. Call 0808 800 5000
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- 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.

Storing Records Relating to Adults

- 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.
- Foundations keeps records in personnel files either until the person reaches the age of 65 or for 10 years – whichever is longer. This applies to volunteers and paid staff. For example:
    - if someone is 60 when the investigation into the allegation is concluded, keep the records until their 70th birthday
    - if someone is 30 when the investigation into the allegation is concluded, keep the records until they are aged 65.
- We keep records for the same amount of time regardless of whether the allegations were unfounded. However, if we find that allegations are malicious, records will be destroyed immediately.
- Information should be kept for this length of time even if the person stops working or volunteering for the organisation.

Exceptions

In some cases, records can be kept for longer periods of time. For example, if:

- the records provide information about a child's personal history, which they might want to access at a later date
- the records have been maintained for the purposes of research
- the information in the records is relevant to legal action that has been started but not finished
- the records have been archived for historical purposes (for example if the records are relevant to legal proceedings involving the organisation).

Where there are legal proceedings Foundations will seek legal advice about how long to retain our records.

Person(s) Responsible For Dealing with Safeguarding Issues:

Eileen McMaster (Trustee & Senior Safeguarding Lead)

Michelle Chirnside (Project Manager & Safeguarding Lead)

Eric Hall (Shop Manager & Safeguarding Lead)

0191 4778337

Organisations must keep any records that could be needed by an official inquiry (for example the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) (IICSA, 2018)). Inquiries will issue directions for records to be retained and these must be followed.

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DBS Check Filing Policy

Foundations does not store copies of DBS check certificates unless there is a dispute about the results of the check. Instead, a confidential record should be kept of:

- the date the check was completed
- the level and type of check (standard/enhanced/barred list check and the relevant workforce)
- the reference number of the certificate
- the decision made about whether the person was employed (with reasons).

If there is a dispute about the results of a check, we may keep a copy of the certificate for no longer than six months.

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 must be held in a secured plastic bag, labelled as confidential and locked in a cupboard or other secure place; or placed in a confidential waste bin.

If Foundations ceases to operate, we will make arrangements for the ongoing management of records. This includes the review, retention and disposal of records.

This policy statement came into force on 3rd December 2019. We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice every year. This policy statement and accompanying procedures were last reviewed in September 2026, and will be reviewed again in September 2027.

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