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Safeguarding Adults

A Practical Guide for Care Staff

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Safeguarding Adults – A Professional Awareness Guide for Care Staff

Protecting Adults at Risk Through Good Professional Practice

Safeguarding adults is one of the most important responsibilities of everyone working in health and social care. Every individual has the right to live free from abuse, neglect, discrimination and avoidable harm. Care staff play a vital role in recognising concerns, responding appropriately and helping to protect adults who may be at risk.

Safeguarding is about promoting an individual's safety, dignity, wellbeing and human rights while ensuring they receive the support they need to live as independently as possible.

Whether you work in a care home, nursing home, supported living service, domiciliary care or another health and social care setting, safeguarding should form part of your everyday professional practice.

What Is Safeguarding?

Safeguarding means protecting adults who have care and support needs from abuse, neglect or exploitation while promoting their wellbeing, independence and right to make informed choices.

A person may be considered at greater risk if they:

- Have care and support needs due to age, illness or disability.
- Are unable to protect themselves from abuse or neglect.
- Depend on others for some aspects of their daily care or support.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Every member of staff has a duty to remain alert to possible concerns and report them without delay.

Types of Abuse

Abuse can take many different forms and may occur once or repeatedly. It can happen anywhere, including care settings, hospitals, a person's own home or within the community.

Common types of abuse include:

Physical Abuse

The intentional use of force that causes pain, injury or physical harm.

Examples include:

- Hitting, pushing or kicking.
- Inappropriate restraint.
- Misuse of medication.
- Rough handling.

Emotional or Psychological Abuse

Behaviour that causes emotional distress or affects a person's mental wellbeing.

Examples include:

- Bullying or intimidation.
- Threats or humiliation.
- Controlling behaviour.
- Isolation from family or friends.

Financial or Material Abuse

The misuse of a person's money, belongings or financial affairs.

Examples include:

- Theft.
- Fraud or scams.
- Pressure regarding wills or finances.
- Unauthorised use of bank accounts or possessions.

Neglect and Acts of Omission

Failing to provide appropriate care, support or access to necessary services.

Examples include:

- Poor personal care.
 - Inadequate nutrition or hydration.
 - Failure to administer prescribed medication.
 - Ignoring medical needs.
 - Unsafe living conditions.
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Other Forms of Abuse

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse includes any sexual activity that takes place without a person's consent or where the person is unable to give informed consent.

Possible examples include:

- Inappropriate touching.
- Sexual assault or rape.
- Sexual harassment.
- Forcing someone to view sexual material.
- Sexual activity where valid consent has not been given.

Discriminatory Abuse

Discriminatory abuse occurs when someone is treated unfairly, humiliated or harmed because of a protected characteristic or personal difference.

This may relate to:

- Age.
- Disability.
- Race, nationality or ethnicity.
- Religion or belief.
- Sex or sexual orientation.
- Gender reassignment.
- Pregnancy or maternity.

Organisational Abuse

Organisational abuse can occur where poor systems, routines or workplace cultures result in unsafe, neglectful or undignified care.

Examples may include:

- Rigid routines that ignore individual preferences.
- Inadequate staffing or supervision.
- Repeated poor care practices.
- Lack of privacy or dignity.
- Failure to respond to complaints or concerns.

Self-Neglect

Self-neglect occurs when a person does not adequately care for their own health, hygiene, safety or living environment.

Possible signs include:

- Poor personal hygiene.
- Unsafe or unsanitary living conditions.
- Not eating or drinking enough.
- Refusing essential care or medical support.
- Hoarding that creates a risk to health or safety.

Self-neglect can be complex. Staff should report concerns and follow the individual's care plan and organisational safeguarding procedures.

Modern Slavery

Modern slavery includes situations in which people are exploited, controlled or forced to work against their will.

This may include:

- Forced labour.
- Human trafficking.
- Domestic servitude.
- Criminal exploitation.
- Sexual exploitation.

Possible Signs of Abuse or Neglect

The presence of one sign does not always mean abuse has occurred. However, care staff should remain alert to unexplained or repeated concerns, including:

- Unexplained injuries, bruising or pain.
- Sudden changes in mood or behaviour.
- Fearfulness around a particular person.
- Withdrawal, distress or unusual anxiety.
- Poor hygiene, weight loss or dehydration.
- Missing money, possessions or financial documents.
- Changes in medication use.
- Unsafe living conditions.
- Inconsistent or unexplained accounts of an incident.
- A person appearing unusually quiet, controlled or frightened.

What Should Care Staff Do?

If an individual discloses abuse or you notice a safeguarding concern:

1. **Stay calm and listen carefully.**
2. **Take the concern seriously.**
3. **Allow the person to speak in their own words.**
4. **Do not ask leading or unnecessary questions.**
5. **Do not promise to keep the information secret.**
6. **Explain that the concern must be shared with the appropriate person.**
7. **Record what was seen, heard or disclosed accurately and promptly.**
8. **Report the concern immediately using your organisation's safeguarding procedure.**
9. **Contact emergency services where there is an immediate danger or urgent medical need.**

Do not investigate the concern yourself or confront the person suspected of causing harm. Your responsibility is to recognise, respond, record and report.

Good Safeguarding Practice

Care staff should always:

- Treat individuals with dignity and respect.
 - Support choice, independence and involvement.
 - Follow agreed care plans and risk assessments.
 - Maintain professional boundaries.
 - Record information clearly, factually and confidentially.
 - Report concerns without delay.
 - Cooperate with safeguarding enquiries.
 - Complete safeguarding training and follow current workplace procedures.
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Key Message

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

Never assume that another person will report a concern. Prompt action can help prevent further harm and ensure that the individual receives appropriate protection and support.

Important Notice

This guide provides general awareness information only. It does not replace formal safeguarding training, professional advice, local safeguarding procedures or your employer's policies.

Always follow your organisation's reporting and escalation procedures. Where someone is in immediate danger or requires urgent medical assistance, contact the emergency services.

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The Six Principles of Safeguarding

The Care Act 2014 identifies six key principles that should underpin safeguarding practice in England. These principles help ensure that adults are protected while remaining at the centre of decisions about their care and support.

1. Empowerment

People should be supported to make their own decisions wherever possible and be given the information they need to make informed choices.

2. Prevention

It is better to take action before abuse or neglect occurs. Good communication, effective risk assessments and safe working practices all help reduce safeguarding risks.

3. Proportionality

Responses to safeguarding concerns should be appropriate to the level of risk while respecting the individual's wishes wherever possible.

4. Protection

Adults who are unable to protect themselves should receive appropriate support and representation to help keep them safe.

5. Partnership

Safeguarding is most effective when organisations, professionals, families and individuals work together to share information appropriately and protect those at risk.

6. Accountability

Everyone has a responsibility for safeguarding. Organisations should have clear policies, reporting procedures and defined responsibilities so concerns are managed appropriately.

Good Professional Practice

Every member of staff can contribute to a positive safeguarding culture by:

- Treating every individual with dignity and respect.
 - Listening carefully to concerns or disclosures.
 - Reporting concerns immediately.
 - Keeping accurate, factual and timely records.
 - Maintaining professional boundaries at all times.
 - Respecting confidentiality while sharing information appropriately to protect individuals.
 - Completing mandatory safeguarding training and refresher training.
 - Following organisational policies and procedures.
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Remember

Safeguarding is not only about responding to abuse—it is also about promoting wellbeing, respecting people's rights and creating environments where individuals feel safe, valued and supported.

If something doesn't seem right, trust your professional judgement, report your concerns and allow the appropriate safeguarding procedures to be followed.

Quick Reference Checklist

Before finishing your shift, ask yourself:

- ☐ Have I noticed any safeguarding concerns today?
 - ☐ Have I listened carefully to anyone who raised a concern?
 - ☐ Have I accurately recorded any relevant information?
 - ☐ Have I reported concerns promptly using the correct procedure?
 - ☐ Have I treated every individual with dignity, compassion and respect?
 - ☐ Have I maintained professional boundaries throughout my work?
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Further Professional Development

Expand your safeguarding knowledge with FlexiLearnHub's CPD-accredited and CQC-aligned online training courses covering safeguarding, person-centred care, professional boundaries, effective communication and other essential topics for health and social care professionals.

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Information within this guide is intended as general awareness and should always be used alongside current legislation, organisational policies, professional guidance and individual care plans where applicable.
