



Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy

1. Purpose and Aim of the Policy

Gaia Education is committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children and vulnerable adults. This policy outlines the principles, legislation and practices that ensure that children and adults are not put at risk.

This policy applies to all staff, contractors, consultants, volunteers and Board members of the organisation regardless of geographical location. It also applies to those who carry out work on behalf of Gaia Education or who partner with us. They should take all reasonable steps to ensure the children and vulnerable adults who participate in our programmes are safe and protected.

Gaia Education does not tolerate bullying, harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse of children and vulnerable adults.

2. Definition

Safeguarding is defined as:

'The fundamental standard: that children and adults using services we regulate must be protected from abuse and improper treatment. Providers should establish and operate systems and processes effectively to ensure this protection and to investigate allegations of abuse as soon as they become aware of them'. (Care Quality Commission:2015)

Safeguarding relates to the prevention of harm, not just to protection. Gaia Education believes that to be truly safeguarded children and vulnerable adults need to be safe, nurtured, respected, empowered and included.

Gaia Education also adopts OSCR 2020 definition:

"Safeguarding is the action an organisation takes to promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults to protect them from harm including physical, emotional, sexual and financial harm and neglect".

3. Who is Vulnerable?

Children

This policy uses the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which defines a child as any person under the age of 18. It is our view that all children should be protected according to their rights under the UNCRC.

Vulnerable Adults

At Gaia Education we believe an adult may be vulnerable if:

- they have a physical disability

- they have a mental illness or reduction in mental capacity
- they live in poverty
- they have a low status, and are at risk of discrimination on the grounds of age, sex, race, disability, religion or gender

4. Equality Statement

All persons are entitled to the same protection regardless of age, disability, gender, racial heritage, religious belief, sexual orientation or identity.

5. Procedures

5.1 Awareness

We ensure that all staff, Board members, consultants and volunteers are made aware of the problems caused by abuse and the risk to children and vulnerable adults.

We ensure that all staff, Board members, consultants and volunteers are made aware of this policy, along with attending an in-house safeguarding training and that everyone understands his/her role and responsibilities in regards to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.

We ensure that all new staff, Board members, consultants and volunteers read this policy as part of their induction.

5.2 Prevention

5.2.1 Code of Conduct

When working with vulnerable adults or children, staff and relevant others must abide by Gaia Education Code of Conduct:

- Always treat all children and adults with respect and dignity.
- Always respect the rights of children and vulnerable adults and empower them to exercise their rights.
- Empower children and vulnerable adults to do things which they are able to do themselves.
- Never use disrespectful language or mentally abuse a child or a vulnerable adult.
- Never discriminate on the basis of age, disability, gender, racial heritage, religious belief, sexual orientation or identity.
- Never deliberately physically abuse a child or vulnerable adult.
- Never have sexual contact or use sexual language with a child or vulnerable adult, nor develop a personal relationship that could lead to, or be interpreted as, abuse.
- Always be aware of the health and safety of children and vulnerable adults and ensure that they are protected from harm.
- Be aware of what is acceptable behavior when working with our project participants, referring in particular to Gaia Education **Anti-Harassment Policy**.
- Ensure there is more than one adult present when working with children.
- Avoid being alone with children.

- Not make any suggestive remarks to children or vulnerable adults which could be misinterpreted.
- Consider the wellbeing of children and vulnerable adults when planning any trainings or activities.
- Never hire or employ a child or vulnerable adult in any way that is exploitative.
- Take allegations or concerns about abuse seriously.
- Report and respond quickly to all reports of malpractice in line with policy and procedures.
- Treat all children and vulnerable adults fairly and not show any favoritism.
- Work with partner organisations to ensure that project participants are safeguarded. Never smoke, use illegal drugs or be under the influence of alcohol when working with children and vulnerable adults.
- Always take seriously any disclosure of abuse by a child or vulnerable adult.
- Ensure they are familiar with the appropriate procedures for reporting any abuse they see and that they understand the importance of reporting this.
- Not take children or vulnerable adults to their home or see them on a one-to-one basis outside project activities.
- Protect the reputation of Gaia Education by working actively to protect children and vulnerable adults by complying with Gaia Education's Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy, Anti-Harassment Policy, IT Policy, Code of Governance and Anti-bribery Policy.

This code of conduct notes that abuse can take place in person, online, via social media, by email, by telephone or by post.

5.2.2. Working with Partners

Gaia Education will work with partners to ensure that they are aware of aware of safeguarding concern and practices.

Gaia Education will strive to help our partners to create or develop their safeguarding policies where there is capacity to do so.

Gaia Education will share their tools and policies with partners.

Gaia Education and partners will share mutual learning and develop their policies accordingly.

5.2.3 Photography and Filming

Photographs of our participants, where the individual is easily identifiable, will only be used with the permission of the individual. This particularly relates to children under the age of 16 whose parent or guardian will be consulted first. The risks in disseminating any material in relation to children or vulnerable adults are always carefully considered before posting on media channels.

5.3 Reporting a concern

Gaia Education takes any allegations of abuse seriously.

5.3.1 What to do if a child or vulnerable adult discloses something to you

- Listen to what the person has to say and let them speak freely.
- Do not try to confront the alleged perpetrator.
- Do not promise confidentiality. Instead, say that you will only speak to the necessary people.

- Inform the person of your next steps.
- Record immediately, or as soon after as possible, what the person has disclosed to you.
- If the matter is urgent – please go straight to the relevant authorities.
- Contact the People Care working group peoplecaregroup@gaiiaeducation.org and/or the Board member in charge of safeguarding gaiiaeducationboard@gaiiaeductaion.org

5.3.2 If you want to report an incident or are suspecting malpractice

If any of Gaia Education or their stakeholders have any concerns about staff, Board members, consultants or volunteers behaviour or the work of Gaia Education, these should be raised in writing to People Care working group peoplecaregroup@gaiiaeducation.org and/or to the Board member in charge of safeguarding gaiiaeducationboard@gaiiaeductaion.org

All employees are protected by the Public Interest Disclosure Act.

6. Investigation

Once a case is reported, the People Care Group will define the process and the person who will undertake the investigation by taking in consideration the following selection criteria:

- Firstly, the investigation officer should consider if she/he can investigate the case neutrally
- It is a manager or a person in a position of sufficient seniority who has not directly managed or supervised the person(s) concerned with the incident
- It is a manager or professional who has the level of experience or knowledge who will be able to critically analyse the situation as well as synthesise the situation from a variety of resources
- It is a manager or professional who is sufficiently independent of the person(s) and the project

Supervision and support for investigating officers

People Care Group will offer supervision, support and guidance in relation to the safeguarding investigation. Investigating officer in collaboration with the People Care Group will develop a schedule and a timeline. If there is a need to operate outside of timescale, it must be discussed with the People Care Group as well as the person who made the complaint.

7. Other policies

This policy should be read in accordance with: Anti-Harassment Policy, IT Policy, Code of Governance, Whistleblowing and Anti-Bribery Policy.