

Ablaze Child Protection Policy & Protocols

•About Ablaze

Ablaze is a registered charity in England and Wales (no. 1110956). Its charitable object is,

'To advance the education and training of young people by creating developing and sustaining partnerships between education, business and the public sectors, thereby raising the equity and quality of education and the aspirations and attainment of young people.'

As a Broker of attainment and aspiration raising support between Employers and Schools, it is of paramount importance that Ablaze's commitment to the protection and welfare of children and young people is explicit and understood by all parties.

This policy has been written in accordance with the South West Child Protection Procedures developed and adopted by the Local Authorities' *Safeguarding Children Boards* across the South West. This means it is consistent with and complimentary to the policies, procedures and protocols applied by Local Authorities in the areas in which Ablaze currently and prospectively works, namely

- Bristol City
- Bath and North East Somerset
- North Somerset
- South Gloucester
- Wiltshire

The South West Child Protection policy, procedures and protocols can be accessed on-line at <https://www.proceduresonline.com/swcpp/>.

This policy has also been written to complement those of Schools. Ablaze recognizes that when Workers ⁽¹⁾ are in Schools or working with children from partner Schools in another agreed setting (e.g. for a Workshop or Conference style event), they are subject to and must comply with the Child Protection policy and protocols of those Schools.

Please Note

(1) Throughout this document, '**Workers**' include all people who work directly with children, these may be Volunteers from Employers working in partnership with Ablaze, members of Ablaze Staff, Ablaze Contractors or Volunteers working directly for Ablaze (rather than as a result of another Employer relationship).

•Our Commitment to Children and Young People

Ablaze believes it is the responsibility of every adult to protect children from abuse. This is both a moral and legal obligation and is central to our values. A child is defined by law as any young person below the age of 18.

We believe all children have the right:

- to be valued, listened to and respected
- to their individual welfare being paramount
- to protection from abuse, whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, religious belief and/or sexual identity
- to the certainty that all suspicions and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.

•Safeguarding Leads

The named Safeguarding Lead for Ablaze is the **CEO, Sally Melvin**. She can be contacted at Sally.Melvin@AblazeBristol.org.

The named Safeguarding Lead for Ablaze Board is **Trustee, Shannett Morgan**. She can be contacted at shannettmorgan@yahoo.co.uk

•Who is this Policy relevant to?

- **Direct Workers – Employer Volunteers and Ablaze Staff** ⁽²⁾ working directly with children and young people to deliver an Ablaze Branded or Co-branded product.
- The **Trustees, Directors** and **Company Secretary** of Ablaze (including any co-opted Directors/Advisers) directly accountable for the Charity's governance and compliance.
- **Indirect Workers - Ablaze Staff** brokering relationships and, coordinating (own-brand, co-branded or third party branded) products and programmes between Schools and Employers.
- **Local Authorities, Schools** ⁽³⁾ and **Employers** engaging with Ablaze as a broker of Education Business Partnerships.
- **Funders** (financial and/or in kind) confirming Ablaze's commitment to Child Protection and best practice risk management.

Please note

Throughout this document:

(2) '**Ablaze Staff**' includes any permanent, temporary, contracted, seconded workers who are contracted by Ablaze and/or (if unpaid i.e. Volunteers) directed by the Ablaze Programme Managers.

(3) '**School(s)**' include all educational settings irrespective of their legal constitution (e.g. Local Authority, Academies, Trusts).

•Staff Recruitment

As part of the recruitment process, those who work directly with children will be required to have a current DBS check. DBS checks are only part of the process to protect children from possible abuse by members of staff, volunteers etc. These

checks will be operated in conjunction with appropriate training for Workers so that they are aware of and sensitive to potentially abusive situations.

NB Those Workers who already have a DBS check do not need to complete another provided that

- their existing DBS check is at a Level (Enhanced) at or above the appropriate level to the work they will be doing and,
- it is no more than three months since they were actively engaged in volunteering.

• **Accountability Guidelines**

The context - Everyone who works with children and young people as a result of Ablaze's brokering activities shall be made aware of this policy and the procedures and working guidelines which follow before commencing work with children. The policy will be made readily available for easy access and reference.

Ablaze recognizes that it is Local Authorities' statutory responsibility to ensure the welfare of children by investigating reported incidents of abuse and ensuring that appropriate Child Protection Policies and Protocols are in place within the Local Authority and its Partner organizations. In relation to activities, brokered into educational settings, Ablaze recognizes that its Child Protection Policy is subordinate to that of Schools (as agents of Local Authorities' Child Protection Policies).

It is the operational responsibility of relevant Ablaze Staff to ensure that the Accountability Guidelines are adhered to as part of engagement process. Where compliance problems are encountered which appear irresolvable, they must be reported to the Ablaze CEO (who is also the named Ablaze Safeguarding Lead) for risk-based assessment, advice and decision.

The Ablaze Board of Directors retains overall executive accountability for overseeing the Charity's compliance with this Policy. All Trustees are required to attend Charity Commission safeguarding training when they join the Ablaze Board.

• **Accountability Guidelines**

The multi-faceted nature of brokerage means it is important that all parties involved in a programme

1. are clear on their respective accountabilities in relation to this Policy,
2. work together to ensure protocol is carried out correctly.

Prior to the start of any Ablaze programme in any setting the following process is undergone as part of our best practice for managing safeguarding and child protection in our programmes.

- All parties involved in a programme, Ablaze, Employer, School, sign a Service Level Agreement (SLA). This document sets out the roles and responsibilities of each party and the Safeguarding processes that will take place prior to the programme commencing.
- Schools and educational settings that students who participate come from are consulted on their safeguarding policies and we ensure that we align our practice to comply to these.
- Settings, such as business premises, undergo a risk assessment prior to programmes starting.
- All adults who are participating on a specific programme receive training from Ablaze prior to starting. This training includes safeguarding and child protection information, advice and protocol, should a safeguarding incident or issue arise.
- All adults are DBS checked before starting on a programme.
- Business co-ordinators are given information on the process to follow should a safeguarding incident or issue arise.
- Where appropriate young people taking part in our programmes are given advice and information on safeguarding procedures and protocols.

Should an existing Employer/School partnership develop, leading to independent development of bespoke initiatives, products and programmes, the School is responsible for all related issues pertaining to Child Protection and their relationship with the Employer.

Should Ablaze introduce third parties' products, programmes and services to Schools the following applies:

- for organizations whose core business includes working with children, Ablaze will require sight of their Child Protection Policy
- for all other organizations, sight of their 'Working with Children Code' (or equivalent); in the absence of a code, Ablaze will signpost the organization to other Employers who already have such a code in place.

Where Schools have already been introduced to the third party and the above information is not forthcoming, Ablaze will advise the School(s) immediately; it will then be for the Schools to decide how to proceed in accordance with their Child Protection Policy, advising Ablaze of their decision.

Where Ablaze engages contractors, and the specialists will work directly with children, Ablaze will ensure that its recruitment process (itself reflecting its commitment to child protection) is adhered to and appropriate DBS checks and training are completed.

In the event that a safeguarding incident or issue arises, Ablaze follows this step by step process.

- The incident is verbally reported to the school representative and the Ablaze representative (if one is present) the same day.
- If an Ablaze representative is not present the incident is reported to them by the school and/or business co-ordinator as soon as possible.

- The incident is logged in the password protected safeguarding log.
- Discussions are had between the Ablaze rep. and the co-ordinators as to the appropriate next course of action to take.
- All actions and discussions are noted in the safeguarding log.
- The necessary actions are taken as soon as possible, and records kept.

- **Protective Working Practices Guidelines (applicable to all Workers)**

The following guidelines have been developed to help Ablaze Staff and Employer Volunteers to:

- Identify their responsibilities with regard to child protection by safeguarding and promoting the interests and well-being of children
- Understand and implement procedures which will offer safeguards to children
- Understand and implement procedures which will protect Ablaze Staff and Employers' Volunteers against unjustified allegations of abuse.

Supervision of Groups

- When organizing a group activity, Workers should always ensure that there are two 'supervising adults' present. Schools, colleges and other educational places are obliged to provide 'supervising adults'; Workers must check they have named people in place before they undertake the event.
- Workers should be satisfied that they can have reasonable confidence in the persons offered as supervisory adults, or that any partner organization involved has confidence in the selected adults (for instance a Primary Head Teacher might ask a parent/carer to assist with the supervision of a group). If a Worker is not convinced, they should raise their concern directly with the School Co-ordinator and/or the Ablaze member of staff.
- Wherever possible, Workers should ensure that groups are fully supervised by their leaders (e.g. their class teacher) and acting within their own Child Protection Guidelines. Workers should not expect to encounter a problem but should be aware and not accept situations they are uncomfortable with – if in doubt, ask!

Sensitive Situations

- Physical contact with children should be avoided at all times. Workers should avoid putting their arm around a child, allowing a child to sit on their lap etc.
- Situations should be avoided where a Worker is alone with a group of young people or lone young person. We accept that sometimes this is unavoidable (for instance when a colleague/supervisory adult leaves the room, is unavoidably late or has to deal with an emergency). If placed in this situation the Worker

should simply record the incident describing the circumstance and share that with the School and Business Co-ordinators.

- No Worker should take children anywhere where they will be alone with the Worker, e.g. the Worker's home.
- Avoid talking to young people in changing areas or other places where they are on their own – if you need to speak to a child, ask them to leave the changing area or place where they are alone.

Transportation

- If a pre-planned event requires transportation, schools should be asked to take responsibility for all transportation. The Worker should be assured by the School Co-ordinator that the School has obtained written consent of parents/carers and that the School or partner agency is applying their own child protection guidelines as well as ours.
- In general we would advise all Workers to make independent arrangements for their own travel, but in the unlikely event that a Worker is travelling in a minibus with children, a 'supervising adult' should be present and that 'supervising adult' should not be the driver.
- No Worker should take young people alone on car journeys, however short, except in exceptional circumstances, defined as being where a young person is at risk unless the person takes appropriate steps to ensure their safety. If this situation arises then a responsible person at the child's school must be informed immediately so they can take appropriate action and inform the child's parents/carers.

This Policy was last reviewed: March 2024

Signed *S.Morgan*

By: Ablaze Board Safeguarding Lead, Trustee Shannett Morgan

Date: *19 March 2024*

Appendix

- **Awareness of Abuse**

Abuse can occur in the home, school and the recreational environment. It can be physical, emotional or both. Everyone in Ablaze and its partner organizations has a role to play in safeguarding the welfare of children in receipt of its services.

Sadly, some individuals actively seek employment or voluntary work with child-related services in order to harm them. It follows that as part of a safe engagement process, Ablaze must insist on the compliance of its partners with the processes set out in the Accountability Guidelines above and make explicit where accountabilities transfer from one party to another during that process.

This is to ensure that as far as possible, Workers are safe to work with children and are well-advised about maintaining safe and caring practices.

Dealing with an allegation that a Worker has abused a child is difficult but must be taken seriously and dealt with swiftly, carefully and fairly; likewise, where Workers suspect abuse of a child.

- **Child Abuse Indicators**

There are normally taken to be five categories of abuse;

Neglect: The persistent or severe neglect of a child or the failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger, including cold or starvation, or extreme failure to carry out important aspects of care, resulting in the significant impairment of the child's health or development.

Physical Injury: Where adults physically hurt or injure children by hitting, shaking, squeezing, burning and biting, or by giving children alcohol, inappropriate drugs or poison. Attempted suffocation or drowning also comes within this category. In physically active situations, physical abuse can be deemed to occur when the nature and intensity of training exceeds the capacity of the child's immature and growing body.

Sexual Abuse: Actual or likely sexual exploitation of a child or adolescent. Girls and boys are abused by adults - both male and female - who use children to meet their own sexual needs. Activities which involve physical contact with children could potentially create situations where sexual abuse may go unnoticed. The power of the coach over young performers, if misused, may also lead to abusive situations developing.

Emotional Abuse: Actual or likely severe adverse effect on the emotional and behavioral development of a child caused by persistent or severe emotional ill-treatment or rejection. Persistent lack of love and affection, where a child may be constantly shouted at, threatened or taunted which

may make the child very nervous and withdrawn. Emotional abuse may also occur when there is constant overprotection (which prevents children from socialising), or there is neglect, physical or sexual abuse. Emotional abuse in the Arts context might occur if children are subjected to constant criticism, bullying or unrealistic pressure to perform to high expectations consistently. (All abuse involves some emotional ill-treatment. This category should be used where it is the main or sole form of abuse).

Indications that a child may be being abused include the following:

- Unexplained or suspicious injuries such as bruising, cuts or burns, particularly if situated on a part of the body not normally prone to such injuries.
- An injury for which the explanation seems inconsistent.
- The child describes what appears to be an abusive act involving him, or her.
- Someone else (a child or an adult) expresses concern about the welfare of another child.
- Unexplained changes in behaviour (e.g. becoming very quiet, withdrawn or displaying sudden outburst of temper).
- Inappropriate sexual awareness.
- Engaging in sexually explicit behaviour.
- Distrustful of adults, particularly those with whom a close relationship would normally be expected.
- Has difficulty in making friends.
- Is prevented from socialising with other children.
- Displays variations in eating patterns including overeating or loss of appetite.
- Loses weight for no apparent reason.
- Becomes increasingly dirty and unkempt.

It should be recognized that this list is not exhaustive and the presence of one, or more, of the indicators is not proof that abuse is taking place. It is not the responsibility of Workers or other staff of Ablaze to decide that child abuse is occurring, but it is their responsibility to act on any concerns.

Child Disclosure

As a person working with children on a regular basis, you may be the first to sense that something is wrong with a given child, or you may be the person to whom a child decides to confide about abuse. It is therefore important that you know what to do if you suspect abuse.

1. **Stay calm.** Try not to transmit your anger, shock or embarrassment to the child. Remaining calm will help lessen the effect of the trauma and will help and reassure the child.
2. **Listen to the child with an open mind.** Children rarely lie about abuse.

3. **Do not promise to keep the disclosure a secret.** Children may well ask you to do this. You cannot and it would be wrong to deceive the child. Explain as simply as you can what and who you will have to tell. A child may beg you not to say anything because they are frightened, but they would not have said anything unless they wanted the abuse to stop.
4. **Allow the child to talk but do not pressure.** Remember it is better if the child does not have to repeat the story over and over again. Don't question the child about what s/he is saying, and certainly do not use any leading questions. You only need to hear enough to know it is (likely to be) abuse. A fuller statement may be taken later by police and/or a social worker. Make a full written statement as soon as possible after the child has spoken to you; do not include your own conjecture.
5. **Report the incident according to this policy** and any 'working with children' code of conduct required by Employer if not Ablaze.
6. **After the incident, seek out someone to talk to if you need to.** You may need to unburden yourself and come to terms with the emotions and feelings you have been experiencing. Your contact for support within Ablaze is the CEO Sally Melvin.

ABOVE ALL

- **Don't panic** - ensure you are aware of the procedure and use it to deal with the situation as effectively and quickly as possible. No-one can handle this situation alone effectively; seek support as soon as possible.
- **Never allow allegations made by a child to go unrecorded or not acted upon.** You should follow the guidelines given to you during your training. If in doubt, ask for this information to be repeated to you upon starting your engagement with the School. If in doubt that your report has been picked up by the School, speak to your contact at the School or the Ablaze member of staff.

Appropriate Behaviour

Staff and volunteers **must never**:

- promise to keep a secret or to keep something confidential; you may need to tell another adult and it is wrong to mislead the child, you can explain this to the child
- engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games, including horseplay
- allow children to use any form of inappropriate language unchallenged
- make sexually suggestive comments to a child, even in fun
- do things of a personal nature for children they can do for themselves
- invite or allow children to stay with you at your home unsupervised.

If a Worker accidentally hurts a child or s/he seems distressed in any manner, appears to be sexually aroused by your actions, misunderstands, or misinterprets something you have done, report any such incident as soon as possible to another Worker and the School Co-ordinator and make a brief written note of it.

- **Responding to Children’s Concerns – the process to follow**

If a child discloses to a volunteer or Ablaze Staff member, or the worker sees visible signs of suspected abuse they should:

1. **Objectively listen and retain the information given by the child** (write this down as soon as possible). Observations made, along with any information offered by the child should be recorded – it is important that you stick to facts, not suppositions. All records must be handled confidentially and appropriately and passed to the relevant person in the School who will take any allegations forward in accordance with their Child Protection Policies and Protocols.
2. Any obvious physical injuries should be referred to and dealt with by a qualified first-aider and noted in the School’s Accident Book.
3. In most circumstances, it would be important to talk to parents/carers, to help clarify any initial concerns; this is the responsibility of the School – volunteers and Ablaze staff should not intervene in any way with this process. Workers should be aware that there are circumstances in which a child might be placed at even greater risk if such concerns were shared with parents/carers.
4. Where a worker (staff, volunteer or freelancer) has received evidence or information which leads them to suspect abuse of a child, the nominated person in the school should be immediately informed. In addition, inform the named Safeguarding Lead for Ablaze, Sally Melvin.

Where the above is not possible, and you feel that the indications are conclusive or lead to strong concern for the child’s safety and well-being you should inform Social Care immediately. If you are not sure what to do, you can also obtain advice by telephoning the NSPCC 24-hour free phone helpline on 0800 800500.

5. Where the nominated person has been informed of potential abuse, they will inform Social Services or other relevant organisations and maintain confidential records of both the incident and the reported conversation. The named Child Protection Officer for Ablaze will also be informed of the action taken.

In the event that you have had to make the referral yourself, referrals telephoned to the Social Care Department should be confirmed in writing within 24 hours.

Information passed to the Social Care Department must be as helpful as possible, hence the necessity of making a detailed record – include the following:

- the name and designation of the Social Care staff member to whom concerns were passed and the date and time of call
- the nature of the allegation
- a description of any visible bruising or other injuries
- the child's account (if it has been given) of what has happened and how any bruising or other injury occurred
- any times, dates or other relevant information
- a clear indication of the distinction between fact, opinion and hearsay.

6. Once Social Care has been informed of suspected child abuse, they have a 'duty' to investigate the incident. The source of information may or may not be disclosed.

- **Allegations of Abuse Against Workers – processes to follow**

NB Employers' Volunteers and Staff of Third Party Providers will be subject to their employing organisation's disciplinary investigations and protocols. What follows applies to volunteers working directly for Ablaze and Ablaze Staff.

Where there is a complaint of abuse against a member of Ablaze staff/ volunteer, there may be three types of investigation:

- A criminal investigation
- A child protection investigation
- A Disciplinary or misconduct investigation

The results of the Police and Social Services investigation may well influence the disciplinary investigation, but not necessarily.

What to do if there are concerns:

- Every effort should be made to ensure confidentiality is maintained for all concerned.
- If following consideration, the allegation is clearly about poor practice, the CEO will deal with it as a misconduct issue.
- Any suspicion that a child has been abused by either a member of staff or volunteer worker should be reported to the Ablaze CEO, unless the allegation is against the CEO, in which case it should be reported to the Chair of the Board. That person will take the necessary steps to ensure the safety of the child in question and any other child who may be at risk. The Named Safeguarding Lead or 'nominated person' at School (or Chair of the Board, see above) will refer the allegation to the Social Care Department (who may involve the Police).
- The parent/carers of the child will be contacted (most probably by the School) as soon as possible following advice from the Social Care Department.
- The Named Safeguarding Lead or Chair of the Board (as appropriate) should decide who will deal with any media enquiries and agree media strategy.
- The CEO in liaison with the Chair of the Board or if appropriate, the

Chair of the Board and at least one Trustee, will make an immediate decision to suspend any individual accused of abuse pending further Police and Social Care inquiries.

- Irrespective of the findings of the Social Care or Police inquiries, the Board must assess all cases under the appropriate Staff/Volunteer Misconduct and Disciplinary Procedure, to decide whether they can be reinstated and how this can be sensitively handled. This may be a difficult decision, particularly where there is insufficient evidence to uphold any action by the Police. In such cases those concerned must reach a decision based upon the information available; decision-makers must be prepared for the fact that this may suggest that on a balance of probability, it is more likely than not that the allegation is true. The welfare of children must always be paramount in such decision-making.
- Consideration should be given about what support may be appropriate to children, parents, members of staff and volunteer workers.

Note: Allegations of abuse may be made some time after the event (e.g. by an adult who was abused as a child by a member of staff or volunteer worker who is currently working with children). Where such an allegation is made the organisation should follow the normal organizational procedure and report the matter to the Social Care Department.