



Safeguarding Policy

Forks and Spoons

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Practitioner: Claire Kerridge

Role: Sole Trader Counsellor (Online Practice)

Last reviewed: [Date]

Next review: [Date]

1. Introduction

At Forks and Spoons, every individual has the right to feel safe. I am committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people, and adults at risk. Safeguarding is central to my practice and applies to all clients engaging in online counselling.

As a sole practitioner, I act as the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) for this practice and hold responsibility for safeguarding decision-making and referrals.

This practice is informed by:

- Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004
- Working Together to Safeguard Children
- Care Act 2014
- Equality Act 2010
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
- Data Protection Act 2018
- UK General Data Protection Regulation
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015
- The Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

Safeguarding is understood as protecting individuals from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and harm, including online harm.

In line with the BACP Ethical Framework, client welfare is my primary concern. Safeguarding decisions are made proportionately, balancing client autonomy with the duty to prevent serious harm.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- Children aged 12–17

Young adults aged 18–25

- Adults at risk (as defined by the Care Act 2014)
- All online and remote therapeutic work

3. Definitions

Safeguarding Children

- In accordance with Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023), safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children includes:
- Providing help and support to meet needs as soon as problems emerge
- Protecting children from maltreatment, including online harm
- Preventing impairment of health or development
- Ensuring children grow up in safe and effective care
- Taking action to enable best outcomes

Child protection refers to activity undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm.

A child is defined as anyone under the age of 18.

Adults at Risk

- Under the Care Act 2014, an adult at risk is a person aged 18 or over who:
- Has needs for care and support (whether or not those needs are being met), and
- Is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect, and
- As a result of those needs is unable to protect themselves.

Forms of Abuse

- Abuse may include, but is not limited to:
- Physical abuse
- Emotional or psychological abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect
- Financial or material abuse
- Domestic abuse
- Exploitation (including criminal or sexual exploitation)
- Online abuse (including grooming, coercion, image-based abuse)
- Radicalisation
- Discriminatory abuse
- Self-neglect (adults at risk)

Abuse may occur within families, peer relationships, intimate relationships, institutional settings, community contexts, or online environments.

4. Safer Practice in Online Work

To reduce safeguarding risks in remote practice:

- Secure, encrypted platforms are used
- Client identity is verified at assessment

The client's current location is confirmed at the start of sessions

- Emergency contact details are obtained before work begins

The client's full home address and relevant local authority area are recorded

- Clear protocols are in place for technological disruption or disconnection
- Sessions are conducted in private environments

5. Consent and Capacity

Children Aged 12–15

- Gillick competence is assessed
- Parental consent is obtained unless clinically or legally inappropriate

The young person's assent is always required

Young People Aged 16–17

- Presumed capacity to consent
- Parents may be informed if safeguarding concerns arise

Decisions regarding information sharing are made in the young person's best interests

Adults (18+)

- Informed consent is obtained directly
- Safeguarding procedures apply where an adult meets the Care Act definition of adult at risk

Capacity and competence are assessed in line with legal and ethical guidance. Decisions regarding parental or third-party involvement are made in the best interests of the client and in accordance with safeguarding responsibilities.

6. Confidentiality and Information Sharing

Confidentiality and its limits are explained clearly at the outset of counselling.

Information may be shared without consent where:

- There is risk of significant harm to the client or others
- A child or adult at risk is experiencing abuse or neglect
- Disclosure is required by law or court order

Where possible and safe to do so, clients are informed before information is shared and are involved in the process.

Information sharing for safeguarding purposes is undertaken lawfully under Article 6(1)(c) and 6(1)(d), and Article 9(2)(b) and 9(2)(g) of the UK GDPR, alongside the Data Protection Act 2018. Information shared is necessary, proportionate, and relevant.

7. Reporting Concerns Procedure

1. Recognise

- Remain alert to disclosures or indicators of abuse, neglect, exploitation, radicalisation, coercion, or significant risk of harm.

2. Respond

Listen calmly and without judgement. Do not promise confidentiality. Explain that information may need to be shared to keep the client or others safe.

3. Record

Make a factual, contemporaneous record using the client's own words where possible. Clearly distinguish between fact, observation, and professional opinion. Records are stored securely.

4. Report

For a child under 18:

If there is reasonable cause to suspect significant harm, a referral will be made to the relevant local authority Children's Services in line with statutory guidance.

If the child is at immediate risk, emergency services (999) will be contacted.

For an adult at risk:

- If there is reasonable cause to suspect abuse or neglect, a referral will be made to the relevant local authority Adult Safeguarding Team.

If there is immediate risk of serious harm, emergency services (999) will be contacted.

Where concerns relate to the conduct of a professional working with a child, advice will be sought from the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) in the relevant area.

Where appropriate, safeguarding advice may be sought from local authority consultation lines prior to formal referral.

5. Further Safeguarding Actions

- Parents or carers will normally be informed of concerns relating to a child unless doing so increases risk.

Adults at risk will be informed of referrals where appropriate and safe.

I will cooperate fully with safeguarding agencies and continue to monitor risk within the therapeutic relationship.

Supervision is used to support safe, ethical, and proportionate safeguarding decision-making.

8. Managing Risk Online

If a client disconnects during a session:

- Attempt immediate reconnection
- Attempt contact via agreed alternative method
- Contact emergency contact or emergency services if risk is imminent

Clinical risk relating to suicide or self-harm is assessed and managed within professional competence. Where such risk reaches safeguarding threshold (for example, imminent danger or inability to ensure safety), emergency procedures will be followed.

9. Recording and Data Protection

- Safeguarding records are accurate, factual, and contemporaneous
- Records are stored securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR
- Only relevant information is shared
- Information sharing is proportionate and lawful
- Safeguarding records may be kept separately from psychotherapy process notes where appropriate

10. Professional Safeguards

I maintain:

- An enhanced DBS certificate for working with children and vulnerable adults, registered with the Update Service
- Registration with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
- Professional indemnity insurance
- Regular clinical supervision
- Safeguarding training refreshed at least every two years

- Ongoing Continuing Professional Development in safeguarding and online practice

Any allegation made against me in relation to safeguarding will be reported to the appropriate authority, including the LADO where relevant, and to the BACP in line with professional conduct procedures.

11. Whistleblowing

Although this is a sole practice, concerns about unsafe or unethical professional conduct (including my own) may be reported directly to the BACP, the Disclosure and Barring Service, or the relevant local safeguarding authority.

12. Review

This policy is reviewed annually or sooner if legislation or statutory guidance changes.