



The Mental Shift CIC – Child Protection Policy

Prepared:	22/07/2025	Prepared by:	Kai Leighton, CEO / DSL
Approved:	22/07/2025	Approved by:	Kai Leighton, CEO / DSL
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1. Introduction

All children and young people are entitled to an enjoyable and safe environment. The organisation has a moral and legal obligation to ensure when given responsibility for children, young people and volunteers, it provides the highest possible standard of care.

The Mental Shift CIC fully accepts its legal and moral obligation to provide a duty of care to protect all children. It is the policy of The Mental Shift CIC to ensure all participants in all our training courses and all other organisation activities are safeguarded from physical, sexual and emotional harm whilst taking part in The Mental Shift CIC activities.

This document does not form part of a contract of employment and may be changed from time to time in line with current best practice and statutory requirements and to ensure business needs are met. Staff will be consulted and advised of any changes as far in advance as possible of the change being made, unless the change is required by law.

2. Policy Aims

- The aim of the policy is to promote good practice, providing children and young people with appropriate safety/protection whilst in the care of The Mental Shift CIC and to allow staff and volunteers to make informed and confident responses to specific child protection issues. A child is defined as a person under the age of 18 (Children's Act 2004).
- The organisation will provide a safe, comfortable environment where all participants' welfare will be safeguarded at all times.

3. Legal and Procedural Framework

The practices and procedures within this policy are based on principles contained within UK and International legislation and Government guidance.

- The Children Act 2004
- The Children and Families Act 2014
- The Protection of Children Act 1999
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Human Rights Act (1998)

- Data Protection Act (2018)

4. Protection of Vulnerable Groups

All those acting on behalf of The Mental Shift CIC who work with children will be recruited with regard to their suitability for responsibility and will be provided with guidance and training in good practice and child protection procedures.

In order to achieve these safeguards, The Mental Shift CIC requires all tutors, assistants, volunteers and other staff working with children and young people undergo Disclosure and Barings Checks.

5. The Welfare of the Child is Paramount

- All children regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/belief, sex or sexual orientation should be able to participate in activities in a fun and safe environment.
- All reasonable steps will be taken to protect children from harm, discrimination and degrading treatment and to respect their rights, wishes and feelings.
- All suspicions and allegations of poor practice or abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.

6. Code of Good Practice

To provide children with the best possible experience and opportunities everyone must operate within an accepted ethical framework.

As an adult working with children and/or young people with The Mental Shift CIC, all must:

- Treat all children and young people with dignity and respect at all times.
- Provide a good example of acceptable behaviour.
- Plan activities which involve more than one person being present or ensure adults are within sight or hearing wherever possible.
- Respect everyone's right to personal privacy.
- Be available to listen to the concerns of young participants and to refer them to other sources of support where appropriate

- Try to ensure actions cannot be misunderstood or cause offence.
- Encourage young participants to feel comfortable to point out attitudes and behaviour they are not comfortable with.
- Show understanding when dealing with sensitive issues and recognise caution is required when discussing such issues.
- Be aware even caring physical contact with a children or young person may be misinterpreted.

As an adult working with children and/or young people with the organisation, all must not:

- Permit abusive behaviour such as bullying, taunting, racist behaviour, harassment or otherwise.
- Have inappropriate physical or verbal contact with children or young people.
- Have any contact or accept friend requests on Facebook or other social networking sites from children or young people associated with the organisation.
- Jump to conclusions about others without checking the facts.
- Allow yourself to be drawn into inappropriate attention – such as crushes or tantrums.
- Show favouritism to any individual.
- Exaggerate or trivialise any child abuse issues.
- Make suggestive remarks or actions, even in jest.
- Deliberately place yourself or others in a potentially compromising situation.

7. Defining Child Abuse

Defining child abuse is a difficult and complex issue. A person may abuse a child by inflicting harm or by failing to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family, institution or community setting, by those known and trusted to them or more rarely, by a stranger. Abuse can happen to a child regardless of their age, gender, race or ability.

There are four categories of abuse:

Emotional Abuse

This occurs when individuals persistently fail to show young people due care, love or affection, where a young person may be constantly shouted at, threatened or taunted or be subjected to sarcasm and unrealistic pressures. There may also be over-protection, preventing young people from socialising or

bullying to perform to high expectations. The young person may lose self-confidence and may become withdrawn and nervous.

Indicators:

- Low self-esteem
- Decline in concentration levels
- Continual self-depreciation
- Emotional immaturity
- Extremes of behaviour

Abuse by Neglect

This occurs when a young person's essential needs for food, warmth and care fail to be met.

Failing to or refusing to provide love and affection could also be deemed as neglect.

Indicators:

- Constant hunger and tiredness
- Poor personal hygiene
- Poor state or inappropriate clothing
- Low self-esteem
- Poor peer relationships

Physical Abuse

This occurs when individuals, including some young people, deliberately inflict injuries on a child or knowingly do not prevent such injuries from being inflicted. It includes injuries caused by hitting, shaking, squeezing, biting or using excessive force. It also occurs when individuals give young people alcohol, inappropriate substances or fail to supervise their access to substances.

Indicators:

- Current unexplained injuries
- Inappropriate excuses to explain injuries
- Untreated injuries
- Fear of returning home
- Aggression towards others

Sexual Abuse

Young people are sometimes abused by adults, who may use young people to meet their own sexual needs. An example would be forcing a child to take part in a sexual activity.

Indicators:

- Unexplained changes in behaviour
- Inappropriate sexual awareness
- Engaging in inappropriate sexual behaviour
- Distrust of adults
- Inappropriate language

8. Procedure

If there is any reason to suspect a child or young person is being abused:

- Inform a manager immediately.
- Make a written record of all details of the facts and give a copy to the manager.

If a child or young person tells you about abuse by someone else:

- Remain calm, do not act shocked, try to act in a reasonable manner.
- Allow the individual to speak freely without interruption, do not question them or attempt to investigate yourself.
- Offer support and reassurance; assure them you believe what they are saying.
- Explain you cannot keep it a secret and must will speak to a manager and/or appropriate persons.
- Make a written record of all details of the facts known to you and give a copy to the manager.

If you become aware of an allegation of abuse about any other member of staff or yourself:

- Immediately inform a manager.
- Make a written record of all details of the facts and give a copy to the manager.
- Try to ensure no-one is placed in a position which could lead to further compromise.

The NSPCC Child Protection Helpline (0808 800 5000) can also be contacted in situations where some external advice or guidance is needed.

9. Use of Social Networking & Child Protection

The Mental Shift CIC acknowledges the impact and involvement of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter have on the lives of young people and the way they interact. There is significant potential for these tools to be used by youth workers to enhance communication.

The Mental Shift CIC also acknowledges the dangers and potential risks which these sites can pose to both young people and youth workers and have the potential to be abused as ways of interacting with young people. All staff using social networking as part of work with young people must abide by the following guidelines to safeguard both workers and young people involved.

Guidelines for Using Social Networking with Young People

- All social networking sites have the potential to allow staff to communicate with young people on a 1:1 basis however, communication using a social networking site must remain in the public forum to safeguard both young people and staff.
- In all communication with young people using social networking sites, it is advisable to not use abbreviations (for example: lol) as these can often be misinterpreted by parents.
- The use of instant chat on Facebook is inadvisable as it provides no log of conversations and could potentially leave staff open to allegations.
- If a public wall post is not appropriate for responding to a young person then staff should arrange a public 1:1 meeting, telephone the young person and take notes or seek further advice from the Child Protection advocate depending on the level of information a young person has disclosed using a social networking site.
- Communication via email should be encouraged for good practice, ease of recording and supporting the development of communication skills for work.

Guidance for staff with mobile phones

- Only use the organisation office or mobile numbers for communicating with young people.
- Do not give out personal mobile numbers.
- Keep log of all text messages, WhatsApp, messenger etc.

10. Data Protection Act 2018

The organisation will treat all personal data in line with obligations under the current data protection regulations.