

MERG Safeguarding Policy for Children and At Risk Adults in the UK¹

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to protect people, particularly children and at risk adults from any harm that may be caused due to their coming into contact with members of MERG and persons attending MERG meetings. This includes harm arising from:

- The conduct of members or personnel associated with MERG
- The design and implementation of MERG's programmes and activities

The policy lays out the commitments made by MERG, and informs members and associated personnel of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding.

This policy does not cover safeguarding concerns in the wider community not perpetrated by MERG members or associated personnel.

What is safeguarding?²

In the UK, safeguarding means protecting people's health, wellbeing and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect.

In MERG, we understand it to mean protecting people, including children and at risk adults, from harm that arises from coming into contact with our members or activities.

Further definitions relating to safeguarding are provided in the glossary below.

Note: The terms 'child' and 'young person' describe any person under the age of 18. References to 'parents' should be read as parents and carers inclusively.

Scope

- All MERG members
- Associated personnel whilst engaged with meetings and activities related to MERG.

Policy Statement

MERG believes that everyone we come into contact with, regardless of age, gender identity, disability, sexual orientation or ethnic origin has the right to be protected from all forms of harm, abuse, neglect and exploitation. MERG will not tolerate abuse and exploitation by members or associated personnel.

This policy will address the following areas of safeguarding: child safeguarding, adult safeguarding, and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

¹ Some differences may be encountered in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Groups meeting outside the UK must abide by the local laws and regulations.

² The relevant legislation and guidance is The Children Act 1989; The Children's Act 2004; The Sexual Offences Act 2003; and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 (HMG)

MERG commits to addressing safeguarding throughout its activities, through the three pillars of prevention, reporting and response.

Prevention

MERG responsibilities

MERG will:

- Ensure all members have access to, are familiar with, and know their responsibilities within this policy
- Design and undertake all its programmes and activities in a way that protects people from any risk of harm that may arise from their coming into contact with MERG. This includes the way in which information about individuals in our activities is gathered and communicated
- Implement stringent safeguarding procedures when recruiting, managing and deploying any paid employees
- Ensure those responsible for MERG safeguarding policies and practices receive training at a level commensurate with their role and responsibilities in the organization
- Follow up on reports of safeguarding concerns promptly and according to due process

Members responsibilities

Child safeguarding

MERG members and associated personnel must not:

- Engage in sexual activity with anyone under the age of 18
- Sexually abuse or exploit children
- Subject a child to physical, emotional or psychological abuse, or neglect
- Engage in any commercially exploitative activities with children including child labour or trafficking

Adult safeguarding

MERG members and associated personnel must not:

- Sexually abuse or exploit at risk adults
- Subject an at risk adult to physical, emotional or psychological abuse, or neglect

Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse

MERG members and associated personnel must not exchange or arrange to be exchanged money, goods or services for sexual activity.

Additionally, MERG members and associated personnel are obliged to:

- Contribute to creating and maintaining an environment that prevents safeguarding violations and promotes the implementation of the Safeguarding Policy
- Report any concerns or suspicions regarding safeguarding violations by MERG members or associated personnel to the appropriate MERG Area Group or Designated Safeguarding Officer

Enabling reports

MERG will ensure that safe, appropriate, accessible means of reporting safeguarding concerns are made available to members and others we work with.

MERG will also accept complaints related to MERG activities from external sources such as members of the public, partners and official bodies

How to report a safeguarding concern

Members who have a complaint or concern relating to safeguarding should report it immediately to their MERG Area Group Safeguarding Officer or to the MERG Designated Safeguarding Officer. If the member does not feel comfortable reporting to either of these Safeguarding Officers (for example if they feel that the report will not be taken seriously, or if that person is implicated in the concern) they may report to any other appropriate member. For example, this could be the Area Group Chairman or a member of the MERG committee.

The Safeguarding Officer can be emailed at safeguarding@merg.org.uk.

A call can also be made by anyone to the NSPCC helpline on 0808 800 5000 for advice or to refer concerns.

Response

MERG will follow up safeguarding reports and concerns according to policy and procedure, and legal and statutory obligations (see Procedures for reporting and response to safeguarding concerns in Associated Policies).

MERG will apply appropriate disciplinary measures to members found in breach of policy.

MERG will offer information on the provision of support to survivors of harm, or their parent(s) or guardian(s) if appropriate, caused by members or associated personnel, regardless of whether a formal internal response is carried out (such as an internal investigation). Decisions regarding support will be led by the survivor.

Confidentiality

It is essential that confidentiality is maintained at all stages of the process when dealing with safeguarding concerns. Information relating to the concern and subsequent case management should be shared on a need to know basis only, and should be kept secure at all times.

Glossary of Terms

Child

A person who has not yet reached the age of 18 years

At risk adult

Sometimes also referred to as vulnerable adult. A person who is or may be in need of care by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness; and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.

Harm

Psychological, physical and any other infringement of an individual's rights

Psychological harm

Emotional or psychological abuse, including (but not limited to) humiliating and degrading treatment such as bad name calling, constant criticism, belittling, persistent shaming, solitary confinement and isolation

Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

The term used by the humanitarian and development community to refer to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse of affected populations by members or associated personnel. The term derives from the United Nations Secretary General's Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13)

Safeguarding

In the UK, safeguarding means protecting peoples' health, wellbeing and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect³

In MERG, we understand it to mean protecting people, including children and at risk adults, from harm that arises from coming into contact with our members or activities.

Safeguarding means taking all reasonable steps to prevent harm, particularly sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment from occurring; to protect people, especially vulnerable adults and children, from that harm; and to respond appropriately when harm does occur.

This definition pays specific attention to preventing and responding to harm from any potential, actual or attempted abuse of power, trust, or vulnerability, especially for sexual purposes.

Safeguarding applies consistently and without exception across our activities and members. It requires proactively identifying, preventing and guarding against all risks of harm, exploitation and abuse and having mature, accountable and transparent systems for response, reporting and learning when risks materialise. Those systems must be survivor-centred and also protect those accused until proven guilty.

Sexual abuse

The term 'sexual abuse' means the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

Sexual exploitation

The term 'sexual exploitation' means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. This definition includes human trafficking and modern slavery.

Survivor

The person who has been abused or exploited. The term 'survivor' is often used in preference to 'victim' as it implies strength, resilience and the capacity to survive, however it is the individual's choice how they wish to identify themselves.

³ NHS 'What is Safeguarding? Easy Read' 2011

MERG Safeguarding Responsibilities

MERG Designated Safeguarding Officer (MERG DSO)

The Organisation should appoint a person who is responsible, through the MERG committee, for:

1. Writing a policy for the protection of children and at risk adults attending MERG meetings and activities
2. Reviewing and where necessary revising the policy at least annually
3. Informing members of the policy
4. Being a first point of contact in respect of any issue related to safeguarding encountered as a result of MERG activities
5. Carrying out periodic risk assessments, with the help of MERG Area Group Safeguarding Officers (MERG AGSOs), relating to the duty of care
6. Providing help, guidance and support to MERG AGSOs
7. Ensuring the completion of recording and progression of any reported incidents
8. Referring cases of suspected abuse to the appropriate local authority social care
9. Reporting regularly to the MERG committee on any matter relevant to the organisation's safeguarding responsibilities

MERG Area Group Safeguarding Officer (MERG AGSO)

Each Area Group (in the UK) should appoint a person who is responsible, in consultation with the MERG DSO, for:

1. Distributing details of the MERG Meetings and Activities Safeguarding Requirements to the local membership
 2. Carrying out periodic risk assessments, with the support of the MERG DSO, relating to the duty of care at least once a year
 3. Seeing that the Area Group keeps a register of attendance of all members, associated personnel and visitors
 4. Being the contact person for any member, parent, guardian, or carer who has concerns regarding;
 - a. the behaviour of any member or associated personnel attending a MERG meeting or activity
 - b. the welfare of a child or at risk adult
 - c. the behaviour of a child or at risk adult
 5. Ensuring the recording of observed or reported incidents which may breach the MERG Safeguarding Policy
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MERG Meetings and Activities

Safeguarding Requirements

Introduction

Everyone attending MERG meetings and activities where children and at risk adults are present, including Special Interest Groups, and video calls⁴ (e.g. via Zoom), has a responsibility and owes a legal duty for keeping them safe, irrespective of their role, and whether they are members or personnel associated with MERG.

MERG is committed to ensure that its activities are ones within which all participants can thrive in a safe environment and that all those taking part, including children and at risk adults, have an enjoyable and positive experience.

Principles

A record⁵ of all attendees must be kept.

For children and at risk adults the record must contain or have reference to emergency contact detail and information concerning any medical concerns.

A copy of the MERG Safeguarding Policy for Children and At Risk Adults must be available.

Contact information for the MERG Designated Safeguarding Officer, and for the Area Group Safeguarding Officer if applicable, must be available.

The permission of the parents, guardians and/or carers of children and at risk adults must have been obtained prior to their attendance, and that person should accompany them to at least their first meeting.

Health and safety, and fire safety and evacuation procedures must be in place and made known to all attendees.

No child or at risk adult must be left alone or unsupervised if undertaking activities that have the potential to cause harm.

Members must not work alone with children or at risk adults unless it is with the permission of their parent, guardian, or carer.

No person under the age of 18 should supervise any activity.

Any observed or reported activity which causes concern, no matter by whom it is observed or reported, must be recorded using a MERG Safeguarding Incident Report Form, and communicated as soon as possible to the Area Group Safeguarding Officer and/or the MERG Designated Safeguarding Officer.

Immediate action must be taken to remove any identified potential source of harm, that is;

- Behaviour in a way that has harmed, or may have harmed, a child or at risk adult;
- Possible commission of a criminal offence against or related to a child or at risk adult;
- Behaviour towards a child/children or at risk adult in a way that indicates it may pose a risk of harm to them;
- Behaviour in a way that indicates a person may not be suitable to work with children or at risk adults.

⁴ Video calls must not allow private meetings/breakouts

⁵ All information must be dealt with according to Data Protection law.

MERG SAFEGUARDING INCIDENT REPORT FORM

In the event of a Safeguarding incident, the following procedure should be followed

- Contact Emergency Services/Relevant Authorities if required;
- For all safeguarding incidents keep one copy of the form in a secure place and forward one copy to the MERG Designated Safeguarding Officer;
- Ensure all information relating to the incident is treated in confidence.

MERG Information	
MERG Area Group or Activity:	
Your name:	Position:
Address	
Tel No:	Mob:
E-mail:	

Child or At Risk Adult Details			
Name:	Date of Birth	Male <input type="checkbox"/>	Female <input type="checkbox"/>
Parent/Carer's Name:			
Address			
Tel No:		Mob:	
Email:			
Have Parents/Carers been notified: Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, please give details of what was said:		

Whose concerns are being reported?	
Are you reporting your own concerns or responding to concerns raised by someone else?	
My own concerns <input type="checkbox"/> Someone else's concerns <input type="checkbox"/>	If someone else's concerns, their details:
	Name:
	Relationship to the child/at risk adult:
	Position in club:
Contact details:	

Person(s) involved in the incident or alleged to have caused the incident:		
Name:	Date of Birth:	Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/>
Address:		
Telephone Number:	Mobile:	
E-mail address:	Position:	

Incident Information:

What Happened?

Where did it happen?
(location and address):

How did it Happen?

When did it happen? (time and date)

When was it reported? (time and date)

Who was it reported to?

Tel No:

Who was it reported by?

Tel No:

Any witnesses?

Yes No

Witness name and contact details:

Witness 1:

Witness 2:

Has the incident been reported to any external agencies:

Yes No

Which Agency was it reported to?

When was it reported? (time & date):

Who reported it? (name & contact details):

Agreed actions/Advice given:

Child/At Risk Adult's Account of Incident:
(In their own words)

Actions taken and Follow Up Actions	
<p>Actions taken and Recommended follow up action:</p>	
<p>MERG Area Group Safeguarding Officer informed?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>When? (time & date):</p>
	<p>By Whom? (name & contact details):</p>
<p>MERG Designated Safeguarding Officer informed?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>When? (time & date):</p>
	<p>By Whom? (name & contact details):</p>

Additional Information

Individual Completing the Form			
Signature	Print Name	Position	Date