

Houses of Parliament

Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults

**Guidance for Safer Working Practice
for Parliamentary staff whose work brings them into contact with children
and vulnerable adults.**

August 2016

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1. Context

Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults and protecting them from harm is everyone's responsibility and institutions that come into contact with the public have an important role to play. Like any other institution, Parliament has a duty to ensure that all its activities and functions, are discharged with regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults.

For organisations whose core business does not centre on work with children and vulnerable adults, it is important to be mindful of risks and safeguards, whilst ensuring a proportionate response. Everyone who comes into contact with children and vulnerable adults has a role to play in keeping them safe and ensuring that their own actions and those of others are respectful, well-meaning and not open to misinterpretation. For the most part, this guidance will simply codify the good practice and behaviours already in existence.

2. Status and Purpose of Document

It is important that all adults working for Parliament understand that where children and vulnerable adults are concerned, the nature and place of their work places them in a position of trust. This guidance document has been agreed by the bicameral Safeguarding Board to provide all Parliamentary staff with clear advice about appropriate and safe behaviours. This will help to maintain a safe and responsive environment which safeguards all individuals, by making it clear what action should be taken to safeguard children and vulnerable adults when they are believed to be at risk of significant harm, and by providing guidance on good conduct, which will reduce the risks of unjust allegations of improper, unprofessional or illegal conduct.

The guidance produced in this leaflet is produced in line with Parliament's safeguarding policy and it is expected that all staff will adhere to the principles and practice outlined in this document.

3. Underpinning Principles

- a) It is the responsibility of all adults to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults whenever they are in a position to do so. This responsibility extends to a duty of care for those adults employed, commissioned, or contracted to work with children. It also applies to adults who represent or are seen to represent the public in any capacity.
- b) Adults are responsible for their own actions and behaviour, and should avoid any conduct which would lead to any reasonable person questioning their motivation and intentions.
- c) Adults should continually monitor and review their practice and ensure they follow the guidance contained in this document.

All adults should clearly understand the need to maintain appropriate boundaries in their contacts with children. Any sexual activity between an adult and a child may be regarded as a criminal offence and will always be a matter for disciplinary action. Allowing or encouraging a relationship to develop in a way which might lead to a sexual relationship is also unacceptable.

There are occasions when adults embark on a course of behaviour known as 'grooming' where the sole purpose is to gain the trust of a child, and manipulate that relationship so sexual abuse can take place. Adults should be aware that consistently conferring inappropriate special attention and favour upon a child or children might be construed as being part of a 'grooming' process and as such will give rise to concerns about their behaviour.

This means that adults should not:

- *Have any form of communication with a child which could be interpreted as sexually suggestive or provocative i.e. verbal comments, letters, notes, electronic mail, phone calls, texts, contacts through social media, physical contact.*
- *Make sexual remarks to, or about, a child.*
- *Discuss their own sexual relationships or preferences with or in the presence of children or vulnerable adults.*

This means that adults should:

- *Ensure that their relationships with children clearly take place within the boundaries of a respectful professional relationship.*
- *Take care that their language or conduct does not give rise to comment or speculation. Attitudes, demeanour and language all require care and thought, particularly when dealing with children and vulnerable adults.*

Whistle blowing

Whistleblowing is one of the ways of speaking up, in matters of public interest. It can inform us about health and safety risks, potential environmental damage, fraud, corruption and many other problems. Proper use of the whistleblowing procedures allows such information to come to light and means that concerns may be addressed before real damage is done. Each employer should have a clear and accessible whistle blowing policy that meets the terms of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. The policies for the relevant Houses can be found here: Commons, Lords.

Adults should acknowledge their individual responsibilities to bring matters of concern to the attention of senior management and/or relevant external agencies. This is particularly important where the welfare of children may be at risk.

This means that adults should:

- *report any behaviour by colleagues that raises concern regardless of source*

Sharing Concerns and Recording Incidents

Adults should be aware of Parliament's Safeguarding policy and procedures for dealing with allegations against adults. All allegations must be taken seriously and properly investigated in accordance with local