

# SWOP Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy

SWOP has a zero tolerance approach to any form of abuse of vulnerable adults.

## Definitions:

### A Vulnerable Adult

Vulnerable adults are people who are over 18 years of age and are getting, or may need, help and services to live in the community. Vulnerable adults may be unable to take care of themselves and be unable to protect themselves from harm or exploitation by other people.

### Abuse

Abuse is when someone does something to another person which damages their quality of life or puts them at risk of harm. Abuse can be a criminal act when it is an offence against another person. It can happen once or repeatedly. Abuse may be carried out as the result of deliberate actions, negligence or ignorance.

#### **Forms of abuse:**

- **Physical:** non-accidental harm to the body. It can range from careless rough handling to direct physical violence
- **Sexual:** the involvement of people in sexual activities for which they have not given consent, or do not fully understand, or were pressured into consenting
- **Psychological and emotional:** any action which adversely impacts on an individual's emotional well being, causing distress and affecting their quality of life and ability to function to their full potential
- **Financial or material:** the theft or misuse of any money, personal belongings or property of a vulnerable person
- **Neglect and acts of omission:** repeated deprivation of medical or physical care needs; including the failure to intervene in behaviour which is dangerous to the vulnerable adult or to others
- **Discriminatory:** when the values, beliefs and culture of the majority results in a misuse of power that denies equal opportunities to some minority groups or individuals
- **Institutional:** the collective failure of any organisation to provide safe, appropriate and acceptable standards of services to vulnerable people. This can occur in routines and systems, attitudes and behaviour that amount to discrimination through prejudice, thoughtlessness, ignorance, stereotyping or malicious intent

## Procedures:

All members of staff have a responsibility to be aware and alert to signs that all is not well with a volunteer. However, they are not necessarily responsible for diagnosing, investigating or providing a therapeutic response to abuse. In addition, not all concerns relate to abuse, there may well be other explanations. It is important to keep an open mind and consider what is known about the volunteer and his or her circumstances. No

action should be taken without discussion with a manager but the first priority should always be to ensure the safety and protection of vulnerable adults.

### **Support for those who report abuse**

All allegations or suspicions of abuse are treated seriously. No abuse is acceptable and some abuse is a criminal offence and must be reported to the Police or other relevant authorities as soon as possible. All those making a complaint or allegation of abuse should be reassured that:

- They will be taken seriously
- Their comments will usually be treated confidentially, but their concerns may be shared if they or others are at significant risk
- They will be given immediate protection from the risk of reprisals or intimidation

### **Staff members should**

- Treat all people with respect
- Respect people's right to personal privacy
- Encourage people to feel comfortable enough to point out attitudes and behaviour they do not like
- Stay Calm
- Listen patiently
- Reassure the person they are doing the right thing by telling you
- Explain what you are going to do
- Report to a relevant Manager
- Write a factual account of what you have seen, and been told, immediately

### **Staff members should not:**

- Appear shocked, horrified, disgusted or angry
- Press the individual for details (unless requested to do so)
- Make comments or judgements other than to show concern
- Promise to keep secrets
- Confront the abuser
- Risk contaminating evidence

### **Managers should:**

- Consider the vulnerable adult's capacity to make decisions
- Decide whether an advocate or appropriate adults might be necessary
- Decide if any immediate action required
- Where abuse is suspected make a referral to the appropriate authority

### **Where the alleged abuser is a member of staff**

Where the alleged or suspected abuser is a member of staff, a full internal investigation must take place. This does not exclude investigations also being carried out by Social Services, the police and any other relevant authority

### **Where the alleged abuser is another volunteer**

Where the alleged abuser is another volunteer a manager must be informed and the points above followed. Duty of care obligations will continue for the alleged abuser and they may need the same or greater support as was available before the allegation. A manager will carry out a risk assessment to establish the likelihood that the alleged abuser will perpetrate further abuse of the alleged victim or other volunteers. Clear interventions for reducing risk must be agreed and communicated to all staff providing support to the alleged abuser, the person abused and anyone else who may be affected.

Where there is an ongoing risk to the volunteer reporting abuse, and other volunteers, that cannot be managed within SWOP, Social Services must be contacted to provide crisis intervention services pending a longer-term solution.

**Where the alleged abuser is a worker employed by another agency**

Where the alleged abuser is a worker employed by another agency (private, statutory or voluntary) e.g. CPN, Social Worker, GP, agency Support Worker etc, a manager will immediately notify the appropriate manager from the agency and plan and agree investigation protocols including notifying other authorities if appropriate.

**Where the alleged abuser is a family member or other person in the community**

Where the alleged abuser is a family member or other person in the community a manager will assess the safety of the volunteer and make referrals to other authorities if appropriate.

**Consent of the abused person**

All action, including referrals to Social Services and the police, must be subject to the consent of the abused person. In every situation it will be assumed that a person can make their own decisions and action will only be taken in the absence of consent where:

- They or others are in physical danger, i.e. they are not the only person at risk and the risk to others needs to be considered;
- It has been assessed and agreed that the vulnerable adult is unable/incapable of making an informed decision for themselves.