Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy

29.09.26

Policy details

Policy owner Claire Murphy

Version number 7

Date of previous review February 2026

Date of current review September 2026

Date of next formal review February 2027

Key changes:

Clarification that verbal abuse can be a form of emotional abuse. (p8)

The definition of Sexual abuse has also been updated to 'forcing, causing or inciting a child…'. More information on child sexual exploitation (p9)

Child criminal exploitation and child sexual exploitation are a separate section (p9)

Information on child-on-child abuse has been expanded (p10)

Addition of sections on domestic abuse (p.11), FGM (p.12) and mental health (p12)

Online safety conduct includes awareness risk and safety of generative AI (p14)

Section on the role of the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) (p19)

Key Contacts

Merlin Tuition

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Brighton and Hove Council

Front Door For Families	01273 290 400	FrontDoorforFamilies@brighton-hove.gov.uk Referral Form
LADO	07795 336355	LADOenquiries@brighton-hove.gov.uk

East Sussex County Council

Single Point of Access (SPOA)	01323 464222	webspoa@eastsussex.gov.uk
LADO		LADO referral form

West Sussex County Council

Integrated Front Door (IFD)	01403 229900	WSChildrenServices@westsussex.gov.uk
LADO	0330 222 6450	LADO@WestSussex.gov.uk

General

NSPCC	0808 800 5000	help@nspcc.org.uk
The Tutors Association (TTA)	01628 306108	info@thetutorsassociation.org.uk
All emergencies	999	

Introduction

This policy applies to all learners. This policy applies to all staff members hired by Merlin Tuition, including all permanent, temporary and ancillary staff, contractors and external services. This policy applies to all self employed tutors registered with Merlin Tuition.

This policy applies to all situations within the UK and internationally. Even where UK law doesn't apply, we will operate as if the laws and regulations do apply and seek support from authorities on best practice. We understand that our learners live in countries governed by laws, regulations and cultural expectations that differ to UK law. We expect our staff and tutors to adhere to this policy and codes of conduct, as informed by UK law.

A child/young person is defined as a person under the age of 18 (The Children's Act 1989 and 2004, and the Children & Young Persons' Act 2008).

Ethos

We as a company are committed to safeguarding, and believe that our staff and self-employed tutors within the agency should provide a safe, respectful and stimulating tutoring environment which values the mental, emotional and overall wellbeing of children and young people, regardless of age, disability, gender identity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation.

We also understand that some learners are additionally vulnerable due to levels of dependency, previous experiences or other factors.

We recognise that all staff and tutors, including permanent and temporary, play a crucial role in protecting children and young people from harm, and the importance of enabling adults to share any concerns about children or other adults promptly.

We understand the importance of a safe and respectful environment. We recognise the importance of enabling children and young people to feel able to speak openly and be confident that they will be listened to. We recognise the importance of teaching children and young people the skills they need to ask for help and stay safe.

We also recognise the importance of working in a compassionate way and understanding there are children and young people that are additionally vulnerable due to the impact of discrimination, previous experiences, their level of dependency, communication needs or other factors.

Roles and Responsibilities

Merlin Tuition is member of The Tutor's Association (TTA) and adheres to TTA guidelines as well as Government legislation and regulations.

All staff are required to read and follow Merlin Tuition's **Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy** and **Code of Conduct**, which are available for children, young people and their families to read. We also recommend that tutors registered with Merlin Tuition read and adhere to these policies.

All staff members, tutors and external providers should know how to recognise the signs and symptoms of abuse, how to respond to pupils who disclose reports of abuse and what to do if they have concerns about a child or young person.

All staff members, tutors and external providers should be able to recognise breach of staff code of conduct, and how to respond if they are concerned about the behaviour of another adult.

All staff with the responsibilities of interviewing and hiring will have received safer recruitment training. During the recruitment process at least one staff member will be CPD certified.

Merlin Tuition will have a nominated staff member whose role it is to review and promote safeguarding policy and advise tutors and staff members on good practice.

Merlin Tuition staff will receive annual safeguarding training, and tutors registered with the company will be offered annual safeguarding training designed for tutors.

All tutors must have an Enhanced with Children's Barred Lists Disclosure and Barring Check (Enhanced with Children's Barred lists DBS) for regulated activity with children, which is kept up to date on the Government's DBS Update System and checked during our recruitment process before they are hired to work with anyone under the age of 18. The process also applies to any staff member hired by Merlin Tuition with access to children.

Tutors who work with Merlin Tuition agency are registered as self-employed, and

do not count as staff hired directly by Merlin Tuition, but are still expected to understand and follow company policies, procedure and code of conduct.

Appendix A- Safer Practice

How We Keep Our Learners Safe

Tutors and Merlin Tuition staff who work with children:

- All members who work with children should adhere to policy, procedures and codes of conduct.
- If in doubt seek guidance and/or training in good practice and child protection procedures
- All children, whatever their age, culture, ability, gender identity, language, racial origin, religious belief and/or sexual identity are able to receive the benefit of tutoring in a safe environment.
- All members should consider child welfare paramount, and provide a caring, positive, safe and stimulating environment in which students can learn and which promotes the wellbeing of the children being taught.
- All reasonable steps are taken to protect children from harm, discrimination an demeaning treatment and to respect their rights, wishes and feelings

Creating a Safe Environment

Maintaining a code of conduct when working with children helps ensure safe practice, and reassures parents and carers that behaviour will be appropriate at all times.

All tutors and staff should:

- Prioritise children
- Ensure that there is always an adult present and available when tutoring, for the “protection” of the tutor as well as the child.
- Never tutor in a bedroom. Tutor in an open space in clear visibility of the adult at home
- Never give out personal contact details to the child or young person, instead use a dedicated work email address and phone number
- Act in a professional manner
- Ensure the environment is suitable and does not contain any sensitive, personal or inappropriate content
- Listen and respect children, respect diversity and avoid favouritism

- Never contact children directly or accept 'friend' requests on social media
- Never provide intimate or personal care. Merlin Tuition does not offer these services nor expect tutors or staff to perform such duties. Only individuals that are fully trained, undergone necessary vetting and barring checks and have a written care plan with the child and their parents/carers would be able to do so.
- Always report concerns about a child or the behaviour of anyone who has contact with a child
- It is illegal for a teacher/tutor to enter into a sexual relationship with a student, even if the student is over the age of consent (i.e. over 16). Tutors, like school teachers, are operating in a similar position of trust and thus must also abide by this law.

Tutoring Online

Online tutoring has become an increasingly popular tutoring method due to the convenience it offers. However online tutoring does have its own safeguarding considerations and risks to take into account. The NSPCC offers considerable advice on the matter.

All staff and tutors should:

- Be aware that you and your student's home environments can be seen. Identify a suitable location to do the call and discourage students from doing calls in their bedrooms.
- Ensure no personal items are visible on screen
- Follow all relevant behaviour and conduct policies
- Minimise disturbances
- Ensure everyone is dressed appropriately
- Use appropriate platforms
- Only keep lesson relevant tabs open when screen sharing
- Consider how to keep parents and carers well-informed

Some students find recording their online session helpful as revision aid later. Under the Data Protection Act 2018, video and audio recording count as personal data. If tutors decide to record sessions they must have a written policy that explains:

- What they will do with the recordings
- How will they store them securely and how long for
- How they will securely dispose of them

- Who can access them and how

Managing recordings and proper use is the responsibility of the tutor. They must also have written consent from the parents/carers and children.

Appendix B- Child Protection and Safeguarding Procedures

Equity of Safeguarding Provision

Some children and young people may be at an increased risk of abuse and/or may face additional barriers that make disclosing abuse less likely. Regardless of the circumstances they face, learners should receive equal protection and special consideration should be given to children and young people who:

- Are disabled or have educational needs
- Are young carers
- Have mental health problems
- Have previously been fostered or looked after outside of their family unit
- Are vulnerable to discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, ability, sexuality, gender identity, disability or does not have English as a first language
- Are in family circumstances that present challenges
- Are showing early signs of abuse or neglect
- Are show signs of being drawn into antisocial or criminal behaviour

Types of Abuse

Abuse is a form of maltreatment and can be categorised as emotional abuse, neglect, physical abuse and sexual abuse. Vigilance is key to recognising any concerns that may be a result of abuse. It is important for staff and tutors to understand that it is not your job to decide whether a child has been abused or not, but you need to be able to recognise possible signs and report concerns.

[Readers should be advised that the following information contains details regarding various forms of abuse, which some readers may find distressing.]

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse, also known as psychological abuse, is the continual emotional maltreatment of a child which has severe and persistent negative impacts on the child's emotional development.

Emotional abuse can involve:

- Making the child feel unloved or inadequate
- Physical abandonment
- Humiliating the child
- Verbal abuse
- High criticism and low compassion
- Only there to meet another's needs
- Deliberately scaring the child
- Ignoring the child
- Overprotection and limiting experience, learning and social interactions
- Unreasonable age or developmental expectations, including forcing the child to take part in activities that are inappropriate for their stage of development
- Bullying (including cyber bullying)
- Exploitation or corruption

Neglect

In the UK, statutory child protection guidance defines neglect as ongoing failure to meet a child's basic psychological and/or physical needs. Neglect happens when parents or carers are unable or unwilling to meet a child's or young person's physical, emotional or medical needs, and is likely to result in serious impairment of the child's health and/or development and even death. It may involve parents/ carers failing to:

- Provide adequate food, clothing and shelter
- Prevent exclusion from home or abandonment
- Ensuring adequate supervision and appropriate care givers
- Respond to a child's basic emotional needs.
- Ensure access to medical care and treatment
- Ensure regular school attendance

Physical Abuse

In the UK, statutory child protection defines physical abuse as deliberately hurting a child or causing physical harm. This may involve hitting, throwing, shaking, burning, scalding, poisoning, suffocating or other types of physical harm. Physical harm can also be caused when parents fabricate the symptoms of or deliberately induce illness in a child. Children and young people can also commit acts of physical abuse.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing, causing or inciting a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. This may involve physical contact (penetrative and non-penetrative), and non-physical contact such as children looking at or in the production of sexual images, including on the internet, watching sexual activities and/or encouraging children to act in sexually inappropriate ways. Most sexual abuse is committed by someone known to the victim.

Sexual abuse:

- Can effect any child or young person under the age of 18, regardless of gender
- Can include 16 and 17 year olds, who can legally consent to sex
- Can still be abuse even if activities appear consensual
- Can include contact, and non contact sexual activity
- Can take place in person and/or via technology
- May occur without the child or young person's knowledge e.g. others copying photos or videos they've posted online
- Is not solely perpetrated by adult men, all adults and other children/young people can also commit acts of sexual abuse
- Can be a single one-off or series of incidents over time, ranging from opportunistic or organised
- Can be forced or use enticement based methods of compliance
- Can be accompanied with violence or threats of violence

Safeguarding Concerns

Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

This type of harm can be committed or facilitated by an organised network or gang that takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive that child into taking part in criminal or sexual activity. This may involve an exchange of financial advantage, something the victim wants and/or violence or threat of violence. CCE and CSE can affect both male and female children, and children may identify as part of one of these groups. Children are not always recognised as victims and can be criminalised for actions they take while under coercion. This can also include children who have been moved (also known as trafficking) for the purpose of exploitation. It is not possible for a child to consent to be exploited, abused or trafficked, and they may not recognise that it is happening to them.

Child criminal exploitation (CCE) is abuse that involves children being coerced, forced or manipulated into committing criminal acts. This can include but is not limited to children being forced or manipulated into transporting drugs or money through county lines, working in cannabis factories, shoplifting or pickpocketing, committing vehicle crime or threatening/committing serious violence to others, or carrying a weapon. Children can become trapped by this type of exploitation, as perpetrators can threaten victims and their families with violence or entrap and coerce them into debt.

Children who are criminally exploited should have their vulnerabilities recognised by adults and should be treated as victims. It is important to note that the experience of girls who are criminally exploited can be very different to that of boys. It is also important to note that both boys and girls being criminally exploited may be at higher risk of sexual exploitation.

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is abuse that involves children and young people receiving something in exchange, such as accommodation, gifts, drugs or affection in exchange for performing sexual acts or having sexual acts performed on them. This type of harm can be committed or facilitated by an organised network or gang and children may identify as part of one of these groups. Another form of sexual abuse is child grooming, defined as the act of someone building a relationship, trust and emotional connection in order to manipulate, exploit and abuse them is another form of child exploitation.

Child-on-Child Abuse (including harassment and violence)

We recognise that sometimes other children or young people can negatively affect the wellbeing and learning of others. Child on child abuse can take different forms such as:

- bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying),
- discriminatory behaviour, including racism, faith-targeted abuse, and other prejudice based incidents,
- abuse in intimate personal relationships between children (sometimes known as 'teenage relationship abuse')
- physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm (this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and/or encourages physical abuse),

- serious physical assault and harm, or the threat of harm with a weapon
- sexual violence such as rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault (this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and/or encourages sexual violence),
- sexual harassment such as sexual comments, remarks, jokes and online sexual harassment, which may be standalone or part of a broader pattern of abuse
- causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent, such as forcing someone to strip, touch themselves sexually, or to engage in sexual activity with a third party,
- consensual and non-consensual making or sharing of nudes and seminudes, including generative AI
- upskirting which typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without their permission, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress, or alarm
- initiation/hazing type violence and rituals (this could include activities involving harassment, abuse or humiliation used as a way of initiating a person into a group and may also include an online element).

Abuse should never be passed off as 'banter' or 'part of growing up' as this attitude can lead to a culture where unacceptable behaviours are tolerated, and thus create an unsafe environment for children and young people. This type of abuse is a safeguarding issue for all children involved. Children who abuse others may also be victims of abuse themselves, and child protection procedures should be followed for both victims and perpetrators.

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse can include a wide range of behaviours and may be a single incident or a pattern of incidents. That abuse can be, but is not limited to, physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, or financial. Children can be victims of domestic abuse. They may see, hear, or experience the effects of abuse at home and/or suffer domestic abuse in their own intimate relationships (teenage relationship abuse). All of which can have a detrimental and long-term impact on their health, well-being, and ability to learn.

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

Female genital mutilation, sometimes referred to as cutting or female circumcision, involves the deliberate partial or total removal of external female genitalia where no medical cause exists. It is child abuse and is illegal in the UK. Whilst all staff and tutors should report any concerns about female genital mutilation (FGM), there is a specific legal duty on teachers. If you think a child might be at risk of FGM or suspect FGM has already occurred:

- If you feel the child is in immediate danger contact 999
- Contact the FGM helpline on 0800 028 3550 or by emailing fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk.
- Apply for an FGM protection order. Anyone can apply on Gov.uk if they are concerned that someone is at risk of FGM.
- Contact your local child protection services. Their contact details can be found on the website for the local authority the child lives in.
- Contact the police.

Mental Health

Staff and tutors should be aware that mental health problems in children can develop into safeguarding concerns. It is not the duty of staff or private tutors to attempt to diagnose mental health problems, only trained professionals should attempt to do so. However, staff and tutors play an important role in recognising the warning signs and identifying children who may be struggling with their mental health.

Possible signs may include:

- significant changes in behaviour
- ongoing difficulty sleeping,
- withdrawing from social situations,
- not wanting to do things they usually like
- physical signs of self-harm or neglecting themselves.

Not every child who exhibits these behaviours is suicidal or has a mental health concern. However, by identifying these and other potential warning signs, staff and tutors can identify children who may be struggling with their mental health and contemplating suicide to get support and vital early intervention.

Online Safety

Online environments play an important part in the lives of children, from education, social lives, entertainment to learning to express themselves. Therefore it is important to consider the risks that children may be exposed to online, as well as offline. Abuse, whether online or offline should follow the same safeguarding procedures.

Staying safe online covers a wide range of issues, and it is important that staff and tutors working with children remain vigilant to them. The 4 main risks are:

- Content - seeing illegal inappropriate or harmful content, including:
    - Pornography
    - Fake news
    - Racist views
    - Misogyny
    - Self-harm and suicide
    - Extremist views
    - Eating disorders
    - Glamorisation of drugs or gang lifestyles
- Contact - harmful interaction with online users, including:
    - Child-to-child pressures
    - Commercial advertising
    - Adults posing as children or young adults
- Conduct - personal online behaviour that increases the likelihood of, or causes harm, including:
    - Making, sending and receiving explicit images
    - Online bullying
- Commercialisation - the risk of people exploiting children for financial gain

Merlin Tuition does not provide internet-connected devices or internet connectivity for the use of tuition services. Self employed tutors and parents are expected to carry out their own risk assessments and ensure personal devices used during sessions have appropriate safeguards to ensure children are safe from harm. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Firewalls
- Keeping software up to date
- Passwords
- 2 factor authentication
- Managing privacy settings

- Enabling safe search
- Understanding of risks and safety of generative AI
- Active parental controls
- Being cautious when using public Wi-Fi (consider using a VPN)
- Using age appropriate apps

Recognising Possible Concerns

Signs of child abuse are not always obvious. A child or young person may not feel able to tell others what is happening to them. Children sometimes don't realise that what is happening to them is abuse. Knowing what to look for is vital for early identification, and keeping children safe from harm. If you work with the child on a regular basis, it is important to look for any patterns in behaviour that may indicate something isn't right.

Signs of abuse may depend on the type of abuse e.g signs of child neglect may be different to signs of physical violence.

Common signs that may suggest something concerning might be happening in a child's life includes:

- Unexplained changes in personality or behaviour, such as becoming withdrawn, anxious or becoming aggressive
- Reluctant to turn on their webcam
- Self harm
- Lacks social skills and has few friends, if any
- Poor relationship with parent
- Choosing clothes that cover their body or having unexplained physical injuries
- Act in a way that seems inappropriate for their age and development
- Loss of interest in education
- Knowledge of adult issues inappropriate for their age
- Running away or going missing
- A child seeming tired or saying they haven't slept

Signs of child abuse and exploitation can include the above signs. Some of the additional following signs may be indicators of child abuse and/or exploitation:

- Children with unexplained gifts or possessions
- Children with older boyfriends and girlfriends
- Children who suffer from sexually transmitted infections or become pregnant
- Children who misuse drugs and alcohol

- Children who suffer from changes in emotional wellbeing
- Children who regularly miss school or do not partake in education
- Children who go missing for periods of time or come home late

These signs don't always necessarily mean that a child is suffering from abuse, there could be other factors in their life affecting their behaviour. However, deciding to overlook the signs may put a child in danger of harm or further harm, so it is important to take action early.

It should also be noted that children and young people with special education needs or disabilities are particularly vulnerable and can have additional safeguarding challenges including:

- Assumptions that signs of possible abuse such as behaviour, mood and injury may be a result of the child's disability
- Children with disabilities or educational needs are particularly vulnerable to bullying and may not show outward clear signs
- Communication barriers may inhibit a child from reporting abuse

Signs of abuse are not just limited to children and young people. Adults with children in their care may also exhibit signs which can cause concern for the child/children or young people in their care.

An abusive parent or carer may:

- Be absent
- Have unrealistic expectations of the child
- Frequently complain about or to the child
- Fail to provide attention, praise or warmth
- Be socially isolated
- Avoid child health services or treatment of the child's illness
- Be involved in domestic violence and abuse

It is the responsibility of all tutors and staff to report worries or concerns over safeguarding and welfare. Tutors and staff should report any concerns and behaviour in accordance with UK law, but be mindful to consider the context of culture, law and guidance of overseas learners. It is important to consider whether the learner, family society considers this behaviour abusive.

Responding to Concerns

The initial response after noticing a concern is important. The nature of the concern will impact the most suitable response for a tutor or staff member to take.

Disclosures made by Children

When a child makes a disclosure it is important to remain professional and respond appropriately. It is essential that victims are reassured that they will be supported and kept safe. They should be assured that they'll be taken seriously. Victims should never be given the impression that reporting abuse has caused problems. Children and young people should never be made to feel ashamed for making a report.

If a child discloses abuse, tutors and staff members should:

Show that you care. Give the child or young person your full attention. Keep body language open and be compassionate. Listen to what is being said without displaying shock or disbelief. Accept what is being said, but don't criticise the alleged perpetrator. Reassure the child that it isn't their fault and stress was the right choice, but also keep professional boundaries.

Don't rush. Allow the child to go at their own pace. Allow the child to talk freely and don't interrupt. Recognise and respond to their body language. Keep in mind that it takes a lot of courage to open up, and it may take several conversations to reveal what's happened to them.

Reflect back. Make it clear that you've understood what the child is telling you. Repeat back what they've said to check you understand what they've disclosed, and use their language to show it's their experience.

Don't ask leading questions. Don't ask leading questions, which are questions that suggest an answer.

Keep Notes. Keep accurate notes about what the child has told you.

Don't make promises you can't keep. Never promise a child that you'll keep what they've told you a secret. Explain that you'll have to share what they've told you with others who can help.

Inform the correct people without delay. Follow child protection and safeguarding policies to report what the child has told you.

Dealing with disclosure from a child can be stressful. Consider seeking

support for yourself from the NSPCC if you think a disclosure has impacted your mental health and wellbeing.

Reporting and Recording

It is important that tutors and staff make records of their concerns, even minor ones as they may be relevant. Any actions they have taken, such as who they have shared concerns with, should also be recorded.

Records may be asked to be shared with social workers at a later date.

The following information should be recorded and reported:

- Name, age and address of child
- Your name and role, or name and role of person who told you
- Where and when this happened, and who else was present
- Nature of concern- what child has said, what someone told you, behavioural and physical indicators
- What the child said, or what you observed. Try to write down their exact words
- Any relevant observations about the child in the past e.g. behavioural changes
- Your response to what the child said, including what you said to the child about confidentiality and their response. Try and use exact wording
- If the child has drawn pictures, you should keep and date them.
- If known, the name and address of the alleged abuser
- Your opinion if this is relevant or useful- but make sure you state when something is your opinion and/or fact in the report
- It is good practice to get the child's consent before passing on a disclosure. If the child did not give consent for you to share this information, you will need to record this, and you will still need to report the concern.
- Who has been told, advice received and/or action taken
- Always sign and date records

Reporting a Possible Concern

When placed in a situation that has raised concerns regarding a child's safety, you must not keep these concerns to yourself. You should share the relevant information with those whose role it is to protect children from harm.

If the risk is high or a medical emergency, report immediately to emergency services on 999. If a crime is being committed or suspected, report this immediately to the police.

If you are concerned about a child but they are not in immediate danger, then you should resort to the following:

Depending on the type of concern, you may want to discuss with the child's parents/carers and/or the school unless you feel this may increase the risk to the child. If unsure, you can ask the NSPCC helpline 0808 800 5000 or emailing help@nspcc.org.uk

Otherwise, report child protection concerns directly to the local child protection services, such as children's social care or social services.

Your local child protection services will decide whether to take further action following your report.

Take a written record, dated and timed recording of any concerns.

Merlin Tuition offers guidelines and will give advice on how to deal with a Child Protection incident or concern. Merlin Tuition will also ensure tutors have adequate safeguarding training. Merlin Tuition tutors are self-employed and any tutor working for us who requires help and support on a Child Protection issue should contact the NSPCC helpline.

A self-employed tutor should always refer any Child Protection concerns directly to the LADO in their local council. As of May 2026 Merlin Tuition will be appointing a designated child protection officer (DCPO). Staff are expected to report all safeguarding concerns directly to the DCPO. Self employed tutors are not considered staff, they are trained to act as their own DCPO and should report to the appropriate authorities, and may seek support from Merlin Tuition's DCPO.

Remember, don't keep child protection concerns to yourself. If the person you report to doesn't take it seriously or the concerns persist, contact the NSPCC helpline on 0808 800 5000 or emailing help@nspcc.org.uk for advice.

Discussing Concerns with Parents/Carers and Schools

Discussing concerns you have with the child's parents or carers can sometimes reveal the reasons for your concerns e.g. a bereavement, or parents splitting up. If you're unsure about whether to talk to parents, contact the NSPCC helpline or children's social care for advice.

However you should not discuss concerns if you believe that doing so will place the child at greater risk, or lead to loss of evidence for a police investigation. If you make a decision not to discuss concerns with a child's parents or carers then this

must be recorded with an explanation of your decision.

If you think that a parent or carer might be responsible or knowingly involved in abuse of a child, you should seek advice from the police or children's social services before approaching them.

You can also consider contacting the child's school. It's good practice to inform the child's school of any child protection concerns you might have. They may already be working to support the child and their family. Or if they have also noticed concerns, your information might help them take appropriate action.

What Happens Next?

If you have reported your concerns, you are not responsible for taking the next steps. Depending on the actions taken by the children's social care, you might continue to be involved in safeguarding a particular child or young person.

You may be asked to contribute to a report by a social worker, which is why your notes and records are so important.

Sometimes the person that reported a concern which led to an investigation may be asked to a meeting to contribute first hand what they saw and did.

A child protection plan may be created to help keep the child safe from harm which may include; how social workers will check on the child's welfare, what changes are needed to reduce risk to the child and what support will be offered to the family.

Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

Merlin Tuition appoints a member of staff to act as a designated safeguarding lead (DSL). The DSL is a senior member of staff who takes lead responsibility for safeguarding children. At Merlin Tuition the DSL takes lead on:

- safeguarding policies and procedures
- training and development
- receiving concerns about a child
- reporting, storing and retaining child protection records following the organisation's policies and procedures.

If the DSL is unavailable for a period of time, arrangements will be made so that another member of staff receives appropriate training and can cover the role in the absence of the DSL.

All self employed tutors are trained to act as their own DSL and will have access to appropriate training to ensure they understand how to make a referral when handling a safeguarding concern (see Recognising Possible Concerns p.14).

Recruitment Process

During the hiring process, Merlin Tuition will check the suitability of candidates to the best of their ability, using our safer recruitment procedure. At least one member of every shortlisting and interview panel will have completed safer recruitment training.

All staff members and tutors who have contact with children and young people will have appropriate pre-employment checks and are required to have an Enhanced with Children's Barred Lists check DBS on the UK Government's DBS Update Service.

Merlin Tuition's job advertisements and application packs reference our commitment to safeguarding children and young people, including compliance with disclosure and barring regulations, as well as clear statements in the job description and person specification about the safeguarding responsibilities of staff members and tutors.

The director and nominated staff member for safeguarding are responsible for ensuring that our single central record of pre-employment checks are accurate and up to date.

For more information on our recruitment process, please see our **Outline of Recruitment Process** document.

Confidentiality and Data Sharing

We recognise that all matters relating to child protection are confidential and sensitive. Information should only be shared on a need-to-know basis and when in the best interest for child safeguarding and wellbeing of the child or young person.

All staff members have a professional responsibility to share information with other agencies in order to safeguard children.

If we create records about the children and/or adults that take part in our services, we will make sure they understand what records we hold, why we need to hold them and who we might share their information with (for example as part of a multi-agency child protection team) (Information Commissioner's Office, 2021). If we are keeping records for child protection reasons, we don't necessarily

need consent from the adults and/or children concerned.

If we need to share records (within the agency or externally), we make sure they are kept confidential.

Concerns about individuals should never be discussed elsewhere, within or outside of educational provision unless in confidential safeguarding meetings. This is not only out of respect to individuals involved, but to ensure that information released does not compromise evidence.

If we have concerns about a child or young person's welfare or safety, it's vital all relevant details are recorded and the report remains factual. This should be done regardless of whether the concerns are shared with the police or children's social care. We will keep an accurate record of:

- the date and time of the incident/disclosure
- the date and time of the report
- the name and role of the person to whom the concern was originally reported and their contact details
- the name and role of the person making the report (if this is different to the above) and their contact details
- the names of all parties who were involved in the incident, including any witnesses
- the name, age and any other relevant information about the child who is the subject of the concern (including information about their parents or carers and any siblings) what was said or done and by whom
- any action taken to look into the matter
- any further action taken (such as a referral being made)
- the reasons why the organisation decided not to refer those concerns to a statutory agency (if relevant).

Storage and Retention of Child Protection Records

Child protection information will be stored and handled according to the Data Protection Act 2018 principles.

Records containing personal information will be adequate, relevant and not excessive for the purpose(s) for which they are held. The data held will be accurate and up to date, and will only be kept for as long as is necessary.

Child protection records will be stored electronically in a limited access area, will be password protected and stored on computers with protection against hackers and viruses. Access to child protection information on these computers will only be available to relevant individuals. Information about child protection concerns

and referrals should be kept in a separate child protection file for each child, rather than in one 'concern log'.

To keep personal information secure, we will:

- Compile and label files carefully
- Keep files containing sensitive or confidential data secure and allow access on a 'need to know' basis
- Keep a log to see who has accessed the confidential files, when, and the titles of the files they have used.

The introduction of General Data Protection (GDPR) in 2018 does not change the way child protection records should be stored and retained.

We will ensure that when records relating to child protection concerns about children and/or adults are kept, we as an organisation understand why they are being kept.

In England, Scotland and Wales, the file should be kept until the child is 25 (this is 7 years after they reach the school leaving age) (Information and Records Management Society (IRMS), 2019).

Recording Concerns About Adult Behaviour

Sometimes concerns might be raised about an adult who works with children. This could be because they've:

- behaved in a way that has harmed, or may have harmed, a child
- committed a criminal offence against, or related to, a child
- behaved in a way that indicated they are unsuitable to work with young people.

We will keep clear and comprehensive records of all allegations made against adults working with children, including:

- what the allegations were
- how the allegations were followed up
- how things were resolved
- any action taken
- decisions reached about the person's suitability to work with children.

We will keep these records to enable us to give accurate information if we are ever asked for it. For example:

- in response to future requests for a reference

- if a future employer asks for clarification about information disclosed as part of a vetting and barring check
- if allegations resurface after a period of time.

Records relating to an adult's behaviour will be kept in a person's confidential personal file and a copy should be given to said individual.

Concerns raised regarding an adult's behaviour should be kept in their personal file until they reach normal retirement age or for 10 years, whichever is longer, regardless of whether allegations were unfounded. Allegations found to be false should be destroyed immediately.

Information will be retained even if the person stops working or volunteering with the organisation.

Exceptions

There are some situations where records need a longer retention period. For example, if:

- the records provide information about a child's personal history, which they might want to access at a later date
- the records have been maintained for the purposes of research
- the information in the records is relevant to legal action that has been started but not finished
- the records have been archived for historical purposes (for example if the records are relevant to legal proceedings involving the organisation)

If records need to be kept for longer than the recommended period, files should be clearly marked with the reasons for the extension period.

Where there are legal proceedings, Merlin Tuition will also seek legal advice on how long records should be retained.

Vetting and barring checks

We will not store copies of vetting and barring check certificates unless there is a dispute about the results of the check. Instead, a confidential record will be kept of:

- the date the check was completed
- the level and type of check (standard/enhanced/barred list check and the relevant workforce)
- the reference number of the certificate
- the decision made about whether the person was employed (with reasons).

If there is a dispute about the results of a check, we may keep a copy of the certificate for no longer than 6 months.

Destruction of child protection records

When the retention period is finished, confidential records will be destroyed in the presence of a member of the organisation or entrusted to a firm specialising in the destruction of confidential material.

Whistleblowing and Complaints

We recognise that children and young people cannot be expected to raise concerns in an environment where adults fail to do so.

We will ensure that all staff and tutors are aware of their duty to raise concerns, which may include the attitude or actions of colleagues and other tutors. Concerns can be raised regarding suspected past, present or imminent wrongdoing, or an attempt to conceal wrongdoing. It is important that concerns are raised as early as possible to allow opportunity to address and resolve any concerns quickly.

When a concern arises, you should not attempt to investigate the matter, but should gather the facts of the case and keep written and dated records.

You should speak with the director or nominated staff for safeguarding.

Should staff not feel able to raise concerns they can call the NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Helpline on 0800 028 0285 or email help@nspcc.org.uk

Staff can also contact The Tutor's Association (TTA) by emailing info@thetutorsassociation.org.uk

Allegations

Merlin Tuition takes allegations and concerns made against a member of staff or tutor seriously, and the situation must be dealt with promptly and sensitively. We will adhere to the relevant disciplinary proceeding regarding the individual concerned. We will also liaise with the local child protection services to ensure we are responding appropriately.

This involves allegations made that a staff member or tutor has:

- Behaved in way that has harmed, or may have harmed a child
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against, or related to, a child
- Behaved in a way that indicated they may pose a risk of harm to children
- Behaved in a way that indicates that they may not be suitable to work with children

If a crime is being committed or direct reporting is necessary, allegations or concerns should be sent directly to the police.

Allegations or concerns against members of staff or tutors should be reported directly to the local authority's designated officer, also known as LADO.

The NSPCC whistleblowing helpline number, 0800 028 0285, can be used if they feel that staff conduct may not have passed the threshold for a criminal offence but raises concerns which are not being addressed within the internal reporting mechanisms.

Allegations against a former member of staff or tutor that is no longer with Merlin Tuition should be referred to the police.

Reports can be made verbally but should be supported by a dated and timed note of what has been disclosed or noticed, said or done.

Low Level Concerns

Low level concerns are behaviours that go against the Code of Conduct, but do not meet the above threshold for harm. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Using inappropriate language
- Being over friendly with students
- Poor attendance to sessions

It is important to share low level concerns to help maintain trust, transparency and a culture where safe and appropriate behaviour, as set out in the Code of Conduct is maintained and monitored by all staff and tutors.

Individuals can also self-refer if they have found themselves in a situation which could be misinterpreted, or believe they have behaved in a way that does not meet expected professional standards.

Low level concerns reported to us will be dealt with sensitively, appropriately and quickly. We will address any behaviour deemed to be unprofessional and support the individual to correct it at an early stage. We will ensure that staff and tutors are clear on what behaviour is appropriate and review any potential weaknesses in the safeguarding procedure. A record of the concern will also be kept in order to identify any patterns of inappropriate behaviour.

Codes of Conduct

Codes of conduct ensures a clear guidance on behaviour to help keep children and their families, our staff and tutors safe, and promote a safe environment.

They help assure parents and carers that behaviour will be appropriate and professional boundaries will be maintained. They ensure the children and young people we work with feel safe, respected and understand that their wellbeing is paramount. Codes of conduct also help our staff and tutors to feel safe and supported in their environment. Staff employed by Merlin Tuition are required to follow the codes of conduct. We also expect tutors recruited by our agency to adhere to the code of conduct for best practice.

Staff and Tutors

Staff and Tutors are expected to:

- Prioritise children
- Listen and respect children at all times
- Act in a professional manner
- Ensure behaviour, content and environment is appropriate and professional
- Value and take children's contributions seriously
- Treat children and young people fairly without prejudice or discrimination
- Use a dedicated email address and phone number for work
- Challenge malpractice, discrimination and prejudice
- Exercise caution when dealing with sensitive issues with children and young people
- Report any concerns about a child or behaviour of anyone who has had contact with a child
- Ensure there is at least one adult present and available during activities

They should not:

- Allow concerns to go unreported
- Take unnecessary risks
- Provide personal or intimate care
- Act in a way that could be perceived as inappropriate, threatening or intrusive
- Allow children and young people to have your personal contact details or have contact with them via social media
- Engage in behaviour that is in any way abusive
- Have favourites

Children and Young People

Children and young people should:

- Be respectful and supportive to others
- Listen to others
- Take responsibility of their own behaviour

- Be dressed appropriately and arrive on time

They shouldn't:

- Be intimidating or make improper suggestions to anyone else
- Send 'friend' or 'follow' requests on social media, or ask staff and tutors for their personal contact details

Parent/Carers and/or Responsible Adult

Parents/Carers or Responsible Adult should:

- Ensure there is an adult at home and available during a tuition session
- Ensure an appropriate and safe environment when tutoring at home
- Pass on any safeguarding concerns to the appropriate authority

Signature and Declaration

We review our policy at least once a year to ensure our practices remain in line with legislation and Government guidelines.

Signed  **Date** 29.09.2026