



Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults

Guidance for Ramblers Areas and Groups

3.1 Who should read this guidance

Volunteers involved in organising activities specifically targeted at families/children and vulnerable adults, or where children or vulnerable adults regularly attend, should be familiar with this guidance and ensure it is implemented. Coordinators and organisers in Areas and Groups that don't run targeted activities should still be aware of the guidance and be prepared to implement it when appropriate.

This guidance is part of a comprehensive policy with specific guidance notes for several different audiences. It is also useful to read the Guidance for the Public and Ramblers Members and the Guidance for Walk Leaders in Areas and Groups. For the full policy and guidance see www.ramblers.org.uk/volunteer/safeguarding.

3.2 Why we need this guidance

The Ramblers provides activities for a wide range of people. We have a duty of care to ensure the well-being of everyone who participates in Ramblers activities and to minimise the risk of harm, and a moral duty as well as a legal and an insurance obligation to safeguard those who are particularly vulnerable, including children and vulnerable adults. Our partner organisations and funders increasingly require us to demonstrate that we have appropriate policies and procedures in place. And it is vital we support fully our volunteers and staff, including protecting them from potential liabilities and false suspicions and allegations of abuse.

3.3 General principles

The Ramblers works to make walking accessible to all, including children and vulnerable adults. We are also committed to equal opportunities and aim to treat everyone with dignity and respect, and not to discriminate on grounds of age, ethnic origin, gender, sexuality, disability or beliefs.

While we are the experts at providing and supporting walking activities, we can't provide specialist care, supervision or support for children and for those who are unable to care independently for themselves. Children under 15 and those with special needs should be accompanied by others who take responsibility for meeting their needs. Young people 15, 16 and 17 can only participate in our activities with parental consent, preferably with written proof. The exception is any activity involving an overnight stay, where everyone under 18 must be accompanied by an adult with parental responsibility.

Participation in all activities is subject to their suitability for individual participants. Leaders of walks and other activities sometimes need to make judgements that take into account the safety and enjoyment of everyone involved in an activity. So long as

a judgement is not based on stereotypical assumption or prejudice, they are well within their rights to refuse a participant if they believe this would result in danger to the individual or danger or major disruption to the rest of the group.

It is also not our responsibility to investigate or intervene in suspected cases of abuse or ill treatment, but it **is** our responsibility to refer such cases to the appropriate authorities, and to recognise that as organisers and leaders of activities in a position of trust, we may be made aware of signs of abuse, or even have it disclosed to us.

When organising activities:

- 1 Ensure that when promoting activities you help potential participants judge their suitability by including details such as walk length, pace, grade/difficulty, and advice on matters such as clothing, footwear and equipment required. Give contact details for more information and be prepared to discuss this in more detail with individual enquirers. Try to refer to other organisations more suitable for an enquirer's needs where necessary.
- 2 If working with other organisations who work with children or vulnerable adults (for example schools or community groups) make clear from the outset that they are responsible for the supervision and support of their participants.
- 3 As outlined in existing guidance, leaders should inform people at the start of an activity what to expect, and be prepared to turn away those they consider ill-equipped or incapable, so long as their decision is based on practicalities and not stereotypical or prejudiced assumptions.
- 4 Look for further information about providing suitable walks for children and people with specific disabilities on the information section of the Ramblers website: see www.ramblers.org.uk/info/firststeps.
- 5 Arrange for extra volunteers on activities aimed at children or people with special needs, to ensure there is cover in case of accident or illness.
- 6 Always report incidents promptly and correctly using the standard form (see www.ramblers.org.uk/volunteer under Essentials: Insurance).
- 7 Be sensitive about taking photos and films of activities. It's always polite to ask the participants first if anyone would prefer not to be featured, and respect their wishes. If working with schools or organisations dealing with children or vulnerable adults, abide by any policies they have about written permission. You could use a photo consent form – see Appendix 2.

3.4 Welcoming children and young people

Ramblers volunteers cannot provide direct care and supervision to **children under 15**. Instead the children must be accompanied by an adult who holds parental responsibility, such as a parent, legal guardian, carer, teacher or youth worker.

Unaccompanied young people aged 15, 16 and 17 can participate in Ramblers activities not involving an overnight stay only with the consent of a parent or legal guardian. On activities involving an overnight stay, everyone under 18 must be

accompanied by another adult with parental responsibility.

We **are** responsible for ensuring that accompanying adults are aware of their responsibility for supervision and direct care, and ensuring that people aged 15, 16 and 17 have parental consent. This is particularly important when the participants concerned are not already well-known to the Area or Group. To make this easier we have introduced a Consent Card, available from central office.

- 1 Include a statement in your programmes and publicity, for example: “Walkers must be 18+ or accompanied by an adult holding parental responsibility. Unaccompanied walkers aged 15-17 are welcome (except on overnight stays) with a valid 15-17 Year Old Parental Consent Card, obtainable free from Ramblers main office, tel 020 7339 8500 or see www.ramblers.org.uk/localgroups.” Alternatively Areas and Groups can issue these cards themselves – please contact the Safeguarding Officer for more details.
- 2 If working with a school or youth organisation bringing young people 15-17 on a walk, it is likely to be impractical to expect all participants to apply for Consent Cards. Make clear to the organisation that they must provide sufficient supervising adults who will take responsibility for the young people.
- 3 Leaders may also accept a clear signed letter or statement from a parent or legal guardian as proof of parental consent, so long as this includes:
 - The name and address of the parent / guardian and their relationship to the young person(s).
 - The name(s) of the young person(s).
 - A clear statement that consent is being given for the young person(s) to participate in Ramblers’ activities.
 - The date and signature of the parent / guardian.
- 4 On activities involving an overnight stay, everyone under 18 must be accompanied by an adult with parental responsibility for them.
- 5 Where accompanied children under 18 are present, the walk leader should remind the group verbally before setting out that Ramblers volunteers are not responsible for their direct care and supervision.
- 6 Alternatively, if you use a signing in form or register, consider including a tick box for responsible adults to confirm they understand their responsibilities.
- 7 If unaccompanied 15-17 year olds are present, the walk leader should check they have valid Consent Cards or letters. Don’t be afraid or embarrassed to ask for proof of age or parental consent if necessary
- 8 If an unaccompanied person is under 18 and doesn’t have proof of consent, or wishes to join an activity involving an overnight stay, or is under 15, it is best for everyone that they do not participate in the activity. Under special circumstances, for example, if you are far from the young person’s home, you may choose to include them as a one off. In this case:
 - Ask for a contact number of a parent or guardian and try to contact that

person to advise them of the situation and check their permission. Tell them you will require proof of consent next time, and advise them where they can obtain a consent card.

- Keep a close eye on the young person and check they are accounted for throughout the activity.
 - Keep a note, and report the incident and your actions to whoever is responsible for coordinating the activity.
- 9 Volunteers who regularly work with children (under 18) on at least a weekly basis are required to have a criminal disclosure check. Please contact the Safeguarding Officer.
- 10 We welcome and encourage young people under 18 to volunteer for the Ramblers. However there are specific recruitment procedures that need to be followed. Please contact the Safeguarding Officer for more details.

Please note this guidance applies across Great Britain. Although Scotland has some age limits which are historically different from those in England and Wales, anyone under 18 is considered to be a child in Scotland for child protection purposes.

3.5 Welcoming vulnerable adults

A vulnerable adult is someone 18 or over who is unable to care independently for themselves. This could be due to a physical or learning disability, illness or injury or mental health issues; old age; substance addiction; domestic violence or abuse or other reasons. It can be a temporary or a permanent condition.

Ramblers volunteers cannot provide direct care to anyone with special needs. We ask for a carer or support worker to accompany them if necessary. Vulnerable adults may have varying degrees of independence and sometimes it will be at the walk leader's or organiser's discretion whether or not they can participate unaccompanied. We encourage people with special needs to contact leaders or organisers beforehand to discuss suitability of activities.

- 1 Make sure the carer or support worker knows they are responsible for the direct needs of the person they're accompanying.
- 2 Take a note of an emergency contact number and any important medical details that can be passed to the emergency services if required.
- 3 It can be difficult to identify levels of independence, and these may change over time. For example an individual who has been attending activities on a regular basis may experience deteriorating physical or mental health. If you have concerns and feel they should be accompanied by a carer, you can seek advice from your Group/Area or the safeguarding officer and could ask them tactfully and discreetly to arrange to bring along a carer in future.
- 4 Carers and support workers accompanying vulnerable adults on activities intended primarily for members are not required to be members themselves.
- 5 Volunteers who regularly work with vulnerable adults on at least a weekly basis are required to have a criminal disclosure check. Please contact the

Safeguarding Officer.

3.6 Concerns about abuse

Your Area or Group may typically have little contact with children or vulnerable adults, so it is unlikely volunteers will encounter concerns about abuse. However if you regularly welcome children and vulnerable adults, though abuse remains thankfully rare, it is possible you may have concerns from your own observations of participants, or have such concerns raised with you. As a trusted adult, you may even have abuse disclosed to you by a victim. Abuse can include not only physical and sexual abuse but also emotional abuse and neglect. Vulnerable adults can also be at risk of financial exploitation or may come to harm through self neglect or their own behaviour.

- 1 If anyone is under serious threat of physical harm or in need of urgent treatment during a Ramblers activity:
 - **Dial 999 immediately** and ask for the **police**, if a criminal offence is being or is likely to be committed, and/or **ambulance** in cases of medical need.
 - When it is safe to do so, make notes of the incident and its outcome, fill in an incident report form and return to Ramblers central office (see Insurance under www.ramblers.org.uk/volunteer/essentials)
 - If there is an issue of violence or abuse, be prepared to answer further questions from the police and/or the local authority. Contact the Safeguarding Officer for further advice.

- 2 If there is no immediate danger but you have a suspicion or concern that abuse is taking place or when an allegation of abuse has been made:
 - Make a note of your concerns as soon as possible, within an hour of any incident if you can.
 - Contact the local authority's children and family services team (see contacts). They may ask for a written report and will advise what should be in it. If you need further advice, contact the Safeguarding Officer.
 - Notify your Area or Group organisers.
 - Fill in an incident report form and return to Ramblers central office (see Insurance under www.ramblers.org.uk/volunteer/essentials), attaching a copy of any written report made to the local authority. Don't record personal details of people involved on the report form.

- 3 Generally:
 - When working with children and vulnerable adults, be sensible and self-aware, and avoid placing yourself into situations where your actions may be misinterpreted. Avoid agreeing to supervise a child or vulnerable adult while a parent or carer is absent especially if this means being left alone with them.
 - If someone discloses abuse to you, be sympathetic and supportive, but don't agree to keep confidences. Explain it is your duty to pass on information appropriately.

- Keep concerns confidential. Only share details as necessary with trusted senior volunteers and staff and the appropriate authorities.
- Don't risk putting yourself in difficulty or danger by attempting to investigate the case yourself or to challenge the alleged abuser.

Summary – for organisers and programme coordinators

- 1 Be familiar with this guidance and ready to explain it to walk/activity leaders.
- 2 Ensure publicity helps people judge the suitability of an activity.
- 3 Communicate our policy on children and young people:
 - Children under 15, and everyone under 18 on activities involving an overnight stay, must be accompanied by an adult with parental responsibility.
 - Unaccompanied young people aged 15, 16 or 17 should have proof of consent (card or letter).
- 4 Be prepared to discuss the suitability of an activity with enquirers, and ensure people with special needs know they must be accompanied by someone responsible for their direct care. Carers don't have to be Ramblers members.
- 5 Enlist extra volunteers on activities specifically aimed at children and people with special needs.
- 6 Ensure volunteers who work regularly and closely with children and vulnerable adults have a criminal disclosure check: contact the Safeguarding Officer.
- 7 Know how to get hold of the contact details for your local authority Child and Family services.
- 8 Ensure incident reports are made correctly and promptly.
- 9 Support leaders in dealing with concerns about abuse, keep appropriate contact details and ensure incidents and referrals are reported to Central Office promptly and accurately.

Useful contacts

- **Emergency:** Police/Ambulance tel 999
- **Ramblers Safeguarding Officer** tel 020 7339 8574, childandvulnerableadults@ramblers.org.uk
- **Local authority child and family services.** Contact the County or unitary council and ask for child and family services. See the phone book or www.direct.gov.uk which has a list of all councils in the UK. They normally have out of hours emergency contacts.
- **Police** (non-emergency calls). England 0300 123 1212, Scotland 01382 207101, Wales 101.
- **NSPCC helpline** tel 0808 800 5000, www.nspcc.org.uk/helpline