



Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults

Guidance for volunteers managed by Ramblers staff

1 Who should read this guidance

This guidance is intended for volunteers managed by staff as part of a Ramblers project such as Get Walking Keep Walking who are likely to have regular contact with children and/or vulnerable adults through their volunteering work. If you're involved in such a project only in a role that doesn't involve regular contact with participants, for example a route developer, there is no need to read this guidance.

There is separate guidance for volunteers in Ramblers Areas and Groups. For the full safeguarding policy and guidance see www.ramblers.org.uk/volunteer/safeguarding.

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.

Ramblers projects such as Get Walking Keep Walking often work with external organisations specifically delivering services to children and vulnerable adults, including schools, youth and community organisations, NHS bodies and charities helping people with physical and mental health issues and disabilities. It is therefore particularly important that volunteers working closely with participants on these projects are aware of procedures for safeguarding vulnerable people.

These projects are managed by trained staff and they will largely deal with our relations to external organisations on matters such as the division of responsibilities, as well as closely supporting volunteers. But it is important that you understand the general principles of safeguarding and have an idea of our policy in case you are called upon to make a decision when a member of staff is not present.

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 do not undertake to provide specialist care and support for children and people who have special needs or who are unable to care independently for themselves. Children under 15 and people with special needs must 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, and anyone under 18 on an activity involving an overnight stay must be accompanied by an adult with parental responsibility. This is normally agreed with our partner organisations by staff before the activity takes place.

Participation in all activities is subject to their suitability for individual participants. Activity leaders 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 to have it disclosed to us.

- The member of staff managing your work should make it clear to you if there are special needs or issues with a particular group you're working with. When in doubt, ask them.
- If you are leading an activity, inform people at the start what to expect, and be prepared to turn away those you consider ill-equipped or incapable, in consultation with the member of staff and/or a responsible person from a partner organisation if present.

4 Criminal records disclosure

If you volunteer on a project where you are likely on a regular basis to come into contact with children and/or vulnerable adults, we require you to undergo a criminal disclosure check (often called a CRB check in England and Wales). This will normally be arranged by your staff manager when your first volunteer. If you haven't had such a check but think you should have one, talk to your staff manager or contact the Safeguarding Officer at Ramblers Central Office (see below).

5 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.

When working with groups of children, such as on a project with a school, sufficient responsible adults should be present in addition to Ramblers staff and volunteers in accordance with the official supervisory guidelines. At least two additional adults should be present with any group in case one of the adults has to accompany a child away from the activity. The guidelines are:

- **Age 0-2:** 1 adult to 3 children
- **Age 2-3:** 1 adult to 4 children
- **Age 3-8:** 1 adult to 8 children
- **Over 8:** 2 adults to 20 children (NSPCC advisory)

Young people aged 15, 16 and 17 can participate in Ramblers activities unaccompanied only with the consent of a parent or legal guardian, except where the activity involves an overnight stay in which case they must be accompanied by an adult with parental responsibility.

Arrangements for the supervision of children and young people will normally have been arranged in advance by staff working with a partner organisation, but individual family groups and unaccompanied young people may also turn up spontaneously to some activities especially if these have been promoted to the public.

We **are** responsible for making clear 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.

- 1 If you are leading an activity where accompanied children under 18 are present, make sure those supervising them are aware that you are not responsible for their direct care and supervision.
- 2 If unaccompanied 15-17 year olds are present, you must check they all have parental consent. Normally your staff manager will arrange this beforehand and provide you with a list or copies of parental consent forms, or the participants may bring completed forms with them for you to collect. Ensure you return all consent forms to your staff manager. Some may also have 15-17 Year Old Parental Consent Cards which we accept as proof of consent. Don't be afraid or embarrassed to ask for proof of age or consent.
- 3 On activities involving an overnight stay, everyone under 18 must be accompanied by an adult with parental responsibility for them.
- 4 If an unaccompanied person is under 18 and doesn't have parental consent, 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 they will need to arrange parental consent next time and explain how to do this.
 - 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 your staff manager.

- 5 Make sure you use any signing in sheets or registration forms provided, ensuring they are completed properly including emergency contacts and key medical details where necessary.

6 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.

Arrangements for those with special needs will normally have been arranged in advance by staff working with a partner organisation, but individuals may turn up spontaneously to some activities especially if these have been promoted to the public.

- 1 If you are leading an activity where people are present with carers or support workers, make sure the carers understand they are responsible for direct care.
- 2 Make sure you use any signing in sheets or registration forms provided, ensuring they are completed properly including emergency contacts and key medical details where necessary.
- 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, seek advice from your staff manager.

7 Concerns about abuse

Cases of abuse are thankfully rare, but if you regularly welcome children and vulnerable adults, it is possible you may have concerns about abuse from your own observations of participants. 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.

Judging outward signs of abuse can be difficult as there are usually other explanations for particular signs, and sometimes it is matter of judgement or instinct, or a combination of indicators. Signs might include:

- Marks in odd places and unexplained injuries, or clothing that appears to hide these.
- Evidence of alcohol or drug misuse.

- Fear or parents or carers.
- Uncharacteristic behaviour or language.
- Habitual severe criticism, discrimination or deliberate humiliation by a parent or carer.
- Constant hunger, lack of personal hygiene, neglected appearance.
- Withdrawn, angry or violent behaviour or unexplained distress.

You may also directly witness abuse taking place or have concerns about abuse raised with you by another participant. As a trusted adult, you may even have abuse disclosed to you by a victim

- 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.
 - Alert your staff manager as soon as possible.
 - When it is safe to do so, make notes of the incident and its outcome.
 - If there is an issue of violence or abuse, be prepared to answer further questions from the police and/or the local authority.
 - Assist your staff manager in completing an incident form as required.
- 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.
 - Raise them discreetly with your staff manager as soon as possible. They should take them up with the local authority who may wish to question you further.
 - If necessary, contact the local authority's children and family services team (see below). They may ask for a written report and will advise what should be in it.
 - Assist your staff manager in completing an incident form as required.
 - If you need further advice, contact the Safeguarding Officer.
- 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. Don't arrange to meet with them socially outside the Ramblers activity.
- 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 your volunteer manager, the Safeguarding Officer 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.
- Don't be afraid to raise genuine concerns about other volunteers or staff if you see examples of bad practice or failure to follow our policy or even have suspicions of abuse. Speak discreetly to your staff manager or the Safeguarding Officer.

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

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