



Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults

Guidance for Ramblers groups and areas

March 2017

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 groups and areas that don't run targeted activities should still be aware of the contents of this 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 participants and the Guidance for walk leaders. 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 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

We help everyone enjoy walking, including children and vulnerable adults. We are committed to equal opportunities and diversity and aim to treat everyone with dignity and respect, and not to discriminate on grounds of age, disability, ethnicity, race, sex (gender), sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion or belief or non-belief, marriage or civil partnership, or pregnancy or maternity.

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 18 and those with special needs should be accompanied by others who take responsibility for meeting their needs.

It is important to ensure that volunteers don't work unsupervised on a regular basis with unaccompanied children and young people under 18 and/or with vulnerable adults. Otherwise our activities might be classified by law as 'regulated activities' and the people organising them will require enhanced background checks to establish that they are not barred from working in this way. Organisations which knowingly allow barred people to work on regulated activities are breaking the law.

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 in writing 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 not capable of doing the activity, so long as their decision is based on practicalities and not stereotypical or prejudiced assumptions.
- 4 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.
- 5 Always report incidents promptly and correctly using the standard Ramblers incident report form which is in the [safeguarding toolkit](#).
- 6 Be sensitive about taking photos and films of activities. Ask the participants first if anyone would prefer not to be featured, and respect their wishes. You should use a photo consent form – see our [GDPR toolkit](#). If working with schools or organisations dealing with children or vulnerable adults, abide by any policies they have about written permission.
- 7 Consider including walks in your programme that are accessible to a wide range of people. For more information, see our [short walks toolkit](#).

3.4 Welcoming children and young people

Children and young people under 18 must be accompanied by an adult who holds parental responsibility, such as a parent, legal guardian, carer, teacher or youth worker. Ramblers volunteers cannot provide direct care and supervision to people under 18.

We are no longer able to accept unaccompanied young people aged 15-17 on Ramblers activities, even with written consent from a parent or guardian. The consent cards which we previously issued for this purpose are no longer valid.

We are responsible for ensuring that accompanying adults are aware of their responsibility for supervision and direct care. This is particularly important when the participants concerned are not already well-known to the group or area.

- 1 Include a statement in your programmes and publicity, for example: “Walkers must be 18+ or accompanied by a responsible adult”.
- 2 If working with a school or youth organisation bringing people under 18, make clear to the organisation that they must provide sufficient supervising adults who will take responsibility for the children and young people.
- 3 For activities using tools, such as footpath maintenance, under 18s must be supervised at all times by a parent, guardian or responsible adult.
- 4 Where accompanied under 18s are present on a walk or other Ramblers activity, the walk leader or organiser should remind the group before the start of the activity that Ramblers volunteers are not responsible for their direct care and supervision.
- 5 If you use a signing in form or register, consider including a tick box for responsible adults to confirm they understand their responsibilities.
- 6 Don't be afraid or embarrassed to ask for proof of age if you think it necessary.
- 7 If an unaccompanied person is under 18, it is best for everyone that they do not participate in the activity. Do your best to ensure that they are safe, for example by asking for a contact number and making arrangements with a parent or guardian. Under special circumstances, for example, if you are far from the young person's home and no-one else is available to ensure they can get home safely, you may choose to include them as a one off. In this case:
 - Keep a close eye on the young person and check they are accounted for throughout the activity.
 - Keep a note, and complete an incident report form (found in the [safeguarding toolkit](#)) .
 - Make sure that the young person and their parent or guardian are aware that they will need to be accompanied in future.

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 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.

Note that providing care for adults with special needs is generally classified by law as a 'regulated activity' and organisations must take special precautions before permitting individuals to provide it (see under General Principles above).

- 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 area or group or the Ramblers 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.

3.6 Concerns about abuse

Your group or area 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 (Find the incident report form in our [safeguarding toolkit](#)).
 - 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 advice and support, and see also Appendix 1.
- 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.
 - Fill in an incident report form and return to Ramblers central office attaching a copy of any written report made to the local authority. Don't record personal details of people involved on the report form. (Find the incident report form in our [safeguarding toolkit](#)).

The Ramblers safeguarding officer is here to support and guide you throughout this process. Please contact them if you need assistance.

- 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 that children and young people under 18 must be accompanied by an adult with parental responsibility.

- 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 Know how to get hold of the contact details for your local authority Child and Family services.
- 7 Ensure incident reports are completed correctly and promptly.
- 8 Support leaders in dealing with concerns about abuse, keep appropriate contact details and ensure incidents and referrals are reported to staff promptly and accurately.

Useful contacts

- **Emergency:** Police/Ambulance tel 999
- **Ramblers safeguarding officer:** Izzy Shaw, tel 020 7339 8569, izzy.shaw@ramblers.org.uk
- **Ramblers insurance and other toolkits.** Under 'Volunteer zone' at www.ramblers.org.uk. Look for 'Support and development' > 'Volunteer toolkits' > 'Organising group walks and developing routes'.
- **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.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

Appendix 1: Questions when referring concerns about abuse

The following questions are likely to be asked by the local authority in the event that you refer to them a concern about abuse. You may find it helpful to consider them when making notes or a referral. Keep any written documents containing personal details strictly confidential and store them in a safe place.

Ramblers staff are here to support you. If you need any guidance, please get in touch with the safeguarding officer.

- 1 Your name and contact details.
- 2 The organisation's name and contact details.
- 3 Your role.
- 4 Child or vulnerable adult's name, age/date of birth (estimated if unknown) and contact details.
- 5 Whether or not you are reporting concerns on behalf of someone else
- 6 A brief description of what prompted the concerns, including dates, times and other specific factors, making a clear distinction between fact, opinion and hearsay, including:
 - Any visible bruising or injuries.
 - Any indirect signs such as behavioural changes.
 - The child or vulnerable adult's account of any signs or injuries, if any.
- 7 Whether or not the child or vulnerable adult has been spoken to directly, and their account of any signs or injuries, or any disclosures.
- 8 Any contact with parents/carers or support workers including:
 - Their names and contact details.
 - Times and dates of discussion.
 - What was said.
- 9 Has anyone been alleged to be the abuser? Give further details.
- 10 Where and when do you suspect the abuse to have taken place? Was it on your activity or elsewhere?
- 11 Is anyone else involved and have they been contacted? Are there any witnesses?
 - Their names and contact details.
 - Times and dates of discussion.
 - What was said.