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## 1. Introduction

The Autistic Society Greater Manchester Area (I AM) is committed to the protection of vulnerable adults from harm of all kinds. We recognise that all vulnerable adults have rights, command our respect and must be treated with dignity.

This policy must be consistently adhered to by all I AM trustees, staff and volunteers, to minimise opportunities for vulnerable adults to suffer harm.

This policy will be at the forefront of any staff selection and training.

## 2. Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy Statement

As an organisation I AM is committed to the protection of vulnerable adults from harm of every kind and will take swift and diligent action should they suspect a vulnerable adult is being harmed in any way.

The individuals using the services of I AM have high dependency levels and, with their parents and carers, rely on the trust, respect and decency of the staff as guardians of their safety and protection.

All staff working at I AM share a responsibility for the safeguarding and wellbeing of all individuals in our care and work together to provide this effectively.

Vulnerable adults have a right to protection. It is the responsibility of everyone to ensure this protection. This is particularly true in relation to individuals with autism who, due to their condition, are potentially vulnerable and at higher risk.



# SAFEGUARDING VULNERABLE ADULTS POLICY

Staff recognise that vulnerable adults have the right:

- To be valued as individuals
- To be treated with dignity and respect
- To be kept safe

We will endeavour to safeguard vulnerable adults by:

- Adopting safeguarding guidelines through a code of behaviour for staff and volunteers;
- Ensuring all front-line delivery and other relevant staff receive training and updates in safeguarding vulnerable adults ;
- Sharing information about vulnerable adult protection and good practice with staff, volunteers, service users and their families and carers;
- Sharing information about concerns with agencies who need to know, and involving parents, carers and service users appropriately;
- Following carefully the procedures for recruitment and selection of staff and volunteers in line with good practice regarding vulnerable adult safeguarding.

## 3. Best Practice in Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults

### GENERAL PRINCIPLES

For the purposes of this policy a vulnerable adult is defined as an individual aged 18 or over who is in need of special care, support, or protection because of age, disability, risk of abuse or neglect. It is therefore likely to apply to most of I AM's beneficiaries and service users of that age as autistic spectrum condition may be classed as a disability. Legislation covering this includes the Care Act 2014, together with the Mental Capacity Act 2005, Human Rights Act 1998 and Equality Act 2010.

In all interventions the vulnerable adult's welfare must be paramount. This overrides all other considerations.

The complexity of safeguarding requires a comprehensive, coordinated and "working together" approach for all those agencies and professionals who are involved with vulnerable adults.

A proper balance must be struck between protecting vulnerable adults and respecting the rights and needs of families and carers. Where there is conflict the vulnerable adult's interest must always remain paramount.

We as an organisation will endeavour to work with all relevant agencies in the best interests of vulnerable adults and their families. We have well-established links with a number of agencies that are involved with vulnerable adults e.g. Social Care, Care Units, Health and Education Professionals. Such inter-agency working requires each agency to have a proper understanding of each other's functions in relation to vulnerable adults and to have good communication with each other. It is essential for all staff and volunteers to be aware of the possible signs and symptoms of possible abuse and their responsibility to safeguard vulnerable adults. Staff should also have some understanding of safeguarding processes and how they operate.



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## Confidentiality

- a) I AM will not pass onto others information of a personal or sensitive nature about the vulnerable adult, their life or family to others without consent from the vulnerable adult (and their parents/carers if relevant), subject to point b) below.
- b) However, the principle that “the welfare of the vulnerable adult is paramount” means that considerations of confidentiality will not override the right of vulnerable adults to be protected from harm. Therefore, if it is felt that seeking or obtaining consent from the vulnerable adult or their parents / carers could compromise the safety or welfare of the vulnerable adult or other people information can be shared with appropriate agencies without their consent. The reasons for not seeking or obtaining consent should be clearly recorded. There is also the Common Law duty to report. Staff should not promise to keep secrets. Information of a confidential nature will only be communicated on a “need to know” basis. Written records of a restricted and confidential nature are securely stored.

## 4. Definitions of Abuse

Vulnerable adults may be abused by a family member, a carer (i.e. who cares for them in their home, such as a visiting carer or a staff member in a residential home), a peer, an acquaintance or a stranger. The abuse may be the result of a deliberate act or of a failure on the part of a carer to act or to provide proper care, or both.

There are different types of abuse and a vulnerable adult may suffer more than one type of abuse.

Categories of abuse of vulnerable adults include:

- Physical abuse (action or failure to prevent)
- Emotional abuse (also including well-meaning over-protection)
- Sexual abuse or exploitation
- Domestic (intimate partner or family member) abuse
- Neglect
- Discrimination
- Financial or criminal abuse
- Radicalisation

Abuse may be a single event or may occur repeatedly over time. Vulnerable adults may exhibit signs of being abused (see “Warning Signs

but often there are no signs. It is important that staff, volunteers and carers are vigilant and alert to how vulnerable adults present. Vulnerable adults who have a disability may be particularly vulnerable to abuse as they are more dependent on care and may be less able to tell anyone.

Prevention of abuse depends on good observation and on knowledge of the vulnerable adult as an individual. Safeguarding is about being alert to the possibility of abuse and preventing situations where it could happen. The importance of being aware of vulnerable adults’ particular needs and capabilities is that it enables staff to be more responsive to an individual’s reactions and situations where they may be suffering abuse but are unable to tell anyone. In most but not all cases parents have been responsible for



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the care and upbringing of vulnerable adults and have a wealth of knowledge about their lives and their emotional, physical and cultural needs; where parents are still involved in a vulnerable adult's life it is therefore important to listen to them but to be aware that abuse may be occurring within the family circle

## Warning Signs

Often vulnerable adults may not say directly that they have been abused but may show signs that can indicate they are subject to abuse. There may be other reasons for these behaviours but if an individual is showing one or more of these behaviours the possibility of abuse should be considered. Signs may indicate more than one type of abuse – e.g. changes in the vulnerable adult's behaviour are often present in most forms of abuse.

- Changes in the vulnerable adult's behaviour
- Change in routines
- Actual physical injuries, including potential sexual health issues
- Appearing unkempt, dirty or thinner than usual
- Change in mood / withdrawn
- Change in eating / sleeping patterns
- Acting in an inappropriate sexual way
- Regression in behaviour
- Change in their finances (e.g. not having as much money as usual to pay for shopping, or getting into debt)
- Increased levels of anxiety
- Seeming to keep a secret
- Unreasonable fear of certain people or places
- Disclosure (intentional or otherwise) of potentially exploitative relationship (sexual and/or criminal)
- Language and activity indicating extremism or radicalisation

These signs and symptoms should be used as a guide and not a checklist because there may be a reasonable explanation for a particular behaviour. Importantly, individuals who are being abused may show no signs of abuse. Diagnosis of abuse is rarely straightforward and is often complex and frequently involves multi-agency assessment. It is not the responsibility of staff or volunteers to determine if a vulnerable adult has been abused. However, the crucial message to staff and volunteers is that if concerns, suspicions or allegations arise action must always be taken – doing nothing is not an option.

## 5. Vulnerable Adults' Rights to be Protected

I AM's Safeguarding Policy seeks to reflect the principles of all safeguarding legislation, in particular, the recognition of vulnerable adults' rights. As an organisation we wish to acknowledge and uphold their rights to:

- Be accorded the same respect and dignity as any other adult, by recognising their uniqueness and personal needs;



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- Access knowledge and information which they can understand to help them make informed choices;
- Information and practical help in keeping themselves safe and protecting themselves from abuse;
- Live safely, without fear of violence or abuse in any form;
- Have their money, goods and possessions treated with respect, and to receive equal protection for themselves and their property through the law;
- Guidance and assistance in seeking help as a consequence of abuse;
- Be supported in making their own decisions about how they wish to proceed in the event of abuse and to know that their wishes will only be overridden if it is considered necessary for their own safety or the safety of others;
- Be supported in bringing a complaint under any existing complaints procedure;
- Be supported in reporting the circumstances of any abuse to independent bodies;
- Have alleged, suspected or confirmed cases of abuse investigated urgently;
- Receive appropriate support, education, counselling, therapy and treatment following abuse;
- Seek legal advice or representation;
- Seek redress through appropriate agencies;
- Have their rights respected and to have their family, informal carers or advocates act on their behalf as appropriate.

Amongst other things vulnerable adults should be made aware that:

- Everyone has rights, such as the right to be safe, which should not be taken away.
- They have the right to say no if anyone tries to make them do something that they feel is wrong or makes them feel uncomfortable.
- They can get help if bullied (individuals with autistic spectrum condition (ASC) may be particularly vulnerable to being bullied, being perceived as “different” or socially disruptive. I AM has a specific anti-bullying policy and all staff and volunteers should be aware of this and follow its provisions should they become aware of, or suspect, bullying of or by members or anyone else).
- Staff will not be angry with them when they speak about any incident that frightens, confuses them or makes them feel unhappy.
- When vulnerable adults are told that they can go to someone for help they need to know they will be taken seriously and supported. NB this does not mean that staff must automatically believe everything the person says (they may be mistaken or acting maliciously) but whatever the person says must be taken seriously and not ignored, with action taken on the assumption that it is true; it will be for the statutory authorities, not I AM staff, to investigate further and determine the facts.
- They should not keep secrets about behaviour that makes them feel uncomfortable – even if someone has told them that they should not tell others

## 6. Safeguarding Procedure

Everyone in the organisation, in whatever capacity, has responsibility for safeguarding vulnerable adults. A vital part of safeguarding is to pass on concerns, suspicions or allegations in a timely and consistent manner. It is the policy of I AM to encourage staff to be proactive and vigilant in sharing concerns and following these reporting procedures.



## How to react and what to do

There is not one simple set of rules to follow in responding to these situations. However, the actions of staff and volunteers who are told of abuse should be guided by the following key points:

### DO's and DON'Ts

**DO stay calm.**

**DO listen** and hear. Give time to the person to say what they want.

**DO reassure** that they have done the right thing in telling.

**DO record** in writing as soon as possible using the exact words used by the individual as far as possible.

**DO NOT** panic.

**DO NOT** ask leading questions.

**DO NOT** promise to keep secrets.

**DO NOT** ask the vulnerable adult repeat the story unnecessarily.

**DO** follow our formal Safeguarding Procedure – see below.

1. Our prime concern must be the interests and safety of vulnerable adults. In urgent situations where immediate action is required, ensure that the individual is safe while you are taking action by calling 999.
2. On every occasion that any member of staff or volunteer has reason to suspect that any vulnerable adult has suffered abuse, or is at risk of suffering abuse, report to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) using I AM's Incident Reporting procedure and form.
3. It is important that an accurate record of all that has occurred is kept, stating the facts of the incident (using the vulnerable adult's words), time, explanation and action taken. This should be recorded on I AM's Incident Report Form which will be retained in accordance with the Incident Reporting procedure.
4. On no account should staff make physical examinations or pursue enquiries beyond the initial statement.



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5. Having been informed the CEO will if appropriate complete the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Referral Form, submit it to the relevant Local Authority Social Care team (see links in section 9) and take any further necessary steps.
6. Local Authority Social Care in accepting the referral become responsible for determining what action is to be taken, including following up with parents/carers. It is not the responsibility of I AM staff to make enquiries but if parents/carers have responsibility for the vulnerable adult (e.g. if the person lacks mental capacity) they should be informed unless to do so would compromise the vulnerable adult's safety (see "Confidentiality
7. .
8. The CEO will arrange for the individual's record on I AM's database to be flagged as being subject to a report, to ensure that future staff are aware that a report has been made. The copy of the Incident Report and if completed the Multi-agency Safeguarding Referral Form should be filed in accordance with the Incident Reporting procedure.
9. Should the disclosure or suspicion involve a member of I AM's staff or trustees, the CEO must refer the matter to the relevant Local Authority (see list of contacts in "I AM Safeguarding, Whistleblowing and Complaints Policies: Lead Contacts"). In exceptional circumstances, the staff member made aware of the allegation must report the matter directly to the Chair of the Board of Trustees, who will report as above.
10. In the absence of the CEO refer all issues immediately to the senior member of staff on duty who will advise on the most appropriate course of action and/or contact the appropriate persons.

## 7. Staff Recruitment and Selection of Volunteers

- All I AM staff and volunteers must complete an application form and references will be taken.
- All staff must provide several types of evidence of ID, including a birth certificate. If the name on the birth certificate does not match current ID evidence of change of name must be provided (e.g. marriage certificate, copy of deed poll).
- All I AM staff and volunteers in positions of direct contact with vulnerable adults are required to have an Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Check in place which has been approved in line with the Equal Opportunities Policy and Recruitment Policy.
- Good practice guidelines are in place especially to ensure the safety and welfare of individuals using I AM services.
- All staff and volunteers will follow a full induction programme, including training on I AM's Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.
- All staff and volunteers will be expected to adhere to all I AM's policies and procedures.
- All staff will follow an ongoing programme of supervision and appraisal.



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- Staff where appropriate will attend external vulnerable adult safeguarding training programmes at the time of recruitment and every three years (or less at management discretion) thereafter. This applies to trustees, all staff working in front-line roles or in regular direct contact with service users regardless of hours worked (e.g. key workers and support workers and their line managers), and support staff (e.g. finance and administration) working 14 hours per week or more. Training undertaken in other roles or employment may be acceptable, subject to proof of content and completion and providing it has taken place in the last two years before recruitment or is updated at no more than three-yearly intervals.
- All staff, volunteers and parents will have access to a complaints procedure.
- All staff will have a written job description.
- All staff will have a probationary period of six months.
- All volunteers will have a probationary period of three months.

## 8. Code of Conduct for Staff and Volunteers

Staff and volunteers are bound at all times by the I AM Code of Conduct for staff and volunteers (see separate Code).

Staff and volunteers may occasionally be requested to provide care of a personal nature for service users, particularly if they have other disabilities. I AM is not set up to offer personal care of this nature and these tasks should be avoided if possible (e.g. if the individual has a carer available to do this instead). If essential they should only be carried out with the full understanding and consent of the individual (and their parents or carers if relevant). If an emergency arises requiring this type of care relevant parents or carers should be fully informed, preferably immediately or if not as soon as reasonably possible afterwards.

## 9. Relevant I AM Policies and Guidance

As well as this policy, the following I AM policies and procedures are also relevant (some already referred to above)

- Code of conduct for staff (also applies to volunteers)
- Codes of conduct for child and adult users, parents/carers/visitors and Trustees
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Incident Reporting Procedure and Form
- Staffing policies including but not limited to: Recruitment and Selection, Probation, Appraisal, Equal Opportunities, Disciplinary
- Health and Safety Policy
- Risk Assessment procedures
- Electronic Devices, Email and Internet, E-Safety Policies
- Anti-Radicalisation Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Data Protection Policy (includes confidentiality and data consent)
- I AM Safeguarding, Whistleblowing and Complaints Policies - Lead Contacts



## 10. National and Local Policies, Procedures and Contact Information

For details of who to contact in connection with safeguarding matters, please see separate list (I AM Safeguarding, Whistleblowing and Complaints Policies: Lead Contacts).

### Information sources

The following documents amongst others provide information and guidance about adult safeguarding:

<https://www.scie.org.uk/contact/concerns/>

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/safeguarding-children-young-people-and-adults-at-risk-in-the-nhs/>

<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/safeguarding-roles-and-responsibilities-safeguarding-everybodys-business>

## 11. Review Date

This safeguarding policy and procedure was approved by the Board of Trustees of I AM on 8th December 2020.

Reviewed and updated: Nov 2023

Reviewed, separated from combined Child and Vulnerable Adult policy and updated: August 2025

Minor corrections and clarifications: January 2026

Next Review: 2027

## 12. Signature and Date

Signed:

Date:

