

Safeguarding Policy

For counselling clients aged 18 and over

Last updated: September 2026

1. Purpose of this policy

As a counsellor working with adults aged 18 and over, I am committed to providing a safe, respectful and confidential counselling service.

Safeguarding means taking reasonable steps to protect an adult from abuse, neglect, exploitation or serious harm, while respecting their rights, wishes, dignity and autonomy.

This policy explains how I approach safeguarding concerns that may arise during counselling. It also explains the limits of confidentiality and what may happen if I become concerned that someone is at serious risk of harm.

2. Who this policy applies to

This policy applies to all clients aged 18 and over who access my counselling service.

Although I work with adults, safeguarding concerns may sometimes involve another adult, a child, or someone else connected to a client. Where appropriate, these concerns may need to be considered as part of my safeguarding responsibilities.

3. My commitment to clients

I aim to provide a therapeutic environment in which clients feel:

- Safe and treated with dignity and respect.
- Able to speak openly without discrimination or judgement.
- Informed about confidentiality and its limits.
- Able to make their own decisions wherever possible.
- Supported to access appropriate help if additional safeguarding needs arise.

I will take safeguarding concerns seriously and respond proportionately, while avoiding unnecessary interference in a client's privacy and autonomy.

4. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an important part of counselling and I will normally keep information shared during counselling private.

However, confidentiality is not absolute.

There may be circumstances in which I need to share information without your consent. This may include situations where I believe there is a serious and immediate risk of harm to you or another person, where there are concerns about abuse or neglect that require action, or where disclosure is required by law or another professional/legal obligation.

Where it is safe and appropriate to do so, I will discuss my concerns with you before sharing information and explain what information may need to be shared and why.

I will aim to share only information that is relevant and necessary for the purpose of safeguarding.

5. What is an adult safeguarding concern?

Safeguarding concerns can take many forms. They may include, for example:

- Physical abuse.
- Sexual abuse or exploitation.
- Psychological or emotional abuse.
- Financial or material abuse.
- Domestic abuse.
- Neglect or acts of omission.
- Discriminatory abuse.
- Organisational or institutional abuse.
- Modern slavery or exploitation.
- Coercive or controlling behaviour.
- Serious self-neglect.
- Serious risk of suicide or other significant harm.

A person does not have to identify themselves as a victim or use the word “abuse” for a safeguarding concern to exist.

6. Adults at risk

An adult may require safeguarding support where they are experiencing, or are at risk of, abuse or neglect and, because of their care and support needs, may be unable to protect themselves from that abuse or neglect.

Having a disability, mental health difficulty, illness, addiction, or other support need does not automatically mean that a person lacks capacity or autonomy.

I will seek to support clients to make their own decisions wherever possible.

7. Mental capacity and autonomy

Adults are generally entitled to make their own decisions, including decisions that others may consider unwise.

Where concerns arise, I will consider the client's ability to understand, retain, use or weigh relevant information and communicate their decision, where appropriate.

I will not assume that a client lacks capacity simply because they have a mental health condition, disability, illness, substance-use difficulty or other vulnerability.

Where a client has capacity to make a decision about their circumstances, their wishes and choices will normally be respected unless there is a compelling legal or safeguarding reason to act differently.

8. Risk of suicide or serious self-harm

If a client tells me that they are experiencing suicidal thoughts or thoughts of serious self-harm, I will explore the level of risk with them and consider what support may be appropriate.

Where possible, I will work collaboratively with the client to develop a plan to keep them safe and identify appropriate sources of support.

If I believe there is an immediate or serious risk of harm and that action is necessary to protect the client or another person, I may need to contact an appropriate emergency or health service and/or share relevant information without the client's consent.

If you are in immediate danger, you should contact 999 or attend your nearest Accident & Emergency (A&E) department.

For urgent but non-life-threatening NHS support, you can contact NHS 111 and select the mental health option where available.

9. Domestic abuse

If a client discloses domestic abuse, coercive control, stalking or another abusive relationship, I will listen without judgement and explore what support the client wants and needs.

I will respect the client's autonomy and will not automatically contact the police or other agencies simply because domestic abuse has been disclosed.

However, information may need to be shared without consent where there is a serious and immediate risk of harm, a legal requirement to disclose, or another exceptional safeguarding circumstance.

10. Concerns involving children

Although I work only with adults, a client may disclose concerns about the safety or wellbeing of a child.

Where a concern relates to a child, I will consider my safeguarding responsibilities carefully and may seek appropriate professional advice or make a referral where necessary.

I will consider the circumstances, the level of risk and any relevant legal or professional duties before deciding what action is appropriate.

11. Information sharing

If safeguarding action is necessary, information may be shared with appropriate organisations or professionals, which could include:

- The client's GP or other healthcare professional.
- NHS services.
- Adult Social Care.
- Children's Social Care.
- The police.
- Emergency services.
- Another appropriately qualified professional involved in the client's care.

I will aim to follow the principles of necessity, proportionality and relevance when sharing information.

I will keep a record of significant safeguarding decisions, including the reasons for decisions and, where appropriate, advice received from other professionals.

12. Safeguarding and online/remote counselling

Where counselling takes place online or by telephone, the same safeguarding principles apply.

I will take reasonable steps to establish the client's identity, contact details and location where appropriate, particularly at the beginning of remote work.

For remote sessions, clients should provide an emergency contact/location where this has been agreed as part of the counselling arrangement.

If I believe there is an immediate risk of serious harm during an online or telephone session, I may need to contact emergency services or another appropriate service using the client's location and contact information.

13. Professional boundaries

Maintaining appropriate professional boundaries is an important part of safeguarding.

I will maintain clear therapeutic boundaries in relation to:

- Contact outside agreed counselling arrangements.
- Communication by email, telephone or messaging services.

- Social media.
- Gifts and financial arrangements.
- Physical contact.
- Personal relationships with clients.
- Confidentiality and record keeping.

I will not enter into a sexual or exploitative relationship with a client.

Any concerns about professional boundaries will be taken seriously and, where appropriate, discussed in clinical supervision.

14. Supervision

I undertake appropriate professional supervision and will use supervision to support safe and ethical practice.

Where a safeguarding concern arises, I may discuss relevant aspects of the situation with my supervisor or another appropriate professional, while taking reasonable steps to protect the client's identity and confidentiality.

If there is an immediate risk requiring urgent action, I will not delay necessary safeguarding action while waiting for supervision.

15. Recording safeguarding concerns

Where appropriate, I will keep a factual record of safeguarding concerns and any action taken.

Records will normally include:

- The nature of the concern.
- Relevant information disclosed or observed.
- The client's wishes and views, where known.
- My assessment of the concern.
- Advice or consultation obtained.
- Any decision made and the reasons for it.
- Any referral, disclosure or action taken.

Records will be stored securely and handled in accordance with applicable data protection and professional requirements.

16. If you have a safeguarding concern about my practice

If you have a concern about your safety, treatment or professional boundaries within counselling, I encourage you to raise it with me where you feel able to do so.

You may also wish to contact my professional membership or registration body, where applicable.

If you believe that someone is in immediate danger, contact 999.

17. External support

Depending on the nature of a concern, clients may be directed towards appropriate specialist services, which may include:

- Emergency services: 999
- NHS: 111 for urgent health advice
- Adult Social Care: through the local authority where the person lives
- Police: 101 for non-emergency matters
- Domestic abuse services: specialist local or national services
- Mental health crisis services: through NHS 111, local crisis services or emergency services

18. Review of this policy

This safeguarding policy will be reviewed periodically and updated where necessary to reflect changes in legislation, professional guidance, best practice or the way my counselling service operates.

Practice details

Policy owner: Michelle Harvey-Fogg

Professional title: Counsellor and ABP Psychotherapist

Professional body/registration: BACP

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