



Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

Including Alternative Provision and EOTAS Safeguarding Procedures

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Approved by:	Board of Trustees
Policy Owner:	Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)
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Other Important Contacts

- Police / Ambulance / Fire: 999
- North Yorkshire Children's Social Care: 0300 131 2 131
- North Yorkshire Emergency Duty Team: 0300 131 2 131
- North Yorkshire LADO: 01609 798005
- Leeds Children's Social Work Services: 0113 3760336
- Leeds Emergency Duty Team: 0113 5350600
- Leeds LADO: 0113 3789687
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- City of York Council Emergency Duty Team (out of hours): 0300 131 2131
- City of York Council LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer): 01904 551783
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1. Statement of Intent

Autism Angels is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of every child and young person who accesses our provision. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and is at the heart of everything we do.

Autism Angels is a specialist **charitable alternative provision** delivering **trauma-informed, neuro-affirming, outdoor, therapeutic and equine-assisted support** for neurodivergent children and young people, many of whom have experienced significant anxiety, trauma, school absence, exclusion, adverse childhood experiences, or mental health difficulties.

We recognise that our learners could be vulnerable due to communication differences, sensory needs, emotional dysregulation, previous trauma, social isolation, or difficulties accessing education. We therefore operate a **whole-organisation safeguarding culture** in which every child is listened to, respected, protected and supported.

This policy aims to:

- Protect children and young people from abuse, neglect, exploitation and harm.
- Provide clear guidance for staff, volunteers, trustees and visitors.
- Ensure compliance with current safeguarding legislation and statutory guidance.
- Promote a culture of vigilance, openness, professional curiosity and early intervention.
- Ensure effective partnership working with schools, local authorities, health professionals, families and other agencies.
- Support children to feel safe, heard, valued and understood.

The welfare of the child is **paramount** in all decisions made by Autism Angels.

2. Safeguarding Ethos and Values

Autism Angels believes that safeguarding is most effective when children experience **safe, trusted, consistent relationships** with adults who understand their individual needs.

Our safeguarding practice is underpinned by the following principles:

- Every child has the right to be safe.
- Every child will be treated with dignity, compassion and respect.
- Neurodivergent children may communicate distress differently from neurotypical children.
- Behaviour is viewed as communication.
- Trauma-informed and low-arousal approaches reduce risk and promote emotional safety.
- Early help is preferable to crisis intervention wherever possible.
- Families should be supported wherever it is safe to do so.
- Children's wishes and feelings must be heard and taken seriously.



- Safeguarding is strengthened through effective multi-agency working.

Because Autism Angels is an **outdoor therapeutic provision**, safeguarding extends across woodlands, fields, rivers, equine environments, farm settings, vehicles, community visits and off-site activities.

We actively create environments that are:

- emotionally safe,
- sensory considerate,
- predictable,
- low demand
- and supportive of regulation and communication.

3. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy:

Child / Young Person means any individual under the age of 18 years. For the purposes of this policy, the term also includes young people aged 18 to 25 years who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and are accessing services provided by Autism Angels.

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children means:

- protecting children from maltreatment;
- preventing impairment of children's mental and physical health or development;
- ensuring children grow up in circumstances consistent with safe and effective care;
- taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.

Abuse is a form of maltreatment. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, failing to prevent harm, or exposing a child to harmful environments or experiences.

Abuse may occur:

- in the family,
- in institutions,
- within peer relationships,
- online,
- in the community,
- or through exploitation by adults or other children.

The four categories of abuse are:

- **Physical abuse**
- **Emotional abuse**
- **Sexual abuse**

- **Neglect**

Abuse can take place **online, offline, or through a combination of both.**

4. Legal Framework

This policy has due regard to the following legislation and statutory guidance, including but not limited to:

Primary Legislation

- Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
- Equality Act 2010
- Sexual Offences Act 2003
- Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015
- Serious Crime Act 2015
- Data Protection Act 2018
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act 2022
- Voyeurism (Offences) Act 2019

Statutory Guidance

- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023
- Prevent Duty Guidance
- Channel Duty Guidance
- Working Together to Improve School Attendance
- Multi-agency Statutory Guidance on Female Genital Mutilation
- DfE guidance on Restrictive Interventions and Reasonable Force

Relevant Non-Statutory Guidance

- Information Sharing (DfE)
- Sharing Nudes and Semi-Nudes
- Filtering and Monitoring Standards
- Teachers' Standards
- Online Safety guidance

Autism Angels will always work in accordance with local safeguarding arrangements and the procedures of the relevant local authority safeguarding partnership.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Safeguarding is the responsibility of **all staff, volunteers, trustees and visitors**.

All Staff and Volunteers

Every adult working on behalf of Autism Angels must:

- place the welfare of the child at the centre of all decision making;
- maintain an attitude of “**it could happen here**”;
- read and understand this policy and Part One of *Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026*;
- know the identity and contact details of the DSL and Deputy DSL;
- recognise signs of abuse, neglect and exploitation;
- understand the additional safeguarding vulnerabilities associated with neurodivergent children;
- report any safeguarding concern immediately;
- record concerns accurately and promptly;
- maintain appropriate professional boundaries;
- contribute to a culture in which children feel safe to speak;
- undertake regular safeguarding and online safety training;
- support multi-agency safeguarding processes where required.

Trustees

The Board of Trustees is responsible for ensuring that Autism Angels has effective safeguarding governance arrangements and that:

- safeguarding is embedded across the organisation;
- policies are reviewed annually;
- sufficient resources are allocated;
- safer recruitment processes are followed;
- allegations against staff are managed appropriately;
- appropriate safeguarding audits and monitoring are undertaken;
- a named Trustee Safeguarding Lead is appointed.

Founder and Charity Lead

The Founder and Charity Lead will ensure that:

- safeguarding policies are implemented effectively;
- staff receive appropriate induction and ongoing training;
- safeguarding arrangements are reviewed regularly;
- appropriate support is provided to the DSL;



- safeguarding concerns are acted upon promptly;
- commissioned schools and local authorities receive safeguarding information where appropriate.

Designated Safeguarding Lead

The DSL has overall operational responsibility for safeguarding and child protection within Autism Angels and will ensure that safeguarding remains central to all aspects of the organisation's work.

The DSL's responsibilities are detailed fully in Section 6 of this policy.

5.1 Staff Safeguarding Training

Safeguarding induction and ongoing training will ensure that staff and volunteers understand how to recognise and respond to specific safeguarding concerns and understand the procedures for reporting any concerns or disclosures immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).

This training reinforces the responsibilities set out in this policy: staff and volunteers must act on concerns promptly, record concerns accurately, report them through the safeguarding procedure, and must not investigate suspected abuse themselves.

6. The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) has lead responsibility for safeguarding and child protection across Autism Angels. The DSL is a senior member of the organisation with the appropriate status, authority, knowledge and time to carry out the role effectively.

The DSL will ensure that safeguarding remains central to all aspects of Autism Angels' work, including therapeutic provision, outdoor learning, equine-assisted activities, family support, volunteer management and commissioned alternative provision placements.

6.1 Availability

The DSL will be available during operational hours to discuss safeguarding concerns with staff, volunteers and external professionals.

Where the DSL is unavailable, the **Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DDSL)** will assume safeguarding responsibilities.

Autism Angels will ensure that appropriate safeguarding cover is available during:

- all provision sessions,

- off-site activities,
- transport activities,
- any holiday programmes,
- and any activity involving children and young people.

6.2 Responsibilities of the DSL

The DSL will:

- take overall responsibility for safeguarding and child protection;
- act as the first point of contact for safeguarding concerns;
- provide advice and support to staff and volunteers;
- make referrals to Children's Social Care, the Police, the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), Channel or other agencies where appropriate;
- contribute to strategy discussions and multi-agency meetings;
- attend child protection conferences, core groups, TAC meetings, Early Help meetings and EHCP reviews where appropriate;
- maintain secure and confidential safeguarding records;
- monitor patterns of attendance, disengagement, emotional wellbeing and behaviour that may indicate safeguarding concerns;
- promote educational outcomes for children who have a social worker, children in need, children subject to child protection plans and children with EHCPs;
- ensure safeguarding information is shared appropriately with commissioning schools, local authorities and other professionals;
- oversee the transfer of safeguarding records when children move provision;
- ensure safeguarding policies are reviewed annually;
- ensure staff receive safeguarding and online safety training;
- keep safeguarding practice updated in line with legislation and local safeguarding partnership procedures;
- maintain professional curiosity and encourage a culture of vigilance.

6.3 Neurodivergent and Therapeutic Safeguarding

The DSL will ensure that safeguarding practice within Autism Angels reflects the needs of neurodivergent children and young people.

This includes ensuring that:

- communication differences are recognised;
- sensory needs are considered during safeguarding conversations;
- alternative communication methods are available;
- disclosures are not discounted because of differences in presentation;
- behaviour is understood as communication;
- and reasonable adjustments are made throughout safeguarding processes.



The DSL will ensure that safeguarding decisions are informed by the child's individual communication profile, sensory profile, trauma history and emotional regulation needs.

7. Multi-Agency Working

Autism Angels recognises that effective safeguarding depends upon **timely, collaborative and professional multi-agency working**.

We will work proactively with:

- schools,
- local authorities,
- Children's Social Care,
- Police,
- NHS services,
- CAMHS,
- educational psychologists,
- occupational therapists,
- speech and language therapists,
- social workers,
- youth offending services,
- virtual schools,
- and other professionals involved with the child.

As a specialist alternative provision provider, Autism Angels often supports children who have experienced school breakdown, emotionally based school avoidance, exclusion, trauma, mental health difficulties or complex SEND needs.

We will therefore actively participate in:

- Early Help assessments,
- Team Around the Child (TAC) meetings,
- Child in Need meetings,
- Child Protection conferences,
- Core Groups,
- EHCP annual reviews,
- professional network meetings,
- alternative provision planning meetings,
- EOTAS reviews,
- attendance planning meetings,
- and transition planning meetings.



Autism Angels will contribute relevant safeguarding information and professional observations to support holistic decision making.

7.1 Working with Commissioning Schools and Local Authorities

Where a child is placed with Autism Angels by a school, local authority or other commissioning body, we will work in partnership with the placing organisation.

This includes, where appropriate:

- attendance reporting;
- safeguarding updates;
- notification of significant incidents;
- participation in reviews;
- sharing of risk assessments;
- and collaborative planning around the child's welfare and educational outcomes.

Autism Angels remains committed to ensuring that safeguarding responsibilities are clearly understood between all agencies involved in a child's placement.

7.2 Information Sharing

Autism Angels recognises that **timely information sharing can be critical in protecting children from harm.**

Staff will understand that:

- safeguarding concerns should be shared on a **need-to-know basis**;
- information may be shared without parental consent where there is a lawful safeguarding reason to do so;
- UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 do **not** prevent appropriate safeguarding information sharing;
- concerns should be shared with the DSL immediately.

The organisation will follow the principles set out in **DfE Information Sharing guidance** and **Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023**.

8. Early Help

Autism Angels is committed to identifying and responding to emerging needs **at the earliest possible opportunity**.

Early Help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any stage in a child's life.

Many children attending Autism Angels have experienced:

- prolonged anxiety,
- school avoidance,
- exclusion,
- trauma,
- adverse childhood experiences,
- family stress,
- social isolation,
- mental health difficulties,
- or unmet special educational needs.

Staff will therefore be particularly alert to indicators that additional support may be required.

8.1 Children Who May Benefit from Early Help

Early Help may be appropriate where a child:

- has SEND or an EHCP;
- is autistic, ADHD or neurodivergent;
- experiences mental health difficulties;
- is a young carer;
- is affected by domestic abuse;
- is affected by parental mental ill health;
- is affected by substance misuse;
- is experiencing emotional dysregulation;
- has experienced trauma;
- is at risk of exploitation;
- is frequently absent from education;
- is at risk of exclusion;
- has returned from care;
- is privately fostered;
- is homeless or insecurely housed;
- or where family circumstances are placing the child at increased risk.

8.2 Autism Angels Approach to Early Help

Where appropriate, Autism Angels will:

- discuss concerns with the family;
- seek consent where appropriate;
- contribute to Early Help assessments;
- act as a supporting professional;
- attend multi-agency meetings;
- provide therapeutic observations;
- support attendance and engagement planning;

- and help coordinate appropriate support.

The DSL will oversee all Early Help involvement.

Where concerns escalate or a child may be suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, Autism Angels will make a referral to Children's Social Care without delay.

9. Recognising Abuse and Neglect

All staff and volunteers will receive training to recognise indicators of abuse, neglect, exploitation and vulnerability.

Staff must remember that **abuse can occur in any family, community, culture or socio-economic group** and that many children may not disclose abuse directly.

Staff will maintain an attitude of **"it could happen here"** and exercise professional curiosity whenever they have concerns.

9.1 The Four Categories of Abuse

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse may include:

- hitting,
- shaking,
- throwing,
- poisoning,
- burning,
- scalding,
- drowning,
- suffocating,
- or otherwise causing physical harm.

It may also include fabricated or induced illness.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse may involve:

- humiliation,
- rejection,
- intimidation,
- excessive criticism,
- exposure to domestic abuse,
- controlling behaviour,

- unrealistic expectations,
- isolation,
- or persistent emotional harm.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse may include:

- rape,
- sexual assault,
- sexual touching,
- grooming,
- exploitation,
- exposure to sexual material,
- online sexual abuse,
- image-based abuse,
- and encouraging children to engage in sexual activity.

Neglect

Neglect may include failure to provide:

- adequate food,
- clothing,
- shelter,
- supervision,
- medical care,
- emotional support,
- educational access,
- or protection from harm.

9.2 Additional Vulnerability of Neurodivergent Children

Autism Angels recognises that neurodivergent children may be at increased risk because they may:

- communicate differently;
- struggle to identify unsafe situations;
- be highly trusting of adults;
- experience social isolation;
- be more vulnerable to manipulation;
- have sensory responses that mask indicators of abuse;
- or present distress through behaviour rather than verbal disclosure.

Staff will never assume that behavioural changes are solely attributable to autism, ADHD or another neurodevelopmental condition.

Any unexplained change in presentation, behaviour, emotional regulation, communication, attendance, social interaction or physical wellbeing will be considered carefully and discussed with the DSL.

10. Responding to Safeguarding Concerns

Every member of staff and every volunteer has a responsibility to act **immediately** if they have any concern about a child's welfare.

A concern may arise from:

- a direct disclosure;
- an observation;
- a change in behaviour;
- information from another child;
- information from a parent;
- information from a professional;
- online activity;
- attendance patterns;
- unexplained injuries;
- or any other indication that a child may be at risk.

10.1 Immediate Action

Where a child is believed to be at immediate risk of significant harm, staff will:

1. Contact the DSL immediately.
2. If necessary, contact emergency services (999).
3. Ensure the child is kept as safe as possible.
4. Not leave the child alone if doing so would increase risk.

10.2 Reporting Procedure

All concerns must be reported to the DSL **as soon as possible on the same day**.

If the DSL is unavailable, concerns must be reported to the Deputy DSL.

If neither is available and the concern is urgent, the member of staff must contact Children's Social Care directly and inform the DSL at the earliest opportunity.

Autism Angels will never delay action because a concern appears uncertain or because additional evidence is not yet available.

Staff are **not responsible for investigating abuse**.

Their responsibility is to:

- observe,
- record,
- report,
- and safeguard.

10.3 Professional Curiosity

Staff will be encouraged to ask respectful, open questions where appropriate and to remain professionally curious.

Repeated low-level concerns may be as significant as a single serious incident.

All concerns, discussions, decisions and actions will be recorded accurately.

11. Managing Disclosures

Children often disclose abuse gradually, indirectly or through behaviour.

Autism Angels recognises that many of the children we support may:

- disclose through play,
- disclose through art,
- disclose while outdoors,
- disclose while caring for animals,
- disclose during movement,
- disclose non-verbally,
- or disclose after a period of trust building.

Staff must be prepared to respond calmly and sensitively.

11.1 If a Child Makes a Disclosure

Staff will:

- listen carefully;
- remain calm;
- allow the child to speak freely;
- avoid interrupting;
- avoid expressing shock or disbelief;
- reassure the child that they have done the right thing by telling someone;
- explain that the information will need to be shared with people who can help keep them safe;
- avoid making promises of confidentiality;
- avoid asking leading questions;

- avoid investigating;
- record the disclosure using the child's own words wherever possible;
- and report immediately to the DSL.

Appropriate prompts include:

- "Tell me what happened."
- "Explain that to me."
- "Describe what happened."

Staff should not ask:

- "Did your dad hit you?"
- "Was it your mum?"
- "Are you sure?"

11.2 Supporting Neurodivergent Children During Disclosure

Staff will make reasonable adjustments such as:

- reducing language demands;
- allowing processing time;
- using visual supports;
- allowing movement;
- allowing access to sensory regulation tools;
- using familiar adults where appropriate;
- and avoiding unnecessary eye contact requirements.

The child's communication style must be respected throughout the safeguarding process.

12. Record Keeping and Information Sharing

Accurate, timely and secure record keeping is an essential part of safeguarding practice.

All safeguarding concerns will be recorded by the DSL and stored securely on the secure SharePoint Drive.

Records will be:

- factual;
- dated and timed;
- signed by the person making the record;
- stored securely;
- and retained in accordance with data protection and safeguarding requirements.

Records will clearly distinguish between:

- fact,
- observation,
- opinion,
- and information provided by others.

The DSL will maintain a confidential safeguarding file for any child where safeguarding concerns have arisen.

These records may include:

- concern forms,
- disclosure records,
- body maps,
- emails,
- professional correspondence,
- meeting minutes,
- referrals,
- social care information,
- police information,
- EHCP safeguarding information,
- and chronology records.

Safeguarding records will be transferred securely to another education provider when a child moves provision and will be transferred within **five working days**, or sooner where there is an immediate safeguarding need.

The DSL will ensure that all information sharing is lawful, proportionate, necessary and in the child's best interests.

13. Confidentiality

Autism Angels recognises that effective safeguarding depends upon children trusting adults enough to share concerns. We also recognise that safeguarding information is highly sensitive and must be handled appropriately.

Children and young people will be informed, in a way that is appropriate to their age, communication profile and level of understanding, that staff cannot promise to keep information secret where there is a concern that they or another person may be at risk of harm.

All staff and volunteers will:

- treat safeguarding information as confidential;
- share information only on a need-to-know basis;

- follow the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018;
- record safeguarding concerns accurately and promptly;
- not discuss safeguarding matters in public or inappropriate settings;
- seek guidance from the DSL where there is uncertainty about information sharing.

Information will be shared with external agencies where necessary to protect a child, promote their welfare, or comply with legal or statutory duties.

Parents will normally be informed of concerns and referrals unless doing so would place a child at increased risk of harm or prejudice a police or social care investigation.

14. Child-on-Child Abuse

Autism Angels has a **zero-tolerance approach** to all forms of abuse, including abuse between children and young people.

We recognise that child-on-child abuse can occur between children of any age and may occur:

- within Autism Angels,
- between children attending different settings,
- online,
- or within community contexts.

All staff will understand that child-on-child abuse is a safeguarding issue and should never be dismissed as:

- banter,
- horseplay,
- relationship drama,
- part of growing up,
- or a feature of neurodivergence.

Forms of Child-on-Child Abuse

Child-on-child abuse may include:

- bullying and cyberbullying;
- prejudice-based bullying;
- physical abuse;
- emotional abuse;
- sexual harassment;
- sexual violence;
- coercion and manipulation;
- image-based abuse;
- the consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images;

- upskirting;
- initiation or hazing behaviours;
- and abuse within intimate personal relationships.

Neurodivergent Considerations

Autism Angels recognises that autistic and otherwise neurodivergent children may:

- misunderstand social boundaries;
- struggle to interpret consent;
- imitate behaviours without understanding their meaning;
- be more vulnerable to exploitation;
- be targeted by peers because of perceived difference;
- or communicate experiences differently.

Safeguarding responses will therefore be informed by:

- communication needs,
- developmental understanding,
- sensory factors,
- trauma history,
- and the child's individual profile.

All allegations or concerns involving child-on-child abuse will be reported immediately to the DSL.

The needs of both the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator will be considered, and appropriate support will be provided to each.

15. Online Safety and Filtering and Monitoring

Autism Angels recognises that online safety is an integral part of safeguarding.

Children and young people accessing Autism Angels may be vulnerable to:

- online grooming,
- exploitation,
- radicalisation,
- cyberbullying,
- harmful content,
- self-harm and suicide content,
- pornography,
- financial scams,
- gaming-related risks,
- social media manipulation,

- and online coercion.

15.1 The Four Categories of Online Risk

Staff training will cover the four categories identified in Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026:

Content

Exposure to harmful or illegal material, including:

- pornography,
- racism,
- misogyny,
- self-harm,
- suicide,
- extremism,
- anti-Semitism,
- conspiracy theories,
- and misinformation.

Contact

Harmful interaction with others, including:

- grooming,
- exploitation,
- coercion,
- fraud,
- and adults posing as children.

Conduct

Harmful online behaviour, including:

- sharing explicit images,
- bullying,
- harassment,
- and abusive communications.

Commerce

Online financial risks including:

- gambling,
- scams,
- phishing,
- inappropriate advertising,
- and financial exploitation.

15.2 Filtering and Monitoring

Children and Young people attending the provision do not access the internet through Autism Angels' systems, and therefore there is no organisational network requiring filtering and monitoring software.

Children will be supported to develop safe online behaviours through discussion, modelling, therapeutic work and appropriate education.

Where technology is used by staff for administrative purposes, this is limited to authorised staff use only and is managed through appropriate security measures, including secure accounts, password protection, data protection procedures, and access controls.

16. Specific Safeguarding Issues

Staff will be aware of the following safeguarding issues, all of which may affect children attending Autism Angels:

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

CSE involves coercion, manipulation or deception into sexual activity in exchange for something the child needs or wants, or for the benefit of the perpetrator.

Indicators may include:

- unexplained gifts,
- missing episodes,
- older associates,
- changes in behaviour,
- online sexual activity,
- or unexplained money.

Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)

CCE includes county lines and other forms of criminal exploitation.

Indicators may include:

- carrying drugs or weapons,
- unexplained travel,



- missing education,
- gang association,
- unexplained money,
- or changes in friendship groups.

Child Trafficking and Modern Slavery

Child trafficking is a form of child abuse and exploitation. It involves the recruitment, movement, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation. Children may be trafficked within the UK as well as across international borders and may be exploited sexually, criminally, financially or through forced labour or domestic servitude.

Staff will remain alert to possible indicators including unexplained travel or movement, going missing, being accompanied or controlled by unfamiliar adults, fearfulness, restricted freedom, unexplained money or possessions, changes in behaviour or relationships, criminal or sexual exploitation, or a child appearing to be under the control of another person.

Any concern that a child may be experiencing or at risk of trafficking or modern slavery must be reported immediately to the DSL. Staff must not investigate the concern themselves. The DSL will consider referral to Children's Social Care, the Police and other appropriate safeguarding agencies. Where there is an immediate risk of harm, emergency services will be contacted without delay.

County Lines

Children may be exploited to transport drugs, money or weapons across geographical areas.

Autism Angels will treat county lines as a safeguarding issue requiring immediate DSL involvement.

Non-Recent Abuse

Autism Angels recognises that a child or young person may disclose abuse that occurred some time ago. A disclosure of non-recent abuse will be treated with the same seriousness as any other safeguarding disclosure.

Staff must listen carefully, remain calm, avoid asking leading questions or investigating the allegation, record the disclosure accurately using the child's own words wherever possible, and report it immediately to the DSL.

The fact that the abuse occurred in the past does not remove the need for safeguarding action. The person alleged to have caused harm may continue to pose a risk to the child, other children or vulnerable people. The DSL will consider the appropriate referral to Children's



Social Care, the Police, LADO or other relevant agencies in accordance with safeguarding procedures.

Domestic Abuse

Children can suffer harm through experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse.

This includes:

- emotional abuse,
- coercive control,
- intimidation,
- threats,
- physical violence,
- and economic abuse.

Mental Health

Mental health concerns may indicate that a child has experienced abuse, neglect or exploitation.

Staff will remain alert to:

- self-harm,
- suicidal ideation,
- eating difficulties,
- emotional withdrawal,
- significant anxiety,
- trauma responses,
- and sudden behavioural change.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

FGM is illegal and a form of child abuse.

Known cases involving girls under 18 must be reported to the police in accordance with statutory duties.

Forced Marriage and Honour-Based Abuse

Staff will be alert to:

- restrictions on freedom,
- threats from family members,
- unexplained travel abroad,
- withdrawal from education,
- or expressions of fear relating to family honour.

Prevent and Radicalisation

Autism Angels has due regard to the Prevent Duty.

Staff will be alert to signs that a child may be vulnerable to radicalisation or extremist influence and will report concerns to the DSL, who may refer to the Channel process where appropriate.

Missing Education

Children missing education are at increased risk of:

- abuse,
- neglect,
- exploitation,
- trafficking,
- forced marriage,
- criminal exploitation,
- and radicalisation.

Attendance concerns will therefore always be considered from a safeguarding perspective.

17. Safeguarding Neurodivergent Children

This section is intentionally specific to Autism Angels and reflects our specialist expertise.

We recognise that neurodivergent children may present safeguarding concerns differently from neurotypical children.

Staff will understand that a child may:

- communicate non-verbally;
- use AAC or visual communication;
- experience selective or situational mutism;
- mask distress;
- present through shutdown, withdrawal or avoidance;
- present through dysregulation, aggression or flight behaviours;
- have atypical responses to pain or injury;
- struggle to identify abuse;
- struggle to recognise unsafe relationships;
- be highly trusting of adults;
- be vulnerable to online manipulation;
- or disclose abuse indirectly through play, art, movement, animals or repetitive interests.

Autism Angels will make reasonable adjustments during safeguarding processes including:

- reduced language demands;
- visual supports;
- processing time;
- access to sensory regulation tools;
- movement breaks;
- familiar trusted adults;
- outdoor conversations where appropriate;
- and flexible communication methods.

No safeguarding concern will be dismissed solely because it may be associated with autism, ADHD or another neurodevelopmental condition.

Staff will maintain professional curiosity and seek guidance from the DSL whenever there is uncertainty.

18. Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

Autism Angels supports many children experiencing significant anxiety, trauma, school avoidance and emotional distress.

Staff will understand that mental health difficulties may:

- be a consequence of abuse or neglect;
- increase vulnerability to exploitation;
- affect communication;
- impact attendance and engagement;
- and require safeguarding intervention.

Any concern relating to:

- self-harm,
- suicidal ideation,
- suicidal behaviour,
- significant emotional deterioration,
- or risk-taking behaviour

must be reported immediately to the DSL.

Autism Angels will work collaboratively with:

- parents and carers,
- schools,
- CAMHS,
- GPs,

- crisis services,
- and other professionals

to ensure that appropriate support and risk management are in place.

Where there is an immediate risk to life or serious harm, emergency services will be contacted without delay.

19. Positive Behaviour Support

Autism Angels is committed to a **trauma-informed, low-arousal, relationship-based approach** to behaviour support.

We recognise that behaviour is communication and that many children attending Autism Angels have experienced trauma, exclusion, sensory overwhelm, anxiety or unmet neurodevelopmental needs.

Our approach prioritises:

- connection before correction;
- co-regulation;
- sensory regulation;
- predictable routines;
- movement;
- choice and autonomy;
- relational safety;
- and positive behaviour support.

20. Physical Contact

We do not use force or physical restraint with any child or young person. Each child is supported to make safe choices for themselves, in word and actions. Children are encouraged to move or children are asked to move away from others and take responsibility for their own safety.

Should there be a situation where a situation has escalated then children, animals and environments are made safe so the child is free to express themselves.

We use a term 'Lock Down' which means remove others and reduce risk in environments. Team members are to keep themselves safe

If harm to self or others comes into play then a light touch with warning before can be used. Any dangerous objects are removed as soon as possible.



Parents are rung as a support NOT a sanction if needed.

Incident reports are written up and shared where necessary.

Parents and the child are supported in a way that best meets the needs at the time.

Risk assessments are written and the team will have a full de-brief about moving forward and what learning has come for anyone involved. What would we do differently? Did we miss any whispers? Did we have enough information from parents/school?

Supervision is given.

Appropriate physical contact is sometimes necessary in a therapeutic, educational, equine and outdoor environment.

Examples may include:

- providing first aid;
- supporting a distressed child;
- assisting with mobility;
- guiding a child safely around animals;
- helping with protective equipment;
- and demonstrating safe equine or outdoor techniques.

Staff will always consider:

- the child's wishes and feelings;
- sensory preferences;
- trauma history;
- communication profile;
- age and developmental understanding;
- cultural considerations;
- and whether a less intrusive alternative is available.

Physical contact must always be:

- appropriate,
- respectful,
- proportionate,
- and in the child's best interests.

Any physical contact that causes concern must be reported immediately to the DSL.

21. Outdoor, Equine and Farm-Based Safeguarding



This section reflects the unique nature of Autism Angels' provision.

Children may access:

- woodland,
- fields,
- rivers,
- gardens,
- equine facilities,
- farm environments,
- cabins,
- shelters,
- and community locations.

Safeguarding within these environments includes:

- appropriate supervision ratios;
- dynamic risk assessment;
- clear boundaries;
- communication systems;
- emergency procedures;
- first aid provision;
- animal welfare protocols;
- transport safety;
- weather monitoring;
- water safety;
- and lone-working risk assessments.

Staff will remain particularly vigilant in outdoor environments where children may disclose concerns during walking, animal care, quiet reflection or therapeutic activity.

These environments are often protective and therapeutic for neurodivergent children, but they require robust safeguarding systems and supervision.

Autism Angels will ensure that all outdoor and equine activities operate within documented risk assessments and safeguarding procedures.

22. Transporting Children and Off-Site Activities

Autism Angels recognises that many of our therapeutic activities take place in outdoor, equine and community settings and that children may be transported as part of their provision.

Safeguarding responsibilities apply equally during transport, transitions between locations, community visits, woodland activities, equine sessions, therapeutic walks and any off-site activity.

22.1 Transport

Where Autism Angels staff transport children or young people:

- parental consent will be obtained where required;
- appropriate insurance will be in place;
- vehicles will be roadworthy and legally compliant;
- seat belts will be worn;
- journeys will be recorded where appropriate;
- lone transport arrangements will be risk assessed;

Where a child becomes distressed during transport, staff will prioritise safety, de-escalation and communication with the DSL and parents/carers where appropriate.

22.2 Off-Site Activities

All off-site activities will be subject to appropriate planning and risk assessment.

See also Guidance around 'How To Determine Which Children Can Be Taken Off Site'

Risk assessments will consider:

- safeguarding risks;
- supervision arrangements;
- communication systems;
- emergency procedures;
- medical needs;
- sensory needs;
- behaviour support requirements;
- weather conditions;
- animal-related risks;
- transport arrangements;
- and environmental hazards.

Children will be supervised by adults who are appropriately trained and familiar with the child's needs.

Any safeguarding concern arising during an off-site activity will be reported immediately to the DSL.

23. Children Missing Education and Attendance

Some children attending Autism Angels may have experienced prolonged school absence, exclusion, anxiety-related non-attendance or disrupted educational histories. Autism Angels recognises that they could be at increased risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation, mental health difficulties and social isolation.

23.1 Attendance Monitoring

Attendance will be monitored for every child attending Autism Angels.

Where placements are commissioned by schools or local authorities, attendance information can be shared on a weekly basis with a designated contact in accordance with parental permission, commissioning agreements and safeguarding requirements.

Unexplained absence will always be considered from a safeguarding perspective.

23.2 Failure to Attend

Where a child is expected but does not attend:

1. Parental Contact: Prior contact should be received from the parent or carer if a child will be late or unable to attend on a given day.
2. Direct Contact: If no prior notification has been received, we will contact the parent or carer directly to check on the child's whereabouts.
3. Notification: If we are still unable to make contact with the parent or carer, we will notify the school or local authority immediately to ensure the pupil's safety and safeguarding.
4. If there is there is a concern for safety, Children's Social Care and/or the Police may be contacted.
5. Any concerns regarding the child's welfare will be discussed with the DSL immediately.

24. Working with Schools, Local Authorities and Professionals

Autism Angels is committed to collaborative multi-agency practice and recognises that effective safeguarding depends upon professionals working together.

24.1 Partnership Working

We work closely with:

- The child and young person
- Parents and Carers
- commissioning schools;
- local authority SEND teams;

- alternative provision and EOTAS teams;
- social workers;
- educational psychologists;
- CAMHS;
- occupational therapists;
- speech and language therapists;
- health professionals;
- and other agencies involved with the child.

Autism Angels actively participates in:

- EHCP annual reviews;
- Early Help meetings;
- Team Around the Child meetings;
- Child in Need meetings;
- placement planning meetings;

24.2 Therapeutic Professionals

Autism Angels does not directly commission occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, or other external therapeutic services.

We work in partnership with all professionals involved with the child, contribute therapeutic observations, participate fully in EHCP reviews and multi-agency planning, and highlight unmet needs where additional specialist support is identified.

This collaborative approach ensures that therapeutic, educational and safeguarding planning remains joined up and centred on the child.

24.3 Information Sharing

Where appropriate and lawful, Autism Angels will share safeguarding information with commissioning schools, local authorities and relevant professionals in order to:

- protect children from harm;
- support welfare planning;
- promote educational outcomes;
- and ensure continuity of safeguarding support.

25. Safer Recruitment and Volunteers

Autism Angels is committed to ensuring that unsuitable individuals are prevented from working with children.



We will operate safer recruitment procedures in accordance with Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026.

25.1 Recruitment Checks

Where appropriate pre-engagement checks will be completed for staff, volunteers, trustees and other adults working in regulated activity.

These include:

- enhanced DBS checks;
- barred list checks;
- identity checks;
- right to work checks where applicable;
- reference checks where applicable;
- qualification checks where applicable;
- and other checks required by legislation.

25.2 Volunteers

Volunteers form an important part of Autism Angels' work.

All volunteers will:

- be subject to a DBS check where appropriate;
- receive safeguarding induction;
- understand this policy;
- know how to report concerns;
- be appropriately supervised;
- and receive training appropriate to their role.

Our volunteering programme is designed as a pathway for the young people in our community to explore routes into employment, enterprise and volunteering. Autism Angels recognises that many of our volunteers are themselves neurodivergent. Appropriate supervision and support arrangements will therefore be provided.

Many have previously have accessed our services and began working and learning with us as teenagers, always under supervision.

For these volunteers, formal application processes and/or external references are not sought due to their age at entry and the length and depth of our direct involvement with them.

26. Allegations Against Staff and Low-Level Concerns



Autism Angels takes all allegations concerning adults working with children extremely seriously.

- This section applies to:
- employees;
- volunteers;
- trustees;
- work experience
- visitors
- students;
- and any adult working on behalf of Autism Angels.

26.1 Allegations That May Meet the Harm Threshold

An allegation may meet the harm threshold if an adult has:

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child or may have harmed a child;
- committed a criminal offence against a child;
- behaved towards a child in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm;
- or behaved in a way that may make them unsuitable to work with children.

Such allegations will be reported immediately to the DSL and Charity Lead.

Where the allegation concerns the DSL, it will be reported immediately to the Board of Trustees.

The relevant Local Authority Designated Officer will be contacted for advice before any investigation is undertaken.

26.2 Low-Level Concerns

Autism Angels encourages a culture in which staff and volunteers feel confident to report any concerns about adults working with children.

- Examples may include:
- boundary concerns;
- inappropriate language;
- over-familiarity;
- favouritism;
- inappropriate communication;
- or other behaviour inconsistent with the Code of Conduct.

Low-level concerns will be recorded, reviewed and managed appropriately.

A pattern of low-level concerns may indicate a wider safeguarding issue.

27. Whistleblowing

Autism Angels is committed to a culture of openness, honesty and accountability.

Staff, volunteers and trustees have a duty to raise concerns where they believe that:

- a child is at risk;
- safeguarding procedures are not being followed;
- unsafe practice is occurring;
- or senior leaders have failed to act appropriately.

Concerns should normally be raised with the DSL or Charity Lead.

Where this is not appropriate, concerns may be raised with:

- the Board of Trustees
- the Local Authority Designated Officer;
- Children's Social Care;
- the Police;
- or the NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line 0800 028 0285 or email help@NSPCC.org.uk

No individual will be victimised for raising a genuine safeguarding concern.

28. Alternative Provision and EOTAS Safeguarding Responsibilities

Autism Angels operates as a specialist Alternative Wellbeing and Learning Provision and Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) provider and recognises the additional safeguarding responsibilities associated with commissioned placements.

28.1 Children at Increased Risk

- Children accessing alternative provision are often at increased risk of:
- exploitation;
- criminal involvement;
- county lines;
- mental health difficulties;
- self-harm;
- suicide risk;
- social isolation;
- school disengagement;
- attendance difficulties;
- and trauma-related behaviours.

28.2 Commissioned Placements

For all placements Autism Angels will:

- maintain appropriate safeguarding records;
- share attendance information where agreed;
- notify commissioners of significant safeguarding incidents where appropriate;
- participate in placement reviews;
- contribute to EHCP and multi-agency meetings;
- share risk assessments where appropriate;
- and work collaboratively to promote the child's safety, wellbeing and educational progress.

28.3 Ongoing Responsibility

Autism Angels recognises that safeguarding responsibility is shared across agencies.

We will ensure that safeguarding concerns are never overlooked because a child is placed by another organisation.

Every child attending Autism Angels will receive the same level of safeguarding protection regardless of funding source, placement type or commissioning arrangement.

29. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed:

- * annually;
- * following changes in legislation or statutory guidance;
- * following learning from safeguarding incidents or reviews;
- * or where organisational changes require revision.

The DSL will ensure that all staff, volunteers and trustees are informed of any updates.

The most current version of this policy will be available to staff, volunteers, parents/carers, commissioning schools and local authorities on request.