

# British Caving Association

## Safeguarding Policy and Guidelines

### Introduction

Whether clubs wish to allow young people or vulnerable adults to use club facilities or attend club activities is a matter for each club to decide. That said, for caving to continue to attract an active and enthusiastic membership, making it possible for youngsters and vulnerable adults to take part would be a very valuable step. This policy sets out how clubs can do this, how they can safeguard children and vulnerable adults, and what to do if there is a suspicion of abuse.

This policy applies to recreational cavers. Organisations who specialise in working with young people are expected to have and to conform to their own policies.

### Policy statement

For the purposes of this policy,

- A child is someone under the age of 18.
- A vulnerable adult is someone who may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.

The British Caving Association acknowledges the duty of care to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults. The BCA is committed to ensuring safeguarding practice reflects statutory responsibilities, government guidance and complies with best practice.

The BCA recognises that the welfare and interests of children or vulnerable adults are paramount in all circumstances. It aims to ensure that regardless of age, ability or disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation, socio-economic background, all children and vulnerable adults:

- have a positive and enjoyable experience of caving in an environment that is appropriate to their needs
- are protected from abuse whilst caving or using club facilities, or outside of caving for example whilst using social media with club members

The BCA acknowledges that some children or vulnerable adults, including disabled people or those from ethnic minority communities, can be particularly vulnerable to abuse and we accept the responsibility to take reasonable and appropriate steps to ensure their welfare.

As part of our safeguarding policy the BCA will

- promote and prioritise the safety and wellbeing of children and vulnerable adults.
- ensure everyone understands their roles and responsibilities in respect of safeguarding and is provided with resources to recognise, identify and respond to signs of abuse, neglect and other safeguarding concerns relating to children or vulnerable adults.
- ensure appropriate action is taken in the event of incidents/concerns of abuse and support provided to the individual/s who raise or disclose the concern.
- ensure that confidential, detailed and accurate records of all safeguarding concerns are maintained and securely stored.

- ensure robust safeguarding arrangements and procedures are in operation.

This policy and procedures will be widely promoted and are mandatory for all BCA members. Failure to comply with the policy and procedures will be addressed without delay and could ultimately result in exclusion from the BCA.

### **Raising awareness**

BCA is keen to encourage member clubs to offer activities for young people and vulnerable adults. The BCA has a 'good practice' document which is an appendix to this safeguarding policy. When the policy is introduced, the policy will be widely publicised on the BCA website and in publications, and the good practice document will be promoted to all members. In addition there are Guidelines for clubs which set out practical measures for dealing with safeguarding.

### **Monitoring**

The policy will be reviewed a year after development and then every three years, or in the following circumstances:

- changes in legislation and/or government guidance
- as required by any bodies that provide grant aid to the BCA or member clubs
- as a result of any other significant change or event.

### **Confidentiality**

Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned. Information should be handled and disseminated on a need to know basis only, which may include the following people:

- BCA Safeguarding Officer
- The relevant Club's Officers
- The parents of the child
- The person making the allegation
- Social Services/Police
- BCA Council members
- The alleged abuser (and parents if the alleged abuser is a child)
- If a club member's privileges are suspended or revoked, it is possible that officers of other clubs will also have to be informed

All information should be stored in a secure place with limited access to designated people, in line with data protection laws.

### **Clubs wishing to offer activities for children or vulnerable adults**

There are three scenarios:

- a) Parents are present and supervise their child, or a vulnerable adult related to them.  
Or,
- b) Parents entrust their child or relative's care to a responsible adult who is well known to the family. Or,
- c) The club undertakes to care for a child, in which case appropriate vetting steps including a DBS check are required for the adults directly involved in that care.

So that everyone is clear about how this works, there is a **consent form** appended to this policy, which parents are required to sign. A separate document provides detailed **guidelines for clubs**, and all BCA members should comply with the '**good practice**' document.



## **Types of abuse**

Abuse can fall into the following categories

### **Physical**

This includes assault, hitting, slapping, pushing, giving the wrong (or no) medication, restraining someone or only letting them do certain things at certain times.

### **Sexual**

This involves forcing or enticing a child or vulnerable adult to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not they are aware of what is happening. It includes rape, indecent exposure, sexual harassment, inappropriate looking or touching, sexual teasing or innuendo, taking sexual photographs, making a child or vulnerable adult look at pornography or watch sexual acts, or sexual assault.

### **Psychological**

This includes emotional abuse, threats of harm or abandonment, depriving someone of contact with someone else, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, putting pressure on someone to do something, harassment, verbal abuse, cyber bullying, isolation or unreasonable and unjustified withdrawal of services or support networks.

### **Financial or material**

This includes theft, fraud, internet scamming, putting pressure on someone about their financial arrangements (including wills, property, inheritance or financial transactions) or the misuse or stealing of property, possessions or benefits.

### **Discriminatory**

This includes types of harassment or insults because of someone's race, gender or gender identity, age, disability, sexual orientation or religion.

### **Neglect and acts of omission**

This includes ignoring medical, emotional or physical care needs, failure to provide access to educational services, or not giving someone what they need to help them live, such as medication, enough nutrition and heating.

### **Bullying**

BCA has a separate policy which defines bullying and sets out possible actions to take.

## Possible Signs of Abuse

The BCA acknowledges that its members are not experts at recognising abuse. The BCA therefore expects members to discuss any concerns they may have with regard to the welfare of a child or vulnerable adult immediately with the person in charge (see section 'What You Should Do Next'). If this is not practical and the situation is deemed to be too serious to delay then advice can be sought from Social Services or the Police.

It is important to recognise that some children or vulnerable adults may have additional vulnerabilities and may face additional barriers or difficulties in communicating any concerns or problems because of their race, gender, age, abilities, religion, sexual orientation, or political persuasion. Members need to recognise this and be particularly sensitive should concerns be raised by such children or vulnerable adults or in relation to them.

Below are listed some of the characteristics which may be evidence of abuse. These are by no means exhaustive and are only indicators of potential abuse, **not** confirmation.

- Unexplained or suspicious injuries such as bruising, cuts or burns, particularly if situated on a part of the body not normally prone to injury.
- An injury of which the explanation seems inconsistent and /or the child or vulnerable adult is unwilling to discuss.
- The child or vulnerable adult describes what appears to be an abusive act involving them.
- Unexplained behaviour changes e.g. becoming very quiet, withdrawn, or displaying sudden outbursts of temper.
- Inappropriate sexual awareness.
- Distrustful of adults, particularly those with whom a close relationship would normally be expected.
- Difficulty making friends.
- A child or vulnerable adult being prevented from socialising
- Displaying variation in eating patterns including overeating or loss of appetite.
- Becoming increasingly unkempt or dirty.

It must be recognised that the presence of one or more of these indicators is not proof that actual abuse is taking place. **It is not** the responsibility of BCA members to decide whether abuse is occurring, **but it is their responsibility to act upon any concerns** (see section 'What You Should Do Next').

## **Advice to members**

### **How to Respond to a Disclosure, Suspicion or Allegation**

A child or vulnerable adult in your care may indicate to you that they are being abused in some way or information may come to you of possible abuse. On receiving this information you should:

- React calmly: do not rush into inappropriate action. What you are told may be very shocking but it is important you give the child or vulnerable adult some stability;
- Reassure the child or vulnerable adult that they are not to blame and that they did the right thing to tell someone, i.e. you, about the incident;
- Take the child or vulnerable adult seriously and listen carefully to them. Recognise how difficult it was for them to tell you;
- Only ask questions which help to clarify the situation. Do not question any more than is strictly necessary, and avoid asking leading questions.
- If possible allow only one adult to talk to the child or vulnerable adult to begin with.
- Try not to make the child or vulnerable adult repeat their account unnecessarily;
- Do not make promises you cannot keep. Explain that you may have to tell other people in order to stop what is happening but that you will endeavour to keep the incident as confidential as possible; and
- Make a full record of what has been said, heard or seen as soon as possible, using the BCA safeguarding incident report form.
- Notify your club's chair or other senior committee member
- Notify BCA's National Safeguarding Officer
- If criminal behaviour is suspected, then either you or a member of your club's committee should make a referral to police or social services.

Do not:

- Take sole responsibility for further action (see section 'What You Should Do Next' on Page 13)
- Approach or try to contact the alleged abuser
- Ignore what has happened
- Make promises you cannot keep
- In cases of suspected criminal behaviour, it is not your job, nor that of club or BCA officers, to investigate

### **What happens if you are accused of an abusive action**

In the event of an accusation:

- Make notes of all your actions/contacts with the child or vulnerable adult in question as soon as possible.
- Seek access to professional and legal advice.
- Ensure that you are no longer working with the child/children or vulnerable adults making the allegation.
- Follow the procedures laid out in the Safeguarding Policy and supporting documents.
- Accept that colleagues may not be in a position to discuss the matter with you while the investigation is underway.
- Accept that you may be barred from club premises or club activities when children or vulnerable adults are present.

Such events are difficult for all concerned. The BCA will do its utmost to remain impartial in all matters relating to an accusation. The main concern with any incident is the welfare of the child or vulnerable adult. For an individual against whom an allegation has been made this will be a difficult time. It is important that you seek help and support.

## **Responding to allegations – actions for clubs and BCA**

There are many possible scenarios. Here are some examples:

- Criminal behaviour is suspected. In this event a referral to police or social services must be made, either by the person first discovering the situation, or by a club officer. That referral must be made promptly, ie within a few hours.
- A club may become aware of an allegation or investigation taking place, that is entirely unrelated to the club, but involves a club member, outside of a club setting.
- Club member(s) may have concerns about the behaviour of a club, that don't appear to be criminal, but which do need to be investigated

### **Protection of children and vulnerable adults whilst an investigation is underway**

Clearly, clubs have a duty of care and so must act to protect children and vulnerable adults in one of the two following ways.

#### **Limited suspension**

This involves barring a club member from using club facilities or participating in club activities, where children or vulnerable adults are expected to be present. However, the club member may continue with activities when children or vulnerable adults are not expected to be present.

To put this in context, if someone is under investigation by police for possession of illegal images of children, such investigations generally last many months and involve considerable stress on all involved. Being able to continue with leisure activities during this time, where those activities do not involve youngsters, would be of great value to someone who is under investigation.

Given that many BCA member clubs have only limited amounts of activity by children, the club may determine that it is reasonable to bar a member from activities that involve children, but to permit other activities to continue.

#### **Full suspension**

A club's committee may determine that it is in the best interests of the club for the member to be suspended from all use of club facilities or participating in club activities, at all times.

#### **Confidentiality**

The club must take reasonable steps to ensure that limited or full suspension is complied with. It is highly unlikely that this would involve notifying all members, but members who participate in club activities very regularly may have to be notified so that they would notice if a member did not comply with their suspension.

Similarly, the BCA Safeguarding Officer or Council may feel that it is necessary to notify membership secretaries of other clubs, in order to prevent a member over whom there are concerns from moving to other clubs. This would be decided on a case-by-case basis, by the BCA Safeguarding Officer and at least one other council member, and clubs who were notified would be asked to keep the matter confidential – only key club officers would need to know.

#### **Liaison between clubs, BCA Council and insurers**

In all situations where there are suspicions, investigations or a member is suspended, the decisions of the club's committee must be forwarded to the BCA's Safeguarding Officer. Very rarely, the BCA's safeguarding officer or BCA Council may feel that more stringent protective steps are required than the club has already taken. The club's committee may then either comply with those steps, or refuse to do so. BCA provides liability insurance for all members and in this event, BCA would have to notify the insurers who would determine whether the club's insurance would be suspended. It is very much hoped that such a scenario will never play out.

### **Outcomes once an investigation is complete**

Again, there are several possible outcomes.

- It may be that it is decided that the concerns or suspicions had no merit
- It may be that there are legitimate concerns, but which do not imply criminal behaviour:
  - A club's committee may decide to offer advice to a member about their future behaviour.
  - Or the committee might decide permanently to limit a member's activities, for example by not allowing them to participate in activities where children or vulnerable adults are present. The committee might feel that the issue would be re-visited after a suitable period of time has elapsed.
  - Or, the committee may feel that the outcome of the investigation means that the member has to be permanently excluded from membership.
- It is essential that the club notify the BCA safeguarding officer of their decisions.
- As described above, BCA may feel that other clubs would need to be notified.

### **Recording information**

Information that is passed on to the BCA, Social Services and the Police must be as helpful as possible. Hence there is a necessity for making as detailed record as possible. This should endeavour to contain:

- the nature of the incident;
- a description of any visible injuries;
- the child's account;
- times, dates or other relevant information;
- a clear distinction between what is fact, hearsay and opinion; and
- a record using the BCA's Safeguarding Incident form

### **Allegations of previous abuse**

Allegations of abuse may be made a long time after the event (e.g. by an adult who was abused as a child or by a member of staff who is still currently working with children or vulnerable adults). Where such an allegation is made, you should proceed in the same manner as described above, ie make a written record and refer on to police or social services, with a copy to the BCA safeguarding officer.

### **Storage, Access to and Retention of Recorded Information**

Information passed to the BCA in accordance with this policy must be kept securely, with access strictly controlled and limited to those who are entitled to see it as part of their duties. These records are to be retained for 30 years.

**Dealing with concerns, disclosure or allegations about BCA members**

