



Whistle Blowing Policy & Procedure

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Whistle Blowing Policy & Procedure

This policy covers all geographical areas where Autism Bedfordshire delivers services.

Policy Statement

Autism Bedfordshire takes any reports of malpractice, unsafe practice, poor safeguarding practice or failure to follow statutory guidance very seriously. The welfare of children, young people and adults at risk is paramount. All workers should feel confident to raise concerns about safeguarding, child protection, conduct, leadership, governance, health and safety, regulatory compliance or any other wrongdoing, including where they feel it is necessary to bypass senior management.

We expect all employees, trustees, volunteers, students, apprentices, contractors and any other person working on behalf of Autism Bedfordshire to maintain high standards in accordance with our organisation's rules, safeguarding policies, code of conduct and statutory responsibilities. Everyone has a responsibility to raise concerns about malpractice, unsafe practice, low-level concerns about adult behaviour, failures in safeguarding arrangements or any matter that may place a child, young person or adult at risk of harm. The aim of this policy is to ensure that workers are confident that they can raise genuine concerns without fear of reprisals, in the knowledge that concerns will be taken seriously, recorded appropriately, acted upon promptly and treated confidentially wherever possible.

Autism Bedfordshire recognises the importance of this policy and will offer employees support and assistance in the use of the procedure.

Autism Bedfordshire promotes an open, transparent and safeguarding-focused culture. Staff are expected to challenge unsafe practice, share information where this is necessary to safeguard children or adults at risk, and escalate concerns where they believe action has not been taken or has not been sufficient.

This policy is for guidance only and does not form part of your contract of employment

Legislative Framework

This policy is informed by the Employment Rights Act 1996, the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, the Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) Order 2014 and subsequent amendments, including the current prescribed persons list, the Equality Act 2010, the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023, the Data Protection Act 2018, UK GDPR, the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, the Children Act 1989 and 2004, the Care Act 2014, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, the Charities Act 2011, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025 and the 2026 edition when it comes into force on 1 September 2026, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026, the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework where applicable, Ofsted inspection and safeguarding guidance, and relevant local safeguarding children partnership and safeguarding adults board procedures.

Protection is given to workers who make a qualifying disclosure in the public interest and in accordance with the legal requirements. A disclosure may be protected where the worker reasonably believes that the information tends to show a criminal offence, breach of a legal obligation, miscarriage of justice, danger to the health or safety of any individual, environmental damage, sexual harassment, safeguarding failure, abuse, neglect, exploitation, unsafe practice, regulatory breach, serious governance failure, financial misconduct, or deliberate concealment of any of these matters.

Whistleblowing concerns should usually be raised internally first where it is safe and appropriate to do so. However, workers may make disclosures to an appropriate prescribed person or statutory agency where they reasonably believe this is appropriate, including where internal reporting has not resolved the issue, the concern involves senior leaders, there is risk of concealment, or there is immediate safeguarding or public interest risk. Safeguarding concerns must never be delayed because of uncertainty about internal reporting routes. Where a child, young person or adult is at immediate risk of harm, emergency services, the police or the relevant local authority safeguarding service must be contacted without delay.

When Should the Responsible Reporting Procedure be Used?

This procedure will apply in cases where an employee genuinely believes that one of the following has occurred or may occur while working on any of Autism Bedfordshire Services:

- A criminal offence, suspected criminal offence or cover-up
- Failure to comply with any legal, regulatory, safeguarding or charitable obligation

- A miscarriage of justice
- Danger to the health, safety or welfare of any child, young person, adult at risk, worker, volunteer or member of the public
- Environmental damage
- Information tending to show that any of the above is being deliberately concealed
- Sexual harassment, including failure to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment
- Discrimination, victimisation, bullying or harassment where this raises a public interest or safeguarding concern
- Poor, unsafe or unaddressed safeguarding practice, including failure to follow child protection, adult safeguarding, safer recruitment or allegation management procedures
- Concerns or allegations about the behaviour of employees, volunteers, trustees, contractors, or other adults working with or on behalf of Autism Bedfordshire towards children, young people or adults at risk
- Low-level concerns about adult behaviour which may be inconsistent with Autism Bedfordshire's code of conduct, safeguarding expectations or professional boundaries
- Serious financial irregularity, fraud, bribery, corruption, misuse of charitable funds or serious governance failure
- Regulatory non-compliance, including matters relevant to Ofsted, the Charity Commission, the Health and Safety Executive, local authority safeguarding services or other statutory bodies

This procedure is appropriate where the employee has genuine concerns about malpractice, unsafe or unlawful activities within the scheme. It is not designed or intended to replace or be used as an alternative to the Grievance Procedure. An employee who is aggrieved about his or her own personal situation should utilise the Grievance Procedure. Employees worried about wrongdoing may not have any personal issues of concern but may have concerns about the scheme. If so, consideration should be given to use of this policy and procedure.

Workers do not have to prove that wrongdoing has occurred, but they must reasonably believe that the information they disclose tends to show wrongdoing and that the disclosure is in the public interest. Concerns should be raised honestly and responsibly. A disclosure that is knowingly false, malicious or made primarily for personal gain may be treated as a disciplinary matter. Autism Bedfordshire will not treat a disclosure as malicious simply because it is not substantiated after investigation.

Safeguarding Concerns and Low-Level Concerns

Where a concern relates to safeguarding practice, child protection, adults at risk, or the conduct of an adult working with or on behalf of Autism Bedfordshire, it must be reported immediately. This includes concerns that may meet the harm threshold and concerns that do not meet the harm threshold but may indicate inappropriate, unsafe or concerning behaviour.

A low-level concern is any concern, doubt or worry, no matter how small, that an adult working with or on behalf of Autism Bedfordshire may have acted in a way that is inconsistent with the

organisation's code of conduct, safeguarding standards, professional boundaries or values, including conduct outside work. Low-level does not mean insignificant. Such concerns must be shared responsibly with the Designated Safeguarding Lead or other named safeguarding lead, recorded securely, reviewed for patterns and acted on proportionately so that risks, training needs and conduct issues are identified early.

If a child, young person or adult is at immediate risk of harm, staff must call 999. If a crime may have been committed, staff should contact the police. Concerns about a child's welfare must be referred to the relevant local authority children's social care service in line with local safeguarding partnership procedures. Concerns about adults at risk must be referred to the relevant local authority adult safeguarding service. Allegations or concerns about adults working with children that may meet the harm threshold must be referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer without delay.

What Should an Employee Do?

To raise or discuss any issue described above, the worker should contact their line manager orally or in writing. Where the concern relates to safeguarding, the worker must also inform the Designated Safeguarding Lead or appropriate safeguarding lead without delay, unless the concern is about that person or there is another good reason not to do so. If the concern relates to the Designated Safeguarding Lead, Chief Executive, Chair of Trustees or another senior person, the worker should use the alternative reporting route set out in the contacts section or contact the appropriate statutory agency directly.

You must state that you are using the Whistle Blowing Policy and specify whether you wish your identity to be kept confidential.

If, because of the nature of the disclosure, the worker does not feel comfortable making a disclosure to their line manager or safeguarding lead, they should speak to the Chair of the Board of Trustees or another Trustee. Where concerns involve an adult working with children and may meet the harm threshold, advice must be sought from the Local Authority Designated Officer. Where concerns relate to immediate risk, children's social care, adult safeguarding services, the police or emergency services must be contacted without delay. Where the concern falls within the remit of a regulator or prescribed person, the worker may contact the relevant body directly.

It is likely that an investigation will be necessary and the employee may be required to attend a meeting or investigative hearing as a witness. You are entitled to be accompanied by a work colleague at any meeting under this procedure. Your companion will be asked to respect the confidentiality of your disclosure and any subsequent investigation.

Autism Bedfordshire recognises that disclosures may involve confidential and sensitive matters. Workers may request that their identity is kept confidential and every reasonable step will be taken to protect confidentiality. However, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed where disclosure is required by law, necessary to protect a child or adult at risk, required for a fair investigation, or necessary for referral to a statutory or regulatory body. Anonymous disclosures

will be considered and acted on where possible, but investigation may be limited if further information cannot be obtained.

Appropriate steps will be taken to ensure that the worker's working environment and working relationships are not prejudiced because they have made a disclosure. Any worker who believes they have suffered detriment, victimisation or retaliation as a result of raising a concern should report this immediately to their line manager, the Chair of Trustees or another appropriate senior person. If the worker is not satisfied with the investigation or outcome, they should write directly to the Chair of the Board of Trustees or, where appropriate, contact a prescribed person, regulator, local authority safeguarding service, the police or Protect for independent advice.

While Autism Bedfordshire hopes that such disclosures will never be necessary, it also recognises that it may find itself in circumstances, which are new to it. Each case will be treated on its own merits.

Investigation of Disclosure

Autism Bedfordshire is committed to investigating disclosures fully, fairly, promptly and confidentially where circumstances permit. Following a formal disclosure, the responsible manager, safeguarding lead or trustee will acknowledge receipt within a reasonable timescale unless doing so would increase risk or compromise safeguarding action. Safeguarding concerns will be triaged immediately and referred to statutory agencies where required.

The length and scope of the investigation will depend on the subject matter of the disclosure. An initial assessment will determine whether immediate safeguarding action, referral to a statutory agency, preservation of evidence, suspension or temporary risk management measures, or a more detailed investigation is required. The person investigating will be suitably independent of the concern wherever possible. In any event, a written record will be produced and shared with the Board of Trustees in an appropriate form. Where appropriate and lawful, the whistleblower will receive feedback about the outcome, although confidentiality and data protection obligations may limit the detail that can be shared.

If a longer investigation is considered necessary, we will usually appoint an investigator or investigative team. For example, if the disclosure concerns financial malpractice, the head of internal audit or the Finance Director may be asked to investigate. Separate personnel will be asked to make a judgment on the report submitted by the investigator (or investigative team). Recommendations for change will also be invited from the investigative team to enable us to minimise the risk of the recurrence of any malpractice or impropriety which has been uncovered. The Board of Trustees will then be responsible for reviewing and implementing these recommendations.

So far as your line manager considers it appropriate and practicable, you will be kept informed of the progress of the investigation. However, the need for confidentiality may prevent us giving you specific details of the investigation or actions taken. It is not normally appropriate to set a specific timeframe for completion of investigations in advance, as the diverse nature of

disclosures contemplated makes this unworkable. We will, however, aim to deal with all disclosures in a timely manner and with due regard to the rights of all individuals involved.

We recognise that there may be matters that cannot be dealt with internally and in respect of which external authorities will need to be notified and become involved either during or after our investigation. We will endeavour to inform you if a referral to an external authority is about to or has taken place, although we may need to make such a referral without your knowledge or consent if we consider it appropriate.

All whistleblowing, safeguarding and low-level concerns will be recorded securely, including the nature of the concern, who received it, dates and times, immediate safety actions, referrals made, decisions reached, rationale, outcomes where known and lessons learned. Records will be retained in line with data protection requirements, safeguarding record retention expectations and any statutory or regulatory requirements. The Board of Trustees will receive anonymised oversight information at appropriate intervals to support governance, identify patterns, monitor culture, and assure itself that concerns are handled lawfully, promptly and effectively.

Assurance

Workers are encouraged to use this procedure where appropriate. A worker who raises a genuine concern or safeguarding concern will not suffer adverse treatment, dismissal, victimisation, harassment, discrimination, disciplinary action, threats, loss of opportunities or any other detriment as a result of making the disclosure, even if the concern is not subsequently substantiated. Any retaliation against a whistleblower will be treated as a serious disciplinary matter.

Every effort will be made to keep the identity of an individual who makes a disclosure under this policy confidential, at least until any formal investigation is under way. In order not to jeopardise the investigation into the alleged malpractice, you will also be expected to keep the fact that you have raised a concern, the nature of the concern and the identity of those involved confidential.

There may, however, be circumstances in which, because of the nature of the investigation or disclosure, it will be necessary to disclose your identity. This may occur in connection with associated disciplinary or legal investigations or proceedings. If in our view such circumstances exist, we will make efforts to inform you that your identity is likely to be disclosed. If it is necessary for you to participate in an investigation, the fact that you made the original disclosure will, so far as is reasonably practicable, be kept confidential and all reasonable steps will be taken to protect you from any victimisation or detriment as a result of having made a disclosure. It is likely, however, that your role as the whistleblower could still become apparent to third parties during the course of an investigation.

Protection and Support for Whistleblowers

Employees and other workers who raise genuinely held concerns under this procedure will not be dismissed, subjected to detriment, or victimised because of their disclosure. Detriment may

include bullying, harassment, threats, reduction of hours, removal of duties, denial of training, adverse treatment in recruitment or promotion, or any other action that makes the worker's position worse because they raised a concern. If you believe you have been subjected to detriment, you should report this immediately using this policy or the Grievance Procedure. Employees who victimise or retaliate against whistleblowers will be subject to disciplinary action.

If an investigation concludes that a disclosure was knowingly false, malicious or made primarily for personal gain, the whistleblower may be subject to disciplinary action. This will not apply where a worker raised a concern honestly and reasonably, but the concern was not substantiated. Anonymous disclosures and disclosures made outside the usual internal route will still be considered, particularly where they raise safeguarding, public interest, regulatory or immediate risk concerns.

Information about this policy will be provided during induction and refreshed through safeguarding training and updates. Managers, trustees and safeguarding leads will ensure that staff understand how to report concerns, how to escalate unresolved concerns, and how to contact external agencies where required.

Note: Before taking action for any but the most minor offences, advice should be sought. Staff should refer to the current ACAS Code of Practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures, current statutory safeguarding guidance, local safeguarding partnership procedures, the organisation's safeguarding and code of conduct policies, and the current GOV.UK list of prescribed persons for whistleblowing disclosures. Ofsted may use information shared with it to inform inspection and regulation, but it does not replace the need to contact children's social care, adult safeguarding services, the police or emergency services where someone is at risk of harm.

Contacts:

Whistleblowing Officer	01234 214871 enquiries@autismbeds.org
Chair of Board of Trustees	Lauraine Montgomery 01234 350704 enquiries@autismbeds.org Mark email as: PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL for the attention of Lauraine Montgomery
Protect (independent whistleblowing charity)	Advice line Tel: (020) 3117 2520 www.protect-advice.org.uk
NSPCC whistleblowing advice line	Tel: 0800 0280285 08:00-20:00 (Mon-Fri) and 09:00-18:00 (weekends)
Ofsted whistleblowing hotline	Tel: 0300 123 3155 (Mon-Fri 08:00-18:00)
UK Government guidance	www.gov.uk/whistleblowing