

Child Protection Policy for Guardian Organisations
(summarised for guardianship personnel)

This version of the AEGIS Child Protection Policy is intended for use by host families and staff members working with Alpha Plus Guardian Services Ltd. It is also available to Alpha Plus students and their parents for reference and possible use.

Please note that any concerns related to possible Child Protection issues should be referred in the first instance to the designated Alpha Plus Child Protection Officer, who is Jane Youdale (Director). She will then determine the relevant and appropriate authority to whom the matter should be passed for consideration and action where necessary.

Why should Guardian Organisations need a Child Protection Policy?

- It helps to create a safe and positive environment for children
- It clarifies what is required of a Guardianship Organisation in relation to the protection of children
- It is a statement of intent that demonstrates the Guardianship Organisation's commitment to safeguard children from harm.

Each Guardianship Organisation has a Child Protection Co-ordinator. This will either be the Director of the Guardianship Organisation or a designated member of staff within the Guardianship Organisation, if such a person exists. The CPC takes specific responsibility for Child Protection matters within the GO.

The role of the Guardianship Organisation and its guardianship personnel

The Guardianship Organisation and guardianship personnel should be aware of the need to report allegations or suspicions of child abuse to the relevant person at the Guardianship Organisation. Children often tell other children, rather than guardianship personnel or other adults, about abuse.

Lines of communication within the Guardianship Organisation

Allegations of abuse made by a child should be reported as follows:

- A child should speak to a member of the guardianship personnel or one of the housestaff at school about any abuse that is taking place
- If the alleged abuser is a member of the guardianship personnel, the child should know that the first port of call is the Director (or Child Protection Co-ordinator) at the Guardianship Organisation
- If the alleged abuser is the Director of the Guardianship Organisation the child should initially report it to another member of the guardianship personnel. The guardianship personnel should then report the matter to a deputy within the Guardianship Organisation or to the Social Services Department, whichever is appropriate.

Any person responsible for the welfare of a child has a duty under English law to report any suspicions of abuse to the relevant authority.

How guardianship personnel should respond to any suspicion of abuse

Any member of the guardianship personnel who is told of any incident or has strong suspicions of physical or sexual child abuse must report the information to the CPC.

If a child or group of children disclose the fact that they are upset or worried, or if a child or group of children give the appearance of being upset, every effort should be made to keep the individual or group of individuals calm and to alleviate, as far as possible, any distress. It is not appropriate to try to force conversation whilst there is an emotive atmosphere. The individual(s) concerned should be taken to a private place where, if you feel the situation warrants it, a second responsible adult should be asked to be present. The following guidelines should be observed:

- **Confidentiality should never be guaranteed.**
- **Questioning should be limited, and 'leading' questions should be avoided.**
- **The matter should be referred immediately to the CPC at the GO.**
- **A written record of alleged abuse should be made as soon as possible.**
- **An allegation of abuse should never be discounted simply on the grounds of the child's location or because the alleged abuser is someone well known to and trusted by the individual to whom the disclosure has been made.**

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Definition of terms

For the purposes of this Child Protection Policy (CPP), all references to ‘child’ or ‘children’ - whether singular or plural – are used and are taken to refer to students enrolled at a school or other educational institution in the United Kingdom who are in the care of an accredited Guardianship Organisation.

‘Guardianship Organisation’ or name of the Guardianship Organisation (Alpha Plus Guardian Services Ltd) are used and are taken to refer to the company or organisation or individual employed by parents to be the Educational Guardians of a child in the UK.

‘Guardianship personnel’ means an educational guardian having any responsibility for a child as defined in the contract during that contractual period. This may also refer to any personnel at the Guardianship Organisation, whether paid or unpaid, whether under a contract of service or apprenticeship, under a contract for services, or otherwise than under a contract, who has similar responsibility for a child and may be interacting with children for or on behalf of the Guardianship Organisation. The normal duties of guardianship personnel include caring for, supervising or being in sole charge of children; they also involve unsupervised contact with children under arrangements made by a responsible person.

Need for and scope of policy

A child protection policy helps to create a safe and positive environment for children. Although no standards or processes can offer complete protection for children, the risk of abuse against children can be minimised by implementing such a policy and following the standards enshrined in it.

A child protection policy clarifies what a Guardianship Organisation requires in relation to the protection of children. It sets out standards of behaviour for guardianship personnel when they are around children and what to do if they notice, or are told about, inappropriate behaviour in others.

A child protection policy is a statement of intent that demonstrates the Guardianship Organisation’s commitment to safeguard children from harm. It will help the Guardianship Organisation and its guardianship personnel to undertake best practice in this area and deter those who would wish to abuse children from joining the Guardianship Organisation as guardianship personnel.

This policy also provides a basis of protection for its guardianship personnel and persons acting on behalf of the Guardianship Organisation.

Aims of the policy

The welfare of children in guardianship is a paramount concern for the Guardianship Organisation. It is incumbent upon all Guardianship Organisations to do everything possible to ensure that children are protected from harm at all times.

This Child Protection Policy sets out:

1. The Guardianship Organisation's principles for the protection of children.

The Guardianship Organisation recognises that child protection is not only a legal obligation but also a corporate and individual responsibility.

2. The Guardianship Organisation's expectations in terms of behaviour and good practice for working with children.

The Guardianship Organisation believes that everyone involved must accept responsibility and take precautions to help create a safe place for children and their protection. This, in turn, requires that everyone be well informed and aware of child protection issues. Likewise, children, their parents and house staff should know that there is always a responsible adult within the Guardianship Organisation whom they can approach if they are worried or in difficulty. The Guardianship Organisation should maintain an ethos where children feel secure and are encouraged to talk and are always listened to.

3. The Guardianship Organisation's guidelines for responding appropriately if abuse of a child is alleged, disclosed, discovered or suspected.

The Guardianship Organisation encourages openness about concerns relating to child protection matters because child abuse thrives on secrecy. The guidelines in this policy explain what should be done about those concerns.

The role of the Child Protection Co-ordinator (CPC)

The Child Protection Co-ordinator is the Director of the Guardianship Organisation or a designated member of guardianship personnel within the Guardianship Organisation if such a person exists.

The Child Protection Co-ordinator takes specific responsibility for Child Protection matters within the Guardianship Organisation. This person is responsible for:

- being conversant with all legislation including regulations relevant to the law of Child Protection.
- holding and being fully conversant with the Guidance and Regulations of the Children Act 1989, or any legislation subsequent to that Act.
- briefing guardianship personnel on the contents of the guidance and procedures and on the procedures. This includes the briefing of new guardianship personnel as part of their induction after joining the Guardianship Organisation.
- ensuring the procedures below are followed within the Guardianship Organisation.
- liaison over child protection procedures with the Social Services Department.

- receiving reports of alleged or suspected child abuse within the Guardianship Organisation or reported by a child relating to incidents at home or outside the Guardianship Organisation, contacting the Social Services Department and taking other action in response, as set out below.
- ensuring that all records of concern about a child, even if there is not a need to take any immediate action, are kept confidentially and securely.

The role of the Guardianship Organisation and its guardianship personnel

The Guardianship Organisation and guardianship personnel should be aware of the need to report allegations or suspicions of child abuse to the relevant person at the Guardianship Organisation. Children often tell other children, rather than guardianship personnel or other adults, about abuse.

The Guardianship Organisation should keep accurate and unchanged/unchangeable records of alleged or suspected abuse, even if such abuse is only a minor incident.

A Child Protection Co-ordinator should be appointed in each AEGIS member organisation. The CPC has responsibility for receiving complaints of abuse, investigating those complaints and reporting any complaints to the appropriate authority, including the management of the AEGIS member organisation.

Lines of communication within the Guardianship Organisation

There should, at all times, be routine contact between the Guardianship Organisation and the child, the guardianship personnel and the child, and the guardianship personnel and the Guardianship Organisation, as a preventative measure against child abuse.

Allegations of abuse made by a child should be reported as follows:

- A child should speak to a member of the guardianship personnel or the housestaff at school about any abuse that is taking place
- If the alleged abuser is one of the guardianship personnel, the child should know that the first port of call is the Director (or Child Protection Co-ordinator) at the Guardianship Organisation
- If the alleged abuser is the Director of the Guardianship Organisation the child should initially report it to another member of the guardianship personnel. The guardianship personnel should then report the matter to a deputy within the Guardianship Organisation or to the Social Services Department, whichever is appropriate.

Parents, in a similar way, should report alleged abuse to one of the guardianship personnel or the Child Protection Co-ordinator at the Guardianship Organisation or one of the house staff at school, depending on whom the alleged abuser is.

Any person responsible for the welfare of a child has a duty under English law to report any suspicions of abuse to the relevant authority.

How guardianship personnel should respond to any suspicion of abuse

Any member of the guardianship personnel who is told of any incident or has strong suspicion of physical or sexual child abuse must report the information to the CPC. (In the absence of the CPC, an immediate report should be made to his/her deputy or Director).

If a child or group of children disclose the fact that they are upset or worried, or if a child or group of children give the appearance of being upset, every effort should be made to keep the individual or group of individuals calm and not distressed. It is not appropriate to try to force conversation whilst there is an emotive atmosphere. The individual(s) concerned should be

taken to a private place where, if the situation warrants it, a second responsible adult should be asked to be present. The following guidelines should be observed:

- Confidentiality should never be guaranteed. Guardianship personnel should guarantee that they will **only** pass on information to the **minimum** number of people who **must** be told to ensure that the proper action is taken to sort out the problem, that they will **never** tell anyone who does not have a clear 'need to know' and that they will personally take whatever steps they can to protect the informing child/children or guardianship personnel from any retaliation or unnecessary stress that might be feared after a disclosure of alleged abuse has been made.
- Any questioning should be limited to the minimum necessary to seek clarification only, strictly avoiding 'leading' the child or adult who has approached them by making suggestions or asking questions that introduce their own ideas about what may have happened. (Questions such as, 'Did he do X to you?' should not be used; instead a minimum number of questions of the 'Tell me what happened?' type may be asked).
- The alleged perpetrator should not be criticised because the child's emotions may already be horribly mixed. The child should not be asked to repeat everything that s/he has already disclosed to another member of the guardianship personnel.
- As soon as the child or adult has disclosed that he or she believes that something abusive has happened to him or her, or to someone else, no further questions should be asked of him or her. Further questioning could cause more damage and prejudice possible criminal proceedings.
- The informing child or adult should be asked what steps s/he would like taken to protect him/her now that the allegations have been made and should be given an assurance that the Guardianship Organisation will try to follow these wishes.
- The matter should be referred immediately, with all relevant details, to the CPC at the Guardianship Organisation.
- The adult to whom the disclosure has been made should make a written record as soon as possible of what s/he has been told. The record should not include the writer's own assumptions and interpretations but solely what s/he has heard and seen. Original notes should not be destroyed, even if the record may be written up more neatly and fully at a later stage. The record should comprise dates, times, places, plus any non-verbal behaviour as well as words used, including sexual words (if any used). If injury is apparent, a diagram should be appended in order to give exact location.
- An allegation of abuse should never be discounted simply on the grounds of the child's location or because the alleged abuser is someone well known to and trusted by the individual to whom the disclosure has been made.

Action by the Guardianship Organisation

When the CPC at the Guardianship Organisation receives an allegation of physical or sexual abuse s/he should:

- a) take any steps needed to protect any child involved from risk of immediate harm. Furthermore, the Guardianship Organisation should take any necessary steps for the longer-term protection and support of each child who has made allegations of abuse, or who is alleged to have suffered from abuse, taking his or her wishes fully into account. This may involve the child receiving continuing support and protection from the guardianship personnel chosen by him or her, or changing accommodation, or returning to his or her parents temporarily.
- b) not interview or investigate the allegation further but refer the matter immediately to the Duty Team Leader at the local Social Services office. The Guardianship Organisation should speak personally to the Team Leader and not rely on leaving a message.
- c) consult with the Duty Team Leader regarding contacting parents, other guardianship personnel, police, doctor or the alleged perpetrator or witnesses directly. Whilst the Guardianship Organisation has a duty first and foremost to the child, it must at all times respect the rights of parents and keep them informed of all matters relating to the child.
- d) contact the Team Manager in the Social Services Department (SSD) who will initiate an independent investigation if this proves to be necessary. The Team Manager will arrange, within pre-set limits, the involvement of the relevant specialist police personnel and, if necessary, a meeting of the agencies who may need to be involved, together with the Guardianship Organisation.
- e) inform the child or guardianship personnel who made the initial allegation of what the next steps are to be, having agreed these with the Team Manager. It is helpful for the call to the Team Manager to be made while the child or adult is in attendance, so that he or she can be told the likely next steps immediately after the call.
- f) inform the Headteacher of the school the child is attending (unless s/he is the subject of any of the allegations or suspicions) of the allegation and the action as taken above and, if the allegation is concerning an incident within the School context, agree necessary further action in line with these standards.
- g) if necessary, cease to use, pending investigation, any member of its guardianship personnel who is alleged to have abused a child or children. The Guardianship Organisation should not hesitate to cease to use any member of the guardianship personnel, without prejudgement of guilt and as a precautionary measure, where there is a concern about possible abuse.
- h) take any necessary steps to protect and support a child who is alleged to have abused another and inform his/her parents immediately.
- i) ensure that any child being interviewed by the police has available supportive guardianship personnel of his or her own choice to accompany him or her if this becomes necessary.
- j) make arrangements, where feasible, for any child who has been the subject of abuse to receive any necessary continuing counselling and support, by agreement with his or her parents where appropriate.

Allegations of abuse against a member of the guardianship personnel or anyone in their household

Following investigation, the Guardianship Organisation should consider taking, and if necessary and appropriate, should take the necessary measures to safeguard the child against any member of the guardianship personnel or of his/her household, where it believes children are at risk of abuse from that member of the guardianship personnel or of their household, even in cases where there may be no criminal prosecution. Cessation from a role within the guardianship personnel (without prejudice) may be necessary to protect all concerned, including the guardianship personnel or his/her household member.

The Guardianship Organisation must make its own decision on whether a child's welfare is at risk, whatever the outcome of a police or SSD investigation may be. The level of evidence needed for criminal prosecution is likely to be higher than that which may trigger valid and appropriate precautionary proceedings taken by the Guardianship Organisation.

Appropriate precautionary proceedings and grounds for concern over its children's welfare may therefore be based on 'balance of probability', rather than on evidence 'beyond reasonable doubt'.

In any instance of an allegation of child abuse the Guardianship Organisation will, after reasonable investigation and if satisfied on a balance of probabilities that there is substance to the allegation, immediately terminate any contract or other arrangement with that member of the guardianship personnel or other person. The Guardianship Organisation has a duty to terminate any possible contact between the child and that person.

Where a Guardianship Organisation has 'low level' concerns that do not amount to allegations or suspicions of specific abuse, but which may indicate the possibility of abuse occurring, the Director of the Guardianship Organisation or designated member of staff should discuss these with the Social Services Department.

Recruitment and screening

All AEGIS member GOs, when using outsourced services (e.g. taxi firms) whose personnel may have contact with a child, must obtain a written assurance from the service provider that all such personnel have been subjected to enhanced Disclosure & Barring Service checks (DBS checks) and other relevant checks done according to the principles and guidelines of the AEGIS Code of Practice.

The Guardianship Organisation, in line with the AEGIS Code of Practice, should make all guardianship personnel aware of the child protection policy of the Guardianship Organisation. Guardianship personnel should be asked to sign a Child Protection declaration. The Guardianship Organisation will take up not fewer than two references as to the character and suitability of any person under their control and their suitability to have contact with a child.

All applicant guardianship personnel must declare any history, criminal or civil, of child abuse. Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks must be sought to confirm this. Permission to interact with children is dependent upon a judgement of these declarations and the results of an enhanced DBS check.

If any member of the guardianship personnel is a risk to children, s/he needs to understand that s/he will not be allowed to work with children again in the Guardianship Organisation or any allied organisation/agency.

Complaints and abuse

The CPC needs to ensure that key people who deal with complaints and concerns are fully aware of this policy document and that there is the possibility of certain complaints understating an allegation of abuse and therefore any such complaints should be routed via the appropriate channels.

False alarms

It is important to realise that the Children Act will inevitably lead to some investigations being triggered which do not substantiate the allegations made, as well as those that do. It is a basic

assumption that it is better to accept some false alarms than to fail to initiate the specialist investigation of instances of real abuse. The Social Service Department will work with the Director of the Guardianship Organisation, guardianship personnel, parents and children involved in any false alarm investigation to assist in recovery from the incident, as well as working with the Guardianship Organisation to assist in 'living through' and recovering from a substantial investigation.

Whistleblowing

We recognise that children cannot be expected to raise concerns in an environment where adults fail to do so. All adults involved in the Guardianship Organisation's provision of care should be aware of their duty to raise concerns, where they exist, about the management of child protection, which may include the attitude or actions of other adults.

APPENDIX 1

GUIDANCE NOTES REQUIRED AS A MINIMUM STANDARD for those in contact with children under the control of the AEGIS member

Definition of child abuse

Child abuse includes abuse of a child by a member of the guardianship personnel or another adult, abuse at home which a child reports to one of the guardianship personnel, abuse by a stranger outside the Guardianship Organisation and abuse of one child by another child. In the case of abuse by a child or group of children, the key issues which identify the problem as abuse (rather than an isolated instance of bullying or 'adolescent experimentation', which might be considered within normal bounds of a child community) are:

- the frequency, nature or severity of the incidents;
- whether the victim was coerced by physical force, fear, or by a child or group of children having power or authority over him or her;
- whether the incident involved a potentially criminal act and whether if the same incident (or injury) had occurred to a member of the guardianship personnel or another adult, it would have been regarded as assault or otherwise actionable.

The definitions below were those recommended as criteria throughout England and Wales by the Department of Health (DoH), the then Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and the Home Office in their joint document *Working Together to Safeguard Children (1999)*:

- **Abuse and Neglect** – Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting, by those known to them or, more rarely, a stranger.
- **Physical Abuse** – Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, near drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer feigns the symptoms of, or deliberately causes the ill-health of a child whom they are looking after. This situation is commonly described using terms such as fictitious illness by proxy or Munchausen's syndrome by proxy.
- **Emotional abuse** – Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only in so far as they meet the needs of another person. It may feature age-related or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. It may involve causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill-treatment of a child, though it may occur alone.
- **Sexual abuse** – Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (e.g., rape or buggery) or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.
- **Neglect** – Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or

development. It may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing, failing to protect a child from physical harm or danger, or the failure to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

- **Organised abuse** – Organised or multiple abuse may be defined as abuse involving one or more abusers and a number of related or non-related abused children. The abusers concerned may be acting in concert to abuse children, sometimes acting in isolation, or may be using an institutional framework or position of authority to recruit children for abuse. Organised and multiple abuse occur both as part of a network of abuse across a family or community and within institutions such as residential homes or schools.

A child may suffer more than one category of abuse.

Signs of Child Abuse

THE CHILD WITH AN INJURY

- a) **BRUISES** – on any part of the body, but especially on the head or face and trunk. Sometimes a finger pattern is visible, which could indicate that the child has been gripped tightly and possibly violently shaken.
- b) **WEALS** – on any part of the body, often linear indicating abuse with a whip, belt or other edged implement; when raised and white, are relatively easy to identify, but when older may be seen as faint linear bruises.
- c) **BITE MARKS** – human bite marks can be differentiated from animal bites. Typically, human bites form two hemispherical lines on the skin.
- d) **BLACK EYE** – often without gross bruising of the forehead.
- e) **BURNS AND SCALDS** – these may be severe and tend to occur in older children.
- f) **INJURIES ABOUT OR INSIDE THE MOUTH** – especially to gum margin, or to the frenulum inside the upper lip, or under the tongue.
- g) **INJURIES TO EARS** - especially when there is bleeding from the entrance to the ear or bruising around or behind the ear lobe(s) indicating injury by pulling.
- h) **INJURIES TO LIMBS** – tender swollen joints or suspected fractures in any part of the body.
- i) **INJURIES TO GENITAL AREA** – especially where bleeding is reported, or a child is walking awkwardly or bruising of any kind is noted.

THE SICK CHILD

There is no injury but the child is definitely ill with no obvious diagnosis.

- a) A listless, apathetic or restless child who is difficult to rouse.
- b) Pallor, failure to thrive, loss of weight and signs of poor nutrition – perhaps with sores about the mouth and on the skin leading to a poor growth rate.

THE EMOTIONALLY DEPRIVED CHILD

A variety of behavioural patterns may be seen in the emotionally abused child. Some present as naughty, overactive, demanding, restless, disobedient and unduly aggressive.

Others may be withdrawn and apathetic, unable to participate in play and with an impaired capacity to enjoy life.

“Frozen watchfulness” sometimes describes the appearance of other unhappy frightened children.

- a) Young children may show clinging and demanding behaviour as an instinctive response to fear of inadequate parenting.
- b) Some children may modify their behaviour in response to parental demands and show intense sensitivity to parental moods, reacting with precocious behaviour and high frustration tolerance to the high expectations of their parents. Physical punishment tends to cause an increase in aggressive behaviour in such children.
- c) The environment of the abused child critically influences development (failure of intellectual development, failure to grow or put on weight, incontinence, enuresis, language delay, poor motor/tactile skills)

Advice on one-to-one contact with children

Guardianship personnel should be wary of placing themselves in situations where they are open to accusations of inappropriate conduct. Essentially this involves exercising common sense.

- If in conversation with a child in a room or a car, for example, a respectful distance should be observed. Guardianship personnel or a member of their household should never be alone with the child in the bedroom with a closed door. If guardianship personnel or an adult member of their family is involved in corrective and personal guidance of a child, it is advisable to take precautions: e.g., if inside the house, by leaving the door to the room open, remaining seated at a reasonable distance from the child, ensuring there is a witness when appropriate or that there is another responsible adult in the house where possible.
- It is not wise to invite a single child into a bedroom or bathroom. On occasions it will be unavoidable that a single child will be transported in a member of the guardianship personnel’s personal vehicle. It is prudent on such occasions to ensure that the child passenger sits on the rear seat to reduce the possibility of accidental contact, which might be misconstrued.
- It is good advice not to make physical contact with a child. This is most important advice in a one-to-one situation between a member of the guardianship personnel and a child. Guardianship personnel should note that, in one-to-one discussions, confidentiality should not be promised to the child.
- Exclusively intimate situations with a child that could either arouse undue suspicion or lead to misinterpretation and false allegations should be avoided.