

Definition & Scope

The Safeguarding Children Code of Conduct outlines standards of personal and professional conduct that all those involved in the work of Mary's Meals UK (MMUK) must uphold at all times, always behaving in an ethical and professional manner. The Code provides a basis for all Mary's Meals UK volunteers and is aimed at maintaining an environment that creates trust, respect and dignity that is positive, enjoyable, safe and free from harassment and discrimination.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as everyone aged 17 and under, and MMUK also adopt this definition. Safeguarding duties for vulnerable adults at risk apply to anyone aged 18 or over who has needs for care and support, is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect and as a result of those care and support needs is unable to protect themselves from either the risk of, or the experience of, abuse or neglect. An adult at risk of abuse may have an illness affecting their mental or physical health, have a learning disability, suffer from drug or alcohol problems or be frail.

The Code provides clear guidelines and standards for the appropriate behaviour expected of MMUK volunteers.

Our values

The Code is established in line with our key organisational values:

- We have confidence in the innate goodness of people; and
- We respect the dignity of every human being and family life; and
- We believe in good stewardship of resources entrusted to us.

Mary's Meals UK place the safety of children and vulnerable adults of paramount importance, we believe that all children and vulnerable adults wherever they live and whatever their circumstances have the right to live in safety and to be free of all forms of violence, abuse, neglect, maltreatment and exploitation. MMUK ensures we meet these high standards of behaviour and conduct whenever anyone representing us interacts either directly or indirectly with children or vulnerable adults by training all staff and volunteers on the importance of Safeguarding. This Code forms part of volunteer training and is compulsory before commencing volunteering activities for MMUK.

Safeguarding Training

Please read the list below of key aspects of Safeguarding (please note this list is not exhaustive). These safeguarding actions not only ensure that we are doing our utmost to protect children and vulnerable adults from harm but that we are also protecting you as a volunteer and the charity itself.

- Ensure that any data or information held or seen about any child or vulnerable adult is kept confidential.
- Always be aware of everyone's health and safety and ensure that they are protected from harm when they are in our care.
- Never hit or physically abuse a child or vulnerable adult in any way or deliberately place a child or vulnerable adult in danger or at risk of abuse.
- Never have sexual contact, use sexualised language, or develop personal relationships with a child or vulnerable adult which could lead to or constitute abuse or grooming. This includes singling out a child to give them a sweet or gift. Try to avoid giving individual children anything unless, for example, it is given to a whole class in a school or a whole group of children you have been working with.
- Never fondle, hold, kiss, hug or touch a child or vulnerable adult inappropriately. When working with children or vulnerable adults as a volunteer the safest action to take is, wherever possible, avoid making any physical contact. This includes carrying out any actions of a personal nature that they are able to do for themselves.
- Never intentionally behave in a way that frightens, intimidates, or degrades. Never use racist, sexist, discriminatory, inappropriate, abusive, or offensive language.
- Carefully consider 'throw away' comments, jokes, or banter; please ensure all comments are appropriate and unoffensive.
- Never invite a child into your home or arrange to see them outside project activities.

- Always be accompanied by another adult when in the presence of children, this ensures that both you and the child are protected against any allegations of wrongdoing. Never stay alone overnight with a child/children or take children with you in your car, whilst undertaking Mary's Meals business without the express consent of the child's parent or guardian.
- Never pay for any service or treat a child or vulnerable adult in any way that could be deemed exploitative.
- Never use internet resources such as social networking sites to make inappropriate contact with anyone that could lead to or constitute abuse or grooming.
- Never smoke, use illegal drugs or be under the influence of alcohol whilst volunteering for Mary's Meals.
- Children should be treated as equals and always valued as individuals, particularly with respect to their own culture, religion, and ethnicity.
- Children and vulnerable adults should feel empowered to raise and discuss any issues or concerns and should always be listened to.
- Always ensure that images of children are respectful and appropriate and obtain permission from a parent/guardian before taking or using any image.
- Any safeguarding investigations or previous allegations must be disclosed to the Head of People immediately.
- If you are at any risk of placement on any nations barring list or children's register, please inform the Head of People immediately by emailing annette.reid@marysmeals.org.

What to do if you witness a safeguarding incident

1. Stay calm and listen to the child/vulnerable adult. Record the facts as much as possible.
2. Reassure the individual that you will take steps to help them. Never promise a child you will not pass on information. It is not your job to investigate or take matters into your own hands – your role is to report the incident.
3. If there is a risk of immediate harm, inform the emergency services by dialling 999.
4. Report your concerns to your Supporter Engagement Officer as soon as possible and they will pass this on to our Designated Safeguarding Lead Annette Reid (annette.reid@marysmeals.org).
5. Do not discuss the issue with anyone else, confidentiality is crucial.

Document control number: Version 2

Effective from: February 2024

Ownership / Responsible for monitoring: Ownership – Safeguarding Committee
Monitoring – Head of People

Responsible body: Safeguarding Committee

Our Safeguarding Children Code of Conduct will be reviewed by the Head of People every two years.
