

Safeguarding and confidentiality within youth volunteering: considerations for health and social care professionals



Young People's
Health Partnership

Safeguarding: preventative measures or actions taken to protect people from harm or damage and to promote their welfare.

Confidentiality: the agreement not to disclose information about individuals without their explicit consent except in exceptional circumstances. The right to privacy is enshrined in The Human Rights Act and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Introduction

This guidance has been written for health and social care professionals who are considering involving young volunteers in their work or within their organisation.

The Young People's Health Partnership (YPHP) is a seven-strong consortium of organisations working with the Department of Health, Public Health England and NHS England as strategic partners to raise the profile of the health agenda across the voluntary youth sector.

We are advocates for young people's rights and understand that confidentiality and safeguarding are integral to effective work with young people across health and social care.

Involving young people in supporting the health and care of others is proven to have positive benefits to patients, the community and young volunteers. It is part of delivering the vision for health and care, [The Five Year Forward View](#), and supports the national [#iwill campaign](#).

However, volunteering has recently come under media scrutiny, particularly in light of the [Lampard Report](#) and, as such, safeguarding and confidentiality are and should be at the forefront of everyone's minds.

YPHP have worked with young people and professionals to develop this guidance in order to enhance the confidence of professionals to engage young people in health and social care volunteering opportunities, ensuring that professionals feel confident balancing their duty of care towards young volunteers, whilst also upholding young people's rights. It is designed to complement the Volunteering Matters [Youth Social Action Toolkit](#).

Safeguarding and confidentiality go hand in hand and cannot be viewed in isolation. There is often a balancing act between a young person's right to confidentiality and an organisation's duty to protect young volunteers from harm. Coupled with this, organisations also have a responsibility to ensure that their young volunteers understand their duty of confidentiality towards clients/patients/beneficiaries, and that they are not put at risk of harm by the involvement of young volunteers.

Safeguarding and confidentiality are so important because they keep your volunteers safe, they keep your clients safe, strong safeguarding and confidentiality policies create a culture of trust between services and young people, and of course the rights to privacy (confidentiality) and to be kept safe are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We recently did some work with our young volunteers to find out what safeguarding and confidentiality means to them. They told us that it's about safety, risk, protection, consent, privacy and choice. Importantly, they also said that it's about *"being respected as a person"*. It's easy for us as professionals to think that safeguarding and confidentiality are things that we have to do because of legal and regulatory frameworks, or to 'protect' young people – but it is important to remember that young people's themselves see it as being about respect and empowerment.

Planning: policy and procedure

In order to ensure that the principles of confidentiality and safeguarding are embedded within your youth volunteering programme, it is useful to view them as a 'golden thread' tying everything together.



Before your programme starts, it's really important that you have correct policies and procedures in place that are appropriate for your organisation. This will need to include the development of a youth volunteer involvement policy which has safeguarding and confidentiality at its core.

Young people's involvement in policy

It is good practice to involve young people in developing or reviewing policy and procedure. This directly links to Article 12 of the UNCRC – that all children and young people have the right to be involved in important decision making that affects them. Involving young people at the earliest possible opportunity is really useful, because it ensures that they are able to engage meaningfully in the process.



Working collaboratively with young people will also help you to ensure that your policies are written in plain English that is easy to understand. You can't expect young people to work to policies that are full of jargon and incomprehensible to professionals. Most young people will be perfectly capable of understanding organisational policies and procedures as long as they are explained in clearly and in plain English.

When creating your policy, you might want to consider issues like:

- What if a young volunteer is a client, or ex-client? Will your responsibilities to them be different from a young person who had never accessed your services? How will you ensure that their client records remain separate from their volunteer file? Or is it important within the context of your organisation for the two to be linked? Whatever your decision, it's very important that you have clear rationale and you can explain your policy in simple, young people friendly language.
- You need to be really clear about whether your young volunteers are classed as part of your 'workforce' or as your patients, clients or beneficiaries. Adult volunteers usually get classed as part of the 'workforce' however you will need to tailor any existing volunteering policies to include your 'duty of care' to young volunteers under the age of 18. Ideally involve young volunteers in the development of this policy, perhaps through a collaborative workshop or focus group.



It's important to explain the policy to your young volunteers and check that they understand it. Avoid merely giving young people your safeguarding and confidentiality policies and expect them to read, digest, and understand how to implement them. You might, however, wish to create a young people friendly or 'easy read' version of your policies, in partnership with young people.

Creating clear volunteer roles

It's really important that you use the same good practice with your young volunteers as you would with your adult volunteers. This includes having a clear role description and volunteer agreement that explains their rights and responsibilities around confidentiality and safeguarding as well as your duty to them. Having this in place at the start makes it easier if you do have difficulties later on, because you have formal agreements that you can reference and return to.

Be very clear in your role description about the boundaries, as well as the skills and attributes required – it is really important in order to safeguard both the volunteer and the patients/clients/beneficiaries that you're confident that they will be able to volunteer well and safely in that environment.

Identifying and managing risk

It's important to have a clear role description so that you can do a thorough risk assessment which includes any potential psychological risks, as well as physical risks. You may wish to also conduct individual 'support needs assessments' with each volunteer during the selection process, to find out about any sensitivities, triggers or emotional or mental health needs.

It's important to risk assess each role that you consider developing, and decide whether it is appropriate for a young person.

When engaging with young people in health and social care settings, it is important to consider the psychological and emotional impact that they may be exposed to. For example; seeing a person their own age or younger with a terminal illness; being exposed to a violent or abusive patient; seeing a person

with a traumatic injury. Whilst these may be infrequent or rare in different settings, they may be more common in others and so care needs to be taken when deciding the appropriateness of placements and the support available to young volunteers¹.

Ensure that, as part of this planning process, you are taking into consideration whether individuals will be supporting vulnerable adults or other young people, and as such ensure that you have the appropriate policies in place for this, risk assessments, and also clarification of the level of DBS required (if indeed it is required, or legally obtainable – under 16s cannot have DBS checks made on them).²

If your role or setting, or the young person is deemed to be high risk, and you are not able to reduce the level of risk then you'll need to consider whether the opportunity should take place. You could instead consider alternative roles for young people, or signpost individuals on to other volunteer involving organisations.



Some young people may not be aware of their individual triggers or levels of resilience. Therefore, if your role or setting is deemed as medium risk it will be very important to build in regular one-to-one debriefs (for example at the end of each session) as well as regular support and supervision.

If your volunteering opportunity is medium risk, then it's important that you ensure that anyone who has been affected by their volunteering can have access to welfare services if necessary. These might include existing workforce welfare services, or access to specialist young people's wellbeing services. As a minimum you should ensure that you have clear signposting pathways in place to local support services for young people who may find their experience triggering.

As a result of your risk assessment, you might decide that your policy will be that no one under 18 volunteers on their own, without a member of staff or an experienced adult volunteer supervising them. This is good practice in terms of

¹ Extract from Volunteering Matters Toolkit: <http://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/report/toolkit-youth-social-action-in-health-and-social-care/>

² Extract from Volunteering Matters Toolkit: <http://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/report/toolkit-youth-social-action-in-health-and-social-care/>

protecting your volunteers whilst also protecting your patients/clients/beneficiaries.

You might need to build in additional support and supervision to ensure that any potential safeguarding or confidentiality issues are identified early, and can therefore be managed more safely and effectively.

Remember that staff or volunteers who are supervising young volunteers will need to be DBS checked. And, depending on whether the role meets the definition of 'regulated activity' you may also need to DBS check the volunteers too (for young people aged 16+).

In addition to ensuring that those who are supporting young volunteers are DBS checked, you also need to make sure that they have the knowledge, skills and experience to adequately support young volunteers and are able to identify safeguarding concerns and areas of risk.

Recruitment and selection

It is important to be aware that young people under the age of 16 cannot be DBS checked. It is also common to find that many young people under the age of 18 also do not have very strong references. This means that it's really important to have very robust recruitment and selection processes.

Whilst the vast majority of volunteers are doing so because they have incredibly positive motivations, remember that young people can still be abusers. This might include young people who want to abuse vulnerable older people, children or even their peers. Robust recruitment and selection procedures can help to mitigate that risk.

Developing a recruitment strategy will help you to ensure that you're approaching confidentiality and safeguarding from all angles.

Application forms

Remember that if you are engaging young people under the age of 18, it is good practice to get parental permission, as long as this does not conflict with their right to confidentiality. For young people under 16 there is a duty to do this from a health and safety perspective too.

It is good practice for application forms to include a request for two references. This can be challenging for young people as they may not have any references other than their teachers. Teachers may be unable to comment on anything other than the young person's academic ability, so it's important that your reference request form includes specific questions about the young person's suitability for the post, for example "is there anything that makes you think they might not be suitable to volunteer in this environment or with this group of

people?”, “What skills/attitudes/qualities does the young person have that makes you think they would be suitable to volunteer in this environment or with this group of people?”

You can also ask specific questions of young people at the application stage, particularly around their motivations for wanting to volunteer with your organisation or client group, their understanding of confidentiality and safeguarding, and identifying any personal vulnerabilities about themselves.

Interviews

Interviews are a great opportunity for you to think about confidentiality and safeguarding.

You can assess the young person's individual level of maturity and understanding, or their potential to understand the principles of confidentiality and safeguarding. You can also use it as an opportunity to assess individual's suitability for the role environment based on their vulnerabilities.

Make sure that your recruitment processes are young people friendly – this might be the first time that they have ever been interviewed, so it's important to manage your own expectations.

They might not be familiar with the words 'confidentiality' or 'safeguarding' so you might need to think about creative ways to assess their understanding of these concepts. You'll also be trying to assess their capability, or potential, to understand confidentiality and safeguarding once training has been provided.

Include scenario based questions to help you understand the young person's motivations, strengths and resilience factors, and their awareness of their triggers. This will help you to understand the attitudes, values, motivations and resilience of prospective volunteers. You are then in a stronger position to assess whether they are suitable for the opportunity. You may want to follow up by explaining what the 'perfect' answer would have been from your organisations perspective if, for example, their values do not align or they do not demonstrate an understanding of boundaries, because this can be a learning opportunity for the young people too.

Some organisations use the Warner Interview Technique to discern the motivations for wanting to volunteer with vulnerable groups. Remember that it's very important to feel able to turn away potential volunteers who you don't feel have the values and attitudes required.

Assessing risks and needs

In addition to standard risk assessments for volunteer roles and individual volunteers, it is also good practice to conduct 'support needs assessments' for young volunteers, plus a health and safety risk assessment (which must be signed by parents if the young person is under 16).

You should consider the roles each young volunteer will carry out and the maturity of each young person to be able to handle any psychologically demanding or emotional situations which they encounter, for example, with palliative care, on cancer wards, or in intensive care wards. Emotional support will be required in these roles, and you should consider whether you can provide that – if not, you should match young volunteers to alternative roles.³

You'll also need to consider your organisations tolerance to vulnerabilities – for example mental health. If a young volunteer will be providing peer support or mentoring to younger people around mental health and emotional wellbeing, you'll need a policy on whether you're happy to take on volunteers who are still accessing services, or whether you're going to state a specific length of time since discharge or from being a mental health service user, for example, or will you ask for a reference from a relevant mental health professional who has been responsible for their care?

Young volunteers who have experience of accessing services themselves may be very well placed to provide an empathetic peer support service, but only if they are coming from a positive place. Think carefully about how you will ensure boundaries are maintained between a young person who has previously been a services user to becoming a volunteer.



³ Extract from Volunteering Matters Toolkit: <http://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/report/toolkit-youth-social-action-in-health-and-social-care/>

Training

It's really important that induction and training includes confidentiality and safeguarding, delivered in young people friendly, jargon free, engaging manner. Remember that the concepts of confidentiality and safeguarding may be new to young people. Don't make assumptions about existing levels of knowledge and understanding – check! Use creative activities to ensure that your policies are 'real' for young people, and include practical examples of how they are implemented in practice.



Wherever possible, try to involve young volunteers in developing the training. This will ensure that your training is young people friendly, engaging and relatable. Ensure that your training caters to the needs of a range of different learning styles too.

It is also good practice to use training as an additional selection stage, as observing individuals within a learning and team work environment gives you an insight into how they inter-relate, provides you with a good indication of any gaps in their skills and knowledge, and gives them an opportunity to explore whether the role and environment is right for them⁴.

It is also good practice to use training as an additional selection stage, as observing individuals



Training should be considered an ongoing activity for volunteers, both because many young volunteers will be motivated by this and because it will ensure your volunteers are competent in their roles and up to date with any changes⁵. Complex issues such as confidentiality and safeguarding may need reinforcing and reiterating several times and in several different ways, catering for different learning styles.

⁴ Extract from Volunteering Matters Toolkit: <http://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/report/toolkit-youth-social-action-in-health-and-social-care/>

⁵ Extract from Volunteering Matters Toolkit: <http://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/report/toolkit-youth-social-action-in-health-and-social-care/>

Peer support settings

In a peer support setting it's really important that your young volunteers understand that they are still in a position of trust. It's not unusual to find that some young people can struggle to understand that in their volunteering role they still have to maintain strong professional boundaries even with their peers. Using scenario based training activities at the interview and training stages can be helpful, and explaining the answer if they get it wrong too! They may never have had professional boundaries explained to them, so check and re-check as part of their volunteer development plan as necessary.

Ongoing Support and Supervision

It's important to have a support and supervision framework for your young volunteers, as they may require more support than your adult volunteers. You'll need to be sure that you're able to provide the level of support required before you engage with young volunteers.

Support and supervision sessions should be held regularly and ensure that safeguarding and confidentiality is always on the agenda.

Make sure that you record support and supervision with your young volunteers, and particularly how you manage any early warning signs of confidentiality or safeguarding issues that might arise. You could do this by writing notes that you keep in their volunteer file or you could use a template.

If your young volunteers require debriefs, then make sure they get them – especially when supporting volunteers in traumatic environments such as palliative care, and intensive care units or wards⁶.

Consider including a probationary period, which includes regular assessments and support/supervision.

As well as having formal approaches to support and supervision, you might also want to compliment this by having more informal buddying relationships, perhaps with slightly older or more experienced volunteers. The most important thing to remember is that everyone who is providing any level of support or supervision to young volunteers must be able to identify the early warning signs of safeguarding concerns or confidentiality issues, and know how to manage those or how to escalate appropriately.

⁶ Extract from Volunteering Matters Toolkit: <http://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/report/toolkit-youth-social-action-in-health-and-social-care/>

Top tips from young volunteers

YPHP worked with a group of young people to identify the key messages that they wanted health and social care professionals to take on board when considering youth volunteering. Here is a list of their 'top tips':

- Make recruitment and selection young-people friendly
- Involve young people in planning your project
- Develop interactive training – use role plays, scenarios, videos etc.
- Be clear about what you expect from volunteers
- Ensure ongoing support is accessible – have a 'hotline' volunteers can use if they are concerned about anything
- Young volunteers should understand their rights and the rights of clients and service users



"Confidentiality and safeguarding are taken very seriously at Ask Brook. They were discussed from my first interview and we had specific training on safeguarding to be best able to protect and support the young people we talk to. The team also has a very open and collaborative approach which means that any conversations which feel like they could be safeguarding concerns can be discussed and worked on together." Young

Volunteer, [Ask Brook](#)

Conclusion

Safeguarding and confidentiality must be managed from all angles in order to ensure a robust approach. It is important to remember that there is a balancing act between your duty to safeguard your young volunteers from harm (as well as your patients/clients/beneficiaries) and your duty to uphold young people's rights in relation to confidentiality.

Youth volunteering is a fantastic way to bring a new perspective and add value to the work you do, but it is important to ensure that your organisation has commitment to invest resources into ensuring a successful programme.

By following the guidance mentioned above, you will mitigate risks associated with youth volunteering in relation to confidentiality and safeguarding within a health and social care setting.

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Appendix

	Young volunteers confidentiality	Safeguarding young volunteers	Client / patient / beneficiary confidentiality	Safeguarding clients / patients / beneficiaries	Considerations
DBS checks for young volunteers	Remember that you can only perform a DBS check if the role falls under the definition of 'regulated activity'			All volunteers aged 16+ who are performing 'regulated activity' must be DBS checked. Good practice is to re-check every three years.	Young people under the age of 16 cannot be DBS checked.
DBS checks for supporting staff/volunteers		This reduces the risk of young volunteers being harmed by those who are supporting them in their role			Ensure that supporting staff also have the correct skills, experience and resources to support young volunteers, and that they are able to assess levels of risk in relation to confidentiality and safeguarding
Parental permission to volunteer	Parental permission to volunteer can be waived if this would conflict with their right to confidentiality (e.g. service user forum)	It is good practice to seek parental permission before under 18s start volunteering			

References	Details of references should be held securely in line with the Data Protection Act	You can ask referees about the young person's level of maturity, their vulnerabilities and support needs	You can ask referees about the young person's understanding of confidentiality and/or their capacity to understand	You can ask referees about the young person's understanding of safeguarding and boundaries and/or their capacity to understand	It can be challenging for some young people to provide references. In these instances look for other ways that you can be reassured – e.g. robust recruitment, selection, training and ongoing support and supervision
Volunteer records	Remember to operate within the Data Protection Act and ensure that you have systems in place to ensure that confidential information isn't shared	Keep signed records of support and supervision sessions, performance development plans, individual risk assessments/support needs assessments, emergency contact details and details of any professionals that are involved in the young person's care.	Keep records of assessments, training, and performance development, including dates for review.	Keep records of assessments, training, and performance development, including dates for review. If the volunteers is aged 16+ keep a record of the date to review their DBS check.	
Role descriptions and volunteer agreements	Clearly state your commitment to volunteer confidentiality, from a legal (data protection) and rights based perspective. State the limits of your confidentiality policy (i.e. in relation to safeguarding)	Clearly state your commitment to child protection and safeguarding.	Clearly state your commitment to client confidentiality, and the expectation that all volunteers (including young volunteers) will adhere to your policy. This can be referred back to if problems arise.	Clearly state your commitment to safeguarding, and the expectation that all volunteers (including young volunteers) will adhere to your policy. This can be referred back to if problems arise.	

Policies and procedures	Ensure you have a policy on how to maintain young volunteers' confidentiality, and any limits on that policy.	Ensure you have a policy on how to safeguarding young people and protect them from harm.	Ensure that your young volunteers understand your client confidentiality policy and how to operate within it.	Ensure that your young volunteers understand your client safeguarding policy and how to operate within it.	Consider developing young people friendly or 'easy read' versions, in collaboration with young people. Policies need to be explained to young volunteers (for example through training activities) to ensure that they fully understand and engage with them.
Interviews	Details of the interview and the outcome should be held securely in line with the Data Protection Act	Your interviewing should include assessment of young people's vulnerabilities, support needs and potential triggers in relation to the role	Include scenario based questions to help you assess the young person's level of understanding of client confidentiality	Include scenario based questions to help you assess the young person's level of understanding of client safeguarding	You will need to ensure that the interviews have the right skills and training to be able to discern the young person's suitability for the role, e.g. Warner Interview Technique
Training	Ensure that young people's right to confidentiality is covered during your training programme	Ensure that your duty to safeguard your young volunteers is covered during your training programme	Ensure that client confidentiality is covered during your training programme and that young volunteers understand how this relates to them and their role	Ensure that client safeguarding is covered during your training programme and that young volunteers understand how this relates to them and their role	Ensure that you use fun, engaging training activities that cater to a range of different learning styles. Provide regular refresher training, for example annually.

<p>Ongoing support and supervision</p>	<p>Ensure that support and supervision records are stored securely, in line with the Data Protection Act</p>	<p>Ensure the safeguarding young volunteers is always on the agenda, that young people have a named supervisor that they are able to go to for support and that they understand how to escalate any concerns.</p>	<p>Ensure that young volunteers' understanding of client confidentiality is regularly reviewed during support and supervision and through personal development plans</p>	<p>Ensure that young volunteers' understanding of client safeguarding is regularly reviewed during support and supervision and through personal development plans</p>	<p>In addition to a named supervisor, consider a buddy/mentoring system. Make sure that young volunteers have access to additional support services for their wider wellbeing needs.</p>
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Useful links:

Volunteering Matters, [Toolkit – Youth social action in health and social care:](http://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/report/toolkit-youth-social-action-in-health-and-social-care/)
<http://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/report/toolkit-youth-social-action-in-health-and-social-care/>

Health, safety and young people in the workplace:
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/youngpeople/law/index.htm>

DBS guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/dbs-referrals-guidance--2>

Guidance on writing a volunteer policy:
<https://knowhownonprofit.org/people/volunteers/keeping/policy>

Guidance on writing a child protection policy:
<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/information-service/factsheet-writing-organisational-child-protection-policies-procedures.pdf>