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Safeguarding Essentials Course Summary

What is Safeguarding?

Safeguarding children and adults at risk means:

- Protecting them from abuse and neglect.
- Making sure that their health and development aren't impaired in any way.
- Making sure that they can grow up safely and take full advantage of the opportunities offered by life.

We need to look out for children and adults at risk who are in danger of being harmed, and take the necessary steps to make them safe. And we need to be proactive and provide the support and information children and adults at risk need to stay safe and healthy ensuring that even the most vulnerable get the chance to explore what life has to offer and achieve their full potential.

Child

The legal definition of a 'child' is very clear and simple. Anyone under the age of 18 is considered a child in the eyes of the law.

Adult at risk

An adult at risk is anyone other than a child who:

- Has needs for care and support and…
- Is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect and…
- Is unable to protect themselves against abuse or neglect.

This might be because of a mental or physical illness or disability, or because of their age.

Understanding abuse

It's a sad fact that some children and adults at risk are abused by others.

FACTS		
Most people who experience abuse know and trust the abuser.	In 15 – 20% of abuse cases, the abuser is a woman.	Children rarely lie about abuse. In fact, their great fear is often that they will not be believed.
A third of the people who sexually abuse children are themselves children – this is known as 'peer on peer' abuse.	Child sexual exploitation by gangs and groups is widespread. The victims and perpetrators come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds.	People with disabilities are more likely to be abused because they may be more dependent on others.

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Forms of abuse

Children and adults at risk can be exploited or harmed by people who take advantage of their vulnerability. This is what's known as abuse.

Abuse can take a number of different forms, for example:

Physical	Hurting a child or adult at risk, or causing them bodily harm.
Emotional	The persistent emotional maltreatment of a child or adult at risk, by making them feel worthless, for example, or by allowing them to witness drug misuse or violence.
Sexual	Forcing or enticing a child or adult at risk to take part in sexual activities, taking photographs under their clothing (known as 'upskirting'), or sexually exploiting them for money, power or status.
Financial	The theft, unlawful acquisition or malicious control of a child's or an adult at risk's money, income, property, inheritance or other form of asset.
Neglect	The persistent failure to meet the basic physical or psychological needs of a child or adult at risk. In cases of self-neglect, the vulnerable person themselves is neglecting their own wellbeing.
Online	Bullying, threatening or exploiting a child or adult at risk via social media, messaging apps or online forums.
Socio-Cultural	Any custom that's established in some cultures but considered abusive and unlawful under our laws. For example, female genital mutilation (FGM).
Radicalisation	The process in which someone is encouraged or persuaded to adopt an ideology that supports terrorism.
Modern Slavery	The trafficking, recruitment or harbouring of individuals for the purpose of exploitation. Can take many forms, including domestic servitude, forced labour and forced sexual exploitation.
Criminal exploitation	Children and adults at risk can be particularly susceptible to criminal exploitation, where they are coerced, manipulated, intimidated or deceived into taking part in criminal activity. This could include transporting drugs or money through county lines, shoplifting or committing acts of violence. It's important to understand that a child or adult at risk can be a victim of criminal exploitation even when they've committed crimes and even if they appear to have done this willingly.

It would be wrong to think that every abused person fits neatly into one of these categories. Also, it's quite possible that more than one type of abuse is occurring at the same time.

Experiencing abuse and neglect can negatively affect a person's mental health and wellbeing, too. Equally, if someone has a pre-existing mental health condition, they may be at greater risk of abuse or neglect. But it would be wrong to think of mental health simply as a safeguarding issue. Mental health is something we all have, like physical health.

How can you help?

A child or adult at risk will come into contact with all sorts of people in their daily lives:

- Parents or carers
- Police, the fire and rescue service, and other emergency services
- Social services personnel
- Teachers and lecturers
- Administrative and support staff at school or college
- Friends, neighbours and colleagues
- Health service personnel
- Strangers and passers-by

We don't know who a child or adult at risk might turn to when they're in need. So we all, as socially responsible individuals, must share responsibility to look out for the most vulnerable.

On the one hand, this just means recognising when someone might be in trouble, and passing your concerns on to the right person. But, more than that, it means maintaining a professional and supportive relationship with the children and adults at risk you come into contact with.

Signs for concern

The following signs do not necessarily indicate abuse and can have perfectly innocent explanations, but they should definitely give cause for concern and should never be ignored.

- Unexplained bruising, burns or bite marks or attempting to cover up injuries, with loose clothing.
- Loss of weight, resulting in a very thin and gaunt appearance can be signs of self-harm or eating disorders
- Suddenly becoming more introverted or uncharacteristic mood swings.
- Inappropriate sexualised or risky behaviour or displaying signs of pain or discomfort can indicate sexual abuse. It's important to remember that children who are being sexually abused or exploited may believe they are in a loving, consensual relationship.
- Expressions of hatred towards others could indicate radicalisation, especially if the person seems to be fixated by a particular ideology.
- Regularly arriving wearing inadequate and/or dirty clothing can be visible signs of neglect.

Mental health conditions

Mental health isn't just a safeguarding issue, but it is a factor to consider. Here are just some of the conditions that people with mental health difficulties might experience:

- **Eating disorder**: any condition in which someone worries excessively about their weight or has eating habits that cause them distress.
- **Anxiety**: a feeling of inner turmoil and worry that people feel in anticipation of a negative event. If this feeling persists, or becomes so intense that it interferes with everyday life, then it's considered a mental health condition.
- **Depression**: in general terms, feeling low or having a negative mood. If these feelings don't fade quickly, or interfere with everyday life, then it's considered a mental health condition.
- **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**: an anxiety disorder caused by stressful, frightening or distressing events. PTSD can also be caused by long term traumas, such as an abusive relationship.
- **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)**:a disorder in which repeated thoughts or behaviours cause distress and start to interfere with everyday life.
- **Bipolar disorder**: a condition in which someone experiences mood swings between periods of unusual happiness, confidence and energy, and other periods of negativity and depression.
- **Psychosis**: a condition in which someone has difficulty distinguishing between what's real and what isn't. Psychotic symptoms can result from a range of causes, including mental illness, drugs or sleep deprivation.
- **Personality disorder**: any condition that affects a person's personality, including their attitudes, thoughts and behaviour. The effects of the disorder may make it difficult for them to form or maintain relationships with others.

Acting on concerns

When you have a concern:

- Be discreet and respect the person's privacy.
- Raise your concerns with the person responsible for safeguarding.
- If a person responsible for safeguarding isn't available and it's an emergency situation, you should contact social services or the police.

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Dealing with disclosures

If someone discloses to you that they're being abused, there are some general dos and don'ts for dealing with the situation.

Do:

- Remain calm and receptive
- Show concern and invite them to explain what's happened in their own words
- Listen, take them seriously and try to clarify the facts
- Reassure them they are not responsible and that telling you is the right thing
- Explain that you will take action and will do your best to help

Don't:

- Show shock or distaste
- Use leading questions or make assumptions
- Make negative comments about the abuser
- Belittle what they are saying or make light of the situation
- Dig for further information
- Make promises you can't keep
- Try to sort out the situation yourself

Taking action

- The person's immediate safety is the highest priority. So, if they're injured, or in immediate danger, call the police or seek urgent medical attention
- Alert the person responsible for safeguarding and tell them everything
- Note down what you've been told and any actions you've taken

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Confidentiality and data protection

Privacy and discretion are immensely important but should never prevent you from passing on information - ensuring someone's safety, and putting an end to abuse, is always the highest priority.

Morally	Always report when someone is in danger, never withhold information, even if you promised to keep the information secret.
Legally	You can always pass personal data on to others if they've given you permission to do so or if it's necessary to protect someone's vital interests.

Under data protection law, any personal information you handle must be relevant and accurate, and it must be kept secure.