Policies, procedures and resources for working with children, young people and vulnerable adults

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MANUAL ONE
THE SAFEGUARDING MANUAL

INTRODUCTION

SAFEGUARDING FRAMEWORK

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE & OVERSIGHT

RECEIVING & RESPONDING TO REFERRALS

MANAGING & MONITORING SUPPORT
Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Welcome to our ‘Manual of Manuals’

Welcome to the 2014 edition of the Safe Families for Children Safeguarding & Operations Manual – a ‘manual of manuals’ covering a broad range of important topics relating to both Safeguarding principles and Operational guidance.

This manual serves as a framework for the safe implementation of Safe Families throughout the UK, informed by the experience of 11 years of running Safe Families in the USA, and the ongoing pilot programme in the North East of England.

It has been written with the aim of being accessible and helpful to a range of audiences – including those with, and those without specialist knowledge of safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, and the complexities of running a charitable organisation.

I trust that you will find it a valuable resource as we work together to achieve our vision of seeing families in crisis move from surviving to thriving as they are embraced by compassionate and committed local volunteers.

| Manual 2 (chapters 4 – 6) | Recruiting and managing the volunteer force |
| Manual 3 (chapters 7 – 10) | Role Specific Handbooks |

Note:
Throughout the manual there will be references to additional more detailed documentation such as forms, job descriptions, policies etc. This documentation is publicly accessible at: [www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual](http://www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual)
1.2 Objectives and Principles

Charitable Objectives
1. The provision of relief and respite to families in a crisis arising from poverty, conflict, hardship homelessness, ill health or addictions.
2. The relief of the needs of overwhelmed and resource limited parents and their children through the provision of safe, temporary family stays for their children.
3. The protection of the physical and mental health of children.

Key operating principles
1. We are committed to being a volunteer movement made up of ordinary people wanting to serve their community and show friendship, care and hospitality. In order to ensure no ambiguity about the basis on which they operate volunteers receive no reimbursement, either financially or as gift in kind.
2. We are committed to strengthening families who are crying out for help, and therefore there will be no coercion or manipulation of parents to participate; they choose Safe Families for Children because they recognise they are in a problem and need to involve others in finding a way forward.
3. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of children, and believe that it is the responsibility of us all. Safe Families therefore works together with Local Authorities, local churches and other agencies, within a robust safeguarding framework, to achieve a safer future for struggling families.

1.3 Why is Safe Families for Children Needed?

Crisis (noun) – ‘a time of intense difficulty, trouble, or danger’.

Life can be unpredictable, and raising healthy and well-balanced children is a difficult task even for the most confident and well-resourced parents. Many parents face pressures and difficulties such as the loss of employment, inadequate housing, personal ill health or an illness striking their child or partner, or the breakdown of a vital relationship. Others may be caught in a trap of debt, poverty, domestic violence, drug and/or alcohol misuse, or incidents that find them dealing with the police, the courts and possibly prison. Such issues can and often do blur together, escalating toward crisis point and feeling totally overwhelming.

During such crises, parents may struggle to provide a safe and caring environment for their children. Research shows that children in a family experiencing crises become especially at risk of neglect or abuse as their parents struggle to cope with crushing circumstances and emotions. The risks are even higher if the parent or carer is socially isolated, without extended family and friends available to help. Without assistance, all too frequently these situations may lead to long-lasting negative consequences for the children.

The Children Act (1989) mandates that Local Authorities must help children deemed at risk of significant harm. However, public sector resources are stretched and Local Authorities’ Children’s Social Care threshold for intervention has crept higher and higher. Support to the family in their home may often be short-term, and foster care is usually reserved only for children who have already suffered harm, or for whom the risk of such abuse or neglect is very high. Moreover, there is considerable bureaucracy involved in statutory intervention that oftentimes creates additional anxiety for the already struggling parent. It is commonly accepted that more help should be provided for such families, and sooner, but what can be done, and by whom?
1.4 The Safe Families Solution

- Stabilising families at times of crisis
- Preventing child neglect and abuse
- Reducing the number of children entering the care system

Safe Families for Children seeks to treat families as a whole, offering help and support that benefits both the parent and the child/children.

The Safe Families for Children charity facilitates the work of a grassroots network of volunteers extending a safety net out in the community and providing parents with timely support when they need help to care for their children. As a faith-based initiative Safe Families is rooted in the belief that the safety and wellbeing of children in our communities is a responsibility that belongs to all of us. Safe Families aims to bring about a new way of enabling the living out of the principles and attitudes of loving our neighbour and extending hospitality to one another.

The focus of Safe Families support is getting alongside families at a time of difficulty, to offer flexible support that benefits both the parent and the child. Parents are offered a volunteer befriender, who we call a Family Friend, and the children may be given respite care, for up to 28 days, which we call Hosting – a new innovation within the children’s social care sector that is positioned between a kinship placement and foster care. Our network of approved Host Families welcome a child to stay with them temporarily, providing them with stability through the crisis.

These interventions are further supported by volunteers called Resource Friends who can offer practical resources needed, and also by a Family Coach who supervises and co-ordinates the involvement, keeping in contact with the family in need and with the volunteers who are helping them in different but complementary ways. Together, the support, resources and relationships that Safe Families offers mean that acute problems within struggling families can be de-escalated and longer-term problems can be averted.

Who does Safe Families support?

Safe Families supports parents and/or primary carers of children who are struggling to give children the care and developmental support they need.

There are no eligibility criteria to meet to qualify for this help. However, some guiding principles are:

- The family live in a qualifying geographic area.
- The parents do not have their own family or friends who can help sufficiently.
- The level of support required is within acceptable safety thresholds for our volunteers.
- The support plan can be shown to be in line with Safe Families charitable objectives.
- The intervention has a reasonable chance of success and is not merely ‘postponing the inevitable’ (i.e. statutory child protection intervention)
1.5 What it means to be a ‘faith-based initiative’

A genuine desire to improve the wellbeing of children and families

Safe Families is a very broad-based organisation spanning all the major church denominations and traditions – Anglican, Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, Reformed etc.

Safe Families for Children’s patron is the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Rt Rev Justin Welby, who is well-known for his position that faith is not simply a matter of private beliefs but that it is the motivation from which springs the desire to address the injustices present in modern society.

(left) Archbishop Justin.

Safe Families for Children is a network of community-conscious churches working together with others to achieve improvement in the wellbeing of children and families. The motivation of all working within Safe Families is to make a tangible difference to the life chances of those helped, irrespective of whether the family identifies with the Christian faith, another faith, or no faith. It is important to note that Safe Families is not a vehicle to support proselytisation.

In order to preserve the integrity of its Christian roots Safe Families requires that participating churches, partners, staff and volunteers:

- be comfortable with, and not antagonistic towards, Safe Families for Children’s ethos as a church-based movement rooted in the historic Christian tradition
- be willing to work with those of any faith or no faith to meet the Safe Families objectives of relief and respite to families in need and the protection of children.

Safe Families has enjoyed constructive dialogue with leaders of other faiths with a view to developing Safe Families for Children within their communities.

The strength of faith communities

Safe Families aims to achieve sustainable support for families and communities. One of the strengths of Safe Families is the network that it creates and the community into which those in need can be linked, to the extent to which they choose to do so. Therefore,

- Referred families will be offered help to access wider opportunities of support which will include other Safe Families volunteers and resources, and also community activities, some of which may be church-based. For any church-based activities, the extent to which faith is openly expressed will be carefully described to each family. Care will be taken not to apply any pressure or coercion to engage in faith-related activities, respecting each person’s right and need to make their own faith choices. Faith-based questions and interest from referred families can be responded to honestly.
- In order to cultivate the sense of community volunteers are expected to participate in their local Safe Families network, which will mean having some kind of connection to a local church. This is to provide both support and accountability.
- Safe Families is willing to work in cooperation with communities of other faiths which may wish to put into practice the principles of Safe Families support from within their own community.
1.6 The history of the organisation

Safe Families for Children (Safe Families) is a charitable organisation that was founded in Chicago in 2003, by child psychologist Dr. David Anderson. Safe Families gives support to families in crisis, principally by offering ‘hosting’ – a short-term community-based voluntary alternative to foster care – supported by the longer-term befriending of struggling parents. Over 11,000 volunteers are now involved in the network with over 2,000 ‘Host Families’ regularly caring for children in crisis.

Safe Families has proven highly effective in fighting against family breakdown, preventing child neglect and abuse, and achieving up to 50% reductions to the numbers of children entering the care system (ref Cook County, Illinois). Safe Families is now operational in 65 cities across 25 American States and over 10,000 children in the USA have benefitted from the intervention. Many awards have been given to Safe Families in recognition of the difference it has made to families.

Beginning in the UK

Safe Families UK was established by Durham-based philanthropist Sir Peter Vardy (right), who over the last 25 years has channelled millions of pounds into projects that have improved the lives of thousands of people affected by poverty, crime, addictions and poor educational provision.

Sir Peter’s vision was to pilot Safe Families first in the North East of England, with a plan to later expand around Great Britain.

The relationship between Safe Families USA and Safe Families UK

Safe Families UK is licenced to operate the Safe Families model in the British Isles and has full access to the experience, systems and knowledge base of Safe Families USA. Safe Families UK is not however a subsidiary of Safe Families USA. Safe Families UK is a fully independent charity with its own board of trustees. Dr. Anderson is a member of the UK board of trustees and as such offers the benefit of his considerable expertise to the UK organisation.

It is recognised that there are considerable difference between the UK and US contexts and as such Safe Families UK is working to the foundational principles and ethos of Safe Families for Children, whilst adapting aspects of the model to be more appropriate and compliant in the UK.
Chapter 2
Safeguarding Framework

2.1 Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults

The 3 aims of Safe Families for Children are:

1. To stabilise families at times of crisis
2. To minimise risks of child neglect & abuse
3. To reduce the number of children entering the care system

2.1.1 Aims and scope

This framework complete with its relevant sections pertaining to policy, procedure and guidance is intended to ensure the safeguarding of the children, young people and vulnerable adults with whom we work. The word safeguarding is broader than the related term 'child protection' as it implicitly includes an emphasis upon preventative awareness as well as responsive action.

Safe Families for Children’s board of Trustees and Executive team are absolutely committed to the principle of safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults. All of our staff and volunteers, whatever role they may serve in, carry a duty of care towards those being assisted by our programmes and services. Having a comprehensive safeguarding framework in place not only protects and promotes client welfare but also it enhances the confidence of our statutory sector stakeholders and the general public.

Our Safeguarding manual is a living, breathing resource at the heart of our commitment to excellence in delivering programmes and services within the community. It should be thoroughly understood and rigorously implemented by all staff and volunteers working in an outreach capacity (i.e. having direct contact with children and vulnerable adults). All support staff (i.e. office-based) should pursue a good working knowledge of its principles. Project partners and stakeholders should also use it as an important reference point in our collaborative efforts to keep children, young people and vulnerable adults safe from harm.

- This policy and associated procedures are applicable to all children, young people and vulnerable adults served through our work, regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or religion.

2.1.2 Definitions of Terms

Child protection

The process of protecting individual children identified as suffering significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect.

Safeguarding

The process of protecting children from abuse or neglect, preventing impairment of their health and development, and ensuring they are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care that enables them to have optimum life chances and enter adulthood successfully.
Child
Is understood by the Children Act 1989 as being under the age of 18.

Vulnerable Adult
A person aged 18 or over who has: a learning or physical disability; a physical or mental illness, chronic or otherwise including an addiction to alcohol or drugs; a reduction in physical or mental capacity; a dependency upon others, or a requirement for assistance in the performance of physical functions; severe impairment in the ability to communicate with others; impairment in their ability to protect themselves from assault, abuse or neglect

Harm
Is taken to include not only ill treatment (including sexual abuse and forms of ill treatment which are not physical), but also the impairment of, or an avoidable deterioration in physical or mental health; and the impairment of physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development.

‘Where the question of whether harm suffered by a child is significant turns on the child’s health or development, his/her health or development shall be compared with that which could reasonably be expected of a similar child’. (Children Act 1989)

Regulated Activity
Unsupervised activities that involves contact with children or vulnerable adults frequently, intensively and/or overnight. Examples include teaching, training, care, supervision, advice, treatment and transportation, and also:

- Any activity allowing unsupervised contact with children or vulnerable adults that is in a ‘specified place’ frequently or intensively. (‘Specified places’ include schools, childcare premises and care homes.)
- Certain defined positions of responsibility, including foster carer, childminder, school governor, director of social services and trustee of certain charities.

Regulated Activity has an emphasis upon regularity. In this context, ‘regular’ means carried out by the same person frequently (once a week or more often), or on 4 or more days in a 30-day period (or in some cases, overnight).

Disclosure
The moment when a child, young person or vulnerable adult chooses to tell a responsible adult, i.e. a Host Family, about abuse they have suffered or are suffering

Abuse
Abuse can occur in any relationship, adult-adult, adult-child or child-child, and may result in significant harm to, or exploitation of the person subject to it. Commonly recognised abuse categories are listed below. Some children, young people or vulnerable adults may suffer more than one category of abuse.

Emotional (psychological) abuse
Persistent emotional ill-treatment causing severe and persistent adverse emotional and/or developmental effects. May involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved or inadequate. May feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. May involve causing children or vulnerable adults to feel frightened or in danger, direct or implied threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, isolation or withdrawal from services or supportive and/or spiritual networks. May involve verbal abuse such as racism, sexism, or mockery based on disability, or other forms of harassment, taunts or similar treatment.
Physical abuse
Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, kicking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, misuse of medication, disproportionate restraint, inappropriate touch or violent and/or cruel punishment. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer feigns the symptoms of, or deliberately causes ill-health to a child they are looking after (a.k.a. fabricated illness, factitious illness by proxy or induced illness).

Sexual abuse
Involves forcing, coercing 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 or may be non-contact activities, or encouraging children/young people to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. Sexual abuse includes rape and sexual assault or sexual acts of touching of intimate places to which the child or vulnerable adult has not or could not consent to and/or was pressured/coerced into consenting.

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. Neglect may be intentional or may emerge through negligence. It may involve a parent or carer failing to provide, or the withholding of: adequate nutrition, safe accommodation, clothing, protection from physical harm or danger, or access to medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child’s basic emotional and developmental needs.

Organised abuse
This may be defined as abuse involving one or more abuser and a number of related and non-related abused young people and children. The abusers concerned may be acting together to abuse children, or may be using an institutional framework or a position of authority to recruit children for abuse.

Abuse of trust
A relationship of trust can be described as one in which one party is in a position of power or influence over the other by virtue of their role, work or the nature of their activity. Abuse of trust is inappropriate the leveraging of this power in order to gain a personal benefit, be it romantic, sexual, financial or otherwise.

Grooming
Deliberate actions taken by an adult to form a trusting relationship with a child, with the intent of later having sexual contact. The act of grooming a child sexually may include activities that are legal in and of themselves, but later lead to sexual contact. Typically, this is done to gain the child’s trust as well as the trust of those responsible for the child’s well-being. Research has shown children are less likely to report a crime if it involves someone that he or she knows, trusts, and cares about. Additionally, a trusting relationship with the family means the child’s parents will be less likely to believe any potential accusations.

Financial or Material abuse
including theft, fraud, exploitation, pressure in connection with wills property or inheritance or financial transactions or the misuse of misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits. Damage or threats of damage to property.
2.1.3 **Headline policies on safeguarding:**

a. **We will honour** the unique status of children, young people and vulnerable adults and will respect them as valued individuals. All our staff and volunteers will strive to safeguard the welfare and wellbeing of the children, young people and vulnerable adults that we work with.

b. **We will apply the highest standards** of safeguarding whether dealing with children and young people or vulnerable adults. We recognise that our approach may need to differ when dealing with children, youth or adults, but the same safeguarding principles will remain.

c. **We will assess** every referral we receive according to pre-defined risk thresholds, only accepting cases that we feel are safe for our staff and volunteers to become involved in. Once assigned volunteer involvement with families will be properly supervised and monitored until the case is closed.

d. **We will uphold integrity** in all relationships with children, young people and vulnerable adults and ensure that our staff and volunteers operate with transparency and avoid any form of exploitation real or perceived. The highest professional standards will be continually encouraged and maintained.

e. **We will take a serving approach,** aware that an unequal balance of power is often the pre-condition from which abuse begins. Staff and volunteers ought never to manipulate a relationship with a child, young person or vulnerable adult for personal advantage or gratification.

f. **We will take any allegation seriously** and we will collaborate fully with the statutory and voluntary agencies concerned with abuse of the vulnerable. We will adhere to systems of accountability and supervision and reserve the right to conduct investigations into the conduct of staff and volunteers.

g. **We will recruit safely** according to stringent recruitment processes, requiring all staff and volunteers to provide evidence that their behaviour has never caused harm to children, young people or vulnerable adults or put them at risk. At time of recruitment, and at specified intervals during their service, all staff and volunteers will be subject to background checks, including detailed character references and screening by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).

h. **We will train** staff and volunteers in principles of safeguarding and child protection, including how to recognise signs and symptoms of abuse, and what to do in event of becoming concerned about the potential abuse of a child or vulnerable adult.

i. **We will supervise** appropriately all our work with families and children in accordance with assessment of potential risks, offering opportunity for debrief, further training opportunities and supportive counselling if required.

j. **We will work in partnership** with other agencies, both statutory and voluntary, in order that the best possible provision of support is available within the community to ensure that every child is protected from harm and grows up in circumstances that enable them to have optimum life chances and to enter adulthood successfully.

k. **We will share information** with other agencies according to well-established principles best practice within the children and families sector.
2.2 From policy to procedure

The policies and procedures outlined in this manual have all been developed with safeguarding children and vulnerable adults in mind. Careful consideration has been given to the welfare of all those we seek to assist through the course of our work – prioritising their best interests and ensuring their safety.

Many important aspects of policy and procedure are unpacked in this chapter, and in the two manuals that follow, on Recruiting And Managing The Volunteer Force which includes our ‘Safer Recruitment’ Process (chapter 4) guidance on Receiving and Responding to Referrals (chapter 5) and Managing & monitoring Safe Families support (chapter 6) and the Role Specific Handbooks, in particular the Family Coach Handbook (Chapter 7) the Host Family Handbook (Chapter 8) and the Family Friend Handbook (Chapter 9).

In addition the final manual entitled Additional Policy Guidance includes important policy and procedure relating to: Safeguarding Policy and Guidance for Volunteers, Dealing with an allegation of abuse against Safe Families, Guidance for making Case Notes (inc. volunteer journaling), Guidance for Discipline, Restraint and Touch, Guidance for transportation, Policy on Smoking, Guidance on sports and leisure activities, Guidance on Private Fostering, Internet and Social Media / Social Networks Policy, Whistle-blowing policy, Policy on dealing with complaints, Policy and Guidance on Information and Data Management.

2.2.1 Safeguarding Officers

Every week Safe Families deals with dozens of families in crisis, and as we grow this number will soon become hundreds. At any time concerns may arise that a child has suffered or is suffering harm as a result of abuse or neglect, or that a vulnerable adult is being abused or exploited in some way. Therefore, experienced Safeguarding officers have been appointed in order to help the whole workforce, staff and volunteers, to respond appropriately.

Safe Families staff and volunteers are made aware of who they should report any Safeguarding concerns to as part of their compulsory induction and training.

At the time of publishing the named Safeguarding officers are:

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<th>Region</th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Date updated</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teesside</td>
<td>Sonia Daniel</td>
<td>June 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyne &amp; Wear</td>
<td>Eileen Brady</td>
<td>June 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolverhampton</td>
<td>Teresa Roe</td>
<td>June 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>Lyn Hair</td>
<td>June 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southampton</td>
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The Safeguarding officers in turn report to their local/regional management group.

2.2.2 Procedural differences in handling children and vulnerable adults

The definition of a child is much more straightforward than that for a vulnerable adult, although there remains some ambiguity in law in the 16-17 age group where certain rights are granted (such as the right to have consensual sex, obtain a driving licence).

The threshold at which an adult is classed as vulnerable is more subjective. Certain factors make the vulnerability more evident, such as a profound mental or physical disability, but other such as milder learning difficulties, or certain addictive behaviours may not always be recognised as placing the individual in a ‘vulnerable’ category. Indeed adults with such conditions may not themselves appreciate being referred to in this way.
Ultimately we want to ensure that all the parents/carers and carers that we interact with are safeguarded from harm, as well as their children. Therefore staff and volunteers should:

- be alert to the vulnerability of the adults we support, they are in a stressful situation and such their ability to protect themselves from assault, abuse or exploitation may be reduced.
- never take advantage of, or exploit the vulnerable position of a parents/carer who is trusting us to support them / their child.
- discuss any concerns that a vulnerable adult has been or is being abused as soon as possible with your Family Coach or Family Support Manager.

It is important therefore to acknowledge that the same safeguarding policy principles (a-k) apply, their application will need to be considered and adjusted on a case by case basis. For example we would appropriately attune our approach to:

- A young mum with a chronic mental health condition that we suspect is subject to domestic violence
- A 3 year old boy suspected of suffering emotional abuse from a close family member
- An 10 year old girl displaying overt an inappropriate sexualised behaviour
- Concern that an ageing grandparent is being physically harmed by a teenage grandchild they have guardianship of

Variables would be likely to include: methods of communication used with the individual concerned, the extent of consultation with parents/primary carers, and the degree to which the individual may be expected to resist or co-operate with any measures to be taken.

The influence of adults in positions of power:
Children from families facing crises may have already suffered significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect. Once they are outside their normal home situation, with new carers giving dedicated time to them, they may become more open to speaking about what has taken place. Safe Families Host Families ought to be especially alert to this possibility.

Similarly Safe Families Family Friends may in the course of their befriending a vulnerable adult hear about, or see signs of abuse, either historic or current. As an adult the individual concerned may or may not be ready to face up to the reality of this abuse, and to take steps to deal with it. This is often the case with domestic violence.

The Safe Families approach to safeguarding is one of never do nothing. All concerns, however minor, ought to be noted and in many cases also reported and discussed with a supervisor such as a Safe Families Family Coach or Family Support Manager.

2.3 Recognising Abuse and Abusers

2.3.1 The challenge of recognising abusers

Those regarded as an abuser might be anyone, including family members, professional staff, paid care workers, volunteers and fellow service users, neighbours, friends and associates.

Abuse may be perpetrated by someone in a position of power or authority who uses his/her position to the detriment of the health, safety, welfare and wellbeing of a vulnerable person.

Abuse may take place in any context; in the home, school, church, hospitals, and other places that are often assumed safe, or indeed in public places.
2.3.2 Signs and symptoms of abuse

Some children can exhibit one or more signs. If there are concerns about a child displaying any of the indicators, discussions should be held with Safeguarding Officer or staff member. Indicators can be physical e.g. marks and bruises, behavioural i.e. aggressive or withdrawn or secretive etc, disclosures i.e. a child tells you something that indicates abuse, presentation/appearance may be unkempt, dirty etc. (Working Together 2010).

The following section summarises helpful guidance given to schoolteachers on this subject:

- Some signs and symptoms are common to all forms of abuse – low self-esteem and changes in behaviour, for example.
- Clusters of signs and symptoms are particularly important rather than isolated instances – although some signs on their own can be particularly significant.
- Significance should be attached to any mismatch between an injury and the account of how it happened.
- It is importance to consider the duration, intensity and frequency of the signs and symptoms.
- Staff/volunteers must record signs and symptoms, even if they have no proof that these indicate abuse. For example, information about when injuries occur (such as after the weekend) can be important.
- Some forms of abuse have no overt signs. Young children often communicate their distress through their behaviour, whereas older children may become adept at hiding signs of abuse.
- Children, young people and vulnerable adults from different cultural backgrounds may communicate their distress in different ways.
- Bear in mind that what you observe is being filtered through your own personal circumstances, the society you live in, and your culturally and socially determined attitudes.
- On their own, the signs and symptoms do not necessarily indicate abuse, but they must be recorded, as many cases of abuse are identified only when one person’s observation of apparently insignificant signs is considered alongside other information.

**NOTE:** Lists of signs and symptoms are not fail-safe mechanisms, but they are often helpful indicators in certain combinations of the likelihood or reality of abuse. Young people may behave strangely or appear unhappy for many reasons, as they move through the inevitable stages of growing up, and their families experience changes.

Remember that there can be other explanations for a child, young person or vulnerable adult showing such signs or behaving in such ways. There is a good deal of overlap between the signs and symptoms of the different types of abuse, particularly between emotional and other types of abuse.

**Further resources**
2.4 Acting upon concerns of potential abuse

Given our prior discussion regarding procedural differences in handling children and vulnerable adults the following guidance indicates whether procedures are advised for children, vulnerable adults, or both.

2.4.1 Consider Urgent Medical Attention

If a child or vulnerable adult is suffering from a serious injury or health-related condition, medical attention must be sought immediately at the nearest Accident and Emergency unit (dialling 999 if paramedics/ambulance is deemed appropriate).

2.4.2 Listening and responding to a ‘disclosure’

When a child, young person or vulnerable adult chooses to tell a responsible adult, i.e. a Safe Families Host Family or Family Friend, about abuse they have suffered or are suffering, we call this a disclosure.

Disclosures may relate to abuse perpetrated by a family member or someone outside the family, e.g. a teacher, youth leader, pastor, online ‘friend’ etc. No group of people is exempt from being abusers. All disclosures must be taken seriously. It is important that the guidelines below are followed:

1) Reassure them they have done the right thing by telling someone.
2) Listen carefully but do not press for information, ‘cross-examine’, or ask leading questions, as any leading questions may prejudice follow-up investigation by Police or Local Authority safeguarding team.
3) Don’t promise confidentiality, rather sensitively explain that you may need to let someone else know - outline what you are going to do next.
4) If after talking to a child, young person or vulnerable adult about a sensitive issue, you feel concerned or upset, make sure you seek help from your Safe Families supervisor.
5) Write up what has been told as soon as possible using the Sensitive Information Report Form (www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual) and wherever it is possible use the person's own words to describe the alleged abuse.
6) Forward the completed form to your Family Coach as soon as possible, either in an envelope marked “Confidential” or in an email similarly marked.
   - You may password protect the electronic form if concerned about email interception, sending the password in a second email.
   - The Family Coach will review the form and follow up its content with an Safe Families Family Support Manager.
7) Be aware that what has been recorded is highly confidential and should only be shared on a need to know basis.
8) The Family Support Manager will need to decide what action to take in liaison with any other relevant persons. The category of abuse and the current level of risk to the child, young person or vulnerable adult will be taken into account when making this decision.

2.4.3 Acting on other concerns of abuse

If your concerns of abuse do not directly arise from a verbal disclosure from the victim the reporting process will be very similar. The Sensitive Information Form also allows for the description of bruising, injury, peculiar behaviour or the witnessing of troubling incidents.
2.4.4 Action flow chart for disclosures

1. Listen to the child/adult and do not promise total confidentiality.

2. Keep calm, do not ask leading questions, say encouraging things.

3. Allow the child/adult to finish in their own time, and let them know what you will do next.

4. If the child/adult is at immediate risk of significant harm jump to 7.

5. As soon as possible fill in a ‘Sensitive Information’ form to give to your Family Coach.

6. Contact Family Coach who may help directly or may include the Family Support Manager for further advice about appropriate action.

7. Take Action i.e. referral to Local Authority social workers or other appropriate course of action

Note: A Family Support Manager is available to offer advice at any stage in the process

2.4.5 Will we inform a child’s parent/carer before referring to Local Authority?

When concerns about potential abuse are considered serious enough to be referred to the Local Authority safeguarding unit Safe Families staff/volunteers are normally expected to discuss any concerns with the family and seek their agreement for a referral to be made. However, discussing with the parent the intention to refer should only be done where such discussion will not place a child at increased risk of harm. For example, we would not seek a parent’s consent to refer a child if:

- The parent is implicated in the abuse
- We believe that the parent is intentionally covering up abuse, out of fear or collusion
- The child may be put at further risk, e.g. physical abuse as a punishment for ‘grassing’
- The perpetrator may be alerted and possibly take action to destroy evidence
- The safety of anyone else, including the referrer, is likely to be put at risk.
- Situations where there is an indication of fabricated or induced illness.
2.4.6 Additional factors regarding potential abuse of vulnerable adults

Safe Families staff/volunteers will usually ask the permission of the vulnerable person they are worried about before sharing any information about / acting upon their situation with others. Exceptions to this rule would be situations where others may also be at risk of abuse, or the person is not able to make their own decisions because of lack of mental capacity and/or perceived threat of repercussions.

Consideration should be given to the following questions in order to determine whether or not the Local Authority or Police should be involved:

a) Has a crime been committed?
b) Is the individual in need of protection?
c) Is the individual in need of further support regarding their vulnerability and/or in coping with the impact of the situation?

Note: this list is indicative, not exhaustive.

2.4.7 Advice in relation to making a referral to the Local Authority

Although making a decision to make a referral may be difficult, you must not delay in contacting the Children's Social Care department at the relevant Local Authority (or Adult Social Care in the case of suspected abuse of a vulnerable adult). In most circumstances this will be the Local Authority in which the child (or adult) has permanent residence.

Family Support Managers and Family Coaches are expected to plan ahead for this eventuality ensuring that they have the relevant names and contact numbers stored for quick retrieval.

It is the responsibility of the person making the referral to do following before contacting Children's Social Care:

- Obtain written details of concern/allegation, signed and dated by the person receiving the allegation (use the Sensitive Information Form for this)
- Acknowledge receipt of and date the written details
- Add notes from follow-up discussions about the matter to the relevant record on the Safe Families database, recording decisions with the rationale for those decisions

If a case is borderline for referral a phonecall to Children's Social Care may be made anyway for the purposes of obtaining advice and guidance. Typically such calls will be received by the manager of the team dealing with referrals. It is not necessary to give the name of the child or family when seeking this advice.

Advice can also be sought out of hours from the Emergency Duty Team and all those in direct contact with children and vulnerable adults are advised to put this number in their phone and their manual contacts list for ease of access.

Members of the public who refer to Children’s Social Care can request that they remain anonymous for this referral. However, with regard to children receiving support from Safe Families, for whom an Safe Families worker wishes to make a referral, Safe Families will be identified as the referrer.

2.4.8 Further Responsibilities of Safe Families as Referrer

The fact that abuse has been reported does not mean that we have no further involvement or no further responsibility to support the protection of the child/children in question. Safe Families will continue to work collaboratively with Children’s Social Care, making sure that the roles within Safe Families, strengths and limitations, are understood and that together
the best arrangements are made for the continuing safety of the child.

If a Safe Families Family Support Manager or Family Coach is not in agreement with the response to the referral, discussion should take place with their superior, who may be the Regional Director or Chief Executive, in order that appropriate action can be taken.

Detailed records of referrals, outcomes and reason should be kept on the Safe Families database and every effort should be made to work with other agencies to ensure that children are safeguarded from harm.

2.4.9 Safeguarding against child – child abuse

Safe Families is aware that when a Host Family with their own children volunteers, there is a concern to safeguard the children within that Host Family as well as the child/children being placed with them. For example a Host Family with a 4 year old and an 8 year old may offer to host an 11 year old for a long weekend. The Host Family may have concerns about safeguarding their own children during the stay, and ought to build in appropriate boundaries for managing perceived risks.

Also, Host Families with children ought to prepare them (age-appropriately) for a visit, from the point of view of helping them understand the importance of privacy boundaries and behaving appropriately.

In response to a specific child – child incident

If a child being hosted by a Host Family has behaved in an inappropriate way towards a child within the Host Family, whether sexually, physically or emotionally, then the Host Family should work through the following questions with the Family Coach / Family Support Manager, taking any appropriate decisions and planning appropriate actions:

- How serious was the incident?
- To what extent was the action malicious or premeditated?
- Is it appropriate for the child to remain in the Host Family home or will he/she need to return home or be found another placement?
- How has the incident affected the child concerned?
- Does the Host Family child who has been affected need further support to process what has taken place?
- Do the parents of the child affected need to talk through and process what happened?
- How will Safe Families inform the placing family of the incident?
- What are the potential risks to other children in the future?
- Does the behaviour indicate new concerns regarding the child who was referred to Safe Families that need to be shared with other agencies? If so, decisions must be made as to the appropriate way in which this is done. This will depend on the nature of the behaviour.

2.5 Dealing with an allegation of abuse against Safe Families team members

2.5.1 Allegations: Who could make one, and for what reason?

Firstly, it is important for all involved with our charity to be vigilant as abusers may seek
access to children by infiltrating organisations such as ours in both staff and volunteer roles. In this sense we must be willing to ‘think the unthinkable’ i.e. that one of our colleagues may have harmed a child or exploited a vulnerable adult.

Safe Families for Children’s procedures for dealing with allegations against staff and volunteers aim to strike a balance between the need to protect children and vulnerable adults from abuse, and the need to protect staff and volunteers from unfounded or malicious accusations. They apply to any allegation made against anyone with a role within Safe Families, whether as an employee or a volunteer.

Allegations may concern:

- Behaviour (intentional or otherwise) that has harmed, or may have harmed, a child.
- A criminal offence against, or related to, a child (including taking indecent images)
- Inappropriate behaviour towards a child or children in a way that indicates s/he is unsuitable to work with children.
- Blurring of the boundaries of a relationship to the extent that concerns of grooming / manipulation / coercion have arisen.
- Signs or patterns that suggest that organised abuse involving a number of perpetrators may be happening
- A current or historical issue, with the latter requiring the same approach as the former.

There are a number of sources from which a complaint or an allegation might arise including:

- A child
- A parent or other adult
- A member of the public
- A colleague (whistle-blowing)
- A disciplinary investigation

**NOTE:** As a charity working within the children’s sector Safe Families is also bound to comply with protocol set out by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) regarding allegations of abuse against staff and volunteers working with children and families in the community.

The detailed process of how we will handle enquiries into allegations made against staff or volunteers is described in Manual 4 (Chapter 11) This includes:

- Whose responsibility is it to handle the allegation?
- Suspension, and other considerations relating to employment
- Concluding the enquiry into an allegation
- Incorporating lessons learnt
- Action in respect of unfounded or malicious allegations
- Managing adverse publicity generated by the allegation
- Flow Chart
### 2.6 Safeguarding Reference Policies Available

In addition to the concise policy framework set out in this chapter, Safe Families has more detailed policies on a number of different aspects of Safeguarding and operational management. These can be found in Manual 4 ‘Reference Policies’ along with a Glossary and complete document index. The policy list consists of:

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Chapter 3  Organisational Structure

3.1 How Safe Families is structured

3.1.1 A charitable company limited by guarantee

As a legal entity Safe Families for Children (Safe Families) is both a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. It therefore benefits from the complementary skills offered by a board of Trustees offering guidance and oversight to an Executive Chairman and a Chief Executive. In terms of its day-to-day life, the charity functions through a dedicated team of full time staff facilitating a much wider network of volunteers who give direct support to families.

3.1.2 Organisational Chart

![Organisational Chart]

3.1.3 The key volunteer roles

The principal volunteer roles within the life of the organisation are listed below.

1. **Host Families.** A family, couple, or in certain circumstances single adult, screened and trained, who open their home to care for a child on a short-term basis while the parents receive the help they need. Parents remain in control, with parental responsibility; the Host Family giving supplementary support.

2. **Family Friends.** A trustworthy and caring individual, willing to befriend a parent who is facing various challenges; supporting and encouraging them both practically and emotionally; helping them to envision and reach towards goals in life. Some Family Friends may help a Host Family if they are looking after a child for more than a few days; others may help parents by providing daytime childcare, or transport for a child.

3. **Family Coaches.** Family Coaches are recruited on the basis of their qualifications and experience in social care support and as such are a highly skilled volunteer member of the Safe Families team. The Family Coach reports to the Family Support Manager and is given delegated supervisory responsibility. Their role is central to the co-ordinating Safe
Families for Children’s involvement with families, especially when multiple volunteers are involved.

4. **Resource Friends.** Volunteers who offer help such as donations of hardware, clothing or furniture. They may also offer services and practical jobs e.g. decorating, gardening, hairdressing. Both referred families and Host Families can receive Safe Families resources. Resource Friends are not authorised to be involved in Regulated Activity.

**NOTE:**
Full volunteer role descriptions can be found at [www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual](http://www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual)

**The full expression of Safe Families support to a family could then look like this:**

*Not every family will need all support roles to be put in place.

3.1.4 **Church support and Co-ordination**
Churches play a vital role in supporting the network of volunteers. Their commitment to their local community, and wider involvement in the life of families from the community, from cradle to grave, sets the work of Safe Families in a wider holistic context. Many local
churches are now appointing an Safe Families co-ordinator as a way of integrating Safe Families into the congregation.

3.1.5 Safe Families National HQ

The Safe Families National Office is based in Durham and provides specialised functions to the operational regions and local sites. This support can be summarised as assistance with:

- Operations management
- Technology support
- Safeguarding standards
- Financial management

The National Office is directly overseen by the Chief Executive.

3.1.6 Safe Families around Great Britain

Safe Families is beginning to expand across England, Scotland and Wales. Each distinct Safe Families operation is referred to as a ‘site’. Each site is the responsibility of a Safe Families Programme Director whose role is to ensure the safe and smooth running of Safe Families in that geographic area, which may be a town, city, or county. Each site is supported by a small management board consisting of leaders and professionals from the area who are willing to volunteer their time in this capacity.

In England Safe Families is operational in the 12 North East local authority regions of Darlington, Durham, Gateshead, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, Redcar & Cleveland, South Tyneside, Stockton and Sunderland.

In Scotland Safe Families will operational in Edinburgh in October 2014.

In Wales Safe Families hopes to become operational in 2015.

3.2 Board of Trustees and Advisory Group

Safe Families recognises the importance of accountability and has a number of structures in place to ensure best practice in every aspect of its operation. This is vital:

- To maintain high standards in safeguarding and protecting children and vulnerable adults.
- To ensure that the policies and procedures that have been put in place are fit for purpose and are being followed.
- To keep abreast of the demands upon the organisation and support ongoing development of personnel and systems.

Summary of levels of accountability

- The trustees of the registered charity. Have ultimate responsibility in law for the governance of the charity. Report to the charity commission.
- Regional Management Groups. Responsible for Safe Families sites around the UK.
- Financial auditing. Currently contracted to Ryecroft Glenton & co.
- Advisory Group. See below.
3.2.1 Advisory Group

An Advisory Group has been established and comprises of 10-15 people with expertise in relevant fields such as children’s social care, paediatrics, mental health, charitable governance, local government and local democracy.

The Advisory group has no executive powers; it is purely advisory with the purpose of serving in a voluntary capacity. It meets 3 times a year to review and advise on:

- High level strategic issues.
- Policies and procedures.
- Independent assessment and structures.
- Assessing practice.
- Selected case studies.

As required, sub groups may be established to advise or review aspects of Safe Families such as:

- Recruitment of staff.
- Social care support for senior Safe Families Coordinators.
- Legal Advice.
- Responding to government guidance, requirements or law.

3.3 The key staff roles

The key staff roles are summarized below. Full role descriptions are available at [www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual](http://www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual)

**The Executive Chairman and CEO**
Both full time roles, working together to further the strategic aims of the charity.

The Executive Chairman has responsibility for matters of governance, legal compliance, financial auditing, franchising, major donor relationships and liaison with central government.

The Chief Executive has responsibility for leading and growing the team, organisational development, partnerships, safeguarding, marketing, and liaison with local authorities.

**Programme Director**
Responsible for the overall operation of Safe Families within a specific geographic location, such as Edinburgh or Wolverhampton. This senior role requires a combination of leadership and management, as duties will involve oversight of both personnel and systems.

**Volunteer Managers**
Responsible for the recruitment, screening, assessment, training and ongoing encouragement of the volunteer force. Has strengths in communication, one to one, group work and confident to speak to larger audiences. A good networker who is tenacious in pursuing recruitment opportunities.

**Family Support Manager**
Have end-to-end operational oversight of all cases that Safe Families deals with, from initial referral, through matching and introducing volunteers, to deciding when outcomes have been achieved and the case can be closed.

**Referrals Co-Ordinator**
Handling incoming referrals. Being the point-person for incoming phonecalls and emails from agencies working with at-risk families. Information gathering and screening according to pre-determined risk thresholds. Friendly but discerning and able to assist the Family Support Manager with decision making. A good organiser who can manage diaries and arrange introductions between those willing to provide the support and the family needing help.

**Suitability Assessors**

Play an important part in the volunteer recruitment process. A suitability assessor will have vocational experience in children’s social care or a related field. They visit the homes of individuals and families wishing to become Host Families and Family Friends, interviewing them for approximately 1.5 hours and writing a report with recommendations for the Family Support Manager to whom they report. Suitability Assessors tend to work on a freelance or voluntary basis.

### 3.4 Working well with other agencies

#### 3.4.1 5 Principles of working with other agencies

Safe Families is a registered charity and is not part of any statutory body. However, in our support of families we will often need to work to complement parallel intervention by statutory services or other voluntary sector groups. The positive benefits of agencies working together for the benefit of children and families is well documented, but it is also accepted that partnership working is not without its challenges.

Therefore, Safe Families has the following principles for working relationships with other agencies:

1. Safe Families will seek to **learn from other agencies** – their knowledge and experience, to ensure that our operational processes remain of the highest quality.
2. Safe Families will **share information** with other agencies, within acceptable and legal limits, which may mean that parental consent will be required prior to certain case notes being released. By doing this we hope to avoid duplication and achieve better outcomes for children and families.
3. Safe Families will **participate in local networking** opportunities in order to help potential referrers to understand our services, our geographic reach and our thresholds of intervention.
4. Safe Families will endeavour to **understand the local landscape** of services for children in families in order to be effective at signposting families to types of support that Safe Families cannot provide.
5. Safe Families will **uphold the integrity of its service** being offered to parents on the basis of voluntary participation and will therefore seek to deter other agencies from referring to Safe Families families that may be engaging under coercion or duress.

Ultimately Safe Families is seeking a natural, relational community of support for families in need, especially who do not have the help of extended family or friends to care for and parent their children whilst additional stresses and needs are addressed. We recognise however that the families we serve often have multiple needs relating to both the children and the parents/carers – needs that may need specialist intervention beyond that which our network of volunteers can offer.
3.4.2 How Safe Families relates to Local Authorities in particular

Wherever it is located Safe Families for Children will seek to develop a constructive and mutually beneficial working relationship with the Local Authority within which it is operating.

In the planning stages of the launch of a new Safe Families site this will involve correspondence and meetings with high level representatives of the Local Authority e.g. the Elected Mayor, Chief Executive, Director of Children’s Services, Chair of LSCB etc.

As Safe Families for Children’s services go live in an area the detail of the working relationship will need to be worked out with the relevant service managers and commissioning managers.

- Operationally it helps enormously for Safe Families to have 2 or 3 named contacts or ‘gatekeepers’ within the Local Authority through which the working relationship can be transacted.
- Occasional roundtable meetings (3 - 4 a year) involving a select group of senior staff from the council also assist greatly with communication, feedback, and the strengthening of the working relationship.
- Information about Safe Families will be distributed around relevant staff at the Local Authority, in particular within Children’s Social Care, Frontdoor service, Triage, CAF, Family Support, Family Intervention, Troubled Families etc.
- Staff from Safe Families may be invited in to give talks to specific teams within Children’s Social Care, as well as to answer questions, to develop dialogue around specific policies and priorities, and to establish thresholds for referrals.
- Safe Families will make its Safeguarding and Operations Manual available for scrutiny by the Local Authority. Typically the Manual will be reviewed by either the LADO or a business manager working on behalf of the LSCB.
- It is likely to be the case that funding becomes allocated to Safe Families by the Local Authority to undertake pre-planned work with targeted families and / or in targeted communities. In this case the requirement for monitoring, evaluation and feedback is likely to be increased.

**NOTE:** Detail of Safe Families for Children’s incoming referral process is contained in Chapter 5 of this manual, entitled ‘Receiving and Responding to Referrals’.

3.4.3 Signposting to Other Services

It is the role of the Family Coach to assist the referred family in considering their additional support needs, and to signpost them to other services as appropriate. Examples might be to access specialist help with a drug or alcohol problem, to seek counselling following a situation of domestic violence, or to access services for their child’s needs such as autism or dyslexia.

If the issues that the child is facing are recognised by the Family Support Manager or Family Coach as escalating to the point of reaching the threshold for statutory intervention (i.e. the situation is becoming unsafe for the child and/or parent) then they should contact with the Duty social worker at the relevant Local Authority, passing on information about the child using the Forward Referral Form (available at [www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual](http://www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual)).
3.4.4 Ofsted registration and inspection

Safe Families is committed to complying with best practice within the children’s sector and believes that its systems are of a very high standard and entirely fit for purpose.

At the time of writing, Ofsted guidance states that the variety of childcare that Safe Families offers does not require mandatory registration or inspection, as no payment or reward is received for the childcare provided.

3.5 Insurance Indemnity and Legal Protection

Safe Families is covered by a comprehensive Social Welfare insurance product underwritten by Markel International Insurance Co. Ltd. renewed annually each April.

Employers’ Liability

Safe Families for Children has employers’ liability according to the requirements of the Employers’ Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969.

The maximum cover within the insurance policy is £10,000,000

General (Public and Products) Liability

Safe Families for Children as the following limits in its public and product liability:

£5,000,000 in any one occurrence of Public Liability.

£5,000,000 in any one insurance period of Product Liability.

Who is covered by the insurance?

The insurance covers all ‘members’ including directors, trustees, staff, volunteers and self-employed contractors. The policy is fully inclusive of Professional Indemnities and associated Legal Protection should a case be brought against Safe Families or any of its members.

Upon completion of the training and vetting process volunteers become accepted as a bona fide part of the Safe Families operation. They are sent a certificate of accreditation as proof of this and thereafter benefit from the organisation’s insurance protection.

It is made clear to volunteers at their training that they need to consult their own Home and Vehicle insurers to cover breakages and accidents in the home or in the car as Safe Families for Children’s insurance will not cover these scenarios.

3.6 The Safe Families Database

Safe Families has invested a huge amount of time, energy and financial resource in the creation of a bespoke database fulfilling all the requirements of volunteer management, and the managing of the caseload of families being supported.

The database is designed with security in mind and involves various levels of protection and access according to the sensitivity of the data held, and the permission level granted to the user.


The Safe Families Database has been designed around the expectations of Safe Families Data and Information Management Policy, also available at the same location.
MANUAL TWO
RECRUITING AND MANAGING
THE VOLUNTEER FORCE

SAFER RECRUITMENT PROCESS

RECEIVING &
RESPONDING TO REFERRALS

MANAGING &
MONITORING Safe Families SUPPORT
Chapter 4
Our ‘Safer Recruitment’ Process

4.1 The role of recruitment in Safeguarding

Our recruitment process is central to our commitment to Safeguarding. We will be rigorous in ensuring that everyone in the Safe Families workforce, be they paid staff or volunteers, is suitable to work with the children, young people, and vulnerable adults with whom Safe Families for Children works.

Additionally our recruitment process is designed to ensure that:

- applicants are selected on the basis of an honest assessment of the motivations for why they are getting involved, and the demonstration that they genuinely have something to offer, in terms of skills and experience, and also compassion and character.
- new starters are equipped to do their role through their induction, training, qualifications, skills and character.
- new starters are clear about the requirements, expectations and boundaries of their role.

4.1.1 Summary of Safer Recruitment Principles

1. We will ensure that everyone seeking to undertake a role within Safe Families for Children is both committed to, and competent to, take responsibility for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults: i.e. promoting their safety and wellbeing, and protecting them from harm.
2. We will operate a well-managed and rigorous recruitment process in order to ensure safe recruitment at a level applicable to the nature of the role.
3. We will provide relevant training that is appropriate to role and risks, with a particular emphasis on ensuring that critical Safeguarding principles are properly understood.
4. We will follow up successful recruits beyond their initial accreditation, to include continuing oversight of the appropriateness of the role, supervision and support, ongoing training and development.

4.1.2 Regulated Activity

Safe Families for Children support is understood to be Regulated Activity (see definitions in Chapter 2) as it involves volunteers taking responsibility for:

- The care of children overnight (aka hosting) by volunteer families;
- The support of parents/carers who may be vulnerable adults;
- The care or transport of children by volunteer Family Friends.
- Regular (weekly or more) or intensive (overnight or 4+ days in 30) unsupervised care of children or vulnerable adults
- The roles of Host Families, Family Friends, Family Coaches and Family Support Managers are therefore understood to be regulated roles.
- All these roles will therefore be subject to an enhanced DBS disclosure.
- In addition, we deem that those in Safe Families who manage, supervise and administrate Safe Families also require enhanced level of DBS disclosure.
4.1.3 Overview of the recruitment process

The Safe Families team is continually engaged in promotional activities geared towards attracting new volunteers who will be well suited to working with struggling families.

The principal pool from which volunteers are recruited are local church communities. Safe Families has found that volunteers from churches are predisposed to help those in need as this resonates with their personal faith-informed values. Church-based volunteers have the further advantage of receiving additional pastoral support from their minister and church community.

The process of becoming a volunteer begins with an application form which includes the applicant's interest and availability as well as requesting details of their referees.

Each staff or volunteer applicant must complete the six steps of the recruitment process from application to approval:

1. Application form
2. Character references
3. Enhanced DBS disclosure
4. Suitability Assessment interview
5. Completion of essential training
6. Approval and accreditation panel

Once these steps are completed the in-process volunteer’s file will be brought to a reviewing group for scrutiny and an approval decision. The panel may approve the applicant, request more information, or declare the applicant unsuitable.

The application process can therefore be summarised as follows:

4.1.4 The Volunteer Application Form

Any potential volunteer Host Family or Family Friend for Safe Families for Children is required to complete an application form.

This volunteer application form asks for basic personal details, brief paragraphs about the role they wish to do and why, 3 referees and also the completion of a self-declaration regarding offences and social care history as well as agreement to a DBS check.

- A more detailed form is used for staff recruitment, see safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual
The volunteer application form is deliberately basic as more in depth information about the applicant is gathered in the later stages of the application process, namely through referencing, DBS checks and a face-to-face suitability assessment.

### 4.2 DBS checks

DBS stands for Disclosure and Barring Service. It was created by a merger of the Criminal Records Bureau and the Independent Safeguarding Authority. The DBS enables organisations to make safer recruitment decisions by identifying candidates who may be unsuitable for certain work, especially that involve children or vulnerable adults.

#### 4.2.1 Roles requiring DBS clearance

The following roles require an enhanced DBS clearance, prior to commencement in the role, regardless of whether they will be fulfilled by a paid employee, freelancer, or volunteer:

- The Safe Families Regional Team including administrative posts that involve contact with families;
- Suitability Assessors of potential Host Families and Family Friends
- All members of the Safe Families senior management team
- Host Families, Family Friends, Family Coaches and Family Support Managers
- Anyone aged 18 and over who lives in the Host Family home.

#### 4.2.2 Those not requiring DBS within Safe Families:

- Members of the Advisory Group. Their role is to attend meetings discussing the operational activity of Safe Families. It is likely however that in their professional vocation the Advisory Group members will have already gained DBS clearance.
- Clerical staff and office volunteers who do not have any contact with children and/or vulnerable adults. Staff with access to personal records will be expected to adhere to strict confidential rules.
- Safe Families Resource Friends will not be subject to a DBS check as they are not involved in Regulated Activity. If a Resource Friend begins to take on a larger role with respect to supporting a family then they will be invited to ‘upgrade’ their volunteer status, requiring them to undertake the full application process, including referencing, DBS checks, assessment and training.

#### 4.2.3 Our DBS arrangement with CCPAS

Our DBS applications are made using the umbrella service offered by the Church Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS). CCPAS act as a clearinghouse for the DBS, and also provide in depth advice on all aspects of safeguarding practice and protocol.

Safe Families has contracted to use the CCPAS online system, known as E-bulk. The system has its own guidance manual available to users. A small administrative fee is incurred for each volunteer that is vetted via the E-bulk system. However, the system is extremely thorough and efficient and we deem the service well worth the cost.

Each Safe Families Office will appoint and register a Lead Recruiter with CCPAS. In addition, several members of each office i.e. those involved in recruitment and assessment, will need to become authorised CCPAS recruiters, trained in ID checking and the scrutiny of associated documents used to prove identity – such as passports, driving licences, birth certificates etc.
The recruiters will all be issued unique serial numbers and logins by CCPAS.

**4.2.4 DBS application process overview:**

The Safe Families Data and Information Management policy (chapter 13) explains expectations around handling and storage of intelligence gained from DBS disclosures.

1. Establish whether the volunteer has internet access, and whether or not they may need help if they are perhaps a little ‘technophobic’.
2. Send an email to the volunteer, attaching the step-by-step instruction letter, CCPAS E-bulk Applicants Guide, plus the pasted link to the CCPAS website (see below)
   - The link is [https://disclosure.capitarvs.co.uk/ccpas/](https://disclosure.capitarvs.co.uk/ccpas/)
3. The applicant then completes their online application for DBS disclosure following the steps which include entering personal details such as name and date of birth, full address history for the last 5 years, etc.
4. At this point the application will be assigned a unique serial number that will need to be recorded against the volunteer’s record on the Safe Families database.
5. Complete the ID check with the volunteer. Details on how to do this are in the next subsection. If the applicant has already completed step 3, then you can do this directly online. If not, then you need to take details of the sources of identification (at least three) which you then use to complete the ID check.
   - Once DBS disclosure is completed, the details of these identification documents should be securely destroyed.
6. The Lead Recruiter will log in to the system and complete the final step which is known as ‘Section Y’. This includes giving information relating to the role being applied for:
   - Whether or not Regulated Activity is involved
   - Whether the role involves contact with children, vulnerable adults, or both
   - Whether the application is a paid or voluntary role
   - Whether the role will be home-based

**4.2.5 The Identification Check**

If your role includes being a recruiter under DBS, then you must make yourself familiar with the CCPAS Guidance and the E-Bulk guidance that they send you when you become an authorized recruiter. Your Lead recruiter has a duty to ensure that authorized recruiters remain up to date with any changes in DBS policies.

By way of summary the authorized recruiter must:

- See an acceptable form of photo ID.
- If the person has a passport, you must see this.
- If the person has a driving licence, you must see this, both parts.
- If the person has changed their name, you should ideally see evidence to confirm this.
- See confirmation of the applicant’s current address.

There are lots of additional notes of guidance contained within the CCPAS guide to the DBS process.

Please note that there may be occasions when identity cannot be identified using the means described above. In such circumstances the Lead Recruiter should become involved and a
telephone conversation with the CCPAS helpline may be necessary.

4.2.6 DBS results: Clean or blemished?

The DBS no longer issues a copy of the DBS certificate to the requesting organisation, instead they will send it to the applicant.

Response times can vary from one week to 3 months. Notification is provided by an email from CCPAS to the Lead recruiter and/or a nominated authorised recruiter. The recruiter will need to log in to obtain the DBS certificate number, the date that the certificate was issued, and to find out whether the certificate was a) clean or b) revealed a conviction history or ongoing investigation – known as a ‘blemished’ record. See below:

a. In most cases, the certificate will be 100% clean, revealing no convictions, no cautions, and no historic or pending investigations. If this is the case the status on the CCPAS system will state “Certificate contains no information”.
   o A clean DBS check means that the applicant can immediately proceed to the next step in the recruitment process.

   b. In some circumstances however, there will be information revealed that needs to be considered in relation to suitability to work in regulated activity. In this case the status on the CCPAS system will state “Please wait to view applicant’s certificate”.

At this point the recruiter will make the relevant note on the Safe Families database, before proceeding to either a) forward the applicant to the next stage of the recruitment process or b) commence an ‘audit’ of their DBS certificate. See below.

Blemished DBS certificates: the DBS Audit

It is the duty of Lead Recruiter the undertake the DBS audit. This will first involve obtaining the original copy of the DBS certificate that has been sent to the applicant.

- Note. There can be sensitivities around requesting the certificate, particularly if the applicant did not self-disclose that they had a prior conviction of some kind, or if they did not know that the Police or other agencies held information about them. So be tactful in approaching this.
- It is up to the good judgment of the Lead recruiter to assess whether any offences revealed are minor, historic and unrelated to relating to children and vulnerable adults. It may be necessary to involve the colleague who undertook the suitability assessment at this stage, and/or to talk directly with the applicant about the issue.
- If the DBS reveals that the applicant is on a Barred List for working with children and/or vulnerable adults then they must not be approved as a volunteer.

The CCPAS E-Bulk recruiters guide contains more guidance on making these decisions. The CCPAS helpline is also available during weekdays (office hours). Safe Families National Office is also able to advise on these matters.

The DBS Audit form can be downloaded from [www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual](http://www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual) and once completed should be uploaded to the Safe Families database and stored in the secure documents associated with the volunteer.

Further points to consider:

Careful consideration must be made as to whether any information revealed may preclude one role whilst allowing another. This has particular relevance to the Host Family role as it must be established that every adult in the household is suitable to have proximity to
children. If such information regarding a related party is revealed then the Host Family role is clearly not appropriate but being a Family Friend may still be possible as that is a role that can be undertaken independently without involving related parties in the wider household.

4.3 Obtaining character references

All Safe Families volunteers, Host Families, Family Friends and Family Coaches, are required to submit at least 3 referees who have known the applicant for more than 2 years. The references must be diverse i.e. not all be from within the same church or from close family members.

Safe Families referencing protocol is concerned with the questions:

- Who is the referee? Are they credible?
- How long they have known the applicant?
- In what capacity have they known the applicant?
- Do the referees independently agree on the suitability of the applicant or are any doubts raised?

- One referee should be pastoral, preferably from the church minister
  - On occasions, the church leader is not an appropriate referee, for example if the applicant is the church leader or a member of the church leader’s family. Then an alternative church overseer, elder, minister, or established church member should be asked.
- One referee should be the person’s current or most recent employer.
  - The employment referee ought to have relatively recent knowledge with respect to the applicant’s reliability and integrity.
  - For those who are self-employed, a contractor, subcontractor, supplier or similar should be asked to provide the reference.
- One referee may be a friend or associate of the applicant who is willing and able to provide comment on their temperament and personality.

The reference forms are available at [www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual](http://www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual)

All staff appointments will be subject to the same requirement for 3 references.

NOTE: the reference form for staff roles is more detailed than the volunteer form.

4.4 The Suitability Assessment Interview and Home Safety Check

4.4.1 Who can conduct a suitability assessment?

A key element of our Safe recruitment processes is the home visit and suitability assessment interview. Host Families and Family Friends are assessed for their suitability for the role by a suitably qualified and trained individual, who may be:

- Family Support Manager
- Volunteer coordinator
- Family Coach
- In periods of heavy demand: a specifically trained and contracted Suitability Assessor
4.4.2 What is the aim of the suitability assessment?

The assessment aims to give rigour to the process of establishing the suitability of the applicant for the role in terms of:

**General**
- Integrity in motivation, evidencing a desire to be involved for altruistic reasons with absolutely no hint of malign intent
- Having sufficient levels of their own support
- Show a mature understanding of the need for empowering families to overcome their challenges, rather than simply being a ‘do-gooder’
- Willingness to work within boundaries and to engage in the wider Safe Families volunteer network
- Able to show sensitivity in issues relating to equality and diversity such as matters of culture, faith, ethnicity and sexual orientation.
- Show that they understand and accept Safe Families values and model of offering support.
- Being alert to those who may be well-meaning but would be ineffective in giving empowering support or who may lack the ability to offer due care.
- To enable the potential volunteer to understand Safe Families better, to feel comfortable with both the process of becoming a volunteer, and to think ahead to how being a volunteer might actually feel.
- To identify and understand the limitations and/or preferences of the potential volunteer for the role.

**Hosting specific**
- Capability to provide well-rounded care for children and/or support to vulnerable parents/carers;
- Offering safety for a child staying in their home; and be trusted not to put themselves at risk of a malicious allegation
- Can be trusted to make good decisions in the interest of the child and take appropriate action in emergencies or regarding issues of possible concern;
- Ensuring that the home itself is a suitably safe environment for the care of a child

**The Suitability Assessment Form**
A specifically designed Assessment Form will be completed during the assessment interview. It is intended to guide conversation through motivation, home life – both present and historic, experience – employment, skills, social care involvement, and support.
- The Assessment Form will generally be completed in note form during the interview, and then written up in detail shortly afterwards, whilst the conversation is still fresh in the mind of the assessor.
- In addition to documenting the answers to the detailed assessment questions, the assessor should write summary paragraphs giving their opinion and analysis regarding points relating to skills and character required for the role.
- Attention to detail is important as the assessment process relates not only to the approval of the applicant/s for the role, it also supports the matching process by which volunteers will be linked to referred children and parents.
4.4.3 Guidance for Conducting the Assessment Visit (General)

Pre-visit
- Ensure that the applicant has allocated adequate time – an assessment usually takes 90 minutes but appointments should be booked for 2 hours to be on the safe side.
- Ensure that all adults, those aged 18 or over, within the household will be present, and expect to be seen and interviewed. It is good for you to have chance to meet and greet any children under 18 too.
- Email the link to the CCPAS DBS application service and request that the relevant steps are completed before you arrive.
- Email the Home Safety Checklist and Host Family Profile a few days beforehand and encourage the family to complete them prior to your visit.

The tone of the visit
- Conduct the interview in a friendly yet thorough manner, taking care to add notes to all relevant sections of the Suitability Assessment Interview paperwork.
- If there are distractions present when the assessment begins do your best to deal with them, e.g. turn off TV, put hyperactive dog into another room.

Address and contact details
- Enquire into address history:
  - If a significant period of the last 5 years has been spent abroad this may have implications for obtaining the DBS check
  - Address history can open up helpful avenues of conversation around issues of family stability, depending on reasons for moving. It may also reveal the extent of the applicant’s integration within the local community.
- Confirm that we have the correct contact details including mobile numbers and email addresses, including emergency contact details.

Motivation, skills and limitations
- Have a comprehensive discussion about motivation, seeking to perceive if there are any ulterior motives behind their application to gain contact with children and families, such as fulfilling their own needs, or an unhelpful personal agenda such as sectarian or political proselytising etc.
- Seek to identify what they feel they have to offer referred families, in terms of practicalities, strengths, and level of interest and capacity to develop ongoing relationships. This will help the matching process later.
- Many who offer to help will already be very busy, we need to understand the extent to which they will adapt to and prioritise the needs of a child staying with them, or of a parent that they have offered support to.
- We need to know about the applicant’s health. It is not necessary to know intimate medical details, but it is important to discuss how elements of ill-health may affect capacity to care for a child, or to reliably offer support to a parent.
- See the ID document check for each person for whom DBS clearance is required. If possible, the online CCPAS E-Bulk process may be completed during the visit.
Ask about what may be disclosed by DBS – if they have a criminal record of any kind it is best to declare it and explain it before we find out later.

4.4.4 Guidance for the Assessment Visit (Host Family Specific)

The home and the household
- Must take place in the home in which the hosting is planned to take place.
- Be clear who lives in the household.
  - Full names and dates of birth must be provided for every resident of the household, adults and children. The applicants ought to have supplied these already but it is good practice to double-check them, along with correct spellings and pronunciations.
- The Local Council area must be detailed accurately as this can become important if issues relating to emergency situations including child protection arise during a hosting and the Local Authority has to be notified.
- If the Host Family is a couple, they need not be interviewed separately, although if any concerns are raised including any history of difficulties in their relationship, individual interviews may be judged important for the assessment.
- Other adults within the household may be interviewed separately to the primary hosts in order to assess their attitude towards the home being used for hosting children. Also obtain their consent to DBS clearance and to ask about any history that may give concern for the safety of others.
- Ask about regular visitors to the home, in order to assess risk with regard to possible relationships that could form.
- The assessor should see around the house in order to identify any hazards or concerns and to identify any limitations it places on the appropriateness of the home for any ages or developmental stages of children
- If someone in the home smokes, please outline the Safe Families smoking policy and direct them to read this in the volunteer pack.

Relationships in the family
- Discussion about the current situation i.e. marriage, how each individual copes with challenges and stress, avenues of support, the needs of children in the household, wider family and neighbour relationships all give important insights into any risks for Safe Families children or parents/carers, and also strengths in what can be offered.
- Note how they cope with stress, challenges and disagreements, and not only with respect to home life, but also other relationships such as work or neighbours.
- Do the applicants have their own children still living at home? It is good for them to join the conversation for a while to offer their perspectives on the hosting. Be alert to both excitement they might have about the idea of becoming a Host Family, but also any anxieties too.
- If there are children already in the home do they have any particular needs that might impact on the ability to become a Host Family?
- Talk about parenting styles referencing the Safe Families policy of ‘no physical chastisement’. Ask how they deal with challenge and expectations they have of children’s behaviour. Are there any particular behaviours that ‘wind them up’? Reflections on their own upbringing and any parenting they have already done with their own children are helpful.
The discussion can then be widened to other experiences in family history which have formed their views, identity etc. These may identify strengths and/or sensitive areas. It is helpful to list some of the experiences that may be of relevance. This is both because it is important to identify if there are any unresolved issues but also to give insight for them and for Safe Families as to whether children and families with certain experiences will be good for them to get alongside or would perhaps re-open old wounds.

If any complex or concerning issues arise during the assessment then the Host Family can be asked to give consent for further enquiries. This could include gaining information from the Local Authority or a Private Fostering Agency if an application to be a foster carer began but did not reach approval. It may include consent to contact a G.P. for confirmation of good health if this is an area of concern. Contact with the Local Authority may also be required if the Host Family themselves have previously been subject to a Child Protection Plan or similar. If consent is not given and concerns cannot be resolved satisfactorily, then the application will have to be turned down.

Values and Beliefs

Specific discussion on values and beliefs to help to identify if there might be any particular traits in referred families that they might judge harshly, or if there are views that might be important for their Host Family profile – in order that parents/carers are not surprised or offended by any strongly held views. This supports the matching process.

It is important to have a discussion about how the family will or can respond if a child’s culture or faith is different from their own. This may include examples of how they can support the child’s requirements and expressions of culture or faith, and also things they feel they could not do that would be against their own faith. It can also be valuable to know the experience the applicant has of getting alongside those of other cultures as this may be a particular strength for some referred families.

Asking about the applicant’s own participation in faith-related activities and how faith is expressed at home is important for the matching process and for Host Families it supports their thinking in how to complete the Host Family profile.

4.4.5 Guidance for the Assessment Visit (Family Friend Specific)

It is best if the assessment is conducted in the applicant’s own home, although this is not a mandatory requirement for the Family Friend role.

Questions should focus on the reliability of the applicant, will they be able to make and keep appointments?

Practical details: can they drive to and from the families they may be supporting; do they have allergies and if so how would they cope if they were visiting a family with lots of pets?

The Family Friend role is very broad – try to home in on what in particular they feel that they have to offer and what type of scenarios they feel best suited to assisting with.

The role of Family Friend is also used to offer back-up support to Host Families, such as transport for children or small amounts of baby-sitting. Would they be willing to do this or are they simply interested in helping parents in crisis?
4.4.6 Peer Review of the Assessment

Once the Assessment is complete it will be written up and uploaded to the Safe Families Database. The Assessor will alert the Family Support Manager for their area, who will peer review the Assessment, raise any queries and add any relevant Approval Notes to the Database.

4.5 Essential Training and Induction

The essential basic training is usually undertaken as one full day’s group training session. At the time of writing, only face-to-face group training is being delivered and it is mandatory for all staff and volunteers to attend.

New starters are equipped with role-specific Handbooks as a resource, reference guide and means of role clarification. Additional matters of training and development are addressed ‘on the job’ through coaching, supervision and appraisal.

4.5.1 Safe Families One-day Training Programme

The aim of the one-day training programme is that volunteers would end the day feeling informed, confident and motivated.

Safe Families volunteer training is intended to be:

- interesting
- relevant
- informative
- inclusive

The day has been deliberately designed according to tried and tested principles of adult learning in a way that will:

- Facilitate discussion
- Push limits of critical thinking
- Identify and address pre-existing assumptions
- Bring to surface knowledge already acquired in years of parenting.
- Encourage the sharing of experiences
- Challenge myths and misconceptions
- Help us during the day to identify any members in the group that may not actually be suitable to serve as volunteers, or who may require more in-depth training.

Learning techniques used include:

- Video
- Discussions
- Group work
- Scenarios
- Problem-solving tasks

Important Safeguarding items covered during the day:

- Developing a child-centred approach
- Understanding lines of responsibility - who to call, about what
- Understand the risk thresholds within which Safe Families operates, and beyond which volunteer involvement is not deemed appropriate
- Clarify what is and is not permissible within the boundaries of the volunteer roles and responsibilities
- Develop self-awareness and good judgment
- Recognise signals, signs and symptoms of potential abuse
- Learning what to do if a child wants to talk about being abused
• Help volunteers to act in such a way that does not raise suspicions or ambiguities about the motivations behind their involvement
• Exploring how caring for children you do not know may be different from caring for your own children or grand children

At the end of the training day all participants will be asked to sign the Volunteer Agreement which includes a declaration to abide by the Safe Families Code of Conduct.

The training is supplemented by the Host Family Handbook and/or a Family Friend Handbook. Prior to the commencement in the role, each volunteer must be familiar with the procedures included in the handbook and must sign an agreement to abide by them. These manuals include specific elements on safeguarding, confidentiality and safety. They also reiterate a strong ethos of working in partnership with others and keeping in good communication with those with oversight for Safe Families in the area.

4.5.2 Further Training

Continual development is promoted for all those involved in Safe Families. Volunteers will be offered opportunities to develop in their roles. One of the main ways that this ongoing development is supported is through the provision of bi-monthly volunteer evenings.

Further specialist training opportunities are offered, particularly for members of the staff team, often using external specialist training contractors.

• Staff are also encouraged to attend training being offered locally by other agencies such as the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board.

Some volunteers also need induction on the use of the Safe Families database. They may either be invited to a group training session for this, or be taken through the steps by a Family Coach or another member of the Safe Families team. Database induction covers issues of appropriate recording, storage of information and also issues of confidentiality and data protection.

4.6 Approval Panel

4.6.1 Pre-approval requirements

The Safe Families Database is central to the Approval process. The Database User Handbook gives more details of the various administrative steps that need to be taken in preparation for the panel. The Database will alert admin users when an application is ready to be considered by the Approval panel. Steps that will have been completed before this alert is issued will be:

▪ The DBS disclosure has been obtained and any further investigations brought to a satisfactory conclusion
▪ 3 references received, uploaded and cross-referenced
▪ Essential training has been completed
▪ The Suitability Assessment has been completed, uploaded and peer reviewed
▪ The Home Safety checklist has been uploaded (Host Families only)
4.6.2 The Approval Panel meeting

The Approval panel will consist of the Programme Director, plus one or two other senior managers in the site (Family Support Manager and/or Volunteer Manager).

The panel will take an objective and unbiased approach to each application. They will discuss any known issues relating to the applicant that are relevant to the decision.

Approval decisions are made on the basis of:

- satisfactory completion of all the steps in the safer recruitment process
- evidence of character and competence revealed through the references, training and assessment
- confidence that the applicant will represent Safe Families well and uphold Safe Families values

The outcome of the Approval Panel will either be:

- Approved as suitable, accreditation certificate may be issued
- Not approved as unsuitable, and must be withdrawn from the process
- Panel not confident in the applicant, they may require further training, or to work in a supervised capacity for a probationary period

4.7 Negotiating any changes in role

It is expected that there will be times when volunteers approved for one role will ask to switch to another. This is one of the main reasons why all volunteers, be they Host Family or Family Friend all undergo the same Safer Recruitment process and attend the same training.

4.7.1 Can Family Friends care for children?

In the role of Family Friend, a volunteer can look after a child for short periods to support the child’s parents/carers, but not at the home of the volunteer. Therefore, this could include babysitting at the child’s home and it could include taking the child out for an activity, for example while parents/carers have health appointments.

If a Family Friend is going to look after a child at their own home, even if it is during the daytime, Host Family accreditation should be given.

4.7.2 Being accredited later as Host Family, having been a Family Friend

In the circumstance in which someone who has been a Family Friend wishes to become a Host Family, the following considerations must be made:

- Did the suitability assessment interview fully consider all the issues required for a Host Family? i.e. does the volunteer show the necessary competencies when it comes to caring for children? (If not they may need a second interview)
- Did the original references reveal anything that might make the applicant inappropriate for hosting?
- Have all adults in the home had a DBS check?
- Have all adults who will actively be hosting had 3 references given?
- Have all adults who will actively be hosting completed the essential training?
- Have they completed a Host Family safety checklist and has the home been seen recently?
If any of the above are not completed, then they must be done before the change in role is brought to the Approval Panel. Once these steps are completed the Approval Panel will meet to consider the change in role as they would any other application.

4.7.3 Being accredited later as Family Friend, having been a Host Family

In the circumstance in which someone who has been a Host Family Friend wishes to become a Family Friend, the central consideration pertains to whether the individual concerned is judged to be suitably competent to begin to address the issues that are being faced by parents in crisis. The Family Friend role requires a different skill set, the ability to coach and mentor adults, rather than to care for children. The Approval Panel need to be satisfied that the volunteer understands this and is ready for the new challenge.

4.8 List of forms used during the recruitment process

The most up to date versions of all forms are stored at www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual

Standard forms and letters used during the recruitment process include:

- Volunteer Application Form
- Reference Request Form
- Applicants’ Letter for Online DBS
- DBS Identity Check Form
- Suitability Assessment Form
- Host Family Safety Checklist
- Accreditation letter with certificate
- Host Family Profile Form
- Volunteer Agreement and Code of Conduct
Chapter 5
Receiving and Responding to Referrals

5.1 What is a referral and who can make one?

Safe Families for Children is a responsive service, which means that we rely on others to bring families in need to our attention. When an agency or individual gets in touch with us to bring a family in need to our attention we call that making a referral.

This chapter is all about how referrals are made, and how we deal with them.

- Anyone can make a referral to Safe Families. Most commonly referrals are made by:
  - Social workers
  - Health visitors
  - Staff at children’s centres
  - GPs
  - Churches
  - Self-referrals

- All referrals will be taken seriously and all referrers treated with equal respect and courtesy.

5.2 Guidelines for Referrals

5.2.1 Operating with a non-judgmental and non-coercive ethos

Safe Families recognises that problems can come to anyone, in many shapes and sizes... Relationships don’t always work out, finances come under pressure, mental and physical health can be fragile, and sometimes people simply make bad choices that they end up regretting later.

This is why it is so important that we operate on a completely non-judgmental and non-discriminatory basis. We do not pick and choose deserving beneficiaries of help. Rather, our Christian ethos informs our belief that everyone is equal, everyone makes mistakes and everyone deserves help in a time of need.

It is also very important to Safe Families that the parent/carer welcomes our support without any kind of external pressure or coercion.

Safe Families is at its best when handling early years / early intervention, before problems have become full-blown.

5.2.2 What kind of families do we help, and in what circumstances?

There are endless configurations of ‘family’. For the purposes of clarity Safe Families considers the basic unit of family at least one adult with legal care of at least one child.

- To qualify for our help the family must be experiencing some kind of difficulty that is making it very challenging for the adult/s to provide stable, healthy and safe care for their child/children.

- The family may already be receiving help from relatives and friends, or from other agencies. This is not a problem and Safe Families is happy to play a part in a larger network of support.
Families referred to Safe Families may experience some of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hospitalisation</th>
<th>Offending behaviour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical Illness</td>
<td>Substance abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health difficulties</td>
<td>Domestic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>Other family crisis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Good questions for referrers to consider prior to getting in touch with Safe Families:

- Are the parent’s problems beginning to have a negative impact upon the child/children?
- Does the family lack the support of kinship and friends that would be available to most families?
- Would the child/children benefit from a short ‘holiday’ (i.e. hosting) away from the family home – so that everyone can ‘chill out’ (i.e. respite)?
- Is there a short-term medical emergency, such as an overnight hospital admission, that may leave the child/children without a primary carer?
- Would the parent benefit from ongoing befriending, particularly from being paired with an experienced volunteer who can act as their ‘buddy’?

5.2.3 Who is involved in receiving the referral?

Each Safe Families office will have a nominated and appropriately trained individual or individuals. From Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm there will always be a nominated person receiving incoming referral calls. This task is likely to be shared as there will be the necessity to ensure cover during breaks, days off etc.

Team members who may be involved in staffing the line for incoming referrals could include:

- Office administrator
- Referrals Co-Ordinator
- Family support manager
- Other trained members of the office team such as Volunteer Co-Ordinator

The task of receiving incoming referrals is simply to deal in a polite and unhurried manner with the caller. A Referral form will be completed during the call with care taken to record as much detail as possible before the call ends. It is usually necessary to email the form to the referrer for them to fill in additional relevant information that they did not have to hand at the time of the call. It can be the case that struggling parents themselves may call to self-refer. These calls can be more difficult to handle as the parent may be emotional and in need of reassurance.

- The Referral Form can be viewed at [www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual](http://www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual)

Once the referral has been received there may be further information gathering to do prior to a decision about taking on the case. Generally there will be a need to liaise with the family directly, and other agencies who may hold relevant information pertinent to the case which will involve listening carefully, asking relevant questions, and adding new info to the case file.

At the point at which sufficient facts have been established the Family Support Manager will consider how the referral maps onto our working thresholds, see next section.
5.2.4 Assessments and Thresholds

Safe Families is designed as an early intervention, and as such we would hope that the referral is made before a family crisis has reached its full proportions. In common parlance we would say that we seek to intervene to prevent a crisis becoming a meltdown. It is standard practice therefore, for the Safe Families team to give proper consideration to the severity of the problem being experienced before accepting the case. Even though Safe Families has an amazing network of volunteers there are some assignments that it would not be fair or safe for them to be expected to handle.

Therefore the Family Support Manager will therefore make a professional judgment upon the referred family’s circumstances, commonly known as an assessment. This will often involve talking directly to the family, in the family home or over the telephone. We will also seek to talk to other agencies that may be involved with the family in order to build a fuller picture of their needs in order to be able to offer them the best possible tailored support. If the situation passes a threshold beyond which it is deemed too complex or unsafe for involvement by our volunteers then FSM will pass the case back to the referrer, or in the case of a self-referral it will be forwarded on to a more appropriate agency.

Assessment Tools

Within the children’s social care sector there are a number of similar and commonly used assessment tools, such as the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and the Early Help Assessment (EHA). Professionals assigned to a family will use these tools to help them assess the nature of the issues the family is facing, and their severity. An example of the CAF ‘windscreen’ shown (right).

Safe Families for Children’s understanding of its own service thresholds are informed by this common approach to assessment, in order to assist our correspondence with other agencies. Safe Families is not positioned as a universal service (tier 1 – green), rather the families we help have been identified as having additional short or long term needs. Therefore we tend to accept referrals when the situation is located in tier 2 (yellow) or tier 3 (orange). If a child is assessed to be in tier 4 (red) then Safe Families is not the appropriate agency to deal with the case. However, on some limited occasions we may support a child who is already in foster care by agreeing a family support package with social workers so that they can be returned home.

- It is an important training requirement that all Safe Families staff handling referrals are familiar with CAF-style assessment.
- Local Authority children’s social care teams keep records of all children that have been
assessed using CAF (stored on their CAF database).

- When dealing with a new referral Safe Families staff should always ask whether a CAF or similar assessment has been undertaken, and what tier of need the child was assessed to be at.

**NOTE:** Safe Families for Children may in some circumstances work with families subsequent to intensive involvement by Children’s Social Care or other agencies; for example as follow-up once the risk of harm has been reduced to a satisfactory level, in order to consolidate the progress made and to prevent future re-escalation of the situation.

### 5.3 Step-by-step Referral Process

**The Safe Families REFERRAL HELPLINE in the North East is 0191 374 4777**

Or may also be sent by email to: refer.northeast@safefamiliesforchildren.com

Other offices will be opening throughout 2014, with their own helpline numbers, check www.safefamiliesforchildren.com for details.

- A referrer or a parent/carer identifies a need for which they believe Safe Families for Children may be able to offer appropriate support.
- Trained staff will answer the phone Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm. Referrals may also be received by email to the mailbox: refer.northeast@safefamiliesforchildren.com
- Referrals arrangements cannot be made after Friday 3pm. Therefore any referral received after Friday 3pm will not be dealt with until 9am the following Monday.
- The referral helpline offers a recorded answerphone service outside office hours
- Note: Emergency hosting of a child previously unknown to Safe Families is not normally available.
- The Safe Families team member taking the call will clarify the request and identify at an early stage whether Safe Families would be suitable (known as pre-screening).
- The referrer, if not the parent/carer, must confirm whether the parent/s are informed about / agreeable to the referral being made.
- An ‘Incoming Referral Form’ will be completed by the Safe Families team member over the telephone (or reviewed on-screen if received via email) and a corresponding record created on the Safe Families database.
- The referral form asks biographical questions about the child and family, as well as questions intended to ascertain the level of involvement by other agencies, plus establishing the degree of urgency in the referral.
- Further investigation / assessment is made by Safe Families team members. Note: this process depends on a level of co-operation and transparency between Safe Families and other agencies in respect of information sharing. Safe Families team members should not be offended if another agency expects them to verify their identity before being willing to share information. (see chapter 13 for more on information sharing)
- **Safe Families aims to give a YES/NO response back to the referrer within 2 working days.** (Generally the response will be made within 24 hours)
- If the response is yes we aim to have support arrangements made within one week.
- Prior to our arranging support the referrer ought to state what level of ongoing involvement they intend to have, and whether they will require periodic feedback on the impact that Safe Families for Children’s support is having.
The following steps assume that a **YES** decision has been made:

- An appropriately trained team member uses the special volunteer search function of the Safe Families database to identify volunteers whose profile, location and availability match the case.
- In most cases the database will generate more than one match, often a dozen or more. An email containing a brief description of the case is sent to every matching volunteer asking for their urgent response. (May also be duplicated by SMS text) We call this step: **‘Posting the need’**.
- At this time the Family Support Manager will also assign a suitable Family Coach to supervise the support that is put in place.
- Once the required number of volunteers have replied and agreed to help arrangements will be made to introduce them to the family requiring support.
- Prior to this introduction a number of administrative items (below) are attended to.

**Note:** Before going live with the provision of support, be it hosting or befriending, informed consent must be acquired from the parent/carer who will be assisted.

The FSM or Family Coach will meet the parent/carer in order to work through / complete:

- A Letter Introducing Safe Families
- A Parent/Carer Consent Form (see section 4.8)
- A Child Information Form (for Host family stays)
- A Child/Young Person Agreement Form (if applicable)
- Risk Assessment documentation

The volunteer/s and the family are finally able to meet, and the support, be it hosting, befriending or both, may begin.

- From here the remaining steps involve:
  - Monitoring safety
  - Tracking progress towards outcomes
  - Decisions regarding when it will be appropriate to close the case and withdraw support

### 5.4 Assigning volunteers to support a Family

In order for support to be provided to a family the referral must become an **assignment** (also commonly called a **case**).

Safe Families responses to family needs generally involve a blend of 3 elements:

1. hosting for child/children (single stay or recurrent plan)
2. befriending for parents/carers (typically a six-month initial plan)
3. provision of resources i.e. physical goods and/or services.

Sometimes 1 and 2 may be blended in the form of daytime childcare provision, either in the family home or the home of the volunteer.

The Family Support Manager has overall responsibility for Safe Families for Children’s involvement with families and as such is the decision-maker selecting which volunteers will be assigned to which families. Such decisions will rarely be made in isolation but rather in...
consultation with other colleagues. On a case-by-case basis a degree of responsibility may be delegated to a Family Coach who will supervise the involvement of Safe Families volunteers with the family in need.

**How the Safe Families Database is central to the assignment process**

The Safe Families Database Admin Users manual (section XX) explains the process of creating an assignment. It is designed to find matches between families in need and families that may be able to help. Various criteria are considered within the matching such as geographic proximity, age and gender of children etc.

- This functionality is only available to trained staff within specialist roles such as:
  - Office administrator
  - Referrals Co-Ordinator
  - Family support manager

Other questions considered at the time of creating the assignment include:

- Are there any people or agencies that may need to know that we are beginning to provide support to the family?
- Has the impact upon the children’s daily routine been considered in sufficient detail – i.e. drop offs and pick ups to/from school / nursery?

Finding an initial match between a family in need and a volunteer or volunteers that may be able to help is generally fairly straightforward, the database is very good at doing this. Generally the difficulty is one of communication i.e. reaching those volunteers with details of the new referral and hoping that they respond in a timely fashion. For this reason the following steps are recommended:

- ‘Posting’ the need using the inbuilt Safe Families Database facility
- Texting an abbreviated version of the need in the same way
- Drafting a prioritised shortlist from the longer match list created by the database and systematically making phonecalls to the volunteers
- Phonecalls are a very effective way of dealing with more urgent requests for help

Once an assignment has been accepted by a volunteer/s the Family Support Manager will also agree with a Family Coach to supervise the introduction of the volunteers to the family in need, and also to take responsibility for supervise the ongoing effectiveness of the support being provided.

The Family Coach role is discussed in considerable detail in Chapter 7: **The Family Coach Handbook.**
5.5 Referrals Flowchart Diagram

- **Need for SFFC support identified**
  - Family
  - Agency

- **Contact the SFFC Helpline**
  - Referral Form completed
  - Parental agreement

- **Referral received**
  - No (Family on system?)
  - Yes
  - Completed Form Logged Uploaded
  - Acknowledgment sent to referring agency (BCC FSM)
  - Printed and E-copy passed onto FSM

- **Family Support Manager**
  - Issue Assignment request to Volunteers
  - Assign Family Coach (where relevant)
  - Meet with Family (where relevant)
  - Organise family assessment (where relevant)
  - Referral assessment

- **SFFC Volunteer**
  - Volunteer response
  - Volunteer identified and assigned
  - Introduction to Family
  - Sign consent form
  - Support Begins
5.6 The Principle of Consent

5.6.1 Obtaining Consent prior to support commencing

Safe Families seeks to ensure that it is always providing support without coercion, and in circumstances where those receiving our help fully understand the nature of any permissions they are giving to Safe Families volunteers.

- Agencies referring to Safe Families must never tell a family that if they do not accept support from Safe Families then their children may be taken into care.
- Families receiving support should never be left in the dark about who is caring for their child, for how long, and what the contact arrangements will be.

Consent forms will need to be signed by those receiving Safe Families for Children’s help whether that help be provided in the form of befriending, hosting, or both.

The following consent-giving procedures apply:

- Adults entering into a befriending relationship will sign a simple form giving permission for certain personal details to be held on the Safe Families database and if necessary shared with other agencies.

Where the hosting of a child/children is to take place:

- If only one parent has duty of care and is the only parent involved in the approach to Safe Families, then consent from the one parent is sufficient.
- If both parents are involved in regular and frequent care of the child, both parents shall be required to give written consent. If for any reason this is not possible (e.g. one parent in hospital or custody), the reason must be clearly documented and approval given by the Family Support Manager that only one signature of consent is needed.
- If the child is primarily cared for by another adult, who is not the child’s parent, then this adult will be required to give consent. However if they do not legally have parental responsibility for the child, parental consent must be gained in addition.

5.7 Risk Management

5.7.1 Risk Thresholds

It is our objective to exemplify good practice and minimise any potential risks of harm, either to the families we are supporting, or to the staff or volunteers that offer the support. Safe Families considers it important to pass on specific information relating to the potential risks that may be associated with a family in need (e.g. drug abuse, domestic violence) to assigned volunteers in order to inform their decision to commence support.

Furthermore, it is important that do not accept cases that our qualified staff deem to be outside of our acceptable risk thresholds. Therefore baseline risk assessments are completed considering any the inherent level of risk that might be involved in delivering a package of support for a child and their wider family.

As part of responsible support for volunteers, the Family Coach will discuss with each volunteer any areas in which they have particular vulnerability relating to the role so that specific consideration can be given to their needs as well as any areas that should be included in a personal risk assessment.
5.7.2 Using Risk Assessment Forms

Form RC (risks related to a referred child)
Designed to aid the identification of any of risks posed for a child requiring Safe Families support. The information gained may be relevant for volunteers whether they are supporting the child directly, or indirectly by supporting their parent. Risks include:
- Physical risk to self (e.g. self-harming threats, lack of safety awareness)
- Physical risk to or from others? (e.g. violence, bullying)
- Harmful actions to or from other children (e.g. sexual or emotional)
- Physical/health/medical risks due to a health condition
- Absenting themselves from school or leaving the house without agreement of carer
- Vulnerable to unhealthy interest from adults or peers
- Abuse issues relating to family or other (e.g. violence, sexual and emotional)
- Negative impact of contact with certain family members.

Form RA (risks related to a referred adult)
Designed to aid the identification of any of risks posed by an adult requiring Safe Families support. The information gained may be relevant for volunteers whether they are supporting the adult directly, or indirectly by supporting their child, children or partner. Risks include:
- violent or aggressive behaviour
- offences against people and/or property
- being under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Mental Health Problems (including irrational or disturbing behaviour)
- Sexually inappropriate behaviour
- Known risk to children

5.7.3 Risk Management General Principles
Risks cannot be completely eliminated but identifying risks, assessing their seriousness, and planning steps for minimisation, significantly increases safety. Our approach to Risk Management works by first determining the category of risk, then specifying the specific risk and consequence. Next a judgement is made on the likelihood of the risk becoming a reality – and the impact if that happens. Finally action is recommended to reduce the risk to within acceptable thresholds.

- Giving our volunteers good quality training and supervision reduces risk.
- Being clear about acceptable levels of risk, and being willing to say no, will increase the safety of our staff and volunteers.
- Risk assessment forms should be completed prior to the beginning of Safe Families support.
- Even once completed, this form should remain as a working document, under regular review to which new situations can be added and ones no longer applicable removed.
- Ongoing training, advice and support should be given to volunteers, helping them to identify areas of emerging risk, and to work through challenges and dilemmas in the role.
- Parents/carers should be asked to identify others involved, or recently involved, in supporting them and to consent to information sharing.
- Referrers to Safe Families are asked to share any relevant known risks.
Safe Families uses a ‘traffic light’ colour coding system to identify the severity of a given risk, as follows:

**Green - Proceed**  A green flag indicates that the risks identified in this area are currently considered to be covered by sufficient controls. There is no additional planned or outstanding action to deal with the risk other than ongoing management monitoring.

**Amber - Caution**  An amber flag indicates that actions to address a control weakness have been identified and that a target date has been set for completion of the task. This date is recorded in the ‘Action dates’ column of the risk assessment.

**Red - Stop**  A red flag indicates that the controls are not sufficient, or that target dates set to complete the mitigating steps have been missed.

If the risks are too great or there are concerns relating to the level of unassessed risk, then a referral to Children's Social Care (CSC) will be recommended. Safe Families would only then consider accepting a referral if the assessment of CSC confirms it to be appropriate.

5.7.4 Lone working guidance

There will be many occasions when Safe Families staff and volunteers need to work alone, and under normal circumstances it will be perfectly safe to do so. However there will be times when it is necessary for team members to work in pairs. Examples of when lone working may not be safe include:

- When visiting members of referred families who are known to be violent or aggressive, whose behaviour is at times influenced by drugs or alcohol, or whose mental health problems cause irrational or disturbing behaviour.
- When there is a high risk of the staff/volunteer being victim of a crime, being falsely accused of abusive or inappropriate behaviour, or becoming emotionally distressed.

5.8 Frequently used forms and letters

The following forms and letters are frequently used during the referral and placement process. They can be found at [www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual](http://www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incoming Referral Form</th>
<th>Hosting Info Letter to be given to parent/carer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Carer Consent Forms</td>
<td>Letter to be given to referring parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child information Form: from Parent/Carer to Host</td>
<td>Contact Details for Parent/Carer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Assessment Form R: Risks relating to a referred child or family member</td>
<td>Risk Assessment Form W: Identified risks in relation to workers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 6
Managing & monitoring Safe Families support

6.1 Supporting volunteers

6.1.1 Why we need to support our volunteers

Safe Families for Children is based upon the contribution of volunteers caring for and supporting families experiencing various challenges and crises. The support offered is relational in nature and may be short, medium or long-term. It is therefore crucial to the success and sustainability of Safe Families for Children that our faithful army of volunteers is itself well supported.

The level of involvement that a given volunteer provides within Safe Families will vary considerably, as will the nature of such involvement. Moreover, those in these roles have varying experience and skills and support needs will vary. Therefore, the support provided for volunteers is done so flexibly, maintaining all the necessary guidance relating to procedures, planning and decision-making with the appropriate level of additional support for the role.

6.1.2 Who is involved in supporting Volunteers?

The following is a summary of the support available as specific details are documented in the manuals provided for volunteers.

The Family Coach

The Family Coach has a specific role to support the volunteers in their role, through regular visits, advice and guidance, responding to needs, coordinating issues and concerns, and facilitating the relationship for the Host Family with the parents/carers.

This role also includes oversight, supervision and review, addressing concerns and enabling development.

An important part of the Family Coach role is to support volunteers working directly with the referred child and family. There are a number of ways in which this is done:

- Answering any questions or concerns they may have.
- Reassuring them regarding appropriate processes and procedures.
- Reminding them of aspects of their training and key principles/tasks.
- Offering a more objective perspective on how the stay/involvement is going and addressing any ways to improve it.
- Double-checking important issues such as safety in the home and other safe working practices in order to prevent any problems.
- Being alert to the needs of referred children and families as well as the needs of the Host Family/Family Friend in order to ensure that all volunteers remain suited and fit for their roles.
- Reminding the volunteer of the importance of remaining connected within the local community to enable community networks to build sustainable positive outcomes for referred families. This includes them remaining connected with Safe Families networks.
- Supporting the volunteer to have all the child-related equipment they might need, for example for a child’s stay.

**Safe Families staff team**

Each volunteer will have contact details for the Family Support Manager should their Family Coach be unavailable. Other members of the Safe Families staff team, such as the Volunteer Managers, are also very willing and available to offer additional support if the need arises. Safe Families for Children’s Volunteer Managers have a roving role and whilst being principally involved in the recruitment, assessment and training of volunteers, they also retain an ongoing relationship with them as they begin to take on live assignments.

**Church co-ordinators**

Some churches will have a nominated member responsible for Safe Families liaison. They encourage people to step forward as volunteers, help them understand Safe Families roles and can encourage informal networking and support amongst volunteers within a church community and also within a local area. Church co-ordinators will be asked to extend their cover of support to other local churches who do not have the resources to nominate their own co-ordinator.

**6.2 Opportunity for further training, development and support**

**Further training**

As mentioned in Chapter 4 continual development is promoted for all those involved in Safe Families. Volunteers will be offered opportunities to develop in their roles. One of the main ways that this ongoing development is supported is through the provision of bi-monthly volunteer evenings that always include a training component. Other voluntary training opportunities will also be promoted, such as those provided by LCSB’s and other local agencies.

**Volunteer Support Groups**

Within in each region, a number of volunteer support groups may take place, these will typically be affiliated with local churches that have a number of members of their congregation active in supporting families through Safe Families. The Volunteer Manager within the region will oversee these groups including Family coaches and church coordinators as appropriate.

**Being A Community**

It is important to remember that Safe Families is not a collection of isolated individuals but rather a community of people with shared vision and values. Safe Families staff will seek to cultivate this sense of community amongst the volunteer base seeking to draw in any volunteers who show a tendency to work in isolation.
6.3 Managing Hosting Arrangements

6.3.1 The Host Family match, recap.

As described in the previous chapter a suitable Host Family will be identified using information yielded by the Safe Families database, combined with more nuanced or in-depth knowledge that Safe Families staff may have about the Host Family.

Aspects of matching are likely to include:
- Physical proximity. Placing parents tend to have less anxiety if they know that their children are reasonably close by (i.e. less than 10 miles)
- The availability of Host Family on the required dates.
- Ability to accommodate special requirements such as keeping siblings together.
- A good match with regard to age and gender. This is more important where the Host Family have their own children at home.
- Particular skills or strengths that the Host Family have demonstrated
- Matching interests (such as being football crazy!)

6.3.2 Guidance on sharing bedrooms

We believe that in most cases, it is best for a child staying with a Host Family to have their own bedroom, allowing for their own sense of space and privacy.

However, we also recognises that there may be some exceptions to this rule. For example if siblings are being placed then they may prefer to share a bedroom. In other circumstances a Host Family may be felt to be a very good fit for the family requiring support (e.g. local proximity, shared culture etc.) but may not have sufficient spare rooms for the child being hosted to have a single bedroom.

In order to assist in decisions of this nature the following guidance is offered:
- There is to be no bed-sharing.
- The placing parent and the child being hosted should be consulted about their views and comfortable with the solution being proposed.
- Account should be taken of the age and developmental stage of the children – physically and emotionally.
- If a social worker is also involved with the child, then they may also need to be consulted about the appropriateness of proposed arrangements.
- Once a plan is agreed it should not be changed without the parties involved in the original decision giving further consent.
- Siblings may share a room, provided this is agreed by the parent/carer and the children. As a rule of thumb we would advise against children of different genders sharing a room if one or more of the children are aged 10 or over.
- In general it is advisable for an Safe Families child aged 10 or over not to share a room with a Host Family child. However there may be exceptions, see guidelines below.
- A child aged 5 to 9 may share with a Host Family child if:
  - They are the same gender
  - Their ages are within 3-4 years of each other
  - It is known and agreed by placing parent/carer and the children
- It is agreeable to all members of the Host Family, including the children
- There are no concerns regarding risk of harm to either child.

- A child 4 or under may share with a Host Family child if:
  - Their ages are within 2-3 years of each other
  - It is known and agreed by placing parent/carer and the children
  - It is agreeable to all members of the Host Family, including the children
  - There are no concerns regarding risk of harm to either child.

- A child should not sleep in the same room as Host Family adults unless:
  - It is known and agreed by the placing parent/carer and
  - Either: The stay begins when the child is under six months old or specific reasons are identified in the referral and the child is under 3.

More detailed information on managing Hosting arrangements can be found in the Family Coach handbook and the Host Family handbook.

### 6.4 Managing Befriending Arrangements

#### 6.4.1 Setting and Monitoring Goals
Safe Families Family Friends can be involved in a wide variety of means of offering support to struggling families, some very simple and straightforward and others much more challenging and involved. One unifying theme in all befriending support is that the befriender and the adult receiving the support need to be clear about what support is being given, what the goal of providing the support is, and over what timescale the support will be monitored for effectiveness.

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support to be given</th>
<th>Safe Families Family Friend will visit struggling single mother who has a 3 year old, a 2 year old and a 3 month old.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of support</td>
<td>Weekly, on Wednesday mornings at 10 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of support</td>
<td>6 months then review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Goals of support | Encourage relationships and bonding in the family unit  
Encourage healthy feeding and hygiene routines  
Help mum get out to the park with the kids fortnightly  
Help mum plan for 3 year old starting local school nursery half days from September |

More detailed information on managing Befriending arrangements can be found in the Family Coach handbook and the Family Friend handbook.
6.5 Managing other volunteer involvement

6.5.1 Resource Friend involvement in support
Concurrent with the consideration of an appropriate Host Family, a Family Coach will be allocated to support the Safe Families involvement.

The Family Coach may immediately initiate resource friends such as meals for the Host Family and other practical help. As the Family Coach meets the referring family, the Family Coach may initiate the allocation of further Family Friends or resource friends.

6.5.2 Local church involvement in support
It is our hope that the Host Family will be a bridge to the resource network of their church on behalf of the parent. A number of churches offer lay counselling and prayer, debt advice and support, Foodbank, toddler groups, children and youth groups etc.. The resource network of the church can be instrumental in helping a parent get back on their feet.

6.6 Supporting Referred Families

6.6.1 The volunteer’s relationship with Placing Parents
Safe Families gives help to families in need through sustained, relational support, reducing their sense of social isolation and developing a network of support. In this way we see increased resilience to stresses, and begin to build a more stable, safer family home for the children.

Key principles for our relationships with families are:
- Mutual respect and reciprocity.
- Working together to identify needs and plan goals.
- Trusting in the instincts of parents to care for their children, although they may go through times when their care-giving ability is negatively affected.
- Focusing on solving problems rather than criticising or blaming the parent for the situation they are in.
- Taking a strengths-based approach, starting with helping parents to build on what they do well and from this place of confidence tackling parenting deficits.
- Maintaining a positive, pro-active role that offers help and makes help readily available.
- Affirming a parents’ desire to reciprocate through offering their help to others.

6.6.2 The Family Coach role in managing and monitoring support
The Family Coach is a field-based role overseeing specific Safe Families family assignments (generally 1—3 cases) and being the primary link between families receiving Safe Families assistance, the Safe Families volunteers offering that assistance, and the Safe Families office.

The Family Coach:
- Enables good communication and smooth arrangements between Safe Families volunteers and the family in need
- Monitors that the help provided by volunteers is both safe and effective
- Provides regular updates to the Family Support Manager regarding how child stays
and Family Friend support is going

- Helps volunteers to understand the importance of maintaining high standards in the area of Safeguarding
- Participates in the wider life of Safe Families for Children within the region, such as volunteer events etc.
- Takes care of basic administration, form-filling and record-keeping connected to the cases that they are supervising

The full part that the Family Coach plays in managing and monitoring the support that Safe Families provides to families in need is described in detail in the Family Coach Handbook.

### 6.7 Ending or Continuing Involvement?

#### 6.7.1 The ending of a child’s hosting

The placing parent/carer determines how long they need their child to stay with a Host Family and when they believe they are ready for their child to be returned home. If the parent believes they are not in a position to take their child back, they are also free to make alternative arrangements.

At the beginning of a child’s stay with a Host Family, Safe Families encourages the parent or carer to estimate how long they think their child needs to be with a Host Family. All efforts are made to help them get back on their feet by that time. However, sometimes a hosting will need to be extended, for example if there is a problem with a hospital procedure and the parent needs to stay on a ward for observation for a few more days.

Parents/carers are asked to give as much notice as possible if they change their plans regarding when they wish their child to be returned to their care. Asking them to give a days’ notice is reasonable guidance should they wish the child to return prior to the planned date. However, if a parent requests their child to be immediately returned to them we have no right to refuse.

The Family Coach will coordinate the logistical arrangements for when the child returns home and how this is done best. Further information about ending a hosting well is included in the Host Family Handbook.

#### 6.7.2 What if we have concerns regarding the safety of a child returning home?

On occasion, there may be a concern about the safety of a child returning to their parental home. In such a scenario, consideration needs to be given as to whether a referral to Children’s Social Care is warranted. At this point the Family Coach need to be involved, and if they deem the situation serious they will also seek advice from the Family Support Manager.

The following are a non-exhaustive list of such scenarios that may warrant a referral:

a) parent/carer has been identified as perpetrator of domestic violence
b) parent/carer continues to live with someone dangerous to the child and refuses to separate after having been advised of the dangers;
c) parent/carer has initiated a new relationship in which there is risk of harm to the children
d) home conditions are poor to the extent of being a threat to the physical health or safety of the child
e) parent/carer is openly rejecting of the child or is emotionally abusive
f) parent/carer’s lifestyle continues to centre around drugs/alcohol addiction
g) parent/carer has a mental health issue that presents a risk of harm to the child

If following discussion and enquiries Safe Families believes that there is risk of significant harm then the forward referral process will be followed, as described in Safeguarding section 2.4. A referral will be made with appropriate urgency and it is then the Local Authority’s responsibility to determine whether the child is safe in the care of their parent/carer.

Safe Families is very concerned about protecting children. Therefore, those assisting a family must flag any concerns they have about a child as early as possible, in order to allow as much time as possible for the Local Authority to conduct its own assessments and enquiries.

### 6.7.3 Arranging longer-term support

Many Host Families maintains a relationship with the placing family after a child’s stay, indeed most hostings are not one-offs but part of a repeat plan, for example having a child to stay one weekend per month for six months. At the end of the plan the Host Family may choose to continue supporting the family as Family Friends for a longer period of time, for example another six months, no longer hosting but visiting, having days out and generally supporting the ongoing healthy development of the family that is beginning to get over its original difficulties. If appropriate, a different Family Friend may be asked to get alongside the parents/carers to offer this post-hosting support.

In the cases of ongoing respite arrangements, the Family Coach will oversee the Host Family and/or Family Friends for as long a period as required. Reviews of the arrangement will take place at established intervals in order to support the arrangement, until such time as the case is closed.

### 6.7.4 When organised support becomes a natural relationship

It is possible and even likely that Host Families and Family Friends may develop a natural and lasting friendship with the family that they have been assisting. In this scenario all involved would need to be clear about the point at which Safe Families support and oversight is withdrawn. Family coaches should make a clear case note on the Safe Families database at this point so that there is no ambiguity about the change in status of the relationship.

Safe Families promotes the development of natural, less formal relationships as a demonstration that the family are opening up to wider community support. The only concern Safe Families would have in these instances is that the relationship between the individuals and/or families must be based on mutuality and not co-dependency. The Family Coach will offer guidance for volunteers and for parents and carers regarding expectations of the ongoing friendship to ensure that it is based on a healthy footing.

### 6.7.5 Re-commencing support

In the majority of cases Safe Families will be successful in de-escalating a family’s problems, restoring stability and safety. However, problems may resurface at a later date and we make it clear to parents that they can return to us for support in the future if required.

It is important that if and when families request Safe Families support, a second, third or even fourth time, the request ought to be made through the proper referral channel i.e. a family ought to self-refer back to their local Safe Families office rather than directly contacting a volunteer who has helped them in the past. In the time since their last
involvement with that volunteer the volunteer may have taken on a new assignment, or ceased to be involved as an Safe Families volunteer. Also the nature of their problem may have changed and their original volunteer may not be suitably prepared for the new challenge.

6.8 Guidelines for disruptions and changes during hostings

It is our hope that children receiving Safe Families support do not experience instability in their Safe Families hostings. To this end, we work hard in the following areas:

- Making a really good match between the referred family and the Host Family
- Ensuring the Host Family are well supported so that the hosting does not have an adverse effect upon their own emotional and physical health and wellbeing
- To be realistic up front about length of stay, working with the general rule of thumb that the longer the stay the greater the chance of a disruption.

However, it is understood that occasionally placements might be disrupted. The following are categories of circumstances that can disrupt hostings:

- The placing parent (or Family Coach) becomes unhappy with the Host Family situation for some reason, requesting an alternative placement
- The placing parent for whatever personal reason requests that the child is returned home
- The Host Family requests an end to a stay for personal reasons and the difficulties and/or disruption cannot be prevented;
- An emergency occurs and the Host Family is no longer able to care for the child
- The hosted child’s behaviour cannot be adequately managed by the Host Family e.g. aggression/violence, sexually explicit behaviour, absconding…
- The Host Family show unwillingness to comply with Safe Families for Children’s policies and expectations
- There is a suspicion or allegation that child abuse may have occurred in the Host Family.

In all these scenarios the Family Coach would create a plan of action with the Family Support Manager and put it into effect as quickly as possible
MANUAL THREE
ROLE SPECIFIC HANDBOOKS

FAMILY COACH HANDBOOK
HOST FAMILY HANDBOOK
FAMILY FRIEND HANDBOOK
CHURCH HANDBOOK
Chapter 7
Family Coach Handbook

7.1 Thank you for becoming a Family Coach

Welcome to Safe Families for Children team. The Family Coach role is critical to the success of Safe families for Children. We are therefore particularly grateful to you for stepping forward and being willing to give your time and talents to this role.

As you will know by now, Safe Families for Children offers a unique opportunity to bring much-needed support to struggling families. The role of the Family Coach is key to ensuring that support provided is appropriately tailored, consistent in quality, and responsive to changes in the situation.

This handbook is designed to give clarity to the elements of the role. It outlines core principles and guidance, as well as important systems and procedures. Whilst covering most of the essentials of the role this handbook isn’t exhaustive in detail. Therefore please do be assured that the Safe Families staff team are committed to supporting you in this role. If there’s anything that’s unclear to you or you need further advice and guidance about please do ask.

We wish you every blessing and trust that you will find the role very fulfilling.

7.2 What does a Family Coach do?

Summary of the role:
A field-based role overseeing specific Safe Families family assignments (generally 1—3 cases) and being the primary link between families receiving Safe Families assistance, the Safe Families volunteers offering that assistance, and the Safe Families office.

General duties and responsibilities:

- Enabling good communication and smooth arrangements, especially at the beginning and the end of Safe Families volunteers’ involvement with a family in need
- Monitoring that the help provided by volunteers is both safe and effective
- Provide regular updates to the Safe Families Regional Families Manager regarding how child stays and Family Friend support is going
- Facilitating the development of the volunteers in fulfilling their role well
- Personally model, and help volunteers to understand, the importance of maintaining the highest standards in the area of Safeguarding
- Encourage prayer for children and families being supported, and for the volunteers that are on the front line of providing that assistance.
- Participation in the wider life of Safe Families for Children within the region, such as volunteer events etc.
- Basic administration, form-filling and record-keeping connected to the role, with appropriate sensitivity given to issues of confidentiality

The full Family Coach role description can be viewed at: www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual
Family Coach Example Assignment Diagram

Good communication is key to the Family Coach role. In relational terms there is no substitute for face-to-face communication. Therefore think about how often you should visit referred families you are overseeing, and also how often you ought to see the volunteers involved in helping them.

Your availability. Beyond meeting face to face, consider how easy it is for the referred family to contact you if they have any questions or issues. Remember, many people may say that they will contact you if they need help or advice, but in practice they may not do it. Later, you may discover that there were a number of things that they wished to ask or say – so be proactive in checking in with people.

Host Families and Family Friends will undoubtedly need to call you at some point for advice and guidance. They may feel that things are not going well, or wish to discuss an issue that they cannot discuss with the parents. Please do your best to be accessible and responsive. If you receive texts, emails or voicemails from volunteers please always respond promptly.

7.3 Achieving goals and outcomes for families in need

When we agree to provide support to a family it is always in the belief that we can help them towards a better outcome than they would have arrived at without our help. At the beginning of the support arrangement there should be discussion between all involved about what this outcome might be. Examples might be:

- to alleviate family tensions and improve relationships between parent and child, or between siblings
- to develop the confidence of a parent to make the most of facilities available in their local community
- to ensure that the effects of a parental illness do not begin to impact negatively on the child’s development
- …and many, many more.
**Staying on track**

A key aspect of the Family Coach role is to ensure that volunteer involvement is tailored to the needs of the child and family, remaining focused on providing support as agreed, rather than straying in numerous other aspects of a family’s life. We must honour the dignity and integrity of the family unit and be careful not to create unhealthy dependencies and open-ended support relationships. The key is to keep the end in mind.

To this end the Family Coach should be fully aware of the extent of the support being given, and the goals that have been agreed, for example:

**Family Friend plan:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support to be given</th>
<th>Safe Families Family Friend will visit struggling single mother who has a 3 year old, a 2 year old and a 3 month old.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of support</td>
<td>Weekly, on Wednesday mornings at 10 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of support</td>
<td>6 months then review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Goals of support | Encourage relationships and bonding in the family unit  
Encourage healthy feeding and hygiene routines  
Help mum get out to the park with the kids fortnightly  
Help mum plan for 3 year old starting local school nursery half days from September |

**Host Family plan:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support to be given</th>
<th>Safe Families Host Family Friend will offer respite for 3 year old girl and 2 year old boy.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of support</td>
<td>Weekends, Friday evening through Sunday afternoon, generally second weekend of the month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of support</td>
<td>6 months then review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Goals of support | Encourage bonding between the brother and sister  
Encourage healthy feeding and hygiene routines  
Take kids out for fun activities and new experiences  
Help children to develop in speech and communication |

If it is your opinion that the Safe Families support arrangements are not satisfactory, or are going off track – either in terms of safety or effectiveness, then you should discuss this with the Family Support Manager as soon as possible, so that together, you can agree what changes can be made and then bring these to the attention of the volunteers and the family being supported.
Good questions to refer to on a regular basis might include:

- Does everyone involved understand how the part they are playing is contributing towards the overall aim of helping the family to ‘get back on their feet’?
- Are the needs of the child/children being properly considered? Do they have any other needs that are not being met? If so, can they be met and how?
- Whose voice needs to be heard? For example, are the child’s wishes and feelings being recognised and appropriately taken into account, or are there other relatives that it might be good to include in future planning?
- Do the assisted family (the adults and the children) know who to talk to and how if any issues arise for them?
- Do the assisted parents appear to be developing a good relationship with the Family Friends and/or Host Family?
- Are decisions about ending Safe Families involvement being made in the child’s interests? What is the likelihood of problems re-emerging within the next 6-12 months?

### 7.4 The importance of safeguarding children

Safe Families is absolutely committed to safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults. All of our staff and volunteers, whatever role they may serve in, carry a duty of care towards those being assisted by our programmes and services. Our Safeguarding policy and associated procedures are applicable to all children, young people and vulnerable adults served through our work, regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or religion.

Please carefully read the ‘Safeguarding Policies and Guidance for Volunteers’ insert, it is 6 pages long but very helpful and very important.

- **The guidance includes:** Safeguarding Policy: Headline Statements, Definitions of Terms, The challenge of recognising abusers, Signs and symptoms of abuse, Acting upon concerns of potential abuse, Action flow chart for disclosures, Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults, Dealing with an allegation of abuse against Safe Families team members


The Safe Families approach to safeguarding is one of **never do nothing.**

Volunteers are expected to report all concerns, however minor, to their supervisor, which will generally be you as their Family Coach. In turn you may seek advice from the Safeguarding lead (see below).

**Please note that you are authorised to act unilaterally by calling the police or duty social work team if you ever feel that a child is at immediate risk of significant harm.**

### Safeguarding Officers

Wherever Safe Families operates a lead Safeguarding Officer is appointed. This responsibility will generally be carried by either the Programme Director or the Family Support Manager. As a Family Coach you will have a direct reporting relationship to this person and you sit in
a very important position in terms of identifying concerns within families and raising them with the Safeguarding Officer as and when you feel the need to do so.

7.5 The first meeting with the family needing support

As soon as possible upon acceptance of the referral an initial meeting with the family will be undertaken by a Family Coach or by a Family Support Manager. There will have been prior communication between the Safe Families office and the family, most likely via telephone. Ideally this first meeting should happen in the home of the family needing help. There may also be occasions when the meeting will be held in another convenient location e.g. a coffee shop, local church, community centre.

- Family Friends or Host Family who have volunteered to support the family may also accompany the Family Coach at this meeting.

At this point the items covered by the Family Coach (or Family Support Manager) to include:

- Spend a little time getting to know the family, sharing some of your own story and generally ensuring that you have a proper grasp of the situation and that the family are clear about how Safe Families can help.
- Go through the brochure that explains Safe Families to the referred family: check that they understand the nature of Safe Families and that they are in agreement with Safe Families involvement.
- Ask the parents to sign a Consent Form. (at www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual)
- Remember: Safe Families operates a principle of no pressure or coercion; so you need to be sure that the parent is genuinely welcoming of Safe Families for Children’s help. If you are in doubt you may need to ask some questions to establish is any pressure is being applied by another party. If so, you may need to pause arrangements until this can be resolved.
- Consider the views of the children themselves at this stage and act accordingly in helping children to understand how Safe Families works. (If the Host Family have children then their views should also be considered).
- Give the family your Safe Families phone number and let them know when you will be available to be contacted. Also make sure they have the Safe Families office number and email address.
- (Hosting arrangements only) Give the referred parents a copy of the Host Family Profile (a short description of the family who have offered to do the hosting). Give them chance to read the profile and offer feedback. You can help them read it if they are not a good reader / do not have English as a first language.
- (Hosting arrangements only) The referred family should complete a Child Information Form (at www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual) to support the child's stay.
- If you have time, you may go through with the referred parents how much the children know of the situation and difficulties and how the parents wish to tell the story of requesting Safe Families involvement.
- Seek to ascertain information that will be relevant for the Risk Assessment process. There is one form (RC) for risks relating a child and another (RA) for risks relating to adult family members. Be sensitive in the use of the forms and do not complete them in front of the family. Discreetly find out what you need to know and complete the Risk Assessment form afterwards.
7.6 Supervising hostings

The extent to which you need to be involved in a hosting will depend upon the length of the stay/s involved, the level of assessed risk, and the experience of the Host Family. For example, if a child being hosted has known behavioural issues then you should monitor more closely, and likewise if a Host Family is hosting for the first time, you should also plan to give extra encouragement and support.

Important items to check prior to the first Hosting:

- Does the Host Family have the Child Information Form?
- Does the Child Information Form include the parent/carers emergency contact details?
- Does the Host Family know who to call at Safe Families if you should not be available?
- Does the Host Family have a signed copy of the parent/carer Consent Form, and have they signed it too?

7.6.1 Short hostings (1-3 nights)

It is anticipated that the majority of hostings will be short. However, short hostings may be repeated, for instance one weekend per month for 6 months. Therefore the relationship between the Host Family and the referred family is still a very important one, and you have an important role both practically and emotionally in facilitating this relationship.

- You may need to arrange an appropriate place for introducing the Host Family and the referred family. Generally speaking it is appropriate to bring the Host Family to the home of the family requiring help rather than bringing the family requiring help to the home of the Host Family.
- On occasion meetings may need to take place in a neutral setting such as the supporting church, or a coffee shop.
- Talk about:
  - what to pack
  - what the child likes to do for fun
  - sleeping arrangements (i.e. single or shared rooms)
  - food, allergies, medicines
  - behaviour and discipline
  - clarify arrangements for contact, eg phonecalls etc

Post-hosting the Family Coach should visit the Host Family for a de-briefing meeting, using the Host Family debrief guide. (available at www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual)

7.6.2 Longer hostings (4-27 nights)

With longer hostings there are additional considerations beyond those already discussed.

Visiting the Host Family

After a few days the Family Coach should pay a visit to the Host Family with the objective of building your rapport with the family, finding out how they are coping, assessing how the child has settled in, and checking whether any unforeseen issues need to be talked through.

- Prior to the visit read any journal notes added to the Safe Families database by the Host Family. If the Hosts are not journaling then you should underline why this is important
when you visit. You may also check that the Hosts know how to login and use the system.

- Use the benefit of your objective perspective to identify any emerging risks or additional needs relating to the child’s stay. Tactfully raise any potential ‘blind spots’ with the Host Family if there are issues you see that they have not self-identified. As Family Coach, you will provide supportive listening.

- Discuss whether there have been any issues around the Host Family’s “rules” for the child, whether there have been any behavioural issues requiring discipline, and, if the Host Family also has children living at home, how they are getting along with the placed child.

- You should double-check the plans for length of stay, in case of the emergence of any circumstances that may either extend or curtail the stay.

- Remember to make a case note from your visit on the Safe Families database.

- You may call the Family Support Manager to offer a verbal update following the visit. This call should supplement rather than substitute your note-keeping on the Safe Families database.

- Keep an eye out for any safety concerns relating to the child’s stay. Ask the Host Family to confirm that they have removed any hazards, both in the house and the garden. If you notice anything that you judge to be unsafe do mention it and ask for it to be dealt with.

Again, Post-hosting the Family Coach should visit the Host Family for a de-briefing meeting, using the Host Family debrief guide (at www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual)

7.6.3 +28 days: The rules around Private Fostering

Private fostering is a private arrangement made between a child’s parents and someone who is not a close relative (i.e. aunt, uncle, brother, sister or grandparent) through which a child starts to live with the new carer for 28 days or more (consecutively). There are a number of legal factors that need to be considered if a hosting extends beyond 28 days and becomes private fostering. Such as:

- As Host Families do not qualify as close relatives Safe Families has a duty to tell the Local Authority of a hosting that extends beyond 28 days as soon as possible.
- The Local Authority has a duty to assess any situation in which a child aged 0-16 years (0-18 for children with a disability) stays with someone who is not a close relative for 28 days or more.

It is worth noting that Safe Families in the UK has never facilitated a hosting for more than 28 days.

- A more detailed info sheet about Private Fostering is included in section 11.10

7.6.4 Final hostings

The aim of Safe Families for Children is that we support parents to get back on their feet and that a child’s stay with a Host Family is a very short-term arrangement. Nevertheless, the process of saying goodbye to the child at the end of a stay, or series of stays, can be emotionally difficult for all involved. Therefore:

- Help the child, parent and Host Family prepare for the end of the stay from the outset.
- Always be open and honest with child and Host Family.
Create a schedule or calendar to help the child understand the timing.

Support the Host Family to plan appropriate ‘endings’, to achieve a healthy balance between remaining ‘low-key’ emotionally whilst marking the goodbye process.

Where appropriate, support the Host Family in completing a ‘memory book’ of the stay for the child (see 8.7.6).

Plan your final visits to the Host Family and to the placing parents according to the planned ending in order to offer appropriate support prior to, during and/or after the end of the hosting.

Plan a de-briefing with the Host Family. Use the Host Family de-brief guide (7.11) for this.

### 7.7 Ensuring contact between the child and their parent/carer(s)

#### 7.7.1 Why regular contact is important

The placing parent retains full responsibility for their child during the time of the stay. Our desire is that Host Families will be able to develop a positive, supportive relationship with them. In some cases the relationship goes so well that it blooms into a genuine friendship that continues beyond the child’s stay.

It is usually in the best interests of the child to maintain regular contact with their parent during their stay. It is also likely that the placing parent will have some anxiety about their child being away from home. A simple phonecall can do wonders in alleviating any worries. There may also be other people that it will be good for the child to be in contact with during their stay, such as siblings, grandparents or friends.

Regular contact between the parent and child therefore achieves several purposes:

- The parent’s anxiety about the hosting is reduced as they continue to feel connected to their child, even though the child is spending time with another family.
- The child is comforted in knowing that their parent is still very much concerned about them and looking forward to their return. They may also sense progress their parent is making towards addressing any difficulties.
- The Host Family is reminded them of the aims to supplement rather than substitute the natural care provided by the parent. Also by observing the interaction they can often better understand the child’s behaviour.

#### 7.7.2 Methods of contact

In working out how and when contact with the parent and the child will happen, the aim should be to make the process as clear, straightforward, and manageable for everyone, in order to avoid potential disappointment and misunderstanding. Generally a combination of phone calls, text messaging and perhaps even good old fashioned letter will present minimal fuss. Face to face meetings will involve more by way of planning and can be more sensitive emotionally.

- More on this in the next section.

It is appropriate for the Family Coach to ask the placing parent, the Host Family and the child (if age appropriate) about the plans for contact to ensure that they are happy with the method and frequency planned.

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**Important note:**

There may be individuals within the relational sphere of the child with whom contact is not allowed. Host Families and Family Coaches will be informed if this is the case.
The most common means of contact is to talk together over the telephone (if age-appropriate). The first telephone contact ought to occur within 24 hours of a child’s stay.

- It is helpful for the call to happen at a regular time of day – e.g. 6 pm, rather than the calls being by ad hoc arrangement
- The Host Family and placing parent will need to be clear about who calls who, as this has cost implications i.e. the placing parent may not have sufficient phone credit to be able to make an outgoing call but may be able to accept an incoming call

### 7.7.3 Arranging direct face to face contact

In longer hostings it is likely that there will need to be direct contact between the parent and the child during the period of the stay, in order to ensure that the parent—child relationship is not adversely affected. The Family Coach should ensure that this contact is part of the initial hosting plan rather than being arranged as an afterthought.

Decisions around direct contact will depend upon the nature of the parents’ issues and also the age of the child. For example there may be limitations around hospital visits and if the parent is to spend a spell in prison or residential rehab face to face contact may be neither helpful nor permissible.

**The location of the contact**

Generally the contact will:

- take place in a neutral location such as a café, park, play centre, church or community centre.
- if the parent is in hospital the child/children may be taken to visit during visiting hours
- not involve returning the child to their family home, because of the possibility of the child deciding that they want to stay there and not continue with the full duration of the hosting.
- not happen in the Host Family home, unless the Family Coach and the Host Family have discussed this and it is clear that the Host Family feel comfortable about the referred parent coming to their home.

### 7.8 Coaching the Host Family

As a Family Coach you also carry a remit that is in part developmental, facilitating the growth of the volunteers as they undertake their role. Coaching conversations may be held during a hosting but are more often more helpful between hostings – especially when a Host Family is involved in offering regular support to the same child.

Through a simple down-to-earth chat over a cup of tea you can help the Host Family to reflect on what they are doing well, identify areas of challenge, and consider ways in which they might improve the care they offer during the next stay.

Coaching questions should be open-ended and follow a simple pattern, such as the questions shown on the right.

A coaching chat doesn’t necessarily need to be face to face, a phonecall or Skype call could be...
scheduled. If this is the way that you and the Host Family would like to talk then just ensure that enough time has been given for the call and that there will not be unhelpful interruptions.

As a rule of thumb during a child’s stay with a Host Family:

- Speak to the parent(s) every 3-4 days for the first two weeks.
- Visit the parent(s) every 1-2 weeks for the first 4 weeks.

### 7.9 Supervising and coaching Family Friends

#### 7.9.1 Introducing the Family Friend to the family in need

Facilitating the relationship between a referred family and a Family Friend should be reasonably straightforward.

- You will introduce the Family Friend to the referred family at an agreed location, which may be the home of the referred family, or a neutral venue such as a local cafe.
- A member of staff from the Safe Families office may get involved in helping with co-ordinating diary arrangements.
- Be prepared to kickstart the conversation between the referred parent and the Family Friend, share some of your own story and then ask them both to do the same.
- Make sure that by the time the first meeting is over everyone is clear about the expectations of the Family Friend involvement. (Refer to the templates in section 7.3)

#### 7.9.2 Coaching the Family Friend

Given that the purpose of the Family Friend role is to get alongside the referred parents directly, further ‘facilitation’ of the relationship should not be necessary, although through support of both, there may be a role to help each understand the other better.

- Speak to the referred parent, or drop them a text, at least once every two weeks.
- Visit periodically, perhaps with the Family Friend, once a month.
- Have a ‘Coaching Call’ or ‘Coaching Coffee’ with the Family Friend every couple of weeks, asking open questions such as:
  - How would you describe the state of your relationship with the parent?
  - What signs are you seeing that indicate that the parent is serious about addressing their issues?
  - What specific progress has been made in the last week or two?
  - Have any new challenges arisen?
  - Is the relationship introducing any new stresses into your own life?

**Note:** The Family Coach is not there to fulfil the role of the Family Friend for them – they need sufficient space to build their own relationship with the parent. The Family Friend will be able to answer many of the referred families’ questions, as well as helping them to directly address their needs. The Family Coach role is to look out for any gaps and signpost to other support services in the locality as and when appropriate. The Family Friend may then help the referred family to take the steps to accessing this additional support – e.g. providing transport to get a local service, or accompanying on a first visit to a local group.
7.10 How to support the child / children

The perspectives of the Family Coach are vital in considering how the child / children of the family being assisted are responding to the changes in their family. This is even more important if the child is being hosted, whether a single extended stay or short multiple stays. Do they understand why new people have appeared in their life? Do they need reassurance about how their parents are? If so, how should this best be done?

If you are going to talk directly with a child during their stay with a Host Family, which is advised, especially during longer stays, then you ought to make space to chat with them on their own. You could for example have a walk around the garden together away from the Host Family so that they have opportunity to tell you whether or not they are really enjoying their stay, and whether any problems may need attending to. Depending on their age and developmental stage most children who can communicate verbally, will find that the chance to express their opinion is an empowering experience.

If there is only Family Friend involvement, then consideration about how to support the child(ren) is likely to be more general. In this instance you are more likely to be asking yourself to what extent the Safe Families intervention is improving outcomes for the child? Have you seen or heard anything that suggests that the Family Friend involvement is helping to enhance family relationships – or does the child actually find it all a bit awkward? Moreover, can you be sure that there is not any negative effect on the children?

During the course of being involved with a family you may discover that one or more of the children have more complex needs that are not being met. If so, you should discuss these needs with the Family Support Manager, with a view to stepping up Safe Families support, signposting to another service, or, in the case of health or developmental concerns, referring to a statutory service.

7.11 Involving Resource Friends

If, during the course of support it comes to light that the referred family would benefit from specific resources, commonly – household items, children’s clothing etc. then the Family Coach may use the Safe Families Database to ‘post a need’ to the network of Resource Friends. Alternatively you may alert the Safe Families office to these needs, so that a member of the office team can post the request on your behalf. Similarly, if a Host Family require an item, for example a child’s booster seat for the car, or a baby cot for their home, then the you may initiate a needs request in the same fashion.

- If the help required if a service rather than goods, i.e. gardening or decorating, then the Family Coach may need to be involved in arrangements to ensure that the work is done at a convenient time, by an appropriate person and to a good standard.
- Consideration may need to be given to the appropriateness of children being in the family home whilst such work is taking place.

7.12 Outline for a Host Family de-brief

RECAP: Prior to Hosting
- What inspired you to become a Host Family?
- What parts of the training and assessment did you find most useful?

DURING: About the stay
- Were you well informed and supported throughout your placement?
- Who did you turn to for support during your placement?
- Did your Family Coach give you enough support and resources?
- Were there other agencies involved with this child and family? If so, tell us more about the level of information-sharing and working together. How well was your role understood by the other agencies?
- What level of support did you have from your church network?
- Did you need/use additional resource sharing?
- Was there also a Safe Families Family Friend allocated?
- Were you involved as a Family Friend for the parent as well as hosting their child?
- How could Safe Families have made the child’s stay a better experience?

AFTER: How you feel about your experience overall:
- Did you feel well informed/prepared?
- Did you have realistic expectations?
- How did this impact your family, both emotionally and spiritually?
- How did you see God at work in this experience?
- Would you say you grew through this and if so, how?
- How did you feel about returning the child/children?
- What would you change before doing this again?
- What have you learned from doing this placement?
- Any other insights or experiences you would like to share with us?

7.13 Communication with other agencies and professionals

Safe Families enjoys excellent working relationships with the Local Authority professionals responsible for Children’s Social Care, Safeguarding and the wellbeing of families. Generally these relationships are managed by the Programme Director and the Family Support Managers. On occasion however you may be asked to:

- Have a phonecall with a member of staff from the Local Authority, such as a social worker or equivalent
- Attend a multi-agency meeting to discuss a particular family that you have involvement with
- Look into complementary or additional services in the local area that might be available to the family that is being assisted

Also, in many cases, for example when the referral has come to Safe Families via a social worker or a health visitor, we will need to provide feedback to them on how the family is progressing, and whether we see evidence of the situation improving. The Safe Families office will generally handle this feedback, but much of it will be based on case notes that you as the Family Coach have been recording on the Safe Families database against the family’s record.
You should therefore be diligent throughout the duration of the support in regularly updating the case notes about the family’s progress, and ensuring that other volunteers involved, such as Host Family or Family Friends, are doing the same.

7.14 Recording regular case notes about your assignments

Safe Families has a system for recording case notes about the families we are helping. All Family Support Managers and Family Coaches are expected to use this facility on a regular basis to record interactions, incidents and information that comes to light in their work.

The case notes facility is also made available to volunteers in Host Family and Family Friend roles for the purpose of journaling their involvement with an adult and/or child. Host Families in particular are expected to make a brief daily journal note during a hosting, even if the day has been pretty uneventful, for continuity purposes.

- Creating cases note is not technically difficult process, the system is very easy to use

Journal notes created by volunteers are retained on a timeline alongside case notes left by the Family Support Manager and Family coach, and together they build up a picture over time of the impact the support is having.

In general notes should:
- be clear, honest, non-judgmental, non-emotive, avoiding jargon and obscure abbreviations
- be in line with the code of conduct, demonstrating respect for all others

and should include:
- Basic narrative i.e. what happened, when; what information was received, from whom etc.
- Relevant, accurate and up to date facts, as distinct from opinion (see below)
- Personal perspective and opinions, always labelled as such, with justification e.g. when noting a ‘gut feeling’ regarding a potentially emerging risk
- Additional information gained. If this is not firsthand then the source of the information must be noted

A more detailed guide to making case notes can be found in section 11.4

7.15 Support for you as a Family Coach

As a Family Coach you are highly valued within Safe Families and as you have seen in this handbook yours is a very important role in ensuring the safety, effectiveness and smooth running of the support we give to families in need. Therefore, we wish to ensure that you feel well supported in this role.

Support for Family Coaches can be summarised as

- Periodic one-to-one supervision with the Family Support Manager. This conversation ought to cover:
  - A review of the volunteers you are supporting and their needs
  - A review of your capacity and the workload requirements
  - A review of your training and development needs
  - A review of any concerns or queries relating to policies and procedures.
- The Family Support Manager will also be available to you on an ad hoc basis to discuss with you any aspect of the cases that you are supervising. If you cannot get hold of your Family Support Manager on their mobile phone speak to a member of the office team who will try to get a message to them for you.
- Regular Family Coach get-togethers, typically held bi-monthly in an evening over a meal. These get-togethers present an excellent opportunity for discussion, peer support, learning and encouragement.

- Further Training. There are many avenues of opportunity for training.
  - Safe Families has its own training plan with events scheduled through the year
  - Local Safeguarding Boards offer training in which we can participate.
  - Other partner agencies within the locality offer training opportunities. This includes the statutory sector, the voluntary sector and Christian organisations.

**Out of hours support**

If a need is urgent, a Family Support Manager should be available on their mobile phone to give you out-of-hours support and advice should you need it. However, in emergencies other avenues for help can also be used, depending on the nature of your concern. For example, the local Social Care Emergency Duty Team will give advice and should be familiar with Safe Families; in addition, the Police and other emergency services can be contacted as needed.
Host Family Handbook
Chapter 8  Host Family Handbook

8.1 Welcome and introduction

Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes a child in my name welcomes me.” Matthew 18:5

Welcome to the team, well done for getting this far, we’re all so thrilled you’ve stepped up to the challenge! Loving your neighbour is about to take on a whole new depth of significance for you as you extend hospitality and love to children and their families who really need it.

In addition to the training you have already received this handbook provides practical information to help you in your Host Family role. We hope it also serves as a reminder to you that you’re never alone in this role; there are lots of experienced people available for you should you need a helping hand yourself. This handbook is just a small part of the Safe Families Safeguarding and Operations Manual*, carefully edited to highlight the key areas you need to know in your particular role.

I’m sure in the months and hopefully years ahead you’ll discover that through giving you also receive. You may expect to be involved in enabling change in the lives of other but also keep in mind that you are likely to be changed by this too!

All the team wish you every blessing and we assure you of our ongoing commitment to you in this amazing task.

Your Regional Office Contact Details

England:
North East Region; 0191 374 4778
Email: northeast@safefamiliesforchildren.com

Scotland:
Edinburgh Region; 0131 561 8930
edinburgh@safefamiliesforchildren.com

*You are welcome to download a full copy of the Safeguarding and Operations Manual, however be warned, it’s around 200 pages long!

You can find it at www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual
8.2 What is a Host Family?

8.2.1 Hosting = offering hospitality

Safe Families for Children (Safe Families) offers support to families in crisis, with the aim of preventing or limiting negative effects of the situation upon the child / children. A vital part of this is providing the child a safe place to stay with trusted and trained volunteers in their home. We call this short stay hosting. The word host shares the same origin as hospitality and within Christian tradition expresses a rich heritage of showing kindness to strangers.

8.2.2 Host Family role and requirements

Hosting is offered by a trustworthy family, couple, or in certain circumstances single adult, willing to take a child or children into their home, giving the child’s parent/s much needed space to deal with pressing issues in their lives.

Hosting is so much more than offering a spare room to a child, it also involves:

- Offering a safe and welcoming home to a child, or siblings, from a family that is struggling (known as the ‘placing family’ or ‘placing parent’)
- Caring for the child with kindness and attentiveness for the duration of the placement
- Being fully committed to the needs of the child for the pre-agreed timeframe of the placement (min. 24 hrs, max 28 days)
- Providing healthy meals and ensuring that the child maintains good personal hygiene
- Ensuring attendance at school or nursery (age-dependent)
- Offering fun leisure activities
- Generally looking after the child’s health and wellbeing.
- Facilitating contact between the child and parent as agreed (phonecalls and/or visits)
- Provide regular updates to the Safe Families Family Coach regarding how child’s stay is going
- Taking care of items of journaling and admin associated with the stay
- Being alert to any potential safeguarding concerns
- Giving appropriate sensitivity to the confidentiality of the family being helped
- Participating from time to time in the wider life of Safe Families for Children within the region, such as training events, volunteer evenings etc.

This may look like a long list but please do keep in mind that Safe Families for Children functions as a network of volunteers with everyone offering what they can. You are never alone as a volunteer – you will always have access to advice and support.
Important pre-requisites for the role:

- Real life experience as a parent, and perhaps grand parent or aunt / uncle.
- If not a parent then able to demonstrate experience of understanding children and their needs, for example as a nursery worker, teacher, nurse etc.
- A home with a spare bedroom in which to host a child.
  
  In some circumstances (i.e. age and gender appropriate) a child may share a bedroom with a child of the Host Family.
- Friendly, welcoming personality, good listener, sensitive to children’s needs
- In reasonably good health, and not so busy as unable to give the child care and attention
- Being/becoming connected to a local church that has agreed to support Safe Families volunteers
- Willing to ‘go the extra mile’ and to problem-solve should unforeseen circumstances arise
- Willing to receive supervision, direction and constructive feedback from your Family Coach and/or Family Support Manager
- Willing to maintain an appropriate level of ongoing training and development, particularly in the area of safeguarding and child protection
- Access to an internet-enabled computer (desktop, laptop or tablet) and able to use IT sufficiently to access and record information on the Safe Families database
- Have own transport – a vehicle suitably equipped for children i.e. boosters seats etc.
- Be in full agreement with the vision and values of Safe Families for Children, which has a clear ethos of expressing Christian compassion and hospitality towards those in need:
  
  Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes a child in my name welcomes me.” Matthew 18:5

The Host Family receives neither pay nor expenses and the parents remain the primary carers of the child continuing to exercise their parental responsibility as much as possible.

The point about expenses is important as the law states that anyone caring for children ‘for reward’ must be subject to a higher degree of scrutiny – such as becoming registered with OFSTED. In this context Safe Families has to be very clear that it always operates on a purely voluntary arrangement between one family and another.

8.3 Getting started

8.3.1 Creating your Host Profile, family preferences and availability

The Host Profile is the first step in making a connection between you and the family that you will be supporting, it offers reassurance to them that their child will be staying with ‘normal’ people! It will be used when the possibility of hosting is first discussed with the placing parent.

A Host Profile looks a bit like this:

We are a family of 3: Tom (dad) Helen (mum) and Jess (1 year old). Our home is happy, lively, loving and colourful. We like to go to playgroups or the park, do arts & crafts, eat cake and play hide & seek. We have two budgies called Bubble and Squeak, and Tom has a motorbike.

Your preferences and availability are very important as this information helps our database to calculate a match between you and a family in need. For example, you may have room for two siblings to stay with you. That’s important information and needs adding to your
preferences. Similarly you may have children yourself, say two girls aged 8 and 6. You may therefore wish to set your preferences to hosting girls from ages 1-9. We would encourage you to be a flexible as possible when setting your preferences.

Similarly when setting your availability, there may be constraints upon your time that are important for us to know.

Please read the Safe Families Database user guide for a step-by-step guide to setting your preferences and availability.

8.3.2 Recapping some important principles for hosting children

a) The child’s safety and wellbeing is of paramount importance. Do take time to become familiar with all the material in this handbook under the heading ‘Safeguarding’, and also note who to contact for any advice you may need, or to report a concern to i.e. Family Coach, Safe Families Office.

b) Host families are not a substitute for the primary parent/carer, rather we aim to supplement them in their role. This means that we will always take care not to undermine or disempower them. Whatever challenges the parent/carer may be facing they retain ultimate responsibility for the child. Therefore, out of respect for them, and remembering that hosting is by voluntary agreement, we always seek to keep them in touch with how things are going during their child’s stay, consulting them for any significant decisions.

c) Children requiring hosting may have different and potentially more complex needs than the Host Family’s own children. This may mean adapting care accordingly – simply saying ‘well this is OK for our kids’ isn’t really good enough, the unique needs of the hosted child need to be considered.

d) We value children’s own voice. As minors their parent/carer is ultimately responsible for decision-making but whenever possible, and as appropriate to age and stage, the child ought to also be consulted about matters concerning them. In this way the short stay away from home can for the child become something to enjoy rather than something to be endured.

8.4 Support for you: the Family Coach and the local church

It is very important that in serving the needs of others you do not neglect your own need for support. We want you to have a long and fulfilling involvement with Safe Families and that will mean pacing yourself and making the most of the support that is available to you. In preparation for being a Host Family, you may wish to tell your wider family, friends and neighbours about your involvement with Safe Families for Children so that they can provide you with any support and encouragement you may need.

8.4.1 Your allocated Family Coach

Your primary link to Safe Families will be through a Family Coach – a more experienced volunteer with whom you may talk things through and discuss any situations that might arise in the course of a hosting. They are there to offer guidance and will help you work within your strengths and not to become extended beyond your limits.

Beyond supporting you during the time of a child’s stay, the Family Coach will reflect with you afterwards, asking about how it went, and considering what may happen next. Whether you continue to have a supporting relationship with that family in need, prepare to support
another child's stay or need to have a break for a while, the Family Coach will be alongside you in this process as much as is helpful to you. Please note that your Family Coach may change when you take on a new assignment with a new family.

**Visiting your home during a stay**
If your hosting is scheduled for more than 72 hours then your allocated Family Coach is likely to want to pay you a visit to make sure everything is going well. In the case of a longer hosting (i.e. 7-28 days) then your Family Coach will continue to visit your home, on a weekly basis. If a stay lasts 28 days or more, then it is classed as private fostering and the Local Authority have to be notified and make their own assessment of it. Details of this are given later in the handbook.

**Offering advice and guidance**
The Family Coach provides supportive listening to you as a Host Family and can help you: to articulate the family’s home “rules” to the child, regarding any behavioural issues, assisting with problems between your children and the placed child, as well as preparing for future issues that may arise in the home setting. In addition, the Family Coach may provide guidance regarding policies and procedures. If you have any questions, so do not hesitate to ask for advice.

**Responding to your needs**
The Family Coach is your advocate. You can feel free to contact them whenever you need help or direction. If things are not going well, it is important for you to let your Family Coach know. The Family Coach is also the first person you should try to contact if you have any concerns regarding the child that you cannot discuss directly with the placing parent or regarding the child’s stay with you.

**Facilitating the relationship with the child’s parents**
The Family Coach is also in contact with the placing parent on a regular basis to keep them in touch with the child’s stay with you, to facilitate issues of contact and communication, and to support the parent in maintaining appropriate levels of responsibility for the child. Moreover, the Family Coach oversees the provision of support from a Safe Families Family Friend, as well as access to other agencies as needed. The Family Coach has a ‘birds-eye-view’ and will seek to co-ordinate help given so that the parents can get back on their feet and resume the care of their child as quickly as possible.

8.4.2 **Support from your local church**
It is likely that your church will recognise the ministry of Safe Families for Children. If you are unsure then please call the Safe Families office and ask to speak to one of the Church and Volunteer Coordinators. They will be able to confirm one way or the other whether or not there has been correspondence/contact with the church. If not Safe Families will be happy to call the minister for a chat.

More and more churches are beginning to appoint their own designated Safe Families co-ordinators. They will provide a helpful source of advice and support should you need it. Within some towns and villages one church in particular has agreed to take the lead on Safe Families so you may find that you begin to get to know an Safe Families co-ordinator based in a church different from the one you are personally affiliated to. Please do ask the Safe
Families office whether there is a church co-ordinator and/or a church-based support for Safe Families volunteers local to you.

If you do not currently have a connection to a local church Safe Families can arrange an introduction for you.

8.4.3 Building in rest time

As an experience of being a Host Family for a particular child comes to an end, you will experience a variety of emotions. Please make sure that you build in the time you need to work through these. The de-briefing following with your Family Coach will help with this but may only be the start of a process for you. Each person’s processing will be different and you must take the time you need before accepting another assignment.

8.4.4 Accessing further information and training

In your role as a Host Family it is important that you feel confident in handling the potential ups and downs of involvement with children who may have difficult family backgrounds. It should also be expected that you will learn from experience too, as you complete your first, second and third hosting assignments, and so on. The debriefing sessions you have with your Family Coach will help to accelerate your learning curve.

As an approved volunteer you will also be invited to bi-monthly volunteer evenings in your local area. These evenings will involve:

- A warm welcome
- Refreshments and nibbles
- Meeting other volunteers, including some facilitated group activities
- Testimonies and news
- A short training spot (15-20 mins)
- Prayer, and sometimes sung worship

We would strongly encourage you to attend these evenings, they are very motivating and a great way to develop in your role by learning from others.

Reading our policy documents is also very worthwhile. They can all be accessed at www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual. The policy documents present clearly our organisational standpoint on a range of issues such as:

- Transport and use of vehicles
- Data protection and information sharing

Refresher training is available to anyone who feels that they would benefit from it. You are very welcome to come to one of our monthly volunteer training days. Simply drop the office a line and we’ll let you know dates of trainings coming up.

Finally, as an organisation Safe Families holds regular staff training on a wide variety of issues, such as child protection and safeguarding, understanding child development, issues such as addictions, mental health, offending behaviour or domestic violence. If you’d like to sit in on a future training day just drop the office a line and we’ll make sure that you receive an invitation.
8.5 The beginning of a hosting

8.5.1 How will I be informed of a potential assignment?

Once a new hosting-related referral has been screened and accepted by the Safe Families office team the best possible Host Family match for the child will be sought. If your family is found to be a good match (in terms of geography, type of need, your family preferences and availability etc.) then you will be contacted, by email or telephone.

Often the Safe Families database provides several matches and the office team will need to communicate with several possible Host Families via telephone in order to find one that is happy to take on the assignment. At this point you will be given extended biographical details about the child, a fuller description of the problem that their family faces, and a reasonably accurate estimate of the duration that the hosting will be for i.e. a weekend.

Generally a swift yes or no response will be needed. Saying yes to the assignment does not mean that the child/children will arrive on your doorstep later that day! Most hostings are planned to take place a week or two in advance.

8.5.2 The child’s arrival with you

Once you say ‘yes’ to taking in a child, an arrangement will be made – ideally as best suits the child and their family – for the child to come to stay at your home. Generally, the introduction of the child to the Host Family is facilitated by a Family Coach or Family Support Manager. It is common practice that they will bring the child to your home. However, you may be asked to collect the child from their home, in which case you may have the opportunity to meet the child’s parent/carer, which can be helpful for all involved.

When the child arrives with you, you should also be given the following paperwork:

- Child Information Form: Describes the child’s personality, likes and dislikes, essential health and schooling information. With this comes a related document including details for contacting the parent or carer, emergency contact details, etc.

- Parent/Carer Consent Form: Parental agreement to the child’s stay with you, including the level to which you can make decisions for the child. It is signed by the parent or by a carer with parental responsibility for the child.

- In some circumstances you may also be given a copy of a Risk Assessment that has been completed, if it contains items deemed relevant to the hosting.

Please remember to keep any information you hold about a child or family stored both securely and easily accessible for you. It is important to respect the confidential nature of this information in where you keep it, but please ensure that you are able to refer to it easily if needed.

We will tell you as much as possible about the child who is coming into your home. However, it is important to note that there could be occasions when we are not aware of certain situations (e.g. health or behavioural issues). If that does occur, Safe Families will work with you to make sure you are able to meet the child’s needs and that information is given to you as soon as possible.

8.5.3 The importance of beginning well

It is particularly important to help the child settle in well at the beginning of their stay with you and to be helped to feel comfortable. This will require quick, careful judgment on your
part as to how they are feeling.

**Age-appropriate considerations**

- Before the child arrives consider their needs according to their age, development stage, and any other information you receive. Do you have all the equipment you need? For example a tiny tot will require a high chair and a changing mat. Do you have appropriate toys available for the child?
- If you are to be hosting a baby / infant it is recommended that you read the guidelines on intimate care (bathing, changing nappies, toileting etc.) These guidelines can be found at [www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual](http://www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual).
- Revisit the Host Family safety checklist that you have completed and double-check any specific considerations you should make for this child’s stay. For example you may need to fit a stair gate.
- If you are lacking anything please ask. Safe Families is a community network of support including resource volunteers who offer a wide range of additional practical items. They will generally be able to deliver to your door!

**8.6 Who might you interact with during a hosting assignment?**

As previously mentioned the Family Coach is your immediate Safe Families support, backed up by a wider community of support from the local church. Others that you may interact with during a hosting assignment may include the child’s parent/carer, and other Safe Families volunteers such as Family Friends and Resource Friends.

**8.6.1 The child’s parent/carer**

It is important that you remember that you are offering supplementary support to the child’s parents in caring for their child, similar to that which would be offered by extended family or friends if they were available. Therefore, the placing parent should not be viewed as distant and without strengths to continue to offer. Although you are helping the parent in a time of difficulty, there may be specific elements of support that you need, such as how to deal with some element of the child’s behaviour. A conversation with the placing parent to share the difficulty and gain understanding of their experience may be very beneficial. You do not have to be an ‘expert’ for them. We will discuss shortly the child’s own contact with their parent/carer whilst they are staying with you.

**8.6.2 Other Safe Families volunteers involved in helping the family**

**Family friends**

“A trustworthy and caring individual, willing to befriend a parent who is facing various challenges; supporting and encouraging them both practically and emotionally; helping them to envision and reach towards goals in life."

If the placing parents wish it, and there is a helpful role to play, a Safe Families Family Friend – or several, may be assigned to get directly alongside them to support them through their difficulties. On some occasions, the Host Family can also act as Family Friend for the same family. Often however, involving someone different for this role is an advantage. You too may well need support in your Host Family role and a Family Friend may be able to come alongside you too.
Resource friends

There are many people within the wider community who want to offer their support for children and families in all sorts of practical ways. One of the main things that Resource Friends do is to donate goods, services, and sometimes even money, in order to ensure that the Safe Families can offer the best possible support to families. As a Host Family you can request help in the form of resources whenever you need them, just ask your Family Coach.

Commonly requested items include:

- Clothing (from babies upwards, male and female)
- Hygiene items (from nappies and wipes to soaps and household cleaning products)
- Buggies and booster seats (various sizes for babies, toddlers and juniors)
- Non-perishable food (particularly follow-on formula and weaning food)
- Household appliances (microwaves, washing machines, tumbledriers, ovens)
- Paint (i.e. household gloss and emulsion)
- Furniture (there is a high demand for cots and beds)

In addition, don’t forget that you have friends and neighbours who love to help others out when needed. You don’t need to share the details of the child staying with you in order to borrow a travel cot!

8.6.3 Emergency services

We hope and pray that you never need to, but, as for anyone in the community, emergency services are available to you and should be accessed in the usual way if needed.

In the event that you do have to call on the emergency services then something is clearly going on that Safe Families and the placing parents ought to know about. When the immediate emergency is over please contact Safe Families and the placing parents accordingly.

Please note that ‘101’ is now functional as the national central switchboard number for non-emergency (i.e. non 999 calls) to the Police.

8.7 Meeting the child’s needs during their stay

Every child has a wide range of needs. For a number of years those involved in work with children and young people have understood these needs with reference to a helpful framework known as ‘Every Child Matters’ (ECM) which highlighted 5 aspects of need:

1. being healthy: enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle
2. staying safe: being protected from harm and neglect
3. enjoying and achieving: getting the most out of life and developing the skills for adulthood
4. making a positive contribution: being involved with the community and society and not engaging in anti-social or offending behaviour
5. economic well-being: not being prevented by economic disadvantage from achieving their full potential in life.

Other frameworks exist but ECM is a good start and provides a common language that most people understand. In this section we are principally concerned with ECM’s first 3 items.
8.7.1 Health needs

- Make sure you know any health and medical information that has been given by the parents/carers on the Child Information Form.
- An important aspect of good health is good hygiene, so be sure to follow all basic washing and cleaning routines. When this involves babies and infants be sure to follow the intimate care guidance previously mentioned.
- Be alert to indications of health concerns that have not been identified. Children in need, especially those who have experienced a degree of neglect, may well have an undiagnosed or a poorly managed health condition. If you have any concerns, discuss them with the Family Coach and/or the parents, either during the stay or when the child returns home.
- Make sure you know the level of consent given by the parent/carer for you to support the child’s health needs. This will be recorded on their consent form.
- Do not hesitate in seeking advice from health professionals on current recommendations regarding specific issues or questions. **Remember to take along the consent form** signed by the parent if you intend taking the child to a hospital or medical centre – doctors and nurses are likely to ask to see it.
- For minor health concerns you may take the child to a G.P. if parental consent has been given for this. Your own G.P. ought to see the child.
- For more serious health concerns it is expected that you will alert the parent and that if possible they will accompany to the clinic / health centre / hospital.
- In emergency situations, the child’s health and wellbeing must be put first and you should respond as you would for any child who happened to be in your care at a time of emergency. As soon as possible, the child’s parents and Safe Families should be informed.
- Remember: You do not have parental responsibility for the child, although you may have some areas of delegated responsibility. Again, **remember to take the consent form** with you, it will be essential in an emergency.
- Also, please note that not acting when action is needed can have significant consequences. Therefore, seek medical advice regarding whether delay in seeking parental consent and decision-making is acceptable in the child’s best interests.

8.7.2 Educational and developmental needs

Opportunities to learn about the world are important for every child, of any age.

- During a child’s stay with a Host Family, every effort will be made to keep the child in the same school or nursery that they have been attending.
- Family Friend volunteers may be involved to facilitate transport arrangements for the child to continue to attend the same school they have been attending. Any arrangements such as free school meals should continue according to existing arrangements.
- If you have a child younger than nursery age in your care, think about how you give age appropriate stimulation and learning opportunities, eg. find a local soft play centre.
- If a child is staying with you, is not of school age and due to your circumstances you need help with daytime childcare for the child, planning needs to be made with the Family Coach and the parents. Options for support include care by other Safe Families volunteers or using local childcare services and the decision needs to be made according to what is good and healthy for the child. Safe Families does not reimburse any expenses for volunteers so costs would need to be met by you, by the parent/carer or by an Safe Families resource friend.
• Arrangements need to be made to ensure that a child’s school/nursery have all the details they need regarding who will collect the child at the end of the day, relevant contact details and that they understand who to contact during the hosting.

8.7.3 Guidance regarding safe boundaries and discipline

It is a given in healthy parenting that boundaries and rules are positive for the child.

• Be clear about your ‘house rules’, but do reflect before the child comes to stay on whether any of these need to be adapted or relaxed during the stay.
• Good communication about decisions being made, and why, gives the child security.
• Consistency is emotionally positive, reassuring and affirming to the child.
• Talk to the parents/carers if possible to understand home routines and boundaries and to avoid too much disconnect between the two home environments.
• Honour the parents/carers, respecting their principles and if possible accommodating their preferences. This is very important when caring for a child from a different ethnic, cultural or religious background.
• Act in accordance with your own values, making judgments you believe are healthy and safe for the child. Your integrity is positive for the child.
• Model the behaviour you expect from them!
• Give a child a chance to learn from their mistakes.

Discipline

Remember: the child may not be used to boundaries and consistency in discipline.

• Physical chastisement is not allowed i.e. smacking of any kind is inappropriate by any Safe Families volunteer with a child in their care. This includes not smacking your own child when an Safe Families child is staying with you because of possible emotional effects on the hosted child.
• The child may be temporarily restrained by a person physically holding them only if a danger to themselves or others or a significant threat to property.
• Seek to de-escalate first, then when they calm down you can talk about their behaviour.
• Never make negative remarks about the child’s family nor about the child themselves.
• Discipline should be specific and proportionate
• Never limit contact for the child with their family as discipline.
• Try to recognise when you are upset or stressed about something else.
• Don’t delegate discipline to others.

8.7.4 Safety and supervision during the stay

Keeping a child who is in your care safe and properly supervised is very important.

• Careful supervision provides emotional security as well as ensuring physical safety.
• Only those authorised to do so may supervise the child. This will include you and your partner (if you are hosting as a couple) and may also include designated Safe Families Family Friends or the Family Coach.
• The duty of care cannot be delegated to others within your circle of friends and family who have not been vetted through the Safe Families process (even if it is your own mother!).
• You may leave the child in the supervision of an organised childcare group, such as a crèche or nursery.
• Think carefully about the activities you plan with the child. You will naturally want to offer the child exciting and memorable experiences but don’t be overambitious as you may find
that get out of your depth. The better you get to know the child the easier you will find it to dream up suitable activities.

If a situation arises that mean you will need help supervising a child for a period of time during the hosting then please speak to your Family Coach about it and they will seek to find an approved Family Friend to help.

8.7.5 Having other people to visit or stay in the home

Please do not plan to have visitors to stay in your home whilst you are hosting a child, even close family or friends. There are two main reasons for this:

- Whilst the child is with you they need to be the priority of your hospitality.
- Having other adults overnight in the home that are not known to Safe Families and have not been vetted by us would present a breach of our safeguarding rules.

It would be expected that visitors may stop by your home as usual but that they would not be left alone with the hosted child.

8.7.6 Promoting stability, identity and emotional development

The child will benefit greatly from having stability and security in routines and arrangements. Remember, they are already experiencing instability and uncertainty simply by staying away from home.

- Encourage the child to feel good about their own personality, interests and abilities.
- Affirm positive expressions of their personal identity, culture and family relationships.
- Give plenty of praise every day. It helps them feel good and it tells them that you notice.
- Plan special time when each child receives your direct attention, irrespective of their age.
- Talk to the child in words and terms appropriate for their age or developmental level.
- The child may express negative feelings regarding their home and difficulties there. Do your best to handle this with tact and sensitivity, helping the child not to dwell on these things.

Create a record of the child’s stay that they can take away

Think about how to create a healthy visual memory of the child’s time with you, as appropriate for the length of stay and the age of the child. You should aim to involve the child in this process as much as possible. It will belong to the child and go with them when they leave.

- We recommend creating some kind of diary-type book. Depending on the age of the child, they may wish to choose the style of ‘book’ to be used for this purpose; you may find a scrapbook designed for memorabilia or choose a smart ring binder that allows flexibility about the number of pages and how they are ordered.
- The ‘book’ will serve a number of helpful purposes, such as helping them to process the reasons behind the circumstances in their lives, and to build positive associations in the midst of what is a potentially difficult phase of life for them and their family.

8.7.7 Online journaling during the stay

In order to ensure that the highest standards of safeguarding are adhered to Safe Families has a facility within its database for recording notes about the families we are helping. It is important that you make use of this. A brief daily journal note during a hosting, even if the day has been pretty uneventful, is important for continuity purposes. These notes will
also help the Safe Families Family Support Manager to build up a picture over time of the impact the support is having. They have access to all the notes created by everyone involved in the family and are able to recognise patterns developing.

Please keep in mind that:

- A detail that seems minor to you may be significant within the wider picture.
- The notes are also very important to refer back to if questions are asked about the hosting at a later stage.
- More detail will be required if you are making note of an incident that has been a cause of friction between you and the child, or any minor accidents that have occurred.
- More significant issues, such as an accident that required taking the child to A&E ought to be noted but then followed up in more detail using an Safe Families Accident Report form.

Accessing the database to make notes:

- You will log on to the Safe Families Database to create notes in the same way as you would to update your family preferences and availability. See the Database User guide for more detailed instructions.
- If accessing the database online continues to be problematic, do talk to your Family Coach about the possibility of arranging an alternative way of recording your notes.

**8.8 The importance of safeguarding children**

Safe Families for Children’s board of Trustees and Executive team are absolutely committed to the principle of safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults. All of our staff and volunteers, whatever role they may serve in, carry a duty of care towards those being assisted by our programmes and services. Our Safeguarding policy and associated procedures are applicable to all children, young people and vulnerable adults served through our work, regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or religion.

- Please carefully read the Safeguarding Policies and Guidance for Volunteers insert, it is 6 pages long but very helpful and important.
- It is especially important that you familiarise yourself with the guidance provided on responding to signs of, or a disclosure of abuse.

**The Safe Families approach to safeguarding is one of never do nothing.**

All concerns, however minor, should be journal-noted, and in many cases also reported and discussed with a supervisor such as a Safe Families Family Coach or Family Support Manager.

**Safeguarding Officers**

Wherever Safe Families operates a lead Safeguarding Officer is appointed. This responsibility will generally be carried by either the Programme Director or the Family Support Manager. During your training you should have been told who this person is. You should write their name and contact details in the space below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Safeguarding Officer for my region:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Their contact number:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their email address:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8.9 Contact between the child and their parent/carer(s)

8.9.1 Why regular contact is important

The placing parent retains full responsibility for their child during the time of the stay. Our desire is that Host Families will be able to develop a positive, supportive relationship with them. In some cases the relationship goes so well that it blooms into a genuine friendship that continues beyond the child’s stay.

It is usually in the best interests of the child to maintain regular contact with their parent during their stay. It is also likely that the placing parent will have some anxiety about their child being away from home. A simple phonecall can do wonders in alleviating any worries. There may also be other people that it will be good for the child to be in contact with during their stay, such as siblings, grandparents or friends.

Regular contact between the parent and child therefore achieves several purposes:

- The parent’s anxiety about the hosting is reduced as they continue to feel connected to their child, even though the child is spending time with another family.
- The child is comforted in knowing that their parent is still very much concerned about them and looking forward to their return. They may also sense progress their parent is making towards addressing any difficulties.
- The Host Family is reminded them of the aims to supplement rather than substitute the natural care provided by the parent. Also by observing the interaction to they can often better understand the child’s behaviour.

Please note: there may be individuals within the relational sphere of the child with whom contact is not allowed. Host Families and Family Coaches will be informed if this is the case.

8.9.2 Methods of contact

In working out how and when contact with the parent and the child will happen, the aim should be to make the process as clear, straightforward, and manageable for everyone, in order to avoid potential disappointment and misunderstanding. Generally a combination of phone calls, text messaging and perhaps even good old fashioned letter will present minimal fuss. Face to face meetings will involve more by way of planning and can be more sensitive emotionally. More on this in the next section.

It is appropriate for the Family Coach to ask the placing parent, the Host Family and the child (if age appropriate) about the plans for contact to ensure that they are happy with the method and frequency planned.

The most common means of contact is to talk together over the telephone (if age-appropriate). The first telephone contact ought to occur within 24 hours of a child’s stay.

- It is helpful for the call to happen at a regular time of day – e.g. 6 pm, rather than the calls being by ad hoc arrangement
- The Host Family and placing parent will need to be clear about who calls who, as this has cost implications i.e. the placing parent may not have sufficient phone credit to be able to make an outgoing call but may be able to accept an incoming call
8.9.3 **Arranging direct face to face contact**

In longer hostings it is likely that there will need to be direct contact between the parent and the child during the period of the stay, in order to ensure that the parent—child relationship is not adversely affected. The Family Coach should ensure that this contact is part of the initial hosting plan rather than being arranged as an afterthought.

Decisions around direct contact will depend upon the nature of the parents’ issues and also the age of the child. For example there may be limitations around hospital visits and if the parent is to spend a spell in prison or residential rehab face to face contact may be neither helpful nor permissible.

**The location of the contact**

Generally the contact will:

- take place in a neutral location such as a café, park, play centre, church or community centre.
- If the parent is in hospital the child/children may be taken to visit during visiting hours
- not involve returning the child to their family home, because of the possibility of the child deciding that they want to stay there and not continue with the full duration of the hosting.
- not happen in the Host Family home, unless the Family Coach and the Host Family have discussed this and it is clear that the Host Family feel comfortable about the referred parent coming to their home.

8.10 **Your relationship with the placing parents**

A healthy relationship between you and the child’s parents/carers also has a positive impact on the child. In addition to the respect that you should show in how you speak about the child’s parents, any contact that you have with the parents and shared discussion and relationship passes on something positive to the child.

In addition, you have a significant opportunity to encourage and strengthen the parents/carers because you are taking care of their child freely, without any payment or material reward. Many placing parents comment that the generosity and selflessness shown by Host Families restores their faith that there is still some goodness left in the world.

Below are some principles to bear in mind when dealing with placing parents, as well as ideas for practical steps you can take to help build bridges.

8.10.1 **Building bridges with placing parents**

**Put yourself in their shoes - how might they be feeling?**

- Is there any chance that they may feel intimidated, jealous or inadequate when comparing themselves to you as the Host Family?
- Are they experiencing various stresses that are preoccupying their thoughts and distracting them from their role as a parent?
- Are they fearful that their child might begin to like the host home situation better than theirs?
- Do you detect any concern that they are worried that they may lose their child’s respect
and love if they allow them to spend time with another family?

- Do they appear embarrassed by their situation, and thus act in ways that seem guarded or unappreciative?
- To what extent are they making choices out of desperation? They may have very few supports in their life and consequently will accept anything you have to offer.

Friendly advice for relating to placing parents

- Use regular phone calls or texts to stay in touch with the child’s parent/carer. This could be just to give them an update on how their child is doing. It may also include asking for advice on how to discipline, feed, or comfort the child. This communicates that you see the parent as the expert on their own child, which is important affirmation for them.
- Many Host Families keep up phone calls to placing parents after the children are returned home just to check in on how things are going. They may even say, “We haven’t seen your children for a while, can we take them off your hands for the weekend?” This can go a long way in strengthening and supporting parents without necessarily waiting until another crisis occurs. Ask your Family Coach for advice about staying in contact.
- Maintain a transparent relationship with the parents, do not hide things ‘for their own good’ or in case you don’t know how they will react.
- Offer compassion and encouragement to the parent, find things to be positive about. (This doesn’t mean playing an artificial ‘happy bunny’ character!)
- Find ways to compliment the parent. Most parents feel devastated by having to ask for support and believe that they have failed somehow. Although the parent may have a lot still to learn about parenting try to point out positive aspects of their care-giving.
- Do not lavish the child with excessive material gifts that the parent is unable to offer.
- As a general rule we advise that you do not give money to parents. If they do need specific financial help, the Family Coach is the best person to assist with this.
- Refrain from being judgmental or critical. Since many of us will probably not have experienced the multiple difficulties the placing parents are under, it is difficult for us to understand the challenges and behaviour that often arise.
- Don’t undermine the dignity or the parents by doing for them what they are capable of doing for themselves. When they are under pressure you may offer to ‘do them a favour’ once or twice but be very careful that a dependency is not created.
- This last point is especially important with respect to the fact that the placing parent remains legally responsible for their child and is expected to continue to take seriously their parental responsibility for the child.
- If there is a need to establish firm boundaries and guidelines concerning contact between them and you, please discuss this with your allocated Family Coach as early as possible. We generally advise that you obtain a dedicated mobile phone for Safe Families-related calls.
- Do not take on the solving of all the problems of the parents/carers. Increasing their own confidence to begin the process themselves will be much more valuable.
- At the end of the day the focus of Safe Families is to support the parents and stabilise and secure the family environment for the children. Our emphasis is to strengthen the parents so they can better care for their child.
8.11 Ending or extending the hosting

8.11.1 How a child’s stay may end

It is our experience that the majority of the time hostings will end in a planned way. However, sometimes a stay may need to be extended, or may end unexpectedly.

Unexpected endings may come about due to:

- The parent/carer choosing that the stay ends earlier than planned. We hope still to make arrangements for appropriate endings in this scenario, but occasionally parents/carers will give little notice.
- You, as host, need to bring the stay to an end earlier than expected. Please give us as much notice as possible if you sense that this may occur, whether difficulties relate to the hosting of this child or to other circumstances for you.

8.11.2 Preparing a child for the ending of their stay with you

It is helpful for children to be prepared for changes to their situation, emotionally and practically. How you do this with a child will very much depend on their age and stage.

As an ending approaches, give consideration to the following:

- Does the child have a good record of their stay, whether written notes, photographs or items associated with the stay?
- Planning appropriate ‘goodbyes’ with the different people the child has met and engaged with during the stay.
- Don’t be afraid to acknowledge sadness at the goodbye alongside the happiness for the child of returning home. Your positive relationship with the child needs to be emotionally affirming for them.
- Be realistic and honest about the future, for example how much ongoing contact is likely for the child, with you and with significant others.

8.11.3 What if we have concerns regarding the safety of a child returning home?

On occasion, there may be a concern about the safety of a child returning to their parental home. In such a scenario, consideration needs to be given as to whether a referral to Children’s Social Care is warranted. At this point the Family Coach need to be involved, and if they deem the situation serious they will also seek advice from the Family Support Manager.

- The only time that Safe Families may refuse to return a child would be if we have strong evidence that the child would be at risk of significant harm if they were returned. In this instance we would need to alert the duty social worker at the Local Authority immediately.
- Ultimately as a Host Family you have no legal status as guardians. If a parent becomes unhappy with the hosting and wants it to end prematurely we must respect their wishes, even if you feel that the home situation is far from perfect or that the parent is being downright unreasonable.

8.11.4 How the ending affects you

Safe Families recognises the emotional impact of having a child to stay with you temporarily. Even in situations when the hosting role has been respite stays or day-time support,
relationships are built, emotional and physical energy has been exerted and the loss of that level of giving is a big change.

Therefore, we ask that all Host Families have time with their Family Coach (or Family Support Manager) in order to reflect upon the impact of this change for them.

8.11.5 What happens next, after the end of a child’s stay?

The answer to this question is very individual, it depends on many things:

- The preferences of the parent/carer.
- Your preferences and availability.
- The nature of the reason for the stay.
- The extent to which the family continue to want and need ongoing support.
- The extent to which future stays may be beneficial, whether occasional longer stays at times of difficulty or perhaps established ongoing respite support.
- The extent to which you feel you should invest in an ongoing relationship and/or host more children.
- The extent to which you have built relationships with the child and the parent/carer.
- The extent to which others within the Safe Families network are also supporting the family.

**Safe Families cares about your own family’s wellbeing.** Therefore we want you to establish clear boundaries that balance your desire to care, even sacrificially, with the needs of your family and ensuring your own well-being.

- Your Family Coach will want to come around to debrief with you. There is some paperwork for this that you can look at beforehand – it will help you to reflect on the hosting in order to get the most from the debrief.
- Family Coaches and the Safe Families team are here to help plan the appropriate follow-up support. Ideally, this will have been considered well before the ending of the child’s stay in order that clear messages can have been given.
- Keep Safe Families in touch with how you are feeling about the balance of investing in ongoing relationships and/or being available to host again.

8.11.6 Extending hostings beyond 28 days

In England, by law, Local Authorities must be informed of, and have a duty to assess, any situation in which a child aged 0-16 years (0-18 for children with a disability) stays with someone who is not a close relative (i.e. aunt, uncle, brother, sister or grandparent) for 28 days or more. This is called **private fostering**.

- As Host Families do not qualify as close relatives Safe Families has a duty to tell the Local Authority of a hosting that extends beyond 28 days as soon as possible.
- The purpose of their assessment is to check that the arrangement that has been made, or that is planned, is good and safe for the child.
- Local Authorities tend to be concerned about ‘private fostering’ because it is not regulated like Foster Care and there have been a number of major abuse cases that have been rooted in a private fostering arrangement.
- Safe Families in the UK has never facilitated a hosting for more than 28 days and it is not envisaged that we will do so this year.
Those supervising Safe Families hostings, i.e. Family Coach and Family Support Manager, must be alert to the possibility of a stay lasting over 28 days and therefore becoming 'private fostering'. In such a scenario, it is the responsibility of the Family Support Manager to alert the Local Authority children’s social care team as soon as possible.

8.12 Frequently Asked Questions

8.12.1 Practical Questions about hosting

Q 1 What type of situations will children be coming from?

The children will be coming from families who are experiencing a crisis of one sort or another. This may be a time-specific period of need such as a hospital admission, a period of counselling or rehabilitation, or a custodial sentence. However, it may be that abuse by a spouse or partner, deterioration in health, or concerns such as finances, employment or housing need to be resolved. Safe Families looks carefully at the seriousness of the issues and makes a decision whether or not to take on the case by judging whether or not it fits within our thresholds (see diagram below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minor issue that does not warrant SFFC support</th>
<th>Identified needs in the family are at risk of escalating without help</th>
<th>Needs pressing and requirement for support has become urgent</th>
<th>Very complex needs and/or serious safety concerns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BELOW THRESHOLD</td>
<td>WITHIN THRESHOLD</td>
<td>WITHIN THRESHOLD</td>
<td>BEYOND THRESHOLD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When Safe Families agrees to be able to support a child and family, it is because we are confident that this is in the best interests of the child and that the child can be well cared for in a Host Family setting.

Q 2 How do you find out about families that need help?

Any statutory, private or voluntary agency can refer as well as self-referrals. In practice this means that referrals may come from Social Workers, Health Visitors, Schools, GPs, Hospitals, Drug or Alcohol Support Agencies, Homeless Centres or Housing Support, Prisons, Police, Probation, Children’s Social Care, and Voluntary Agencies such as Christians Against Poverty (CAP), Home-Start or Foodbank. As a point of principle Safe Families will not proceed until the full agreement of the child's parents/carers has been established.

Q 3 How long will the child stay?

The length of time that a child will be with a Host Family can vary. It may be as short as one day; it is unlikely to be more than two weeks. In unusual circumstances it could be longer.

Every effort will be made to estimate how long that time will be at the time of requesting Host Family support.

Q 4 How will the child feel about coming to stay?

Children have a variety of reactions to coming to stay with a Host Family. Some children might be angry because they are away from their parents/carers and everything familiar. Some may be relieved because their living situation was quite difficult. Other children may be quite shy and withdrawn. Some may appear overly friendly and compliant. Trying to put yourself in the child’s shoes can help you understand some of the difficulties a child might...
have. How would you react to being separated from all of your natural supports – home, job, family, and friends? Feelings of sadness, nervousness, uncertainty and stress can be difficult for a child to deal with.

**Q 5 What about Child Benefit?**

A parent of the child will be receiving Child Benefit for the child and will continue to do so for the duration of the child’s stay with you.

The Inland Revenue accepts that such scenarios may arise. However, it is expected that the person in receipt of Child Benefit uses the money for the benefit of the child.

Therefore, in negotiation with the Family Coach, you will have a role in enabling the parent to continue this responsibility appropriately. For example, the parent could use the Child Benefit money for items for the child such as new shoes or clothing, toys, or to fund a school trip. As one of the principles of Safe Families is that volunteers do not receive reimbursement or payment for their care of a child, the parent/carer will not pay money to you to cover food or other daily necessities.

**8.12.2 How to address issues relating to the child’s parents/carerers**

**Q 6 What if the child gets homesick or misses their parents?**

In most cases, this is to be expected and a normal response of the child. When possible, the child should be assisted in contacting their parent. When that is not possible, the empathy and support of the Host Family is crucial to help the child to feel comfortable and to settle.

If you have any concerns that the child’s stay with you is not working well for the child, please do not hesitate to seek further advice from the allocated Family Coach, the Safe Families office team or, if applicable, from others involved in the child’s support. The aim is always to do what is best for the child; success for any child’s stay is in making this choice at every opportunity, not in continuing a stay that is not working out. Please remember, it is a fairly frequent occurrence in life that a person’s reactions to situations are not as would have reasonably been predicted. If adjustments need to be made to the expected plan for a child’s stay this may be no-one’s ‘fault’. However, if we do not honestly address issues and concerns as they arise then we may be responsible for not doing the best for a child.

**Q 7 What if the parent/carer and I have a disagreement?**

Different points of view are natural. It is important for Host Families to strive to understand the parents/carers and not to react against ideas that may not be communicated in the best way. Remember: this is a family in crisis and a parent may feel very threatened or troubled by their need for their children to be away from them, even when they know it is necessary and something they themselves requested. Unless it is clearly against policy or the values of the Host Family, every effort should be made to accommodate the parent/carer’s preferences and include them in the decision. This may include very simple things such as cutting a child’s hair. In the case of ongoing conflict or failure to reach resolution, please contact your allocated Family Coach.

**Q 8 What if a relative tries to remove the child from my care?**

It is worth saying first of all that in the eleven years of Safe Families this has never happened. However, guiding principles are:
The arrangement made with Safe Families is made between the placing parent/carer and Safe Families. Therefore, in so far as it depends upon you, you should not pass the child into the care of anyone else without the clear instruction to do so from the placing parent.

Even if the relative claims Parental Responsibility for the child, it is too difficult for you to clarify this, to be sure of their identity and to know whether or not there are any legal orders in place preventing them from contact with the child. Therefore, you should remain firm in saying that you cannot allow this without clear consent from the parent/carer.

If the person trying to take the child presents any difficulty regarding your response, you should tell them that you will need to contact the Police to ask for assistance as you are not in a position to let the child out of your care other than according to the arrangements made with the placing parent/carer. If the situation is calm, it may be appropriate to contact the placing parent/carer regarding the request. However, if you are in doubt or feel that the request would be inappropriate for the parent/carer without time for consideration, then you should explain that you cannot allow this without prior instruction from the parent/carer. Note: if the parent/carer is going to give consent for you to pass the child into that person’s care, you need to feel very sure that there is no misunderstanding regarding the person’s identity.

If you have immediate concerns for the safety of the child or of yourself, you should ring the Police straight away to report the situation. You should then ensure that the placing parent is contacted as soon as possible and that the Safe Families team is also made aware.

The risk assessment completed at the beginning of the stay should have included consideration of this issue if there was any concern that this situation might arise.

8.12.3 Faith-related Questions

Q 9 Can I take the child with me to church? Can I pray with the child aloud?

Host families should be able to include the child in as many of the family’s normal routines and support networks as possible. That would certainly include church and faith-related activities. Moreover, we recognise that faith encouragement can be valuable during difficult times. However, it can be difficult for a child, as it can be for an adult, to go into new surroundings with many people who are unfamiliar to them. In addition, experiencing trauma and crisis can make it even more difficult. It is therefore important that you are sensitive to the child’s needs with regard to church attendance, as with any events or activities you consider doing with them.

It is important to remember that our objective is to care for the wellbeing of the child and family; the aim is not exposing them to Christian beliefs.

Pre-hosting communication with the family will include making the parents/carers aware that a Host Family is likely to attend church, pray together and do other faith-related activities. Moreover, the parent/carer will receive a copy of your profile that you have prepared and this should include any comments to help them understand your usual practices. If the parents/carers express any difficulties about this, it will be explained to you and a way of respecting their wishes and your family routines will be established. Otherwise, the child’s stay will not be arranged with you as mutual respect is in everyone’s best interests.

If a child is of a different faith from yours, the situation will have been carefully discussed
with the parent/carer in order to meet the child’s needs, respect the faith of the family and maintain as normal a routine for you and the child as possible.

8.12.4 Emergencies

Q 10 What do I do if my family has an emergency?

If an emergency occurs for your family that will include having an impact on a child who is staying with you, the following principles should be taken into account:

- The more notice a person, child or adult, has of changes to a plan, the better. Therefore, please inform Safe Families (generally via your Family Coach, although you may call the office directly if you wish to) as soon as any such issue arises. As much time as possible to make any decisions and if necessary alternative arrangements is beneficial for those involved.

- A child staying with you is likely to have experienced a level of loss and instability already – even recently. Therefore, anything you can too to minimise such additional effects the better. Please bear in mind that it is usually better to share difficult news in some way or another with a child than to ignore it and to hope they don’t notice. A child is likely to pick up on increases in tension and stress and certainly if they return home unexpectedly or have to move to stay with someone else. They need some level of explanation. Otherwise, children very easily blame themselves and misconstrue the situation negatively.

8.12.5 Other Questions

Q 11 Can we go away on holiday with a hosted child?

If you are planning to go away on holiday during a hosting, even for a night or two, you should:

- Talk about this up front with the Family Coach before you take on the assignment.

- Discuss the holiday plan with the parent/carer and have their agreement regarding the plan for the child who is staying with you, whether that plan is for the child to accompany you on holiday, to stay with an alternative Host Family or to return to them or to other relatives.

- Ensure that Safe Families has a record of the address and contact number for the place where you are staying and the exact dates of the trip if a hosted child is with you. It is also helpful for Safe Families to know dates when you are unavailable to take new referrals.

- If the child is accompanying you, ensure that Safe Families has details of any potential issues regarding the trip, such as risks posed to the child, the arrangements for supervision of the child etc. and that as appropriate these have been discussed with the parents/carers. These issues, and the discussion with parents/carers, should be recorded by you and the Family Coach. In addition, you should ensure that you take the parental consent form with you in case of emergencies.

Q 12 What happens if someone else independently asks me to host their child?

If this is not a close relative or friend of yours, we do ask that you direct the request via the Safe Families office in order to avoid confusion – the emergence of an ad hoc hosting network could quickly become both disorganised and unsafe.
Q 13 What kind of Insurance Cover is needed?

- As an approved Safe Families volunteer you are covered by Safe Families Public Liability insurance, which covers accidents and offers legal protection. The Safe Families cover does not include breakages to household items or vehicle accidents. You may therefore wish to speak to your home insurance and car insurance provider to check your cover and excesses. Because you are caring for children on an entirely voluntary basis, as you would do for your grandchildren or your children’s friends, there ought not be an increase in premium.
  - Please note that Safe Families Public Liability insurance does not extend to high-risk sporting activities such as rock climbing etc.
Safe Families for Children

Family Friend Handbook
Chapter 9  Family Friend Handbook

9.1 Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to the team, well done for getting this far, we’re all so thrilled you’ve stepped up to the challenge! Loving your neighbour is about to take on a whole new depth of significance for you as you extend hospitality and love to children and their families who really need it.

In addition to the training you have already received this handbook provides practical information to help you in your Family Friend role. We hope it also serves as a reminder to you that you’re never alone in this role; there are lots of experienced people available for you should you need a helping hand yourself. This handbook is just a small part of the Safe Families Safeguarding and Operations Manual®, carefully edited to highlight the key areas you need to know in your particular role.

I’m sure in the months and hopefully years ahead you’ll discover that through giving you also receive. You may expect to be involved in enabling change in the lives of other but also keep in mind that you are likely to be changed by this too!

All the team wish you every blessing and we assure you of our ongoing commitment to you in this amazing task.

Your Regional Office Contact Details

England:
North East Region; 0191 374 4777
Email: northeast@safefamiliesforchildren.com

Scotland:
Edinburgh Region; 0131 561 8930
emailburgh@safefamiliesforchildren.com

*You are welcome to download a full copy of the Safeguarding and Operations Manual, however be warned, it's around 200 pages long!

You can find it at www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual
9.2 What is a Family Friend?

The Family Friend is a trustworthy and caring individual, willing to befriend a parent who is facing various challenges; supporting and encouraging them both practically and emotionally; helping them to envision and reach towards goals in life. They will draw alongside parents in need to support them through their crisis by coaching, mentoring and generally offering consistent moral support and a sympathetic listening ear. Their goal is to journey with the parent until their situation has begun to normalise, helping them to begin to establish good parenting and a safe home environment for their own children. Some Family Friends may provide daytime childcare, or assist with transporting children to/from school or nursery.

9.2.1 Family Friend role and requirements

- Offering friendship and support to a parent who is struggling
- Meeting them on a regular basis (generally weekly) either in their home or at a mutually convenient location
- Being committed to supporting the parent for the pre-agreed timeframe of the assignment (generally 3 – 6 months)
- Listening to, and talking about the issues that they are facing
- Helping the parent to envision goals that they can work towards, which may simply be small manageable steps in their journey of overcoming whatever challenges they are facing
- Ensuring that the child or children are a frequent topic of conversation, as a means of informally coaching and mentoring in the area of parenting skills
- Provide regular updates to the Safe Families Family Coach regarding how the relationship is going
- Taking care of items of journaling associated with the befriending relationship
- Being alert to any potential safeguarding concerns in the family
- Giving appropriate sensitivity to the confidentiality of the family being helped
- Participating from time to time in the wider life of Safe Families for Children within the region, such as training events, volunteer evenings etc.

This may look like a long list but please do keep in mind that Safe Families for Children functions as a network of volunteers with everyone offering what they can. You are never alone as a volunteer – you will always have access to advice and support.

Important pre-requisites for the role:

- Real life experience as a parent, grandparent, aunt/uncle
• If not a parent then able to demonstrate experience of understanding family life, parenting, and/or children and their needs, for example as a social worker, teacher, nursery nurse, health worker etc.
• Friendly, welcoming personality, good listener, sensitive to the parent’s ups and downs
• Well-organised and punctual, in order to make and maintain appointments – note that there is no guarantee that the parents themselves will be organised or punctual!
• Connected to the community of a local church that has agreed to support Safe Families volunteers
• Have own transport – it may be useful to have a vehicle suitably equipped for children i.e. boosters seats etc.
• Willing to ‘go the extra mile’ and to problem-solve when unforeseen situations arise
• Happy to receive supervision, direction and constructive feedback from your Family Coach and/or Family Support Manager
• Willing to maintain an appropriate level of ongoing training and development, particularly in the area of safeguarding and child protection
• Access to an internet-enabled computer (desktop, laptop or tablet) and able to use IT sufficiently to access and record information on the Safe Families database
• Be in full agreement with the vision and values of Safe Families for Children, which has a clear ethos of expressing Christian compassion and hospitality towards those in need.

9.2.2 Unpacking different aspects of the Family Friend role

Moral support
Many of the parents/carers that Safe Families works with lack self-confidence and have feelings of failure or guilt. Asking for help is a big step for them. They need to be encouraged that asking for help when it is needed is a positive rather than negative thing – it is not an admission of failure. Your involvement can help them to see that can offer a healthy home for their children by addressing certain issues with the right support. Bit by bit, week by week a Family Friend can help them to find purpose, make positive changes, build on their strengths, and not become down-hearted by perceived weaknesses.

Mentoring in parenting
Ultimately the Family Friend is helping the parent in order to improve the outcomes for the child. The parent ought to know that this is the aim, and share it, being encouraged in the vision of providing a healthy home environment for their children.

The role will need to be undertaken with great sensitively and Family Friends must be careful never to be judgmental or patronising. Care must be taken to enable the parent to be the best parent they can be, which is not the same as the kind of parent the Family Friend would be. Focusing on the parent/carer strengths and what they want for their child will be important as well as helping them find ways to deal with stresses and challenges that do not affect their child negatively.

In some situations, a Host Family volunteer will fulfil the role of the Family Friend as well. In these cases, mentoring in parenting can be a significant feature of the Family Friend role as the Host Family volunteer has opportunity to spend time with the child as well as the parent.

Signposting to other services
Safe Families is established in partnership with other services, such as health, education, and voluntary sector agencies such as those that work with people affected by substance misuse,
domestic violence, debt, etc. The Family Friend can help direct parents to the most appropriate source for help and, if needed, can support them in taking the first steps of engagement with these services.

**Advocacy**
At an informal level a Family Friend can help a parent to voice their opinions on matters that affect them and are important to them, for example to a social worker. Recognising the difficulty that some parents/carers will have in expressing their concerns and views to others and of doing so in an appropriate way, the Family Friend can facilitate this well.

**Daytime respite and baby-sitting**
There are circumstances when a family being assisted by Safe Families does not need full overnight hosting for their child, but does need daytime or evening care. Examples might be when a lone parent needs to attend a weekly group, such as AA, or Alpha. The Family Friend may be well placed to offer support in caring for the child, either in their own home or in the child’s home.

**Transport**
On occasion, issues of transport arise that cause practical difficulties for either the Host Family or the parents/carers. For example, if a child placed with a Host Family continues to attend a school that is a few miles away from the Host Family home. Help in taking the children to or from school may be critical to the stay with a Host Family running smoothly. Transport help may also be required to support contact arrangements for children with their parents during the time of a stay with a Host Family.

9.3 Support for you: the Family Coach and the local church
It is very important that in serving the needs of others you do not neglect your own need for support. We want you to have a long and fulfilling involvement with Safe Families and that will mean pacing yourself and making the most of the support that is available to you. In preparation for being a Family Friend, you may wish to tell your wider family, friends and neighbours about your involvement with Safe Families for Children so that they can provide you with any support and encouragement you may need.

9.3.1 Your allocated Family Coach
Your primary link to Safe Families will be through a Family Coach – an experienced volunteer with whom you may talk things through and discuss any situations that might arise in the course of a hosting. They are there to offer guidance and will help you work within your strengths and not to become extended beyond your limits.

Beyond supporting you through the befriending assignment, the Family Coach will reflect with you afterwards, asking about how it went, and considering what may happen next. Whether you continue to have a supporting relationship with that family in need, prepare to support another parent or need to have a break for a while, the Family Coach will be alongside you in this process as much as is helpful to you. Please note that your Family Coach may change when you take on a new assignment with a new family.

Responding to your needs
The Family Coach is your advocate. You can feel free to contact them whenever you need help or direction. If things are not going well, it is important for you to let your Family Coach know. The Family Coach is also the first person you should try to contact if you have
any concerns regarding children in the family that you cannot discuss directly with the parent you are helping.

9.3.2 Support from your local church

It is likely that your church will recognise the ministry of Safe Families for Children. If you are unsure then please call the Safe Families office and ask to speak to one of the Church and Volunteer Coordinators. They will be able to confirm one way or the other whether or not there has been correspondence/contact with the church. If not Safe Families will be happy to call the minister for a chat.

More and more churches are beginning to appoint designated Safe Families co-ordinators. They will provide a helpful source of advice and support should you need it. Within some towns and villages one church in particular has agreed to take the lead on Safe Families so you may find that you begin to get to know an Safe Families co-ordinator based in a church different from the one you are personally affiliated to. Please do ask the Safe Families office whether there is a church co-ordinator and/or a church-based support for Safe Families volunteers local to you.

If you do not currently have a connection to a local church Safe Families can arrange an introduction for you.

9.3.3 Building in rest time

As a Family Friend assignment comes to an end, you will experience a variety of emotions. Please make sure that you build in the time you need to work through these. The de-briefing following with your Family Coach will help with this but may only be the start of a process for you. Each person’s processing will be different and you must take the time you need before accepting another assignment.

9.3.4 Accessing further information and training

In your role as a Family Friend it is important that you feel confident in handling the potential ups and downs of involvement with parents who may difficult lives. It should also be expected that you will learn from experience too, as you complete your first, second and third hosting assignments, and so on. The debriefing sessions you have with your Family Coach will help to accelerate your learning curve.

As an approved volunteer you will also be invited to bi-monthly volunteer evenings in your local area. These evenings will involve a warm welcome, refreshments and nibbles, meeting other volunteers, including some facilitated group activities, testimonies and news, a short training spot (15-20 mins), prayer, and sometimes sung worship.

We would strongly encourage you to attend these evenings, they are very motivating and a great way to develop in your role by learning from others.

Reading our policy documents is also very worthwhile. They can all be accessed at www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual. The policy documents present clearly our organisational standpoint on a range of issues.

Refresher training is available to anyone who feels that they would benefit from it. You are very welcome to come to one of our monthly volunteer training days. Simply drop the office a line and we’ll let you know dates of trainings coming up.

Finally, as an organisation Safe Families holds regular staff training on a wide variety of issues, such as child protection and safeguarding, understanding child development, issues
such as addictions, mental health, offending behaviour or domestic violence. If you’d like to sit in on a future training day just drop the office a line and we’ll make sure that you receive an invitation.

9.4 Beginning a Family Friend relationship

9.4.1 How will I be informed of a potential assignment?

Once a new befriending-related referral has been screened and accepted by the Safe Families office team the best possible Family Friend match will be sought. If you are found to be a good match (in terms of geography, availability preferences etc.) then you will be contacted, by email or telephone.

Often the Safe Families database provides several matches and the office team will need to communicate with several possible Family Friends via telephone in order to find one that is happy to take on the assignment. At this point you will be given extended biographical details about the family, a fuller description of the problem that they are facing, and a general sense of what we are hoping to achieve through the help given.

Generally a swift yes or no response will be needed. Saying yes to the assignment does not mean that you will be introduced to the family later that day! Most assignments are planned to begin a week or two in advance.

- At the time of accepting the assignment, or shortly afterwards, you will be given details of which Family Coach has supervisory responsibility.
- Family Coach will call you to clarify expectations around time commitments, any transport issues, and also any considerations relating to risk.

9.4.2 Being introduced to the family in need

You will normally be introduced to the parent that you will be befriending by either the Family Coach or Family Support Manager. If the assignment is judged to be very straightforward and low risk then you may be asked to see them on your own.

- The introduction will happen at an agreed location, which may be the home of the referred family, or a neutral venue such as a local cafe.
- A member of staff from the Safe Families office may get involved in helping with co-ordinating diary arrangements.
- The Family Coach will help to kickstart the conversation between yourself and the referred parent, sharing some of their own story and then asking you both to do the same.
- By the time the introductory meeting is over everyone should be clear about the expectations of the Family Friend involvement. (Refer to the template in section 9.8)
- If the role will include sole care of a child without the parent/carer being present, (i.e. if they are attending a course or clinic) then you will
  a) have opportunity to meet the child
  b) be given all appropriate contact and consent forms relevant

9.5 Who might you interact with during a befriending assignment?

As previously mentioned the Family Coach is your immediate Safe Families support, backed up by a wider community of support from the local church. Others that you may interact
with during a hosting assignment may include the child’s parent/carer, and other Safe Families volunteers such as Host Families and Resource Friends.

9.5.1 The adults in the family

The family that you are befriending may have any number of combinations of adult carers, and you will have been given information specific to the family that you will be helping prior to accepting the assignment. Generally a Family Friend has a focus on helping one parent in particular, and most commonly, the mother. However, in the course of your getting to know the particular parent that you are befriending you may also meet their partner, and other family members too, such as their mother, father, sister, etc. Ideally, in order to be able to talk together freely you will need some one-to-one time with the parent that you are supporting.

You may be asked to help the parent in all sorts of practical ways, but the most important aspect of the time you spend with them will be the quality of the conversations that you have together. Below are some guidelines:

Do's and Don't's for helping parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do:</th>
<th>Don't:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respect the parent as a unique individual</td>
<td>Be dogmatic about your own religious or political opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be prepared to listen and let the person talk</td>
<td>Rush in with judgments and advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on their aspirations as a parent</td>
<td>Take sides in family disputes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitively approach known challenges that</td>
<td>Press the parent to talk about things that they are not yet ready to address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the parent wants help with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep to set days and times for meetings</td>
<td>Administer any medication for them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give adequate notice and explanation if you</td>
<td>Lift or move heavy objects in their home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have to cancel a visit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform the Family Coach of any concerns or</td>
<td>Exchange any money with the parent – either giving to, or taking from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incidents such as harmful behaviours or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deteriorating health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9.5.2 The children in the family

As part of your befriending assignment there may or may not be a remit to spend time with the children. You will either:

- See the parent on their own without the kids (i.e. when they are at school, or in bed)
- See the parent when the kids are around (pre-schoolers, or at weekends)
- See the kids as your primary focus, to enable the parent to do something important (such as attend a course or clinic)

It is important that you remember that you are offering support to a parent in order that they might be better able to care for their child. It is therefore very likely that you will get to meet the child/children and to interact with them. There may be specific elements of support that the parent needs, such as how to deal with some element of the child’s
behaviour. You do not have to be an ‘expert’ for them but should be open about the lessons you have learnt as a parent/carer, and the way you managed to overcome parenting challenges you faced. This will be valuable to them and will enhance the bond between you.

**When caring for children**

- Consider their needs according to their age, development stage, etc. What activities will you get up to? Will you need to prepare any food – if so what can/can’t they eat? Do you have all the equipment you need? For example a tiny tot will require a high chair and a changing mat. Do you have appropriate toys available for the child?
- If you are having the children in your own home for the day make sure you have completed an Safe Families Home Safety checklist, that you have taken care of any hazards identified in it, for example you may need to fit a stair gate.
- If you are lacking anything please ask. Safe Families is a community network of support including resource volunteers who offer a wide range of additional practical items. They will generally be able to deliver to your door!

### 9.5.3 Others involved in helping the family

**Host Family**

“A trustworthy family, couple, or in certain circumstances single adult, willing to take a child or children into their home, giving the child’s parent/s much needed space to deal with pressing issues in their lives.”

In most cases a Safe Families Family Friend will be working with a family that is also receiving support from a Host Family. If this is the case it will be useful for you to talk to the Host Family from time to time to ‘compare notes’ and to ensure that you are working collaboratively for the best of the family in need.

**Resource friends**

There are many people within the wider community who want to offer their support for children and families in all sorts of practical ways. One of the main things that Resource Friends do is to donate goods, services, and sometimes even money, in order to ensure that the Safe Families can offer the best possible support to families. As a Family Friend you can request help in the form of resources whenever you need them, just ask your Family Coach.

Commonly requested items include:

- Clothing (from babies upwards, boys and girls)
- Hygiene items (from nappies and wipes to soaps and household cleaning products)
- Buggies and booster seats (various sizes for babies, toddlers and juniors)
- Non-perishable food (particularly follow-on formula and weaning food)
- Household appliances (microwaves, washing machines, tumbledriers, ovens)
- Furniture (there is a high demand for cots and beds)

### 9.5.4 …in an emergency!

We hope and pray that you never need to, but, as for anyone in the community, emergency services are available to you and should be accessed in the usual way if needed.
In the event that you do have to call on the emergency services then something is clearly going on that Safe Families needs to know about. When the immediate emergency is over please contact the appropriate people accordingly.

9.6 The importance of safeguarding children and vulnerable adults

Safe Families for Children’s board of Trustees and Executive team are absolutely committed to the principle of safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults. All of our staff and volunteers, whatever role they may serve in, carry a duty of care towards those being assisted by our programmes and services. Our Safeguarding policy and associated procedures are applicable to all children, young people and vulnerable adults served through our work, regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or religion.

- Please carefully read the Safeguarding Policies and Guidance for Volunteers insert, it is 6 pages long but very helpful and important.

The Safe Families approach to safeguarding is one of never do nothing.

All concerns, however minor, ought to be noted and in many cases also reported and discussed with a supervisor such as a Safe Families Family Coach or Family Support Manager.

Safeguarding Officers

Wherever Safe Families operates a lead Safeguarding Officer is appointed. This responsibility will generally be carried by either the Programme Director or the senior Family Support Manager. During your training you should have been told who this person is. You should write their name and contact details in the space below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safeguarding Officer:</th>
<th>Their contact number:</th>
<th>Their email address:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

9.7 Managing expectations and boundaries

It is important to find the right balance in the relational support you give, so that you keep within the limits of your Family Friend role responsibility. The following are some guidelines for appropriate boundaries in the role:

- Do not raise unrealistic expectations; only offer what you really can do. Agree the purpose of your involvement and tailor your support accordingly. In some circumstances, very firm boundaries need to be in place.

- It will be important for you, for the family and for Safe Families that progress can be identified according to the reasons identified for support. More about this in the next section.

- Whether or not you share your address and personal phone number with the parent will be something that varies case by case and according to how the relationship develops. The recommendation is that you discuss this question with the Family Coach early on.

- Please do not give the parents/carers money directly. If they do need specific financial help, there may be possibilities available to help with this and the Family Coach is the best person to coordinate how such support may be given. It is also appropriate to keep in discussion with the Family Coach regarding other resource-support the family needs and how best to help. We need to remember that it is important not disempower parents by
taking responsibility away from them. They need to be personally pro-active in getting back on their own two feet.

- Please refrain from being judgmental or critical. Since many of us will probably not have experienced the multiple difficulties the parents/carers are under, it is difficult for us to understand the challenges and behaviour that often arise.

### 9.8 Goal-setting and journaling

#### 9.8.1 The importance of having clarity around goals

As a Family Friends you may be involved in a variety of ways of supporting struggling families, some very simple and straightforward and others much more challenging and involved. One unifying theme in all befriending support is that the befriender and the adult receiving the support need to be clear about what support is being given, what the goal of providing the support is, and over what timescale the support will be monitored for effectiveness.

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support to be given</th>
<th>Safe Families Family Friend will visit struggling single mother who has a 3 year old, a 2 year old and a 3 month old.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of support</td>
<td>Weekly, on Wednesday mornings at 10 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of support</td>
<td>6 months then review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Goals of support | Encourage relationships and bonding in the family unit  
Encourage healthy feeding and hygiene routines  
Help mum get out to the park with the kids fortnightly  
Help mum plan for 3 year old starting local school nursery half days from September |

#### 9.8.2 Using journaling to record progress being made

Safe Families has a facility within its database for recording notes about the families we are helping. **It is important that you make use of this.** A brief journal note following a meeting, even if it has been pretty uneventful, is important for continuity purposes. These notes will also help the Safe Families Family Support Manager to build up a picture over time of the impact the support is having. They have access to all the notes created by everyone involved in the family and are able to recognise patterns developing.

Please keep in mind that:

- A detail that seems minor to you may be significant within the wider picture.
- The notes are very important to refer back to if questions are asked at a later stage.
- More detail will be required if you are making note of an incident that has been a cause of friction between you, or any minor accidents that have occurred.
• More significant issues, such as an accident that required a visit to A&E ought to be noted but then followed up in more detail using an Safe Families Accident Report form.

Accessing the database to make notes:
• Log on to the Safe Families Database to create notes. See the Database User guide for more detailed instructions.
• If accessing the database online continues to be problematic, do talk to your Family Coach about the possibility of arranging an alternative way of recording your notes.

9.9 Ending involvement well

9.9.1 Preparing for the end of a befriending assignment
How you draw a befriending arrangement to a conclusion will very much depend on the nature, the intensity and the length of the involvement you have had with the parent.

As an ending approaches, give consideration to the following:

▪ The extent to which the original goals of the involvement been achieved
▪ Ways in which the family has gained fresh confidence and stability, practically and emotionally, and how this will be maintained when the support is withdrawn
▪ Don’t be afraid to acknowledge sadness at the goodbye alongside the happiness for the family in recognition of the changes they have made.
▪ Be realistic about the future, for example how much ongoing contact is likely.

Note: it is possible that your relationship with a family does not completely end but rather transitions so that you continue to be friends with a natural two-way relationship

Your Family Coach is available to help you all think through these steps in plenty of time. The Family Coach will also debrief with you once the assignment is over.

9.10 Frequently Asked Questions

Q 1 What type of situations will families be experiencing?

The families we help will be experiencing a crisis of one sort or another. This may be a time-specific period of need such as a hospital admission, a period of counselling or rehabilitation, or a custodial sentence. However, it may be that abuse by a spouse or partner, deterioration in health, or concerns such as finances, employment or housing need to be resolved. Safe Families looks carefully at the seriousness of the issues and makes a decision whether or not to take on the case by judging whether or not it fits within our thresholds (see diagram below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threshold</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BELOW THRESHOLD</td>
<td>Minor issue that does not warrant SFFC support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WITHIN THRESHOLD</td>
<td>Identified needs in the family are at risk of escalating without help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WITHIN THRESHOLD</td>
<td>Needs pressing and requirement for support has become urgent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEYOND THRESHOLD</td>
<td>Very complex needs and/or serious safety concerns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When Safe Families agrees to be able to support a family, it is because we are confident that this is in the best interests of the parent and child and that the parent will be responsive to a Family Family relationship.
Q 2 How do you find out about families that need help?

Any statutory, private or voluntary agency can refer as well as self-referrals. In practice this means that referrals may come from Social Workers, Health Visitors, Schools, GPs, Hospitals, Drug or Alcohol Support Agencies, Homeless Centres or Housing Support, Prisons, Police, Probation, Children’s Social Care, and Voluntary Agencies such as Christians Against Poverty (CAP), Home-Start or Foodbank. As a point of principle Safe Families will not proceed until the full agreement of the child’s parents/carers has been established.

Q 3 How long will the assignment last?

If the assignment is a ‘classic’ befriending, i.e. getting alongside a parent to help them to get through a crisis and get back on their feet, then it is likely that it will last 6 months before the first major review.

Other forms of Family Friend support may be more short term, for example:

- Assisting a parent with attending a series of appointments, at a hospital, clinic, court or similar, may last a few weeks
- Daytime caring of a child during a family emergency, such as the arrival of a new baby, may last just a few days.

Q 4 What if the parent and I have a disagreement?

Different points of view are natural. It is important for Family Friends to strive to understand the parents/carers and not to react against ideas that may not be communicated in the best way. Remember: this is a family in crisis and a parent may feel threatened or troubled.

Unless it is clearly against our policies or values every effort should be made to accommodate the parent/carer’s preferences.

In the case of ongoing conflict or failure to reach resolution, please contact your allocated Family Coach.

Q 6 To what extent can I share my faith with the parent?

Your faith is probably a very important aspect of your life, and is likely to have been a driver in your becoming involved as a volunteer – i.e. there is a match between the personal values that you derive from your faith, and those Safe Families also holds to as a charity with a strong Christian ethos.

Our advice regarding sharing faith is drawn from 1 Peter 3v15

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”

It is clear therefore that if a parent you are working with asks questions about your faith then you should feel comfortable to reply. The important thing is to be sure that the parent is leading the conversation and that they are free to change the subject whenever they like.

If a parent enquires about your church and shows an interest in coming along with you on a Sunday then again, if they are genuinely interested and have not in any way been coerced into attending then that is absolutely fine and appropriate. Do however be extra sensitive if you are working with a parent as another faith, to ensure that they are not naive about how attending church might be perceived within their own faith community. We do not want them to suffer any hostility or stigma by being perceived to be betraying their own roots or
culture in any way.

Volunteers often also ask whether they may pray for/with a parent that they are helping. Again very similar principles apply – use your best judgment given how well you know the parent, their degree of openness to spirituality, and to the appropriateness of the context. For example a simple prayer following a bereavement can be very comforting.
Chapter 10  Church Handbook

“Whoever welcomes a child in my name welcomes me.” Matthew 18:5

10.1 Welcome and Introduction

When the church functions as God designed it to, it resembles a wonderful extended family with a huge capacity to care, not just for its own members, but also for the vulnerable and the hurting within its wider community. Safe Families for Children offers churches a way to serve their community in a way that not only brings about social transformation but also deepens the discipleship of the church volunteers who choose to become involved.

As you will be well aware, prior to the advent of the modern Welfare State much of the social care provided throughout British society was mediated through the church. After several decades of government-led work in the area of family life and wellbeing people are beginning to conclude the limits of the state’s ability for social transformation have been reached. A new settlement is emerging within which responsibility for the care of society’s most vulnerable is being shared between the public and voluntary sector.

This is therefore an interesting and exciting time for the church as it is regaining its confidence in playing a more active role in society. Over and over again research has proven that members of local churches tend to be predisposed towards volunteering, in a way that members of many other types of social groups often are not. Safe Families for Children is therefore confident that it is doing the right thing by focusing on partnership with local churches.

In order to help and equip your church to understand more about our vision, values and operating model, we’ve written this brief handbook*. We trust you will find it a valuable resource as we work together to achieve our vision of seeing families in crisis move from surviving to thriving as they are embraced by compassionate and committed local volunteers.

*This handbook is just one in a number of related handbooks that form our overarching Safeguarding and Operations Manual. You are welcome to download a full copy of the Manual, however be warned, it’s around 200 pages long! You can find it at www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual
10.2 The world’s need – our calling

10.2.1 Why is Safe Families for Children Needed?

Life can be stressful and raising healthy and well-balanced children is a challenge even for the most confident and well-resourced parents. Many parents are facing additional personal pressures and difficulties that at times of crisis can be overwhelming. During such crises, parents may not be able to provide a safe and caring environment for their children, especially those that are socially isolated, without extended family or friends around them.

Research tells us that children in a family traumatised by crisis become especially at risk of neglect or abuse as their parents struggle to cope with crushing circumstances and emotions. Without assistance, all too frequently these situations lead to long-lasting negative consequences for the child. For many such families who are experiencing financial, housing or employment difficulties, domestic violence, parental drug and/or alcohol misuse, illness or custody issues, supplementary care for their child to enable them to have some respite and a chance to get ‘back on their feet’ would be beneficial both to the child and to the parents.

Local Authorities’ Social Services have a high threshold for their intervention; support services to the family in the home are typically short-term and Foster Care options are usually only available for children who have suffered significant harm or for whom the risk of such abuse or neglect is very high. Moreover, there is inevitably considerable bureaucracy involved in Local Authority care, even if agreed to voluntarily by parents. This can make it slow and inflexible in operation as well as unattractive for families feeling in need of support.

10.2.2 Recovering the Christian tradition of radical hospitality

For 2000 years an important aspect of the vocation and ministry of the church has been showing kindness and compassion to strangers in need. This radical hospitality has a very rich tradition, indeed you could say that it is part of Christian DNA, and it is permanently woven into the scriptures too. The original Greek word used in the New Testament to convey this calling is:

Φιλοξενία  
translated: hospitality

Philo = love    Xenia = stranger

One of the most well known references to philoxenia is Hebrews 13v2.

‘Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.’ Hebrews 13v2

The concept also features in 1 Timothy 3, in the list of qualifications for a bishop, and in Titus 1, in the character attributes of an elder in the church. Additionally it features in St Paul’s great spur to true worship in Romans 12.

Of course beyond this simple word study the bible abounds with examples of hospitality, Old Testament and new, from Abraham to Zacchaeus. And many times Jesus himself spoke on the subject, from the inn-keeper in the parable of the ‘Good Samaritan’, to the image of the ‘Sheep and the Goats’ –

‘Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Matthew 25v35—36
10.2.3 How it works...

There are around 600 Safe Families volunteers, involved in the following ways:

- **Host Families.** A family, couple, or in certain circumstances single adult, who opens their home to care for a child on a short-term basis while the parents receive the help they need. Parents retain responsibility with the Host Family giving supplementary support.

- **Family Friends.** A trustworthy and caring individual, willing to befriend a parent who is facing various challenges; supporting and encouraging them both practically and emotionally and helping them to envision and reach towards goals in life. Family Friends may also help struggling parents by providing daytime childcare, or transport for a child.

- **Family Coaches.** Highly skilled volunteer member of the Safe Families team who supervises a child’s stay with a Host Family. Central to the co-ordinating Safe Families for Children’s involvement with families, especially when multiple volunteers are involved. Family Coaches are recruited on the basis of their qualifications and experience in social care support.

- **Resource Friends.** Volunteers who offer help such as donations of hardware, clothing or furniture. They may also offer services and practical jobs e.g. decorating, gardening, hairdressing. Both referred families and Host Families can receive Safe Families resources. Resource Friends are not authorised to be involved in Regulated Activity.

The full expression of Safe Families support to a family could then look like this:

All volunteers working under the umbrella are thoroughly vetted and trained as part of our ‘Safer Recruitment’ system, which is just one aspect of our commitment to the highest possible standards in safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.

Safe Families is a registered charity, no. 11
10.3 Partnerships that span the denominations

Safe Families is a very broad-based organisation spanning all the major church denominations and traditions – Anglican, Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, Reformed etc.

Safe Families for Children’s patron is the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Rt Rev Justin Welby, who is well-known for his position that faith is not simply a matter of private beliefs but that it is the motivation from which springs the desire to address the injustices present in modern society.

Safe Families functions as a network of community-conscious churches working together with others to achieve improvement in the wellbeing of children and families. The motivation of all working within Safe Families is to make a tangible difference to the life chances of those helped, irrespective of whether the family identifies with the Christian faith, another faith, or no faith. It is important to note that Safe Families is not a vehicle to support proselytisation.

In order to preserve the integrity of its Christian roots Safe Families requires that participating churches, partners, staff and volunteers:

- be comfortable with, and not antagonistic towards, Safe Families for Children’s ethos as a church-based movement rooted in the historic Christian tradition
- be willing to work with those of any faith or no faith to meet the Safe Families objectives of relief and respite to families in need and the protection of children.

Safe Families has enjoyed constructive dialogue with leaders of other faiths with a view to developing Safe Families for Children within their communities.

Encouragement and help from supportive friends can make such a difference to parents and children in challenging times. I’m very pleased to be the Patron of Safe Families for Children as they extend their work to help volunteers and churches provide that essential support for families in crisis.

The Most Revd Justin Welby,
Archbishop of Canterbury

There are so many in our communities that are living with stress and anxiety. We, as followers of Christ, should be available to help in whatever way we can. Whether it be offering your home to a child for a few days, mentoring an isolated parent or just supplying some of the needs of our neighbours. I want to fully endorse the work of Safe Families for Children to you all.

Rt Revd Seamus Cunningham,
Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle
10.4 Opportunities to become a ‘Safe Families’ Church

Churches of all sizes are necessary in order to provide assistance for struggling families within our communities, and there are different ways in which every church that wishes to do so can participate. For example:

Promoting Safe Families for those who need it
Local churches with links into their community through playgroups and schools can get the word out amongst families in need, so that they can become aware of what Safe Families offers and how they might benefit from getting in touch.

Welcoming those who receive Safe Families involvement
Enabling those referred to Safe Families who wish to receive more general support from within the church community to feel welcome and to be appropriately supported and guided.

Recruiting Volunteers
Welcoming a Safe Families volunteer manager to come and speak to the congregation; showing a promotional video during a Sunday service and/or hosting an information table.

Encouraging Host Families and Family Friends
Encouraging and empowering potential Host Families to embrace this expression of hospitality to those in need and to help potential Family Friends to be able to get alongside families in crisis. Providing practical and emotional support and guidance as needed.

Pastoral Support to volunteers
Providing a pastoral network to support the volunteers who are involved directly with families in need. Being willing to extend this pastoral support to isolated volunteers in neighbouring churches.

Hosting a regional volunteer evening
Periodically Safe Families volunteers will meet together to share fellowship, hear testimony, receive training, pray and build a sense of community. These events generally migrate around churches in order to generate a sense of unity and to limit the burden falling on one particular church.

Providing Resources
Developing a resource centre to help gather, store and distribute items needed for children placed within Host Families. For example, this may include car seats, clothing, bedding, cots, toys, nappies, formula milk and other supplies that families may be in need of.

Also identifying people able to offer practical support such as babysitting, transportation, meals, or donations of goods or those offering skills such as hairdressing, cleaning, gardening and DIY. Moreover, there may be people with experience in Children’s Social Care, Health, Education, Police, Legal Work, etc. who can offer valuable guidance to families in crisis.
Appointing a Church Co-ordinator

Many local churches are now appointing an Safe Families co-ordinator as a way of integrating Safe Families into the life of the congregation. This is particularly helpful as a critical mass of members of the church become actively involved as volunteers helping local families in need. The Church Co-Ordinator can encourage people to step forward as volunteers, and encourage them as they become active. They can help members of the congregation to understand the variety of Safe Families roles and provide a helpful link back to the main Safe Families office.

10.5 Integrating Safe Families into the life of the church

10.5.1 Working together with shared vision

In order for Safe Families for Children to become a fruitful, sustainable and well-integrated ministry within your church there should be clarity about how the Safe Families vision dovetails with your own. Here’s a helpful way to visualise the relationship:

10.5.2 Pastoral care of volunteers

Safe Families would never seek to undermine the pastoral responsibility that ministers have toward the members of their congregation – but neither do we take this for granted, or wish to create an extra burden. For this reason we will work closely with partner churches to ensure that volunteers have appropriate support and that everyone is clear about who is providing it.

10.5.3 Relating to existing church ministries

In your local church there may already be a number of existing outreach ministries that can work well in collaboration with the Safe Families initiative. For example:

- Mother and tots group
- Counselling service
- Debt advice service
Children’s and youth ministry

10.5.4 Congregational Benefits of Involvement in Safe Families for Children

Safe Families involvement makes such a difference to those families in crisis and it is incredibly rewarding for individuals involved. However, Safe Families offers more than individual spiritual growth to volunteers; it enables the life of the whole church to be transformed and transformational as the church shares in community with those with whom there may not otherwise have been any contact.

The following are just some of the congregational benefits of involvement in Safe Families:

Spiritual formation
Lots of Christians today are busy but bored; many are looking for opportunities to be part of a movement of compassion that can change society. Safe Families for Children assists people of faith in answering that call. For some families, this is by simply adding another child to the activities they are already providing for their children. In addition, families with older children and no children can respond well to the Safe Families movement as a way of practicing Biblical hospitality.

Community building for the congregation
When members of the congregation become active in the various Safe Families volunteer roles they naturally begin to work together as a team in order to surround parents and children with care and support. As they do so the bonds between them are strengthened and appreciation their appreciation of one another is deepened. This is an excellent witness to the whole church.

Unity amongst Christians within and across churches
The church is all too aware of its struggles over issues that divide and yet we know that Jesus prayed for unity amongst us: “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” John 17:22-23.

Safe Families, with its emphasis on localised support within the community can include the whole church and can unite congregations within a particular community context.

Increased connection to community
As children come to stay with Host Families and their parents are mentored by Family Friends they often begin to feel a sense of belonging to the community to which the volunteers belong – the church. Some families that we help, according to their choice, wish to explore becoming part of a local congregation because they begin to feel loved and accepted there, and recognise that it can be a healthy place where, together with their kids, they can flourish and enjoy life and freedom.

Additionally, members of local churches become more aware of the needs of their community and in stronger relationship with many more people within it. Moreover, forming a network of local churches that work together, allows for an increased connection between people of different churches and this also widens local social networks. Furthermore, networks of churches working together broadens the possibilities significantly in terms of all that can be done on behalf of people and communities in need.
MANUAL FOUR
ADDITIONAL POLICY GUIDANCE
AND HANDBOOKS

REFERENCE SAFEGUARDING POLICIES

DATABASE USER HANDBOOK

POLICY AND GUIDANCE ON
INFORMATION & DATA MANAGEMENT

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

INDEX
Chapter 11  Reference Safeguarding Policies

11.1 Safeguarding Policies and Guidance for Volunteers

Safe Families has a full Safeguarding and Child Protection Manual – this section a cut down summary of its important principles and priorities intended to be easily accessible for volunteers.

11.1.1 Keeping children safe is at the heart of our organisation's vision

The 3 aims of Safe Families for Children are:

1. To stabilise families at times of crisis
2. To minimise risks of child neglect & abuse
3. To reduce the number of children entering the care system

Safe Families’ board of Trustees and Executive team are absolutely committed to the principle of safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults. All of our staff and volunteers, whatever role they may serve in, carry a duty of care towards those being assisted by our programmes and services. Having a comprehensive safeguarding framework in place not only protects and promotes client welfare but also it enhances the confidence of our statutory sector stakeholders and the general public.

- Our Safeguarding policy and associated procedures are applicable to all children, young people and vulnerable adults served through our work, regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or religion.
- Please carefully read section 11.2 ‘Safeguarding Policy: Headline Statements’
- Please note that Safe Families Safeguarding principles apply to both children and vulnerable adults (definitions on the next page)

The Safe Families approach to safeguarding is one of never do nothing.

All concerns, however minor, ought to be noted and in many cases also reported and discussed with a supervisor such as a Safe Families Family Coach or Family Support Manager.

11.1.2 Safeguarding Officers

Wherever Safe Families operates a lead Safeguarding Officer is appointed. This responsibility will generally be carried by either the Programme Director or the senior Family Support Manager. During your training you should have been told who this person is. You should write their name and contact details in the space below:

Name of Safeguarding Officer for my region:

Their contact number:

Their email address:
11.1.3 Definitions of Terms

Child protection
The process of protecting individual children identified as suffering significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect.

Safeguarding
The process of protecting children from abuse or neglect, preventing impairment of their health and development, and ensuring they are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care that enables them to have optimum life chances and enter adulthood successfully.

Child
Is understood by the Children Act 1989 as being under the age of 18.

Vulnerable Adult
A person aged 18 or over who has: a learning or physical disability; a physical or mental illness, chronic or otherwise including an addiction to alcohol or drugs; a reduction in physical or mental capacity; a dependency upon others, or a requirement for assistance in the performance of physical functions; severe impairment in the ability to communicate with others; impairment in their ability to protect themselves from assault, abuse or neglect

Harm
Is taken to include not only ill treatment (including sexual abuse and forms of ill treatment which are not physical), but also the impairment of, or an avoidable deterioration in physical or mental health; and the impairment of physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development.

‘Where the question of whether harm suffered by a child is significant turns on the child’s health or development, his/her health or development shall be compared with that which could reasonably be expected of a similar child’. (Children Act 1989)

Disclosure
The moment when a child, young person or vulnerable adult chooses to tell a responsible adult, i.e. a Host Family, about abuse they have suffered or are suffering

Abuse
Abuse can occur in any relationship, adult-adult, adult-child or child-child, and may result in significant harm to, or exploitation of the person subject to it. Commonly recognised abuse categories are: Emotional (psychological) abuse, Physical abuse, Sexual abuse, Neglect, Organised abuse, Abuse of trust, Grooming, Financial or Material abuse.

- You may download a full ‘Abuse Definitions’ resource sheet from www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual

11.1.4 The challenge of recognising abusers
Those regarded as an abuser might be anyone, including family members, professional staff, paid care workers, volunteers and fellow service users, neighbours, friends and associates.

Abuse may be perpetrated by someone in a position of power or authority who uses his/her position to the detriment of the health, safety, welfare and wellbeing of a vulnerable person.

Abuse may take place in any context; in the home, school, church, hospitals, and other places that are often assumed safe, or indeed in public places.
11.1.5 Signs and symptoms of abuse

Some children can exhibit one or more signs. If there are concerns about a child displaying any of the indicators, discussions should be held with Safeguarding Officer or staff member. Indicators can be physical e.g. marks and bruises, behavioural i.e. aggressive or withdrawn or secretive etc, disclosures i.e. a child tells you something that indicates abuse, presentation/appearance may be unkempt, dirty etc.

Remember that there can be other explanations for a child, young person or vulnerable adult showing such signs or behaving in such ways. There is a good deal of overlap between the signs and symptoms of the different types of abuse, particularly between emotional and other types of abuse.

Further resources: www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual contains a detailed NSPCC factsheet on recognising signs and symptoms of abuse.

NOTE: Lists of signs and symptoms are not fail-safe mechanisms, but they are often helpful indicators in certain combinations of the likelihood or reality of abuse. Children may behave strangely or appear unhappy for many reasons.

11.1.6 Acting upon concerns of potential abuse

Given our prior discussion regarding procedural differences in handling children and vulnerable adults the following guidance indicates whether procedures are advised for children, vulnerable adults, or both.

Consider Urgent Medical Attention
If a child or vulnerable adult is suffering from a serious injury or health-related condition, medical attention must be sought immediately at the nearest Accident and Emergency unit (dialling 999 if paramedics/ambulance is deemed appropriate).

Listening and responding to a ‘disclosure’
When a child, young person or vulnerable adult chooses to tell a responsible adult, i.e. a Safe Families Host Family or Family Friend, about abuse they have suffered or are suffering, we call this a disclosure.

Disclosures may relate to abuse perpetrated by a family member or someone outside the family, e.g. a teacher, youth leader, pastor, online ‘friend’ etc. No group of people is exempt from being abusers. All disclosures must be taken seriously.

It is important that the guidelines below are followed:

1) Reassure them they have done the right thing by telling someone.
2) Listen carefully but do not press for information, ‘cross-examine’, or ask leading questions, as any leading questions may prejudice follow-up investigation by Police or Local Authority safeguarding team.
3) Don’t promise confidentiality, rather sensitively explain that you may need to let someone else know - outline what you are going to do next.
4) If after talking to a child, young person or vulnerable adult about a sensitive issue, you feel concerned or upset, make sure you seek help from your Safe Families supervisor.
5) Write up what has been told as soon as possible using the Sensitive Information Report Form (at www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/manual) and wherever it is possible use the person's own words to describe the alleged abuse.
6) Forward the completed form to your Family Coach as soon as possible, either in an envelope marked “Confidential” or in an email similarly marked. The Family Coach will review the form and follow up its content with an Safe Families Family Support Manager.

7) Be aware that what has been recorded is highly confidential and should only be shared on a need to know basis.

8) The Safe Families Family Support Manager will need to decide what action to take in liaison with any other relevant persons. The category of abuse and the current level of risk to the child, young person or vulnerable adult will be taken into account when making this decision.

Acting on other concerns of abuse

If your concerns of abuse do not directly arise from a verbal disclosure from the victim the reporting process will be very similar. The Sensitive Information Form also allows for the description of bruising, injury, peculiar behaviour or the witnessing of troubling incidents.

11.1.7 Action flow chart for disclosures

1. Listen to the child/adult and do not promise total confidentiality.

2. Keep calm, do not ask leading questions, say encouraging things.

3. Allow the child/adult to finish in their own time, and let them know what you will do next.

4. If the child/adult is at immediate risk of significant harm jump to 7.

5. As soon as possible fill in a ‘Sensitive Information’ form to give to your Family Coach.

6. Contact Family Coach who may help directly or may include the Family Support Manager for further advice about appropriate action.

7. Take Action i.e. referral to Local Authority social workers or other appropriate course of action.

Note: A Family Support Manager is available to offer advice at any stage in the process.
11.1.8 Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults

The threshold at which an adult is classed as vulnerable can be rather subjective. Certain factors make the vulnerability more evident, such as a profound mental or physical disability, but other such as milder learning difficulties, or certain addictive behaviours may not always be recognised as placing the individual in a ‘vulnerable’ category. Indeed adults with such conditions may not themselves appreciate being referred to in this way.

Ultimately we want to ensure that all the parents/carers and carers that we interact with are safeguarded from harm, as well as their children. Therefore staff and volunteers should:

- be alert to the vulnerability of adults we support, they are in a stressful situation and such their ability to protect themselves from assault, abuse or exploitation may be reduced.
- never take advantage of, or exploit the vulnerable position of a parents/carer who is trusting us to support them / their child.
- discuss any concerns that a vulnerable adult has been or is being abused as soon as possible with your Family Coach or Family Support Manager.

The same safeguarding policy principles (a-k) apply to vulnerable adults as they do to children, but their application may need to be considered and adjusted on a case-by-case basis. For example we would appropriately attune our approach to:

- A young mum with a chronic mental health condition that we suspect is subject to domestic violence
- A 3 year old boy suspected of suffering emotional abuse from a close family member
- An 10 year old girl displaying overt an inappropriate sexualised behaviour
- Concern that an ageing grandparent is being physically harmed by a teenage grandchild they have guardianship of

Variables would be likely to include: methods of communication used with the individual concerned, the extent of consultation with parents/primary carers, and the degree to which the individual may be expected to resist or co-operate with any measures to be taken.

Safe Families Family Friends may in the course of their befriending a vulnerable adult hear about, or see signs of abuse, either historic or current. As an adult the individual concerned may or may not be ready to face up to the reality of this abuse, and to take steps to deal with it. This is often the case with domestic violence.

11.1.9 Further guidance relevant to our work with children and vulnerable adults
11.2 Safeguarding Policy: Headline Statements

a. **We will honour** the unique status of children, young people and vulnerable adults and will respect them as valued individuals. All our staff and volunteers will strive to safeguard the welfare and wellbeing of the children, young people and vulnerable adults that we work with.

b. **We will apply the highest standards** of safeguarding whether dealing with children and young people or vulnerable adults. We recognise that our approach may need to differ when dealing with children, youth or adults, but the same safeguarding principles will remain.

c. **We will assess** every referral we receive according to pre-defined risk thresholds, only accepting cases that we feel are safe for our staff and volunteers to become involved in. Once assigned volunteer involvement with families will be properly supervised and monitored until the case is closed.

d. **We will uphold integrity** in all relationships with children, young people and vulnerable adults and ensure that our staff and volunteers operate with transparency and avoid any form of exploitation real or perceived. The highest professional standards will be continually encouraged and maintained.

e. **We will take a serving approach**, aware that an unequal balance of power is often the pre-condition from which abuse begins. Staff and volunteers ought never to manipulate a relationship with a child, young person or vulnerable adult for personal advantage or gratification.

f. **We will take any allegation seriously** and we will collaborate fully with the statutory and voluntary agencies concerned with abuse of the vulnerable. We will adhere to systems of accountability and supervision and reserve the right to conduct investigations into the conduct of staff and volunteers.

g. **We will recruit safely** according to stringent recruitment processes, requiring all staff and volunteers to provide evidence that their behaviour has never caused harm to children, young people or vulnerable adults or put them at risk. At time of recruitment, and at specified intervals during their service, all staff and volunteers will be subject to background checks, including detailed character references and screening by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).

h. **We will train** staff and volunteers in principles of safeguarding and child protection, including how to recognise signs and symptoms of abuse, and what to do in event of becoming concerned about the potential abuse of a child or vulnerable adult.

i. **We will supervise** appropriately all our work with families and children in accordance with assessment of potential risks, offering opportunity for debrief, further training opportunities and supportive counselling if required.

j. **We will work in partnership** with other agencies, both statutory and voluntary, in order that the best possible provision of support is available within the community to ensure that every child is protected from harm and grows up in circumstances that enable them to have optimum life chances and to enter adulthood successfully.

k. **We will share information** with other agencies according to well-established principles best practice within the children and families sector.
11.3 Dealing with an allegation of abuse against Safe Families team members

11.3.1 Allegations: Who could make one, and for what reason?

Firstly, it is important for all involved with our charity to be vigilant as abusers may seek access to children by infiltrating organisations such as ours in both staff and volunteer roles. In this sense we must be willing to ‘think the unthinkable’ i.e. that one of our colleagues may have harmed a child or exploited a vulnerable adult.

Safe Families for Children’s procedures for dealing with allegations against staff and volunteers aim to strike a balance between the need to protect children and vulnerable adults from abuse, and the need to protect staff and volunteers from unfounded or malicious accusations. They apply to any allegation made against anyone with a role within Safe Families, whether as an employee or a volunteer.

Allegations may concern:

- Behaviour (intentional or otherwise) that has harmed, or may have harmed, a child.
- A criminal offence against, or related to, a child (including taking indecent images)
- Inappropriate behaviour towards a child or children in a way that indicates s/he is unsuitable to work with children.
- Blurring of the boundaries of a relationship to the extent that concerns of grooming / manipulation / coercion have arisen.
- Signs or patterns that suggest that organised abuse involving a number of perpetrators may be happening
- A current or historical issue, with the latter requiring the same approach as the former.

There are a number of sources from which a complaint or an allegation might arise including:

- A child
- A parent or other adult
- A member of the public
- A colleague (whistle-blowing)
- A disciplinary investigation

**NOTE:** As a charity working within the children’s sector Safe Families is also bound to comply with protocol set out by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) regarding allegations of abuse against staff and volunteers working with children and families in the community.

11.3.2 Process of enquiry into the allegation

**Whose responsibility is it to handle the allegation?**

Once an allegation has been received it will be the responsibility of the most senior manager involved in that Safe Families site to lead the internal enquiries. In the event that the most senior manager is the subject of the allegation then a member or the management committee will lead the enquiries. They will:

- Ensure that their follow up accords with best practice guidance as contained in ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children’ (2010 and 2013).
- Provide, in timely fashion, information about the allegation and the ongoing enquiry to Safe Families for Children’s Chief Executive, and the chair of the relevant regional Management Committee.
- Within 24 hours liaise with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) who is specifically appointed to offer advice and guidance to local charities in allegation cases, along with knowledge of due process such as when and how to involve the Police, and how to ensure all parties concerned are dealt with in a thorough and fair process.
- Liaise with the family of the alleged victim, using the most sensitive and appropriate means of communication to make them aware of the allegation, which may involve visiting them.
- Liaise with the accused, again using the most sensitive and appropriate means of communication to make them aware of the allegation. A face-to-face meeting is always recommended. Note that if the police are involved there may be limits on what information can be disclosed to the accused.
- Co-operate with statutory agencies who may, depending on the seriousness of the allegation, initiate their own investigation, criminal or civil.
- Take advice on the impact of the allegation upon other ways in which the individual concerned may be involved with children. For example, if the accused is a school teacher, sports coach or church children’s worker.
- Keep detailed and organised records using the secure notes facility on the Safe Families database.
- Ensure pastoral / emotional support is offered to those involved in the enquiry as it progresses, including both the victim and the accused.
- Bring the enquiry to a clear and timely conclusion. If at all possible enquiries should be expedited in days rather than weeks.

11.3.3 Suspension, and other considerations relating to employment

Following an allegation the regional Safe Families management committee, informed by the senior manager leading the enquiries, ought to consider the appropriateness of a suspension, or whether the allegation is so well-founded and serious to present grounds for immediate dismissal. Safe Families does not rule automatic suspensions in cases of allegations being received, as other options may be available, such as withdrawal from frontline duties and temporary placement in a supervised desk-based role.

- The decision whether or not to suspend or withdraw from normal duties ought to be taken within 24 hours of the allegation being received.
- As soon as practical the staff member / volunteer should be advised to seek legal advice or contact their professional association (i.e. trade union).

The regional Safe Families management committee (or a sub group of) will also discuss and agree the scope of the enquiry and the extent to which disciplinary procedures will be necessary. If a disciplinary hearing is required, it should be held within 5 working days of the conclusion of investigations into the allegation.

If post-allegation a person tenders his or her resignation this must not prevent the allegation being followed up in accordance with procedures. It is important that every effort is made to reach a conclusion in all cases of allegations bearing on the safety or welfare of children including any in which the person concerned refuses to co-operate with the process.

‘Compromise agreements’ by which a person agrees to resign, the employer agrees not to pursue disciplinary action, and both parties agree a form of words to be used in any future reference, must not be used in these cases. In any event, such an agreement will not prevent a thorough police investigation where appropriate.
**Note:** Whilst the LADO will advise Safe Families as an employer on appropriate courses of action neither they nor the police can demand that Safe Families suspend a member of staff or a volunteer. However, rejection of their advice would be very unusual.

### 11.3.4 Concluding the enquiry into an allegation

The senior manager leading the enquiry should **provide a factual report** to the regional management committee within 10 working days, copying the report to the Chief Executive. The report should include details of discussions with the LADO, and a summary of the guidance provided by the LADO. It should also include details of whether or not the police have become involved and if so whether or not police investigations have, or are likely to, lead to formal charges and a potential prosecution.

On receipt of the report of the enquiry, the regional management committee (or sub group of) should make a decision within 2 working days as to whether or not a disciplinary hearing is needed. If such a hearing is needed it should be held within 10 working days.

- If it is a volunteer that is subject to the allegation it is possible that they will disengage from the process and refuse to attend the hearing. If they do so then by consequence they will be barred from working with Safe Families again in the future.

**If the allegation is unsubstantiated** a meeting should be arranged with the subject of the allegation to convey this news to them, and to handle any outstanding questions that they may have. Depending on the nature of the allegation, and the robustness of their personality, they may still require support and may not immediately be ready to return to frontline duties. Depending on the individual’s circumstances, a phased return and/or the provision of a mentor to provide assistance and support in the short term may be appropriate.

The senior manager should also consider how the person’s contact with the person who made the allegation can best be managed if future contact is likely.

**If the allegation is substantiated** then any of the following courses of action may be available, depending on the nature and seriousness of the offence.

- If the team member has been found to have committed an abuse category offense resulting in police charges then they will be dismissed.
- If the team member has acted in a careless or reckless way that has brought the organisation into disrepute then, depending on seriousness, they may be dismissed, given a written warning, and/or retrained / reposted.
- If the enquiry revealed a serious lack of competence to safely fulfil the responsibilities of their role then a dismissal may be necessary on these grounds.

**Incorporating lessons learnt**

At the conclusion of a case in which an allegation is substantiated Safe Families will review the circumstances of the case to determine whether there are any improvements to be made to Safe Families procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future. This should include issues arising from any decision to suspend a member of staff, the duration of the suspension and whether or not suspension was justified.

**Action in respect of unfounded or malicious allegations**

If an allegation is determined to be unfounded or malicious, the employer should refer the matter to Children’s Social Care to determine whether the child concerned is in need of help, or may have been abused by someone else. In the event that an allegation is shown to have been deliberately invented or malicious, the police should be asked to consider whether any action might be appropriate against the person responsible.
11.3.5 Managing adverse publicity generated by the allegation

Every effort must be made to maintain confidentiality and guard against publicity whilst and allegation is being investigated or considered. Information should be restricted to those who have a need to know and all should be done to protect and safeguard the child.

If the Police do find sufficient evidence to make an arrest and a criminal charge then it is very likely that the matter will enter the public domain at that point. In this eventuality Safe Families HQ should be consulted regarding the drafting of a formal press release.
11.3.6 Handling allegations against team members: Flow chart

**ACTION BY SENIOR MANAGER & LA DESIGNATED OFFICER**

- Allegations/concerns identified in organisation to be reported to Designated Senior Manager
- Allegation/concern made direct to police or children’s social care

**Consultation between LADO and Designated Senior Manager**

- Allegation is demonstrably false
- Allegation is a possible disciplinary matter

- Child suffering or at risk of suffering Significant Harm
- No significant harm but allegation might constitute criminal offence

**Children’s social care and/or police Investigation**

- After completion (earlier if agreed with children’s social care and police)

**Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)**

- to be informed if alleged behaviour has or may have harmed a child; is a possible criminal offence; or indicates unsuitability to work with children

- No further action, but refer to: children’s social care as ‘child in need’
  - Police if allegation deliberately invented

- LADO refers to children’s social care for strategy discussion
- LADO refers to police for initial evaluation

**Share information**

- Decide action
  - Consider suspension

- Consider:
  - No further action
  - Professional advice
  - Disciplinary process
11.4 Guidance for making Case Notes (inc. volunteer journaling)

There are two parts to the guidance for making case notes:

1. Best practice for the actual content of what to put in a case note or journal notes.
2. Technically how to use the database system to create a case note or journal notes.

11.4.1 Best practice for creating case notes and journal entries

In order to ensure that the highest standards of safeguarding are adhered to Safe Families has a system for recording case notes about the families we are helping. All Family Support Managers and Family Coaches are expected to use this facility on a regular basis to record interactions, incidents and information that comes to light in their course of their work.

The case notes facility is also made available to volunteers in Host Family and Family Friend roles for the purpose of journaling their involvement with an adult and/or child. Host Families in particular are expected to make a brief daily journal note during a hosting, even if the day has been pretty uneventful, for continuity purposes.

- Creating a case note is neither technically difficult nor intellectually demanding!

Journal notes created by volunteers are retained on a timeline alongside case notes left by the Family Support Manager and Family coach, and together they build up a picture over time of the impact the support is having.

- Case notes and journal notes are essentially the same thing, the difference in terminology is for two reasons:
  - Volunteers have been intimidated in the past by the phrase ‘case notes’ as they perceive it to be something that they need special training for
  - The case notes created by Family Support Managers and Family Coaches are expected to contain a higher standard of both objectivity and opinion

In general notes should:

- be clear, honest, non-judgmental, non-emotive, avoiding jargon and obscure abbreviations
- be in line with the code of conduct, demonstrating respect for all others

Notes should include:

- Basic narrative i.e. what happened, when; what information was received, from whom etc.
- Relevant, accurate and up to date facts, as distinct from opinion (see below)
- Personal perspective and opinions, always labelled as such, with justification e.g. when noting a ‘gut feeling’ regarding a potentially emerging risk
- Additional information gained. If this is not firsthand then the source of the information must be noted

Family Support Managers should:

- Keep notes of information received at the point of referral
- Keep notes of further enquiries into the situation of the family prior to the formal acceptance of the case
- Record interactions between themselves and other agencies involved with the family
- Any decisions that they have made and professional opinions that they have formed
Family Coaches should:
- Keep notes for all visits made to placing parents/carers, inc. conversations with children
- Interactions with Host Families or Family Friends, such as meetings or phonecalls, noting any significant details or decisions
- Any training issues or support needs relating to the Host Family or Family Friend
- Note any important milestones reached in the course of the support being given, such as a goal or outcome being achieved
- Anything said which makes you question aspects of a person’s wellbeing or safety.

Notes from phone calls:
It is important for Family Support Manager and Family Coaches to make notes during/following phonecalls between themselves and the supported family, especially at critical stages of the support such as the beginning, the end, and at various intermediary review points.
- Day and time and who called who.
- Purpose of call.
- Any decision made or action agreed.

Host Families should:
Create daily journal notes during a child’s stay, summarising in just a few sentences:
- How the child seemed e.g. happy, sad, relaxed, anxious.
- Any activities of note e.g. trips out, people met.
- Outline any interesting topics of conversation
- Any contact with the child’s family by the child or by you as host.
- Positive aspects of the stay.
- Any challenges in behaviour and how they were handled.
- Information relating to any identified aim in supporting the child.
- Any accidents or incidents of concern.

Family Friends should:
Create daily a journal note following each meeting with the parent that they are supporting, summarising in just a few sentences:
- When and where the meeting took place
- Outline interesting topics of conversation
- Any significant milestones achieved
- Any incidents of concern

Keep in mind that:
- A detail that seems minor to you may be significant within the wider picture.
- More detail will be required if you are making note of an incident that has been a cause of friction between a member of Safe Families and a member of a supported family – either and adult or a child,
- Minor accidents that have occurred can be recorded using a case note but more significant issues, such as an accident that required taking the child to A&E ought to be noted but then followed up in more detail using an Safe Families Accident Report form.
- The recording of case notes should not be used to replace colleagues having direct conversations about important aspects of support being provided
11.4.2 Who has access to the notes and what will they be used for?

The case notes are treated as highly sensitive information and for this reason are only accessible by a very limited number of people.

- Family Support Managers: may see all notes within their region of responsibility
- Family Coaches: may see all notes for cases that they are supervising
- Host Families and Family Friends: only see notes that they themselves have created

The notes are principally used by the Family Support Managers in their strategic case management. It is very important for them to be able to look at specific assignments periodically to see how they are progressing. In this way they can make decisions about allocating further resources, or begin to move a case towards closure.

The notes are also very important to refer back to if questions are raised about any aspect of Safe Families for Children’s support at a later stage. Recent court cases have shown that allegations can be made years later, when most people’s memories will have long faded regarding specific aspects of cases.

11.4.3 Accessing the Safe Families database to record your notes

All staff and volunteers are issued with a unique login for the Safe Families database. The login grants visibility permissions according to the seniority of the role held by the user.

The Safe Families database can be accessed on any computer via a web browser.

The Database URL is: http://secure.safefamiliesforchildren.com/crm/login.php

There is also a handy link to the database on the Safe Families homepage, www.safefamiliesforchildren.com (top right hand corner of the screen)

A step-by-step guide to logging in and creating a note can be found within the Database User Guide.
11.5 Guidance for Discipline, Restraint and Touch

11.5.1 Healthy discipline: principles and practice

Volunteers looking after someone else’s child ought to abide by the following principles:

- Remember: whilst the child may not be used to boundaries and consistency in discipline it is recognised boundaries and rules are positive for child development and that consistency is emotionally reassuring and affirming for them.
- Honour the parents/carers, respecting their principles and if possible accommodating their preferences. This is very important when caring for a child from a different ethnic, cultural or religious background.
- Talk to the parents/carers if possible to understand home routines and boundaries and to avoid too much disconnect between the two home environments.
- Be clear about your ‘house rules’, but do reflect before the child comes to stay on whether any of these need to be adapted or relaxed during the stay.
- Act in accordance with your own values, making judgments you believe are healthy and safe for the child. Your integrity is positive for the child.
- Try to recognise when you are upset or stressed about something else that may be affecting your judgment.
- Communicate clearly and consistently regarding consequences of actions.
- Discipline should be specific and proportionate.
- Err on the side of grace and ensure that plenty of praise is given.
- Give a child a chance to learn from their mistakes.

Practical pointers for healthy discipline

- Seek to de-escalate first, then when they calm down you can talk about their behaviour.
- Techniques such as ‘yellow cards’, ‘time-outs’ and removing certain privileges are more healthy and constructive discipline options.
- Use distraction tactics and the encouragement of good behaviour to try to avoid the need for discipline.
- **Physical chastisement is not allowed**
  i.e. smacking of any kind is inappropriate by any Safe Families volunteer with a child in their care.
  This includes not smacking your own child when an Safe Families child is staying with you because of possible emotional effects on the hosted child.
- The child may be temporarily restrained by a person physically holding them only if a danger to themselves or others or a significant threat to property (see next section).
- Never make negative remarks about the child’s family nor about the child themselves.
- Never withdraw essential elements such as food and rest as punishment.
- Never limit contact for the child with their family as discipline.
- Model the behaviour you expect from them!
- Don’t delegate discipline to others.
11.5.2 Restraining a child: Policy and procedure

Most of the children that Safe Families volunteers care for are expected to respond well to loving and consistent discipline.

There may however be times when a child with emotional and behavioural problems becomes physically dangerous, and this is when restraint i.e. physically holding a child, may be required.

Our policy on restraint is that it must only be used:

- as a last resort and when all other courses of de-escalation have been exhausted.
- when it is necessary to avert an immediate or potential danger of:
  - the child injuring themselves
  - another person being injured
  - serious damage to property

Through proper training, risk management and good communication we hope to:

- minimise both the use and misuse of restraint
  and therefore:
  - minimise the risk of actions being misinterpreted
  - minimise actions being offensive or harmful to a child

Finally, restraint should never be used as a way of ensuring compliance i.e. to make a child do as they have been asked; or because a volunteer has begun to lose control of their own temper.

Reporting and Learning

Following any occasion when physical restraint has been used by a volunteer,

- The incident should be recorded by the volunteer using the notes facility within the Safe Families database.
- The Family Coach should be informed, and allowed to query the circumstances and appropriateness of the actions taken.
- The Family Coach will then advise of how and when the incident should be communicated to the child’s parent/carer.
- The Family Coach will want to debrief around the nature of the challenging situation that led to difficulty in discipline and the use of restraint. They will also make a note on the Safe Families database by way of ensuring accountability should there be a complaint raised later.
- If required the volunteer will be offered further training on how to manage challenging behaviour.
- Those caring for children are advised to talk to their Family Coach about any situation that was ‘on the edge’ of requiring restraint, so that guidance can be sought to avoid further escalation of a child’s behaviour in the future.
11.5.3 The use of touch to affirm or comfort a child

Touch is a necessary part of caring for children and is important for their emotional wellbeing and development.

However:

- Children involved in Safe Families may have received inappropriate or confusing touch by adults and therefore they may be more susceptible to misunderstanding your affection.
- Parents being supported by Safe Families may also have distorted levels of concern about the intentions of other adults around their child.

Therefore:

- When affectionately touching a child, it is generally appropriate to touch the hand, shoulder, top of the head or upper back. It is not appropriate to touch a child on any areas that would be normally covered by a bathing suit.
- A child who is upset, crying etc. may be given a comforting hug to help them calm down and regain composure.
- Be careful to avoid any element of touching sensitive or private areas of the body.
- Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the child. For example, it is generally appropriate for a four-year-old to sit on an adult carer's knee, but it is not appropriate for a teenager.
- Touching should be initiated by the child or. It should be a response to the child’s need for comfort, encouragement, or affection. It should not be based upon the adult’s emotional need.
- Touching should not give even a hint of wrongdoing. Safe Families staff and volunteers must foster trust at all times and should be above reproach.
- If a child is being ‘overly tactile’ in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable or you sense could be misunderstood think about ways to distract them or engage them in a non-physical activity.
- A child’s preference not to be touched should be respected. Do not force affection upon a reluctant child.
11.6 Guidance for Intimate Care

In course of caring for children, especially those that are still babies/infants, or those with a degree of disability/developmental delay, it may be necessary to provide intimate hygiene care to the child, such as bathing, toileting, changing nappies, administering creams etc.

In such instances volunteers should adhere to the following guidelines.

- Treat children with dignity and respect and ensure privacy appropriate to age and situation.
- It is neither expected nor appropriate for Safe Families for Children volunteers to provide intimate care to vulnerable adults.
- Ask the parent before the Hosting about the degree to which the child is able to take care of his or her own washing, toileting etc.
- The issue of privacy is an important one and everyone has a right to it. Some aspects of intimate care, of necessity, are carried out by a lone adult. Having an adult working alone does increase the opportunity for possible abuse, but this has to be balanced by the loss of privacy and lack of trust implied if two people have to be present at all times.
- As far as possible, involve the child in their own intimate care.
- Always avoid doing things on the child’s behalf if they are able to do it alone or for themselves. If they are able to help, encourage them to do so. If the child is dependent on you for help, talk to them about what you are doing and offer choices where this is possible.
- Be aware and responsive to the child’s reactions.
- Always check what you are doing by involving the child. Ask questions such as ‘Can you wash there?’, ‘How do you normally do that’, ‘Is it all right to do it like this?’
- If the child expresses dislike, or shows concern at a certain person carrying out their intimate care, try and find out why and share this with your Family Coach.
- If you are out of practice in changing nappies make sure that you ‘refresh your memory’ before attempting, you may need to have a trial run on a teddy bear. Better to practice first than have a smelly accident on your hands!
- You will not be expected to deal with complicated intimate medical care procedures of the sort carried out by nursing or medical staff.

Reporting incidents

- If whilst attending to the intimate care of a child you accidentally hurt them, or notice that they are sore or tender in the genital area, report this at once following standard Safeguarding protocol.
- If the child misunderstands or misrepresents something or has an emotional reaction without apparent cause, report it immediately by speaking to your Family Coach or Family Support Manager. Make a report of the incident on the Safe Families database as soon as possible.
- The way we respond to the handling of intimate care procedures will convey a message to the child i.e. we convey to them value of their bodies. Children who are confident and feel their bodies belong to them are less vulnerable to sexual abuse.
- The attitude of an adult when performing intimate care is important. Bearing in mind the person’s age and understanding care should be enjoyable, relaxing and fun.
- A child’s right to object or say no must always be fully respected.
11.7 Guidance for transportation of children/parents

As a normal part of fulfilling their duties we expect that Host Families will use their own vehicles to transport children during a child’s stay with them. Similarly Family Friends may provide transport in their own vehicle to parents and children that they are assisting.

Additionally it is recognised that transporting children/parents may involve using public transport such as bus or train, or using a private hire minicab. In these instances there is the general expectation that the transport provider will be bona fide and licensed accordingly.

Through this policy we aim to clarify the responsibilities involved in providing transporting and to minimise any risk of harm.

Regarding vehicle and drivers

Any vehicle you use to transport children/adults that you are helping must be:

- Fully insured. You may wish to check with your own insurance company whether transporting other people’s children is currently covered. It will be important to let them know that you are NOT a foster carer and that you are providing transport by voluntary agreement as you would for your own friends and family and not for any kind of hire or reward.
- Roadworthy and properly taxed with a valid MOT.
- Fitted with the appropriate car seats, according to their age, weight or height, and that seat belts are worn according to legal requirements.

The driver must:

- Have a valid driving licence.
- Ensure that at the time of driving, they are fit to drive i.e. not impaired by alcohol or medication

Further considerations:

- Volunteers must exercise good judgment regarding the safety of transportation methods.
- No smoking is allowed in a vehicle when a Safe Families child/parent is present.
- No Safe Families child may travel in a vehicle unless accompanied by the member of staff / volunteer who has accepted the duty of care for them.
- This policy applies if a friend/neighbour is assisting with the transportation in their car.

Planning ahead

- The Family Coach / Family Support Manager should plan ahead and make appropriate arrangements for transporting children prior to a period of support commencing. Examples of situations in which a transport solution may need to be planned in advance would be
  a) To facilitate a child’s contact with their parents/carers
  b) To enable ongoing school attendance

- If additional travel arrangements arise that would not normally be expected by the parents/carers, then further consideration should be given to assessing any risks. For example, if a longer or more complex journey is planned, or if a vehicle or driver involved in the transport plan becomes unavailable.
11.8 Policy on Smoking

Our policy on smoking is to promote the health of children and families Safe Families supports, whilst showing respect for any volunteers who smoke.

The following principles apply:

- We do not believe that smoking in the presence of a child sets a good example. Therefore we ask staff and volunteers to refrain from doing so.
- Volunteers who smoke can be approved as Host Families if they always smoke outside the home throughout the duration of a child’s stay.
- Volunteers caring for a child should avoid taking them into close proximity of others who are smoking, whether inside or outside.
- Host families with a smoker must indicate that they smoke on their Host Family Profile.
- Family friends should not smoke during the times of their involvement with parents/carers unless that person is also smoking and agrees to the Family Friend also smoking.
  - The Family Friend should do this only if there are no children present.
11.9  Guidance on sports and leisure activities

11.9.1  General principles

This policy offers advice and guidance to Safe Families volunteers who will have care of other people’s children, regarding decisions they may take to engage in various sport and leisure activities that may carry increased risk.

- Our stance is that if it is reasonably likely that the child’s parents/carers would be shocked, upset or anxious to know that their child had been involved in a certain activity, then it is respectful to talk to them about the planned activity beforehand.
- Safe Families volunteers must think very carefully about the safety of activities they do with Safe Families children and the age appropriateness of each activity. It is important for them to give consideration to this in the light of the activity being unfamiliar to the child and to the personality of the child being not well known to the volunteer.
- Clearly the age and development of a child determines which activities would be considered risky i.e. beyond normal expectations.

11.9.2  Indicative examples of ‘normal’ vs ‘risky’ activities

- Swimming in a local indoor pool is a ‘normal’ activity. However, volunteers must not choose their level of supervision based on the child’s statement of how well they can swim. Either the guidance of the parent/carer should be followed or the volunteer must observe for themselves and ideally both.
- Swimming in fresh water is not a ‘normal’ activity and carries much more risk.
- Fairground rides vary. Visiting large theme parks should be discussed with parents/carers. A sensible judgment should be made regarding attendance at local fairs.
- Climbing, or other activities involving a harness for safety, may be seen as outside the normal expectations of parents/carers and therefore should involve consultation.
- ‘Normal’ sports such as football are not classed as risky but do actually carry a reasonably high risk of injury (such as falls, twisted ankles etc) and therefore ought to be supervised

The following ‘risky activities’ are not covered by Safe Families for Children’s Public Liability insurance:

Adventure activities or outward bound courses not undertaken at activity centres registered with and licensed by the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority

(ii) other than when undertaken at activity centres registered with and licensed by the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority,

(a) abseiling, rappelling

(b) assault courses

(c) dirt, vert, park, street, flatland and BMX freestyle disciplines of BMX cycling; cross country, trail riding, all mountain, downhill, freeride, slopestyle dirt jumping and trials disciplines of mountain biking

(d) mountaineering, cliff or rock climbing without the use of ropes

(e) winter sports (other than curling or skating)

(iii) barfly jumping, parkour, ”street running”, “B.A.S.E.” jumping, pole climbing, elastic rope
sports or activities

(iv) contact sports other than association football as an amateur

(v) driving of a motor vehicle by anyone not licensed to drive such a vehicle on a public road (irrespective of whether or not the vehicle is being driven on a public road)

(vi) hang gliding, flying (other than as a commercial fare-paying passenger)

(vii) horse-riding (including, but not limited to, pony trekking and equestrian sports) or other animal rides (other than when undertaken at an accredited British Horse Society stable)

(viii) jet-skiing, water-skiing, sub-aqua diving

(ix) martial arts (other than tai chi)

(x) motor sports including motorcycles and quad bikes

(xi) paintballing

(xii) raft racing, white water rafting

(xiii) road rallies, air displays

(xiv) use of fireworks, firework displays or bonfires (other than those bonfires and firework displays organised in accordance with HSG124 ‘Giving Your own firework display; How to run and fire it safely’ using professional firework display organisers who are members of the British Pyrotechnists Association with less than 500 attendees)

(xv) shooting (other than clay-pigeon shooting).
11.10 Guidance on Private Fostering

What is Private Fostering?

Private fostering is a private arrangement made between a child’s parents and someone who is not a close relative (i.e. aunt, uncle, brother, sister or grandparent) through which a child starts to live with the new carer for 28 days or more.

In England, the following situation applies:

- The Local Authority has a duty to assess any situation in which a child aged 0-16 years (0-18 for children with a disability) stays with someone who is not a close relative for 28 days or more.
- As Host Families do not qualify as close relatives Safe Families has a duty to tell the Local Authority of a hosting that extends beyond 28 days as soon as possible.
- The purpose of their assessment is to check that the arrangement that has been made, or that is planned, is good and safe for the child.
- Local Authorities tend to be concerned about ‘private fostering’ because it is not regulated like Foster Care and there have been a number of major abuse cases that have been rooted in a private fostering arrangement.
- Safe Families in the UK has never facilitated a hosting for more than 28 days, but if this became the case we expect that the Local Authority would wish to visit the child at the Host Family home, and usually to see the child on their own, once every six weeks for the first year of a stay (and every twelve weeks thereafter).

Those supervising Safe Families hostings, i.e. Family Coach and Family Support Manager, must be alert to the possibility of a stay lasting over 28 days and therefore becoming ‘private fostering’. In such a scenario, it is the responsibility of the Family Support Manager to alert the Local Authority children’s social care team as soon as possible.

As much of the following information as is known should be given to the Local Authority with regard to the hosting that has become a private fostering arrangement:

Details of the child
- The name, sex, date and place of birth, religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background of the child.

Carer (ie Host Family) Details
- Name and current address of the proposed or current private foster carer and addresses within the previous five years.
- The Local Authority are also likely to request information about the history and suitability of the Host Family with respect to criminal convictions etc.

Parental Details
- Name and current address of the parents of the child and of any other person who has parental responsibility for the child and (if different) of any person from whom the child is to be, or was, received.

Details of the proposed stay
- Date on which the private fostering arrangement in intended to start, or did start.
- Intended duration of the private fostering arrangement.
**11.11 Policy on Communication Methods**

This policy advises staff and volunteers on choosing forms of communication wisely, particularly with reference to communicating with parents receiving our help.

**11.11.1 Safe Families Communication Principles**

- **Respect**
  - Everything we say or write should be respectful of others, particularly the parents, carers and children we support.
  - Parents/carers should be the first to hear information regarding their children (except in some circumstances of child protection).

- **Sensitivity**
  - We must be aware of the potential for misunderstanding and upset
  - In new relationships, we do not know if there are any risks associated with sharing personal information and therefore, we need to act protectively in case there are risks, whilst not acting judgmentally assuming there are risks.

- **Confidentiality**
  - The principle of respecting confidentiality will be highly regarded in our organisation
  - Point to data and info sharing policy

**11.11.2 Use of Telephone**

- We have found that many families we work with will not answer the phone to a withheld number
- Many of the families we work with do not have a land line and often run out of mobile phone credit – so you may need to call them rather than waiting for them to call you.

**11.11.3 Use of Text Messaging**

- Texts are most appropriate to clarify practical arrangements, for example when and where you are meeting someone.
- Do not use texts to share emotions or in depth opinions on a subject.
- Be careful when using ‘texting language’, that the tone of texts can be misunderstood.
- Even the absence of a reply can cause upset, so be clear to ‘end’ conversations well.
- Make sure you are very clear with parents/carers if you are using texts to communicate about the child or if the child is using your phone to text e.g. to say ‘goodnight’. Everyone needs to know whether the absence of a text is a reason to worry.

**11.11.4 Use of Email**

- Please discuss with the Family Coach any planned email use with parents/carers. On occasion, they may request up to date communication this way or even the child may wish to write a message. However, it would not be a good method of communicating any difficulties or concerns.
- The advantage of using email is that a precise record of the communication can be retained by the user and sender.
11.12 Internet and Social Media / Social Networks Policy

11.12.1 Intro to social media policy

This Policy aims to:

- outline the responsibilities staff and volunteers using the internet in general and access social networking websites in particular.
- ensure that staff and volunteers are aware that they can be putting themselves, children and vulnerable adults at risk when communicating via social networking.
- ensure that all representatives of Safe Families establish safe and professional online behaviour.

There are many forms of social media for which this policy is relevant. Facebook and Twitter are two of the most widely used in the UK.

Safe Families is particularly concerned to prevent:

- The sharing of inappropriate photographs and video
- The posting of inappropriate comments

Official Safe Families web presence

Safe Families has a number of official locations on the web:

- www.safefamiliesforchildren.com
- www.facebook.com/SafeFamiliesUK
- www.twitter.com/safefamiliesuk

New Safe Families sites being launched around the UK are allowed to create their own Facebook and Twitter accounts, once Safe Families national office has been assured that they will be managed in accordance with this policy.

Safe Families reserves the right to remove, block or delete any content which is harmful or inappropriate.

The pro's and con's of social media

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<tr>
<th>Positives</th>
<th>Negatives</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social media can be used to promote awareness of positive opportunities and initiatives such as Safe Families.</td>
<td>It can be used to find out detailed information about others with the intent to use this information negatively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media can feel a non-threatening way for people to feel connected in relationships and networks.</td>
<td>It is very easy for people to share information without thinking through the consequences for them or for others. For example, making information public before those who should know first have been informed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media can be used to pass on encouraging comments and thoughts.</td>
<td>It can easily become a forum for the expression of emotions such as frustration and disappointment, or of opinions that can be challenging, upsetting or negative.</td>
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11.12.2 Online requirements for staff and volunteers

Safe Families requires that:
- You do not at any time become Facebook friends (or other equivalent) with any child or young person under 18 in a family who has been referred to Safe Families.
- You do not post any photos or videos of any child who is part of a family referred to Safe Families on any website / social media site.
- You do not post information about a child or family you are supporting in a way that means they could be identified by others.
- You do not make any comments on social media sites about private Safe Families meetings such as volunteer support groups.
- You never send abusive, defamatory or distasteful messages or post any offensive photographs, videos or the like.
- You ensure that any comments you post on these websites could not constitute bullying, harassment or discrimination;
- If you refer to Safe Families in social media, you do so only in relation to information that is publically available and that you do so constructively and in accordance with the code of conduct.

Safe Families recommends that:
- Err on the side of caution when receiving a ‘friend request’ from an adult who is receiving support from Safe Families. If you have any concerns do not accept.
- If it is natural for you to use social media sites for communication with families you are supporting, that you do so with direct private messaging only.

11.12.3 Policy regarding staff online and social media conduct

Safe Families respects a member of staffs’ right to a private life. However, Safe Families must also ensure that the confidentiality of service users and its reputation are protected. Furthermore, Safe Families must ensure that staff safely use the internet.

As well as being vigilant whilst using the internet at work it is important that staff safeguard the use of their own computers, laptops etc. at home and never engage in any Internet activity that might be misinterpreted as being detrimental to their work with children and young people.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Do</th>
<th>Don’t</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set your profiles to private, so that you control who may see detailed information</td>
<td>Conduct yourself in a way that is or could be seen as bringing Safe Families into disrepute</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appropriately use social networking sites for Safe Families related activities such as communication other supporters.</td>
<td>Allow your interaction on websites to damage working relationships between members of staff and clients of Safe Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report the potentially inappropriate use of social media / social networking to your line manager.</td>
<td>Allow their interaction with children, young people or vulnerable adults to be construed as unprofessional.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use social media for personal and recreational purposes outside working hours, accepting that working hours Safe Families reserves the right to restrict access</td>
<td>Contravene the Data Protection Act or Safe Families Confidentiality policy by posting personal information about Safe Families, its staff or volunteers, children, young people or vulnerable adults or any third party.</td>
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11.13 Whistle-blowing policy

11.13.1 What is whistle-blowing?
The Public Interest Disclosure Act of 1998 amended the Employment Rights Act 1996 to give legal protection to workers against being dismissed or penalised as a result of disclosing certain legitimate concerns. This is commonly known as ‘whistle-blowing’.

Safe Families recognises the importance of having a mechanism for whistle-blowing to ensure that no worker is disadvantaged through raising legitimate concerns.

Safe Families staff and volunteers must acknowledge their individual responsibility to bring matters of concern to the attention of senior managers or the leadership team. Although this can be difficult it is particularly important where the welfare of children and vulnerable adults may be at risk.

Staff and volunteers may be the first to recognise that something is wrong, but may not feel able to express their concerns out of a feeling that this would be disloyal to colleagues or they may fear harassment or victimisation. These feelings, however natural, must never result in anyone continuing to be unnecessarily at risk.

If a member of staff or a volunteer is not sure whether to raise a concern, he or she should discuss the issue with his or her line manager or the designated senior manager/trustee if he or she feels comfortable doing so.

11.13.2 General responsibilities

i. Staff and volunteers must acknowledge their individual responsibility to bring matters of concern to the attention of senior management and/or relevant agencies. Although this can be difficult, this is particularly important where the welfare of young people or vulnerable adults may be at risk.

ii. Even where staff and volunteers do not feel able to express their concerns out of a feeling that this would be disloyal to colleagues or fear harassment or victimisation, this must never result in a child, young person or vulnerable adult continuing to be unnecessarily at risk and concerns should always be reported.

11.13.3 Reasons for whistleblowing, and challenges in coming forward

Each individual involved in Safe Families has responsibility for raising concerns about unacceptable practice or behaviour for the following reasons:

i. to prevent the problem worsening or widening
ii. to protect or reduce risks to others; and
iii. to prevent themselves from becoming implicated.

Staff and volunteers may experience the following concerns when contemplating whistleblowing, which will need to be overcome:

i. starting a chain of events which spirals
ii. disrupting the work or project
iii. fear of getting it wrong
iv. fear of repercussions or damaging careers; or
v. fear of not being believed.
11.13.4 How to raise a concern

i. You should voice your concerns, suspicions or uneasiness as soon as you feel you can. The earlier a concern is expressed the easier and sooner action can be taken.

ii. Try to pinpoint exactly what practice is concerning you and why.

iii. Approach your immediate manager or go directly to the Safeguarding Officer.

iv. If your concern is about your immediate manager or a Safeguarding Officer at Safe Families then you are within your rights to go to the Duty social work team at the relevant Local Authority.

v. Make sure you get a satisfactory response - don’t let matters rest

vi. Ideally you should put your concerns in writing, outlining the background and history, giving names, dates and places where you can.

vii. A member of staff is not expected to prove the truth of an allegation, but you will need to demonstrate sufficient grounds for the concern.

11.13.5 What happens next

• You should be given information on the nature and progress of any enquiries

• Your employer has a responsibility to protect you from harassment or victimisation

• No action will be taken against you if the concern proves to be unfounded and was raised in good faith.

• Malicious allegations may be considered as a disciplinary offence

11.13.6 Self-reporting

There may be occasions where a member of staff has a personal difficulty, perhaps a physical or mental health problem, which they know to be impinging on their professional competence. Staff have a responsibility to discuss such a situation with their line manager so professional and personal support can be offered to the member of staff concerned. Whilst such reporting will remain confidential in most instances, this cannot be guaranteed where personal difficulties raise concerns about the welfare or safety of children, young people or vulnerable adults.
11.14 Policy on dealing with complaints

Safe Families wishes to support children and their parents/carers in the best possible way. Therefore, if the parents/carers feel let down in some way, it is respectful to encourage them to express this disappointment and if necessary to make a complaint.

There may also be occasions when volunteers are not happy about some aspect of how they have been treated, and wish to give feedback or formally make a complaint.

In these instances the following guidance ought to be followed:

- The individual wishing to give feedback / make a complaint should be given a Feedback & Complaints Form (available at www.safefamiliesforchildren.com/maunal)
- A senior manager will handle the complaint, treating it with sensitivity and as a priority. We will take seriously all comments and complaints, and use them to inform developments and changes to be made.
- Whilst complaints can feel negative, they should also be viewed positively as an opportunity for people to express their view, any difficulties or upset they have been caused, and as an opportunity to promote positive change.

Process of responding to complaints

- The individual making the complaint should be treated with respect at all times and spoken to in a polite manner, even if they are upset, angry or unreasonable
- If the individual making the complaint is present in person (rather than phoning in with a complaint for example) and is becoming physically aggressive then the Safe Families team member handling the complaint may call for assistance / call the police.
- The staff member dealing with the complaint should ensure that the person making the complaint or comment understands the process and should offer to access help in completing the form if necessary.
- If the complainer does not want to submit a written complaint but wishes to make a verbal complaint then the member of staff should listen and complete the form for them.
- The complaint will then be handed to a senior manager who will identify what action they wish to be taken.

If the issue is not resolved at this stage, then the manager will need to direct the complaint to the Programme Director, or potentially to the regional management committee if the complaint involves the Programme Director.

Note: The Complaints Policy is not the right way to handle a safeguarding allegation against a member of staff or volunteer (see 11.3) or a whistle-blowing matter (see 11.12)
Chapter 12  Policy and Guidance on Information and Data Management

12.1  Our approach to safely storing and sharing data

12.1.1  Why Information and Data Management matters

As an organisation with hundreds and soon thousands of volunteers, dealing with hundreds and soon thousands of families, we accumulate a tremendous amount of personal data. Some of the data is straightforward and of the variety held by many organisations, such as names, addresses and contact telephone numbers. Other data is of a more sensitive nature, such as the case notes we make in the course of our work with families, or the information we gather from volunteers during their suitability assessment.

Much of this information is simply used by our team to enable us to communicate effectively with the families we are helping and with the volunteers engaged in that support. However, given the nature of our work with families in crisis, and particularly because we often need to work in partnership with other agencies to protect the safety of children and vulnerable adults, we may need to share information with third parties. This section gives guidance regarding the various circumstances when this may be necessary, and how we can handle personal data both safely and legally.

12.1.2  Information and Data Management Policy Statement

Safe Families has a legal liability to ensure that personal data is processed and stored in accordance with data protection legislation and principles.

Safe Families will treat all personal data as confidential and will not obtain, record, hold or use it other than for legitimate purposes. Safe Families will take steps to ensure such information is accurate, up to date and not kept for longer than is necessary. Measures will also be taken to guard against unauthorised or unlawful processing and accidental loss or destruction or damage to the data.

12.2  What is Data Protection?

12.2.1  Introduction to the Data Protection Act

The Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) gives rights to individuals about whom information is obtained or processed. The DPA outlines legal obligations on the way in which Safe Families obtains, records and processes personal information about individuals, whether this is done manually or electronically.

The DPA is based around eight principles of ‘good information handling’. These give people specific rights in relation to their personal information and place certain obligations on those organisations responsible for processing it.

An overview of the main provisions of the DPA can be found in the Information Commissioners Office’s Guide to Data Protection.
12.2.2 General principles & DPA rights

Safe Families are voluntarily registered with the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO), which is also known as being a ‘Registered Data User’. The ICO are the UK’s independent organisation responsible for upholding information rights and data privacy. Safe Families uses the principles and guidance provided by the ICO in administering DPA policies when processing data.

The Safe Families data controller is Mark Buchanan and he carries organisational responsibility for ensuring we remain compliant with the Data Protection Act 1998.

All information relating to current and former staff, workers, volunteers and service users, will be:

- Obtained fairly
- Held for specific purposes and used only for those purposes
- Relevant, accurate and up to date
- Corrected if shown to be inaccurate
- Kept no longer than necessary
- Protected against loss or disclosure
- Treated as confidential at all times
- Not revealed to third parties without the authority of the person to whom it refers, with the following exceptions:
  - to comply with a statutory requirement or a court order
  - where there is a clear health and safety risk
  - evidence of fraud.

Each data subject has the following rights under the DPA:

- The right of access to personal data relating to him/her
- The right to prevent his/her personal data being processed in certain circumstances
- Rights in relation to automated decision-taking
- The right to have inaccurate personal data corrected or erased
- Compensation for damage caused by contravention of the DPA.

Full DPA rights and responsibilities can be found in the Data Protection Act 1998.

The DPA and Safeguarding

As a Registered Data User, Safe Families are committed to abiding by the principles of the DPA. Our processes and data policies have been designed to uphold these principles and protect staff, volunteer and family data in accordance with Safe Families values and DPA guidelines. However, if the preservation of DPA guidelines appears to be contributing to a situation where a child is at risk of harm through information not being shared we will always act in accordance with our conscience to protect the child as our highest priority.

Notice of processing

Safe Families only processes information applicable to the administration of its aims and objectives. By nature, this involves relational work, both in the assessment of volunteers for a specified role and in getting alongside those referred. In the assessment of volunteers and in the taking of referral details, care has been taken to use forms enabling an appropriate level of information to be collected and not to gain irrelevant personal information. If wider information is offered, the recipient of the information must decide if it is relevant for recording, however, data must always be treated according to principles of confidentiality.
12.3 Consent and Information Sharing

12.3.1 Principles

i. Consent should be given by the parent/carer, and by the child if appropriate, for the sharing of information. The exception to this is where to do so would put that child, young person or others at increased risk of harm or an adult at risk of harm, or if it would undermine the prevention, detection or prosecution of a crime, including where seeking consent might lead to interference with any potential investigation.

ii. Information should be shared to ensure:
   - A child/young person/family’s needs can be met
   - The child/young person/family receives appropriate support

iii. It is recognised a family/child is more likely to know if there is an agency with which they do not want information shared; they may struggle to identify positively those people or agencies with whom they want us to share information.

iv. Parents/Carers and children engaging in Safe Families for Children need to understand the relationship Safe Families has with other agencies, including the Local Authority, Police, Probation, Health, Housing, Education and many other voluntary and statutory agencies, in order to provide informed consent regarding information sharing. This relationship will be explained to families during initial engagement.

v. Parents/Carers and children engaging in Safe Families for Children need to understand the support network in which volunteers operate and the level of information sharing that takes place. This network will be explained to families during initial engagement.

vi. Family Coaches, Host Families, Family Friends or Resource Friends should refer requests for information from other agencies to Case Managers to allow identities to be verified. Information may be provided directly in exceptional circumstances, where consent to do so has been obtained from the child and/or the parent/carer (See below for more information on Consent).

vii. The safety and welfare of a child or young person must always be considered when making decisions to share information about them. Where there is concern the child may be suffering or is at risk of suffering harm, the child’s safety and welfare must be the overriding consideration and as such will over-ride any other data-protection, confidentiality or other consensual agreements.

viii. It should be ensured information is accurate and up-to-date, necessary for the purpose for which it is being shared and that it is shared securely, only with appropriate people. Reasons for sharing decisions should always be recorded, regardless of the outcome.

ix. Local Authorities may establish Multi-Agency Information Sharing Protocols to include both general principles and purpose specific agreements. Alternatively, a Service Level Agreement may apply.

x. Advice from the line manager or supervisor should be sought where there is doubt. Where your doubt relates to a concern about possible harm to a child or others, advice from a line manager or supervisor should be sought as soon as possible.

12.3.2 Understanding the relationship between Safe Families and other agencies

Safe Families for Children is a charity, offering voluntary sector support to families in need. Safe Families is available for children and families recognising themselves as in need of support and Safe Families support can be offered without reference to other agencies.
Where a family and child engaging with Safe Families also have targeted support from other agencies, it is in the best interests of the child and family that the workers involved in these agencies talk to one another about support. In this case Safe Families requires that parents agree to the sharing of information with other agencies involved. Regarding universal services, the parents must inform relevant services of the support offered by an agency and/or Safe Families, for example:

- Safe Families support involves a stay with a host family for a school age child during school term, then the parent must inform the school of the arrangement.
- If the arrangements for the Safe Families child are such that the host family will be taking a significant role in aspects of a child’s health such as immunisations or GP appointments, then the family must inform the relevant health professionals.

Representatives from statutory and voluntary agencies do offer background support to enable the smooth running of Safe Families policies and procedures. Information of individual children or families is not shared at this level.

12.3.3 Understanding the Safe Families Volunteer Support Network

When a family chooses to engage with Safe Families for Children, it is expected that a certain level of information can naturally be shared amongst the community network for the host family and is not regarded as confidential. Examples of this information are:

- The child’s first name
- The relationship of the child with other children also staying with the host family
- General likes/dislikes.

In addition to this, those involved in support of the host family, namely family coach, family friends and resource friends, will receive sufficient information regarding the family situation and needs, allowing them to provide appropriate support.

12.3.4 Release of data

Under no circumstances should information be released about an individual to any person requesting information by telephone, email, fax or post, unless the identity of the person making the request has been confirmed and that he/she is entitled to receive the info.

Please note: parents (unless in relation to children under 16), spouses, partners and children are not entitled to information about another individual. Personal information should only be released to the individual to whom it relates.

Processing by third parties

Personal data must not be passed to any third party for processing unless authorised by the Safe Families Data Controller. Such authorisation requires confirmation the necessary consent has been given, or necessary circumstances exist. Such decisions must be recorded.

Sending sensitive personal data

Sensitive personal data should not be sent by email unless using an encrypted/password protected attachment. Alternatively secure document sharing may be used i.e. supplying hyperlinks that require login before access is granted.

Sensitive personal data must not be sent by fax unless it is to a confidential or direct fax number, the fax is marked confidential and the recipient has been notified in advance of the information being sent.
12.3.5 Flowchart for considering the sharing of information:

12.3.6 Procedures for gaining consent

- The principles of information sharing should be clearly explained to a family
- Parents/Carers requesting Safe Families involvement sign a consent form, which includes agreement to Safe Families information storage and information sharing
- Those agencies with whom the child or family do not want information shared should be recorded on the consent form.
12.3.7 Consent from children

- Every effort should be made to work according to the wishes and feelings of all the children Safe Families are supporting. Any messages they give regarding a wish to maintain privacy about aspects of their lives should be respected and taken into consideration.
- Children aged 12 or over may generally be expected to have sufficient understanding to give their consent where the practitioner deems the child to meet the following criteria:
  - Can the child understand the questions being asked of them?
  - Does the child have a reasonable understanding of:
  - What information might be shared?
  - The main reason or reasons for sharing the information?
  - The implications of sharing that information and of not sharing it?
  - Can the child or young person:
    - Appreciate and consider the alternative courses of action open to them?
    - Weigh up one aspect of the situation against another?

12.3.8 Referral consent and information sharing:

Obtaining consent for information sharing
Safe Families will ask the referring parents/carers and/or the referrer/referring agency (if different) to inform Safe Families if there are other support agencies or professionals involved with the family and if there has been recent involvement from such agencies or professionals. If this is the case, then Safe Families will only proceed to be involved if consent is provided by the parent/carer and child (if applicable) for a sufficient level of sharing of information with the other agencies involved.

Who must provide consent for information sharing?
- If both parents are involved in regular and frequent care of the child, both parents shall be required to provide consent. If for any reason this is not possible, the reason must be clearly documented and approval provided by a Family Support Manager explaining only one signature of consent is needed.
- If only one parent has such care and is the only parent involved in the approach to Safe Families, then consent from this parent is sufficient.
- If the child is usually cared for by another adult and they are not the child's parent, the adult will be required to provide consent. If they do not have parental responsibility for the child, parental consent must be gained in addition. If they do have parental responsibility for the child, a parent’s consent will be sought if practical and if there is no risk to the child in doing so.

Information sharing regarding adults involved
For information regarding an adult that may present a risk of harm to a child or to a vulnerable adult, or harm to an Safe Families volunteer in support of a child & family, then child protection protocols may allow some information to be shared with Safe Families.

It is expected this would include:
- Any risk to child status
- Any risk of physical or verbal violence or abuse
- Any known significant alcohol or drug misuse.

Those regarded as relevant adults are:

- Those who will engage directly with Safe Families, particularly the referring family members
- Those with whom the child will have prolonged periods of contact during a stay with a host family or times of primary care contact during the planned period of Safe Families involvement
- Those known to present a risk to the referred family / those who support them.

For any other personal or health information, the sharing of this information would only be expected if relevant to Safe Families and with the consent of the adult concerned.

Local Authority involvement and information sharing

If a Local Authority’s Children’s Social Care is, or has recently been, involved with the child or family, then it is hoped, following consent of the parent/carer, the Local Authority will agree to provide Safe Families with the following information:

a) If there is an open case:

- the name and contact details of the allocated social worker
- an indication of the current involvement e.g. if the child is subject to:
  - Section 47 enquiries
  - A Child Protection Plan
  - A Child In Need Plan
  - A Team Around the Family/Common Assessment
  - Care Proceedings
  - Information as to the level of completed up to date Assessment
  - Their opinion on the likely appropriateness or otherwise of Safe Families for Children involvement as part of the child’s plan.

b) If there is no open case, confirm if the case has been open to Children’s Social Care in the last three years and if so, a brief outline of why the referral was made, the outcomes of the work completed and any relevance in consideration of the appropriateness and any risks related to Safe Families involvement

c) Other Local Authority involvement, if there is a team around the family, a recent assessment under CAF (Common Assessment Framework) and/or known involvement from integrated services:

- if so, the name and contact details of the Lead Professional and key agencies involved and if there is a current Plan
- if not, if there has been any Common Assessment Framework (CAF) involvement in the last three years.

12.3.9 Regarding referrals:

Safe Families agrees to provide the following information to the Local Authority:

- if there is no current involvement for the family with Children’s Social Care, then no information is given
- if the child is an open referral with Children’s Social Care then the allocated social worker will be informed of the outcome to the referral i.e. the expected nature of
the involvement of Safe Families, including the contact details of the allocated Family Coach
• if the child is the subject of a support plan, the Lead Professional will be informed of the outcome to the referral i.e. the expected nature of the involvement of Safe Families, including the contact details of the allocated Family Coach
• For any child staying with a host family for whom the stay is expected to last longer than 28 days, Safe Families for Children will notify the Local Authority as soon as possible of the child’s details and their family details, the details of the host family and the date of commencement of the stay, according to the guidance for notification to the Local Authority for private fostering.
• For any child with an existing support plan Safe Families will participate in multi-agency discussions as appropriate and will share information in order to promote the safety and well-being of the child, according to consent provided by the family.

The Local Authority agrees to provide Safe Families with the following information:
• any changes in the level of involvement of Children’s Social Care e.g. when children begin or cease to be subject to a Child Protection Plan
• any changes to the allocated social worker.

This is under circumstances when both Safe Families and the Local Authority are involved.

12.4 Information Storage

12.4.1 General Principles
• Information should be stored, handled and retained according to an identified need and purpose for information.
• Information storage and handling should ensure only relevant persons have access.
• Written information should be retained according to identified need and purpose.
• Information is stored confidentially and securely, minimising the risk of unauthorised access.
• Personal and confidential information should be disposed of in such a way as to ensure that at no time does the information become accessible to those without the identified need to know.

12.4.2 General Processes
• Where possible, Safe Families records are maintained within a secure database
• Documents which must be obtained in paper format will be scanned and uploaded to a document storage facility within the database. This typically applies to documents requiring a signature.
• Those involved in Safe Families have access to personal information regarding children and families according to their required level, in order to perform their required actions.
• Safe Families will take all reasonable care and safeguards to protect both the physical security of Information Technology and the data within.
• All information systems will be password protected and users will not divulge the password, nor leave systems active while unattended.
• All personal files and confidential information will be kept in secure locations when unattended e.g. locked storage cabinets, locked offices. Keys to these locations is kept secure and available only to staff with authorised access.
• Information within Safe Families should be reasonably secured against risks of compromise or loss.

12.4.3 Creating individual record systems
Staff wishing to create their own system or records, for example a spreadsheet or database/card index, in any format, which contains personal data about individuals, must ensure the Safe Families team and the Data Controller are aware of this processing and that appropriate security has been applied to this system or record. Remember, individuals have the right to see and be provided with a copy of all such records, on request, and therefore staff must ensure the records are kept in accordance with the requirements of the DPA.

12.4.4 HR records
Like any employer, Safe Families will hold records of information on all staff. Staff are required to keep their manager informed of any changes to personal circumstances, for example change of home address, telephone number, and any significant changes in their personal circumstances, such as next of kin. Further information regarding HR policies can be found in the staff handbook.

12.4.5 Information Storage: Paperwork
All confidential paperwork should be stored in lockable filing cabinets. This policy applies at the Safe Families office, or in the home of a member of staff or volunteer. Secure documents should never be left loose in in-trays, lying around on desks or in photocopier areas. Confidential paperwork that is no longer required, or has expired, should be securely shredded.

12.4.6 Information Storage: Safe Families Electronic Database
The secure Safe Families for Children database holds information related to volunteers, churches, agencies and families known to and actively involved with Safe Families. Information within the database is protected in two ways: inbuilt security and user access permissions.

Inbuilt security features include:
• an automated time-out facility when a user remains inactive
• automatic logout on change of IP address
• password encryption
• the database does not allow the storage of passwords and prevents web browsers from using inherent functionality to remember passwords
• passwords are never stored in clear text, with only the initial welcome email offering a plain text password. Users are encouraged to change their password on first use of the database.
• Off-site secure hosting
12.4.7 Database user access permissions

Volunteer
- access to their own details and details of their family/household members
- access to active assignments
- access to details of families the volunteer is actively supporting
- access is never granted to notes, documents or referral details within family records

Family Coach
- access to their own details
- access to assigned families
- access to details of volunteers, linked to assigned families
- access is never granted to private notes or private documents within family records

Church Coordinator
- access to their own details and associated church details
- access to details of volunteers, linked to assigned churches
- access is never granted to names or details of families supported by volunteers

Administrator – Safe Families staff and central office team
- access to full volunteer details
- access to full family details
- access to full church and agency details

Super-Administrator (limited to 2 users, 1 of which is the Safe Families Data Controller)
- full database access, including field values and email templates

12.4.8 Use of other electronic storage applications

SharePoint
Safe Families for Children use Microsoft SharePoint 2013 for shared information amongst Safe Families staff and as a document storage repository.

SharePoint 2013 offers native security encoding, including user-specific password access. All documentation stored outside of the database will be stored within the Safe Families SharePoint library structure. Access to documents within SharePoint is limited to authorised staff users and document sharing is via hyperlink to documents, rather than attachments, ensuring a password is always required to grant access. External access may be granted at file or folder level within SharePoint, however, it is not anticipated this feature will be utilised for confidential data or information of a personal nature.

Dropbox
Safe Families occasionally uses Dropbox as a file sharing tool. This is typically utilised for external volunteer assessors to prevent the sharing of files by email. Folders are established per assessor, to ensure an external user may only view a shared folder of their own caseload. Internal Safe Families users are granted folder-level access according to their region, or as relevant to their role. Dropbox uses password access but, due to ‘app’ functionality, is also governed by the Safe Families BYOD policy.
12.4.9 Handling and storage of DBS Information

Safe Families has subcontracted all DBS processing to the CCPAS and as such does not retain paper or electronic copies of DBS certificates.

In cases of investigating ‘blemished’ DBS certificates i.e. those identified by CCPAS as revealing a past conviction history, a DBS Audit form will be completed by a senior Safe Families staff member with a Safeguarding remit. The form will be uploaded to the Safe Families database and stored against the volunteer record.

12.4.10 Bring Your Own Device (BYOD)

The increase of tablet and smartphone devices has introduced a new opportunity for businesses to allow easy access to data for staff, leading to increasing productivity and availability of information, commonly known as Bring Your Own Device (BYOD). This approach does, however, introduce new risks to data compromise and loss. Safe Families allows access of data by staff on personal devices but imposes guidelines to protect sensitive and personal information. Any staff member using personal devices must ensure:

- There is password protection required to unlock the device
- No Safe Families data is used where the device is shared with non-Safe Families staff
- Files and information is not stored offline, other than when in use
- Safe Families related passwords are not stored in plain text on personal devices
- Cached and current data is removed from a device no longer used by a staff member
- Stored passwords are removed from any device no longer used by the staff member
- Lost/Stolen devices are reported at the earliest opportunity and relevant passwords reset as soon as possible
- Suspected compromised passwords are reset and reported to the Data Controller
- Prior to leaving Safe Families employment, personal devices must have Safe Families related access removed in the presence of a line manager or the Data Controller.

12.5 Information Retention

Consent forms (i.e. those completed and signed by families receiving our assistance) will be retained for the duration of involvement by Safe Families, namely:

- a stay with a Host Family
- an identified period of involvement from a Family Friend, with specified purpose, expected outcomes and means of evaluating outcomes.

Consent forms will also be retained for a further period of not less than 12 months to allow for the consideration and resolution of any disputes or complaints.

Note: New forms are required for any families re-referred for Safe Families involvement. Where an arrangement is recurring respite for a child or ongoing support by a family friend, one consent form may remain valid and applicable. The family coach will review this regularly.

Referral documents will be entered electronically to the secure Safe Families database.

Information will be retained following the cessation of involvement, in order to aid the consideration and resolution of any future disputes or complaints.
12.6 Policy on Incident Management

12.6.1 Online security and identity theft

It is known that criminals infiltrate social networking websites in order to obtain personal details that can be used fraudulently. Therefore:

- Staff and volunteers must also be security conscious and take steps to protect themselves from identity theft, for example by restricting the amount of personal information that they give out, for example via social media.
- Staff should not assume that their entries on any website will remain private, and should use the appropriate privacy settings to ensure their profile is protected and not open to the general public.
- In addition, staff should refrain from revealing any sensitive and/or confidential information regarding Safe Families on any social networking website.
- For more information see Safe Families for Children’s Internet and Social Media / Social Networks Policy Manual section 11.11

We aim to ensure Safe Families is prepared to act appropriately and effectively, which may require speed, in the act of a breach in the security of information held.

12.6.2 Responding to a breach of security

A breach may arise from:

- a theft
- a deliberate attack on systems
- the unauthorised use of personal data by a member of staff, worker or volunteer
- accidental loss
- equipment failure.

Safe Families will approach any incident/breach as follows:

Step 1 Consider the impact and risks associated with the breach

- Identify the affected information. Do those affected know? What should they know and how should they be informed?
- What information is compromised? Who is at risk due to the breach? What are the risks to them?
- Has access to information been breached? If so, who potentially has this information? What are the risks associated with this?

Step 2 Plan appropriate action

- Volunteers, workers or staff must inform their line manager
- A designated person is assigned to oversee this plan, Safe Families Data Controller
- Minimise any negative impact of the breach
- Seek to recover the information
- Inform those who need to know in the most appropriate way. This may include: the subjects of any information, those who had supplied Safe Families with the information, other agencies supporting a family.
- Apply disciplinary/legal procedures, as necessary.
Step 3 Review procedures

- Update information security
- Review procedures, including any issues of training or awareness of them.

12.7 Requests for Access to Information

Requests to access any files should be directed to the Data Controller. In consultation with a Family Support Manager, the request will be appropriately allocated. The response is likely to be prepared by an administrator and checked by a Family Support Manager or Data Controller.

The timescale for allowing access to personal information, both paper records and those held electronically is 40 days from the receipt of a formal request. This is subject to confirmation of identity and validity of the request.

Safe Families will not make a charge for granting access to files or for reasonable requests for copies of documents, but reserves the right to charge up to £10 for second and subsequent requests and to make a nominal charge for extensive photocopying.

If a member of staff, volunteer or assisted parent asks to see his or her records:

1. Explain the process and timescale, including the need to verify they are entitled to see the information.
2. Verify that they are entitled to see the information.
3. Record the details of the request from the individual.
4. Make an appointment for the individual to view the requested information.
5. Explain the types of identification required at the viewing, if the individual is not known to the staff member supervising the viewing (e.g. passport, driving licence, rent book).
6. Explain the organisation will not make a charge, but may do so for a subsequent request.
7. Provide a printout, if appropriate. The information should be provided in writing, unless another form is agreed.
8. Provide explanations of any abbreviations, technical or complicated terms, which may impact the individual’s ability to interpret the information.

Preparing Documents for Viewing

- Prepare the file in advance of the appointment for viewing, in case you need to take advice about any of the file contents.
- Remove information relating to or identifying another individual, unless the person concerned has given their written consent, and any other information which should be withheld for other reasons.
- If some elements of a document can be shared, but some information cannot be disclosed. Make a photocopy of the document, blank out the full extent of the information not to be disclosed, ensuring the confidential information cannot be seen on any copy provided to the individual.

Requesting Permission to share Third Party Material

If the applicant asks Safe Families to seek permission from a third party to release information we have previously withheld:

- Ask for the reason (to provide to the third party).
- Write to the third party explaining the request, who it is from and the reason access is required or requested.
Inform the applicant of the outcome of the request and invite them back to view the relevant document within 10 working days, if consent is granted.
Chapter 13   Glossary of Terms

**Assisted Family, aka Placing Parents**
A family (minimum one adult + one child) that Safe Families is supporting through whatever problems they may be facing. Can include other relatives (such as Grandparents) or other carers who parental responsibility / legal custody / guardianship for a child / sibling group.

**Referred Family**

**Supported Family**

**Church Coordinator**
A volunteer role established within a given church or cluster of churches; a person willing and able to coordinate networking and mutual support of volunteers and to facilitate churches working well together.

**DBS**
Disclosure and Barring Service. Previously CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) The DBS enables organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors make safer recruitment decisions by identifying candidates who may be unsuitable for certain work, especially that involve children or vulnerable adults.

**Family Coach**
Has direct supervision of Safe Families volunteers’ involvement with a number of assisted families. Reports to Safe Families full time Family Support Manager.

**Family Friend**
A Safe Families volunteer, individual or couple, who assists and mentors parents through their difficulties, also helping them in accessing other services as needed. They may also help a Host Family and the role can include some care or transport for a hosted child.

**Host Family**
A single adult, couple or family, who open their home to care for a child on a short-term basis, without financial compensation, while the placing parents, retaining all parental responsibility, get the help they need.

**Resource volunteer**
Those who provides offer help such as donations of equipment, clothing or furniture. Services and practical jobs may also be offered. A referred family or a Host Family can receive resources. Various levels of screening may apply.

**Programme Director**
Carries operational responsibility for Safe Families within a given geographic region.

**Parental Responsibility**
This is a legal term for the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority that by law a parent of a child has in relationship to the child and the child’s property. There are various rules which determine who has parental responsibility for a child. It can be acquired by law but is not lost even when others gain it.

**Safe Families Church**
A Christian church community that desires to participate in the Safe Families initiative.
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