

# BIRCH Outreach Project Personal Safety and Risk Assessment Policy

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The purpose of this policy is to provide reasonable measures and procedures to protect staff, volunteers and service users from situations in which their personal safety could be at risk or their honesty and integrity questioned. Any work with people carries some level of risk and individual volunteers will be encouraged to develop an awareness of the situations in which they feel more vulnerable during the training programme. Aggressive situations are very rare, but in such a rare situation, this is the policy we would expect staff and volunteers to adhere to.

## Definitions and approach

BIRCH’s outreach project defines violence and aggression as:

Any behaviour towards the UASC/young person/employees/volunteers of the project that has a damaging physical or psychological effect upon them as a result of their involvement in the project

The project believes that:

All violence to service users/employees/volunteers is unacceptable whatever form it takes and whatever reasons are cited for it

The risks to service users/employees/volunteers of carrying out their work should be recognised and the organisation should take action to minimize these risks

The effects of violence on individuals can be potentially damaging and stressful

Dealing with or being subject to violent behaviour is not considered to be a failure on the part of the service user/employee/volunteer

## **Risk Assessment**

Risk assessment is a technique for identifying and controlling hazards associated with the projects activities.

A hazard is anything that has the potential to cause harm

Risk is the likelihood of it causing harm and the degree of harm it could cause

The risk assessment process will be used for all activities which service users and volunteer may be involved in during their meetings.

Risk assessment involves identifying all hazards, assessing the risk and putting in places measures to control unacceptable risks. Assessing risk requires detailed knowledge of the activities and working practices normally undertaken by the people doing the work. Risk assessments have been undertaken for all the activities presently done by the befriending project and these will be updated on an annual basis. Any new activities to be undertaken will have a risk assessment completed.

Volunteers have a responsibility to observe project policy and guidance and not put themselves in situations where there is undue risk.

### **Guidance on visiting service users in their home/place of residence .e.g hotel/hostel room.**

Most meetings between volunteers and the service users will take place outside the home in a public space, but there may be exceptions when the meeting will take place inside the service users place of residence.

The guidance below is to ensure the personal safety of the project's staff, volunteers and service user.

Before a staff member or volunteer visits a service user at their place of residence, the visit will be discussed, and risk assessed by project staff. Project staff might decide to be present for the initial visit for volunteers or take a volunteer for their initial visit. Any safeguarding issues should be discussed and assessed. If the visit is to go ahead, volunteers must call project staff at the beginning and end of the visit, project staff should follow this procedure with another staff member. Project staff must ensure that they have full details of the visit, who is being visited, address of premises, staff and service user telephone number and next of kin details.

If the visit is in a hotel, staff and volunteers must also inform hotel staff about their visit and report to them at the end of the visit. These visits should also be risk assessed.

If an incident should occur, staff and volunteers should leave the premises where appropriate to avoid any danger or where this is not possible, call project staff or in immediate danger, the police.

Following an incident, Birch will review the incident and offer appropriate after care and review any necessary guidance.

### **Managing a Threatening, Violent or Aggressive Situation**

Basic guidance that staff and volunteers should observe includes the following points:

- Give the person as much personal space as possible
- Try to stay calm, be aware of your own voice, speak slowly and clearly
- Be aware of your body language. Avoid an aggressive stance or mimicking what the aggressor is doing
- Be aware of your own feelings and reactions and do not let these effect your approach to the situation
- Try to sit down, show that you do not want to fight or be aggressive towards them
- Do not respond aggressively

If you cannot diffuse the situation you must get away:

- Trust your instincts
- Prepare to get away – assess possible escape routes
- Try to keep your exit route clear
- Don't turn you back on the aggressor; move gradually backwards

If the situation turns violent get away as fast as you can; aim towards a place where you know there will be people

If you cannot get away:

- Tell the person to stop what they are doing
- Shout out or scream; your voice is your best defense
- Give the command to call the police

If you have to protect yourself:

- Use self-defense only as the last resort where de-escalation has failed and you are being attacked
- If you have to defend yourself do it quickly and this will provide an element of surprise
- Only use the level of restraint that is warranted by the attack. There are certain no go areas such as groin, breasts, eyes or forcing joints against their natural movement
- It is important that you show that you do not want to fight and disengage and leave the area as soon as it is safe to do so
- Remember that avoiding high-risk situations is the best form of ensuring safety.

Adhere to the policy and guidance of the project. Observe your boundaries. Do not put yourself at risk.

In the event of an incident occurring in which a volunteer felt threatened or had to deal with an aggressive situation during a meeting this should be reported immediately to the project staff or other staff members.

An incident form should be completed and placed on the volunteer's personal file and logged in the office incident/accident file. All incidents that have been reported by a volunteer will be subject to a review by project staff who will then sanction appropriate action should this be necessary. It will also be notified to a member of the steering committee or trustee of BIRCH. The project staff will provide immediate support to the volunteer/UASC/young person involved.

### **Aftercare**

Staff/volunteers will be offered the opportunity of support to discuss any accidents or incidents that have occurred with project staff/other staff members/supervisor. One of the aims of providing aftercare is to discuss any action that could be taken to avoid a similar situation arising in the future. The option to take some time out from the project will be available to the volunteer if he/she felt the need.

Support will also be provided to the service user to discuss and explore the reasons for the aggressive/inappropriate behaviour. The aim will be to provide an opportunity to the service user to reflect on the circumstances that led to the behaviour. The service user's responsibilities will be reiterated and project staff will assess whether it is appropriate for visits to continue.

### **Other Risks**

If volunteers are taking the service user on an outing which involves using their car, staff/volunteers must tell their car insurers that they are using your car in this way – it may incur an extra admin charge, but it is worth doing for staff/volunteers own peace of mind. Birch will cover any expenses incurred relating to this for volunteers or staff.

Staff/volunteers should be wary of accepting gifts from service users.

Staff/volunteers should take care not to put themselves in positions where they could come under suspicion or take part in activities or behaviour that could be misinterpreted.

Adverse weather conditions – In the event that a staff/volunteer feels that the weather conditions are too poor to progress with the arranged meeting with the service user/s, they should notify the service user/s.