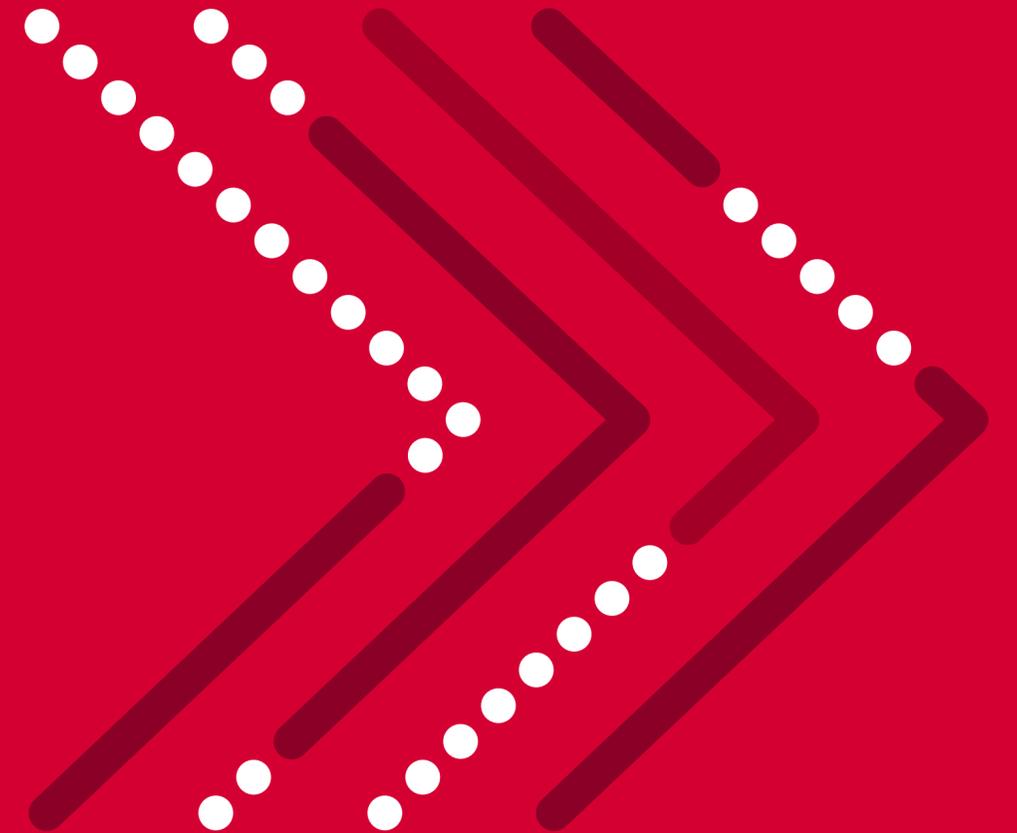# Understanding effective safeguarding culture

A tool to help organisations understand the indicators and behaviours associated with safeguarding culture.

Introduction

Organisational culture is the basis for safeguarding to be practiced well in an organisation: where people are and feel safe to engage and anyone in, or impacted by, an organisation is empowered to report concerns wherever they may arise.

Organisations often find it difficult to analyse or critique their own organisational culture.

This tool has been designed to help facilitate conversations within organisations, at all levels, to improve the collective understanding of what constitutes a positive safeguarding culture.

It describes behaviours that are often indicative of an organisational culture that is non-compliant with good safeguarding practice and progresses to behaviours that are more likely to be indicative of a culture where best safeguarding practice is genuinely valued and is part of the lived experience of those within, or impacted by, the organisation.

It can be used to introduce or support the safeguarding leadership tool, or as a standalone tool.

Using the tool

When people try to describe behaviours that are indicative of a positive safeguarding culture within their organisation, they often describe behaviours that are more indicative of compliance. For example, the statement: "Everyone in our organisation completes a safeguarding induction course" is a statement about meeting a minimal standard of compliance, rather than one that describes the impact on behaviours that attending such a course should have.

An effective way in which this tool can be used is to:

> Gather participants in groups, either as mixed cross-organisational groups, separate teams or as a whole staff team in smaller organisations.

> Share the tool, either electronically or as handouts, but with the final column "Effective safeguarding culture" removed or covered.

> Ask participants in groups or pairs to complete this last column: What behaviours do they feel would indicate an effective safeguarding culture?

> Ask participants to reflect on the extent to which these behaviours are evident in their own organisation or team.

This information can then be used in to improve safeguarding engagement and practice.

Policies and procedures

Non-compliance

Safeguarding policy for children and vulnerable adults either does not exist, is of **poor** quality, or is outdated.

Staff are **unaware** of the existence of the policy or know that it is in place but there is no requirement to adhere to it.

Safeguarding policy is not reflected in or connected to other relevant policies.

Policy does not seek to address **power** or **gender** imbalances.

Processes do not consider the **unique** needs of different at-risk groups.

Staff do not understand how they can influence the policy; there is a **lack of transparency** about policy development.

Widespread belief that the rules in the policy are easily or often **flouted** or **ignored**.

Minimal compliance

An up to date safeguarding policy exists, but there is limited evidence that staff are **adhering** to the policy, or have been trained to do so.

Staff feel uncertain about the policy, unclear about how to **access** it (where it is located), who "owns" it, and how to apply it.

There is mention of safeguarding in some, though not all, related policies and there is no adequate process for **checking implementation**.

Some evidence that processes supporting the policy are attempting to be inclusive, however this is experienced as **tokenistic**.

Some senior leaders exhibit **behaviour** that is not **consistent** with the policy, which suggests that "the rules do not apply to them."

Rules are followed without an understanding of their reasoning - leading to **inconsistent or inappropriate implementation** in different contexts.

Effective safeguarding culture

A robust and effective policy exists, is a key part of induction and is **lived** day-to-day, with supporting processes in place which are used regularly.

Policy is well **integrated**: staff **proactively** refer and adhere to policy and processes, which **guide** behaviour and actions.

Relevant organisational policies have safeguarding as an integrated element and are **actively considered** by all those who have safeguarding integrated into their roles and functions.

Processes are sensitive to gender and power imbalances, **inclusive** and explicitly ensure that the perspectives of those most at risk are addressed. Staff are able and willing to challenge when that is not achieved.

There is **rigour** amongst all staff in adhering to and upholding policies and processes.

There are demonstrable, contextualised and effective approaches to **embedding** core and consistent safeguardind standards. .

Safer programming

Non-compliance

Safeguarding is only considered when donors **demand** it (for example, in due diligence assessments), and never proactively.

Safeguarding capability and standards are compromised and not seen as an essential component to operational response teams (for example, safeguarding staff are not involved in **programme** discussions or decisions or not seen as part of the operational team).

Time pressures often result in safeguarding failures (for example, not completing criminal record checks or risk assessments of new programmes or activities).

Safeguarding issues are spoken about with disdain, **frustration** or are never mentioned at all.

There is no consistent and ongoing **assessment** of safeguarding risks in programmes, including within partnerships.

Minimal compliance

Ad hoc consideration of safeguarding risks and response in programme design and implementation.

On occasion, senior leaders agree that, due to **time pressures**, safeguarding standards cannot be met.

If safeguarding risks and issues are raised about partners and programme activities, these are seen as a **frustration** to be overcome, not a legitimate concern to be addressed.

Staff do not feel supported to challenge poor practice, instead relying on **hierarchical structures** or gossip to express frustrations or share risks.

Risk assessments are ad hoc, done without guidance and commitment to consistent training, review and checks.

Effective safeguarding culture

Safeguarding is **integral** to all stages of the programme cycle. Managers actively check how safeguarding has been considered and addressed.

Consistent safeguarding standards are upheld and teams resist pressure to cut corners on safeguarding (for example, in rapidly moving emergency response).

Leadership will only approve new projects or initiatives if they are **assured** that safeguarding is properly embedded and risks are fully assessed.

All staff and volunteers are **empowered and supported** to challenge poor safeguarding practices, and their concerns are addressed.

There is a **consistent process** to assess partners and programme safeguarding processes, ensuring there is staff capacity, supported by ongoing mentoring and training.

3 Survivor-centred approach

Non-compliance

A survivor-centred approach is not, or not seen to be, an organisational priority.

Reporting processes do not prioritise the welfare of the survivor. They may be **non-confidential** or even require survivors to report to the police.

Responding to cases does not take the needs and preferences of the survivor into account.

Reporting mechanisms do not enable **rapid response**, missing the 72-hour window to provide PEP to sexual assault survivors.

Untrained, **unsupervised** staff run investigations; using inappropriate or even shaming language and questions.

No **funding** is allocated to survivor-care.

Confidential and sensitive **data** is not kept secure.

Organisation has never considered that **survivors** may be among their workforce.

Minimal compliance

Senior leaders frequently ask about **reputational impact** before asking about the welfare of the survivor.

Reporting processes are **confidential**, but there is still a lack of sense of safety, accessibility and uptake in reporting.

Survivors may be asked what s/he needs, but this is not consistently taken **into account** in the response.

There is a lack of clarity and provision for 72-hour referral care. Staff running **investigations** may have received training, but not specifically for investigating safeguarding concerns.

Some **limited** funding may be available for survivor care, but there is a lack of clarity over how to access it.

There is provision for confidentiality in knowledge of, storage and access to sensitive information, but it is not followed or monitored well.

The organisation recognises that their workforce is likely to include survivors but takes no action in respect of that.

Effective safeguarding culture

Leaders demonstrate doing the **right thing for survivors** by placing them at the heart of their response, even above the interests of the organisation (for example, risk to fundraising) and ensure there is a strong track record of support.

Organisational reporting processes **prioritise** the wellbeing of survivors.

Survivors are consulted and involved in determining the response to their concerns.

Staff undertaking investigations receive **safeguarding specific training**.

Financial and other **resources** (for example, PEP or counseling) are allocated to survivor care and investigations are properly resourced.

Confidentiality in knowledge of, storage and access to sensitive information is routinely followed and monitored.

Survivors report that the organisation is a **safe place** for the employment of survivors.

4 Awareness raising

Non-compliance

Safeguarding is rarely, if ever, discussed until there is an incident.

A general lack of understanding of the organisation's legal Duty of Care to safeguard; and lack of understanding of the definitions of abuse and how to report it.

Pervasive belief that abuse by a member of the organisation **"couldn't happen here"** or that abuse is "dreadful, but rare."

Senior leaders **avoid or decline** to attend safeguarding training and do not prioritise attending **mandatory training**.

There is a lack of resourcing, training and ongoing support for staff and organisational awareness.

Absence of clarity over what training is essential for all staff.

Safeguarding is **not mentioned by senior leaders** in briefings or meetings.

Minimal compliance

Some limited **communications materials** on safeguarding are available but may not be in the correct languages, or may not be accessible to all (for example, due to illiteracy).

An awareness of duty to report but not a consistent understanding of, and approach to, safeguarding.

Attitude that abuse is "possible, but very unlikely to happen here".

Senior leadership does not **champion** safeguarding training or request shorter training for senior staff.

There is an ad hoc approach to training.

Investment in some training but lack of clarity on frequency and mandatory requirement.

Senior leaders do not **openly discuss** insights into safeguarding. Safeguarding may be on the agenda for key meetings, but issues are shared in a non-compelling or "dry" manner.

Effective safeguarding culture

Regular open discussion and **ongoing dialogue** is evident, especially with communities.

CEO and senior leadership lead from the front, talking about safeguarding and promoting corporate responsibility. They are visibly **engaged with safeguarding** learning opportunities.

The relevance of safeguarding training is clear to all. There is active discussion of vulnerability and a commitment to addressing it.

Leaders model **commitment to learning** and development about safeguarding.

Good quality and accessible information, training and learning opportunities are available for all staff. Regular checks on awareness and compliance.

Senior leaders **regularly share insights** around safeguarding that bring the issues to life in a meaningful way for staff.

Safer recruitment
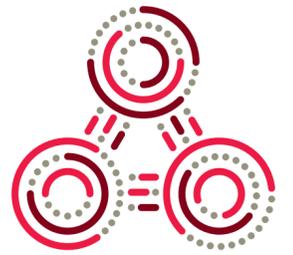
Non-compliance

Leaders encourage staff not to follow **safe recruitment processes**, often due to time pressures.

Roles are not consistently subject to **open recruitment processes**. People known to senior leaders are often recruited.

Safeguarding is **not mentioned** in the job advertisement, candidate information or at the interview stage.

Criminal records checks are only sought for a few roles.

References are not always taken up and only done briefly via email.

Induction does not occur or does not include a clear **code of conduct**.

An option in resolving staffing difficulties is to offer references in exchange for leaving quietly.

Minimal compliance

Safer recruitment **principles** exist and are documented within the organisation, although they may be only loosely applied.

There are significant differences in the processes of recruitment at the **senior leadership** level in comparison to other recruitment, for example at national levels.

Safeguarding is mentioned but not actively explored in in the application process or interview.

Criminal records checks are not followed up across all countries or roles.

References are requested but **not to a standard format** and are not verified.

Informal induction processes occur, but without specificity about expected behaviour.

Sometimes staff members are offered references in exchange for leaving quietly.

Effective safeguarding culture

All staff, from volunteers to board members and ambassadors, are recruited according to the same safer recruitment principles and standards.

Senior leaders actively **champion**, adhere to and model safer recruitment processes.

Organisational commitment to new initiatives that enhance screening of potential employees. All staff at all levels are asked carefully chosen safeguarding questions in interview.

No staff are allowed to be in post without completion and periodic review of criminal record checks.

References are requested in an agreed format and verified by recruiting managers.

Defined induction processes are provided for all new joiners and include a Code of Conduct.

Senior managers never authorise **"deals"**, whereby staff members who have committed suspected safeguarding violations receive a reference in exchange for leaving quietly.

Non-compliance

Staff do not **report** concerns and are unaware of a **requirement** to report. This is not addressed in policy and training.

Organisation does not receive reports from any **marginalised groups** (including children, women, people with disabilities, minority ethnic groups, LGBTQI, etc.) and does not explore the reasons for this.

Staff are **discouraged** from reporting by overly complex, unsafe or inaccessible reporting mechanisms.

Gossip and/or retaliation is unchecked, leaving staff feeling **unsafe** to discuss concerns.

Staff **overreact** to reports leading to a fear that reporting will result in ill-considered excessive response to the alleged perpetrator.

Minimal compliance

Low number of reports from staff are received; may only relate to serious or "clear" cases of abuse.

Requirement to report is **not communicated** or encouraged. Reporting mechanisms are not accessible to some groups.

Some staff feel **unsafe**, unsupported or unsure about reporting; they report feeling uncertain about how reports are handled.

Some reports from **community members** are shared but not from marginalised groups; organisation does not explore why.

No **clear process** to record or address gossip or retaliation.

Senior leadership does not openly engage in discussion about **barriers** to reporting. No attempts are seen to find ways to overcome these barriers.

Reports are handled in a more **appropriate** manner, but there is a lack of clarity in process and role/authority of focal points and line managers.

Effective safeguarding culture

Staff **routinely** report issues, including lower-level concerns.

Staff report because it is the right thing to do and are **confident** about the response.

There is **diversity** in reporting mechanisms, making it accessible to all groups.

Reports relate to incidents of possible abuse and to **concerns** about behaviour.

Reports are actively encouraged and received from marginalised groups and the organisation routinely **reflects** on patterns, trends and how to improve.

There are clear guidelines and processes to **prevent** and address gossip and retaliation.

Senior leaders are **open** to receiving feedback about all sorts of issues, never penalise those who ask difficult questions, but instead demonstrate accountability.

Focal points and line managers are equipped to **respond** to reports.

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