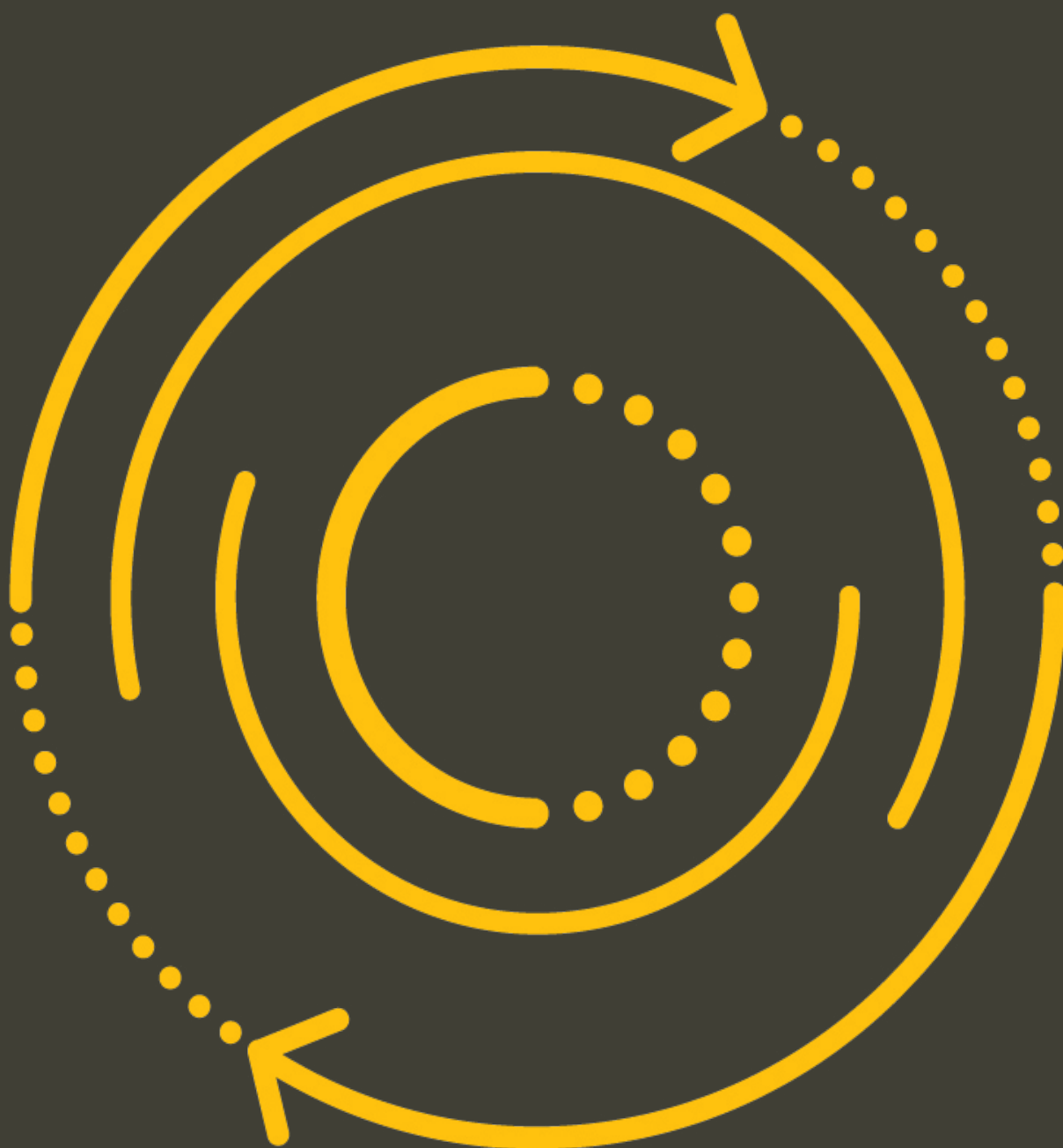




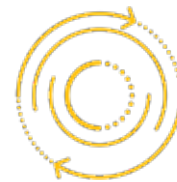
# Case study: How feminist leadership can enhance safeguarding

ActionAid's pioneering use of  
feminist leadership principles



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# How feminist leadership can enhance safeguarding



## Cultural change



### Safeguarding Commitment 5:

Our boards and senior leaders drive behaviours and attitudes throughout our organisations, leading by example to nurture a strong safeguarding culture that addresses structural inequalities based on gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexuality and age. [Read the commitments.](#)

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#### Safeguarding challenge:

- How can we address power imbalances in the workplace and between our organisation and partner organisations?

**Organisation:** ActionAid

**Date:** February 2020

#### Key recommendations:

- Take a look at ActionAid's Feminist Principles
- Consider how your organisation empowers people to make a disclosure. Have you asked beneficiaries what reporting procedures work best for them?
- Review how your organisation listens to the quieter voices – both of staff and beneficiaries. How are you supporting and empowering those people to meaningfully participate in discussions and decision-making?

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**ActionAid works with women and girls living in poverty, ending violence and fighting poverty so that all women, everywhere, can create the future they want. ActionAid is pioneering feminist leadership principles across its organisation and with partners. Former ActionAid trustee Patti Whaley explained why it is so important.**

ActionAid views poverty and exclusion primarily as a result of power imbalances and the injustices that come from those power imbalances. Safeguarding is also a response to injustices that can occur when there is a power imbalance. ActionAid helps women and girls to claim their rights and live a life of dignity and autonomy. Safeguarding is key to this. The Not This Girl and My Body Is Mine campaigns are two examples of campaigns that empower girls to protect themselves and their rights, feel safe and empowered over who touches them and how. For Action Aid, part of safeguarding is about telling people's stories in ways that are not exploitative, that protect their dignity and that they are comfortable with: in essence, telling their stories their way.

Feminist leadership is a way of addressing and redistributing power in a more inclusive way, not just in regard to gender; who gets to speak, who is heard and who is believed – all of which is key to safeguarding. The word "feminism" can make people defensive, so it's important that feminist leadership is not about finger-pointing at individuals but more about seeing and responding to the wider systemic issues around power and privilege. It's not about putting women first – it's taking what has been learned about gender power imbalances and using that to address other imbalances.

The ActionAid Board puts the principles of feminist leadership into practice at every meeting: for example, they have defined what they mean by "respectful listening" and check in that they are hearing all the voices in the room at the start and end of each meeting. This helps build a culture throughout the organisation of listening and people being able to speak up, even if they are or feel less powerful. Former Trustee Patti Whaley highlighted: "You can't just write the policy, agree to it and that's that – it has to lead to real organisational change."

Globally, attitudes and approaches to both safeguarding and feminist leadership are changing. Patti emphasised: "It's important to recognise, discuss and address power imbalances and move towards listening to each other."

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