

Sha'arei Tsedek North London Reform Synagogue

Safeguarding Children Policy

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Introduction

Sha'arei Tsedek is a community of diverse individuals and families having rich and complex networks of relationships with others. We value, and seek to promote, this richness and diversity. We have duty to protect children and young people in line with statutory requirements, government guidance and standards of best practice. All staff, trustees and other volunteers have a full and active part to play in protecting (safeguarding) children and young people from harm. We explicitly affirm that safeguarding children and young people is everyone's responsibility.

This policy has been developed in line with the following:

Working Together to Safeguard Children, December 2023 (with February 2024 updates) (HM Government)

Keeping Children Safe in Education, September 2024

London Safeguarding Children Procedures and Practice Guidance

<https://www.londonsafeguardingchildrenprocedures.co.uk/index.html>

This policy applies to everyone playing a role in Sha'arei Tsedek synagogue community life - including teachers, volunteers, rabbis, paid staff, sessional workers,

agency staff, and members of the congregation participating in services and events at the synagogue, or at other sites.

Definitions of abuse, neglect and exploitation

Abuse refers to a variety of forms of harm and maltreatment, including neglect, circulation of indecent images etc). Of course, there are clearly bad experiences in a child's or young person's life which are not abuse. In this section we offer some definitions which enable all of us to be alert to abuse, to identify it, to recognise when it is being reported, and to be conscious of things in everyday life which may point to the existence of abuse.

Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting, by those known to them or, more rarely, by others (e.g. over the internet). They may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children. It is also harmful where children witness, by seeing or hearing, the ill treatment of others, particularly where there is domestic abuse.

Physical Abuse - Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

Emotional Abuse – Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent diverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond a child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyber bullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

Sexual Abuse - Sexual abuse Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or

non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children. If a child initiates a sexual situation, it would still be abuse if any adult or older teenager took advantage of this.

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 occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)
- protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger
- ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers)
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

We are also alert to persistent or unexplained absences from education

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a form of child sexual abuse, occurring where an individual or a group exploits an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity. This may be in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, or for financial advantage or enhanced status for the perpetrator or facilitator. This is true even if the sexual contact appears consensual. It may not involve physical contact, and can take place through the use of technology.

Indecent images and "sexting": it is illegal for sexual or indecent photographs of a child under 18 to be taken and/or distributed. "Sexting" refers to the circulation via SMS texting and social media of such images and messages containing sexual content relating to individuals. Such messages are often sent with the intention of bullying, embarrassing, intimidating or terrorising a child or young person.

Female Genital mutilation involves the cutting and sometimes the sewing of female genitalia, may be undertaken without anaesthetic and from birth onwards. It is a cultural practice prevalent in some communities in the UK. The Female Genital Mutilation Act (2003) makes FGM an offence within the UK, and to take a girl out of the UK for that purpose. Professionals have a mandatory duty to report it.

Symptoms and signs may include pain or discomfort, or frequent use of the toilet, becoming evasive if upset. FGM should be considered if a child is from a community that practices it, has recently travelled abroad or been absent, and seems to be in pain.

Forced Marriage occurs where a young person has been forced into a marriage, and includes coercion, intimidation, threats and possibly physical and sexual abuse. It is a crime and should always be reported to the police and social care. We should be alert where Jewish communities practice arranged marriages and withdraw young people from education, and their ordinary lives.

Staff, Trustees and Volunteers

- All staff will have up to date knowledge of safeguarding issues, and will understand their duty to report concerns to the DSL, MASH or the NSPCC, with annual training updates, to include best practice, social media and online guidance, and whistle blowing
- All Trustees will maintain an up to date knowledge of Safeguarding, and the Council will discuss Safeguarding at every council meeting
- Madrichim, (young educators) will receive annual training, and support to ask questions and share concerns with staff. They are always supervised
- All volunteers are supervised, and briefed on our Safeguarding children policy reporting procedures.
- All visitors are clearly signposted to areas that may and may not be used; the staff member running activities for children has control over that activity, so that visitors may not have unsupervised access to children.

Responding to suspicions of abuse, neglect or exploitation

We will respond promptly and appropriately to all incidents, whether they concern children within our setting or not. Staff, trustees and volunteers should do the following if they suspect abuse.

- **Recognise** the signs and behaviours which may be cause for concern
- **Record** as quickly as possible using language the child has used, and drawings if appropriate
- **Respond** to the child or young person sensitively

- **Refer** the situation to the Designated Safeguarding Lead as soon as possible, and within one working day, who will decide what further action to take and inform the relevant safeguarding agencies as necessary
- **Reflect** on our action, what we learned and how we might handle concerns in the future

Disclosure of Abuse

If a child or young person has chosen to disclose abuse to you, you are a very special person for that child or young person.

Staff and volunteers should follow this procedure in the event of a disclosure: Never promise that you can keep anything secret that a child or young person tells you. You have a duty to pass information on in order to protect children and young people.

If the young person, then chooses not to disclose the information you should follow the steps below and inform the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

When a child or young person discloses abuse, it is important to:

Receive

- **Listen** to what is being said, trying not to display shock or disbelief be careful of physical messages
- **Accept** what is being said but do not comment upon it.
- **Do not** ask 'leading' questions, for example, "What did s/he do next?" (This assumes s/he did!), or, "Did s/he touch your private parts?" Such questions may invalidate the evidence in any later court action.

Reassure

- **Reassure** the young person but only so far as is honest and reliable, for example, don't make promises you may not be able to keep, such as, "I'll stay with you", or, "Everything will be all right now".
- **Don't promise to keep what they tell you a secret; you have to pass it on.**
- **Do** reassure and alleviate guilt, if the young person refers to it. For example, you could say: "You are not to blame." "You are not alone, you're not the only one this sort of thing has happened to."
- **Do not** criticise the perpetrator; the young person may love that person and reconciliation may be possible.

Record

- As soon as possible all information should **be recorded**. Record as much detail as possible, including names, address, and contact information.
- **Write down** the nature of the allegation, do not include your own judgement or assumptions. Stick to what was said by the young person. You should use their own words, and this of course includes slang words for body parts if the child uses these words. You may add details of any physical marks to our standard body outline drawing, but never under any circumstances take any photographs
- **Note** any observations on behaviour/emotional state or injuries and bruising.
- **Note** time, location and date of disclosure and sign the notes.
- **Do not investigate** the matter yourself, merely receive information and be ready to refer.
- **Write down the actions taken and the rationale for your decision and actions**

Refer

- **Pass this information on - a verbal account must be conveyed immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.** In the absence of the Safeguarding Lead, refer information to another senior staff member – for example, a teacher – ensuring that he/she will relay the report to the Safeguarding Officer as a matter of high urgency.
- **It is your duty to refer this information – you cannot keep it a secret.**
- Information should only be **shared** with the Safeguarding Officer or Safeguarding Lead.

Disclosure by a third party

Disclosures by a 3rd party such as a neighbour, parent or member of the public will be recorded, and the Designated Safeguarding Lead will refer on serious concerns to the appropriate agency. We will also empower those who make such disclosures to report their concerns directly to NSPCC, social care or the police as necessary, an anonymously if necessary.

Local Authority Escalation Process

- If we feel that any referral made previously has not been dealt with properly or if concerns remain unaddressed or the response has been inadequate, we will escalate the concern by contacting the Barnet Safeguarding children Partnership, at bscp@barnet.gov.uk or on 020 8359 2762
- All staff will be aware of how to escalate concerns

Record Keeping

All verbal information should be written down, to include the names of relevant people, date and time. All notes, however rough, must be kept. With the child's agreement, notes can be written while speaking with them. Make a more detailed record after the interview, recoding exactly what the child said. Record your own responses. Record the context to the disclosure, what was the background to the child choosing to tell you? Record the emotional content, describe any non-verbal behaviour. Record any repetitions. Draw diagrams, and how any marks or bruises.

Further Steps

The Designated Safeguarding Lead will make onward referrals to the Barnet MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub), either via the reporting form at <https://www.barnet.gov.uk/children-and-families/keeping-children-safe/worried-about-safety-child>

During office hours at 020 8359 4066

Out of hours at 020 8359 2000

Informing parents

- Parents will usually be the first point of contact, and concerns will be discussed with them unless there is potential for risk to the child, or a police investigation may be impeded, or a delay is anticipated to the referral. Advice will be sought from the MASH or the police where necessary.
- Parents will be informed of referrals to social care unless the Social Care procedure does not allow this, for example if a child may be placed in danger.
- The DSL will consult the MASH about whether to inform parents before a referral if informing parents is thought to put the child at greater risk, or to interfere with police investigation. The DSL will record and follow the advice given.

Working with Other Agencies

- The Designated Safeguarding Lead will always contact the Barnet MASH where there are concerns for a child's safety or welfare.
- Following initial contact, and with MASH agreement, a written referral will be made within one day
- Advice and next steps from MASH will be followed
- The Designated Safeguarding lead will monitor progress and take further steps as needed.

- All suspicions and investigations are kept **confidential** and shared only with those who need to know. In most cases this is the Safeguarding Officer and Safeguarding Lead and no one else.

Best Practice at Sha'arei Tsedek

The purpose of this section is to develop positive robust working practices that protects staff, madrichim, volunteers and children. Our best practices are under continual review, and are part of our culture of creating a respectful and safe community. As part of our ongoing development of our diverse and expanding synagogue, we will work to prevent and challenge all forms of discrimination.

- a. All adults, including staff, rabbis, trustees and all volunteers, will be made aware that they are in a position of **adult responsibility**, and that it is their responsibility to ensure that all interactions, whether verbal or physical, are entirely appropriate. Madrichim/helpers are teenagers, and though they are not adults, they are in a position of responsibility and the same guidelines and requirements apply to them.
- b. **Physical contact** In general, we do not anticipate that there is a need for adults/teenagers who are madrichim/helpers, to physically touch young people – but if there is, for instance, occasion to offer a physical gesture of reassurance or consolation, this must be done in a way that reflects our training and awareness. We do not express our relationships with our young people through physical means such as hugging.
- c. **Lone working** should be avoided wherever possible; where it is a necessity it will be done by agreement with a senior manager in the synagogue and clearly recorded in the individual member of staff's calendar and parents will be invited. Under no circumstances will we work with young people with the door closed.
- d. **Toilets** Certain staff do have specific responsibilities accompanying very young children, or children with disabilities, to the toilet; however, **other** adults shall **not** take individual children to the **toilet**. Staff who have such responsibilities – for instance, accompanying a child to the toilet, or helping the child to dress or get cleaned up – should ensure that another staff member is present, or the door is open and a colleague on the premises is aware of what is happening.
- e. **Mobile phones.** Staff must not bring out their **mobile phones, ipads or smart watches** while working with children and young people unless for official purposes. **Photographs** only to be taken on a 'work mobile phone,' a Sha'arei Tsedek camera or a members' camera with a Sha'arei Tsedek memory card, which must then be removed. Any photos on staff or volunteer mobile phones that are necessary for official purposes must be deleted immediately

after they have been transmitted for use in our own records or for publicity purposes or communicating with families.

- f. **Contact** with young people away from the synagogue. Staff, including madrichim, should not **correspond** (make phone calls, send texts, messages or emails) with pupils/learners except via official Sha'arei Tsedek channels, nor should they share their private mobile telephone numbers or Instagram/TikTok/Snapchat, Twitter 'handles' or identities.
- g. **Social media** Staff need at all times to model appropriate behaviour in their use of social media, in a way that reflects the reality that we are a community, recognising that teachers, volunteers and other adults are likely to have multiple and overlapping relationships with children and young people attending educational and other activities at the synagogue. They should not meet or 'friend' these young people through social media or arrange to meet privately, unless (a) this has been arranged and agreed with their Sha'arei Tsedek line manager for an official synagogue purpose and (b) parents have agreed to the meeting and venue. They should not accept 'friend' requests from anyone under the age of 16. We recognise the only exception to this as being when teenage helpers/madrichim are already friends with children with whom there is a small age gap. We commit ourselves to vigilance in this area while at the same time valuing the importance of being available to our young people. We will remain aware of the age limits set by the various apps, and will abide by them. We note for example that WhatsApp now has a minimum age limit of 13. The new Religion School Teachers and Madrichim WhatsApp group will include the mobile phone numbers each teenager educator's (madrich/madrichah) parents. We will guard the online privacy of our young members and use first names only in our publications.
- h. **Shared use of the building** People of all ages and generations share our Sha'arei Tsedek premises at 120 Oakleigh Road North. We welcome this reality of broad community involvement and presence in our building. However, children's activities (such as Religion School, youth clubs, Alonim classes etc) are organised specifically for children, not for adults. Clearly, many staff and volunteers have key responsibilities requiring them to work and otherwise interact with children and young people every day, but **other adults** – including parents, visitors, Council members, etc – **should not attend or frequent children's activities** without the express approval of relevant staff, who are in charge of those activities.

- i. **Ratios** We provide adequate and appropriate staffing resources to meet the needs of children. We will abide by the NSPCC guidance for adult-to-child ratios, see Appendix for these.
- j. **Risk Assessment** We include the presence of volunteers and members of the public as part of our risk assessment for any offsite activities
- k. **Layout of rooms** occupied by children (attending any activity at the synagogue) should allow for constant supervision.
- l. We aim to introduce **positive elements** of keeping children safe into our programme in order that we promote their personal, social and emotional development, enabling them to grow to be *strong, resilient, listened-to, and conscious of the importance of safety in everyday life*.
- m. We create within the synagogue setting a **culture of value and respect** for the individual, having positive regard for children's heritage arising from their colour, ethnicity, languages spoken at home, cultural and social background, and we will not tolerate any form of discrimination.
- n. We make sure that this is carried out in a way that is **developmentally appropriate** for the children.

Allegations against staff, volunteers, trustees, and all those in positions of trust

- Every member of Sha'arei Tsedek and all visitors will be made aware of how to report concerns
- We take responsibility for promoting positive and appropriate behaviour and avoiding for example, inappropriate sexual and personal comments, excessive one to one attention and sharing of images, directly or via social media
- We will ensure that all staff and volunteers will be aware of how to raise concerns about staff, volunteers or trustees to the DSL
- We will ensure all staff and volunteers are aware that they should escalate concerns if they do not feel they have been appropriately addressed, to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), on 020 8359 4066. Concerns about the Designate Safeguarding Lead, Designated Safeguarding Officer, Rabbi (if not same) or any senior leader should be reported directly to the LADO.

Whistleblowing Policy

1. Purpose

This policy ensures that all members, staff, volunteers, and visitors feel safe to report safeguarding concerns, misconduct, or unethical behaviour within the synagogue community without fear of retaliation. It upholds the synagogue's commitment to protecting children, vulnerable adults, and all congregants.

2. What to Report

Concerns may include:

- Suspected or actual abuse (physical, emotional, sexual, or neglect)
- Unsafe safeguarding practices within the synagogue
- Breaches of legal, ethical, or religious responsibilities
- Misconduct by clergy, staff, or volunteers
- Attempts to cover up safeguarding failures

3. Confidentiality & Protection

- Reports will be handled with strict confidentiality and shared only with those necessary for investigation.
- Whistle-blowers will be protected from retaliation, harassment, or exclusion from synagogue activities if they report in good faith.
- Anonymous reports will be reviewed, but full investigations may be limited without contact details.

4. Reporting Procedure

- Concerns should be raised with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or a Rabbinical or Senior Leadership Representative.
- If the concern involves leadership figures, it should be reported to an independent safeguarding body, the local authority, or the police (if necessary).
- Reports should be made in writing where possible and include as much detail as possible.

5. Investigation Process

- All reports will be taken seriously and investigated promptly.
- Outcomes will be communicated appropriately while maintaining confidentiality.
- If misconduct is confirmed, appropriate disciplinary action will be taken, including referrals to external authorities if needed.

6. External Reporting

If concerns are not properly addressed internally, whistle-blowers should contact:

- Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for safeguarding concerns
- The Movement for Reform Judaism Head of Safeguarding & Wellbeing, 020 8349 5670
- NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line
- The Police if there is an immediate risk

Safer Recruitment

- Applicants for posts within the setting are clearly informed that the **positions are exempt** from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.
- Candidates are informed of the need to carry out '**enhanced disclosure**' checks with the Disclosure & Barring Service before posts can be confirmed.
- We abide by **safer recruitment guidance** in respect of our interviewing process, two signed references and DBS checks for staff and volunteers, in order to ensure that no disqualified person or unsuitable person works at the setting or has access to the children.
- **Volunteers** do not work unsupervised.
- We abide by the Protection of Vulnerable Groups Act requirements in respect of any person who is **dismissed** from our employment or resigns in circumstances that would otherwise have led to dismissal for reasons of child protection concern.
- Where a member of staff or volunteer has been **dismissed** due to engaging in activities that caused concern for the safeguarding of children or vulnerable adults, we notify the **Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA)** of relevant information so that individuals who pose a threat to children (and vulnerable groups), can be identified and barred from working with these groups.
- We adhere to the Information Sharing Agreement with the Movement for Reform Judaism.

Review

This policy is reviewed annually by Council

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