



Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

Person responsible for the Policy:	<i>Natasha Hamilton</i>
Date Approved:	<i>7th October 2025</i>
Signed:	<i>N.J Hamilton</i>
Date for Review:	<i>6th October 2026</i>

At Astbury Merecats Out Of School Club the named personnel with designated responsibility for Child Protection and Safeguarding are:

Designated Safeguarding Lead	Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead	Safeguarding Owner / Committee Chair
<i>Natasha Hamilton</i>	<i>Angela Collingwood</i>	<i>Natasha Hamilton</i>

The named personnel with designated responsibility regarding allegations against staff/those working in the setting are:

Manager	Deputy Manager	Owner in the event of an allegation against the Manager
Natasha Hamilton	<i>Angela Collingwood</i>	Contact Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

The named person with designated responsibility regarding Cared for children and Operation Encompass are:

Designated lead for cared for children
<i>Natasha Hamilton</i>
Operation Encompass Key Adult
<i>Natasha Hamilton</i>

1. Introduction:

At Astbury Merecats we recognise the duty we have under section 39(1)(b) of the Childcare Act 2006 to comply with the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, 2025)

Early years and childcare providers must ensure that:

- Training must be renewed every two years. Providers may consider whether any staff need to undertake annual refresher training during any two-year period to help maintain basic skills and keep up to date with any changes to safeguarding procedures or as a result of any safeguarding concerns that occur in the setting.
- A practitioner must be designated to take lead responsibility for safeguarding children. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) is responsible for liaison with local statutory children's services agencies, and the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership (CESCP) as appropriate. The DSL must provide support, advice and guidance to all practitioners on an ongoing basis, and on any specific safeguarding issue as required. The DSL must attend a training course consistent with the criteria set out in Annex C. (Childminders must take the lead responsibility themselves.)

This policy demonstrates the setting's commitment and compliance with safeguarding legislation; it should be read in conjunction with:

- [Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership \(CESCP\) procedures](#)
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#)
- [What to do if you are worried a child is being abused](#)
- [Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025](#)
- [Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage 2025](#)
- [Guidance for safer working practice for those working with children and young people in education settings February 2022](#)
- Setting online safety policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Staff use of mobile phones and Social Media Policy
- [Safeguarding children and protecting professionals in early years settings: online safety considerations](#)
- [Preventing and Tackling Bullying](#)
- [Prevent Duty Guidance](#)
- [Protective security and preparedness for education settings - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Emergency planning and response for education, childcare, and children's social care settings - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Mandatory reporting of FGM – procedural information](#)
- [Whistleblowing policy](#)

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility. Everyone who comes into contact with children and their families and carers has a role to play in safeguarding children. In order to fulfil this responsibility effectively, all practitioners in this setting make sure their approach is child centred. This means that we consider, at all times, what is in the best interests of the child. The term children includes everyone under the age of 18.

No single practitioner can have a full picture of a child's needs and circumstances. If children and families are to receive the right help at the right time, everyone who comes into contact with them has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information, and taking prompt action. Through our day-to-day contact with children and direct work with families, staff take notice of indicators of possible abuse or neglect and consult with Children's Services in Cheshire East (or in neighbouring authorities dependent upon the child's area of residence). We recognise that we form part of the wider safeguarding system for children. This responsibility also means that we are aware of the behaviour of staff in the setting; we maintain an attitude of '**it could happen here**' where safeguarding is concerned.

In our setting we ensure that:

- All children, regardless of age, gender, ability, culture, race, language, religion, or sexual identity, are treated equally and have equal rights to protection
- All staff act on concerns or disclosures that may suggest a child is at risk of harm
- All staff are professionally curious and feel able to challenge decisions to ensure children receive the right support
- Children and staff involved in safeguarding issues receive appropriate support
- Staff adhere to a Staff Behaviour Policy (Code of Conduct) and understand what to do in the event of any allegations against any adult working in the setting
- All staff are aware of Early Help and ensure that relevant referrals, assessments and interventions take place
- All staff are aware that abuse, neglect and safeguarding issues are rarely standalone events that can be covered by one definition or label; they recognise that, in most cases, multiple issues will overlap with one another
- All staff understand that children's poor behaviour may be a sign they are suffering harm or that they have been traumatised by abuse
- Staff have received advice, support and training in regard to adverse childhood experiences and trauma informed practice

This policy is available on our setting website and printed copies of this document are available to parents upon request. We inform parents and carers about this policy when their children join our setting and through our setting newsletter.

The policy is provided to all staff (including temporary staff and volunteers) at induction, alongside our Staff Code of Conduct. Induction training must include information about emergency evacuation procedures, safeguarding, child protection, and health and safety issues. All staff are trained to understand the safeguarding policy and procedures and we ensure that their knowledge on safeguarding issues are kept up to date.

In addition, whilst it is not statutory for early years settings it is considered good practice that all staff are provided with Part One of the statutory guidance '*Keeping Children Safe in Education*', DfE (2025) and Annex B and are required to sign to indicate that they have read and understood it.

Annex B contains important additional information about specific forms of abuse and safeguarding issues.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead is able to support all staff in understanding their responsibilities and implementing it in their practice.

2.0 Aims of this document:

- To provide staff with the framework to promote and safeguard the wellbeing of children and in doing so ensure they meet their statutory responsibilities
- To ensure consistent good practice across the setting
- To demonstrate our commitment to protecting children
- To raise the awareness of all staff of the need to safeguard all children and of their responsibilities in identifying and reporting possible cases of abuse
- To emphasise the need for good communication between all members of staff in matters relating to child protection
- To promote safe practice and encourage challenge for poor and unsafe practice
- To promote effective working relationships with other agencies involved with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, especially with Children's Social Care and the Police
- To ensure that all members of the setting community are aware of our procedures for ensuring staff suitability to work with children
- To ensure that staff understand their responsibility to support children who have suffered abuse in accordance with their agreed plan e.g., extra / targeted help/ Child in Need/ Child Protection Plan

3.0 Scope of this Policy

This policy applies to all members of the setting community including staff, children, volunteers, parents/carers, visitors, agency staff and students, or anyone working on behalf of Astbury Merecats Out Of School Club. This policy is consistent with Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership (CESCP) child protection procedures.

4.0 Definitions of terms used in this document:

Child Protection: refers to the activity undertaken to protect specific children who are suspected to be suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm.

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children: refers to the process of providing help and support to meet the needs of children as soon as problems emerge, protecting children from maltreatment, whether that is within or outside the home, including online, preventing the impairment of children's mental and physical health or development, ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care, promoting the upbringing of children with their birth parents, or otherwise their family network through a kinship care arrangement, whenever possible and where this is in the best interests of the children and taking action to enable all children to have the best life chances.

Early Help: means providing support for children of all ages that improves a family's resilience and outcomes or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse.

Abuse: a form of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent harm. Harm can include ill treatment that is not physical as well as the impact of witnessing ill treatment of others. This can be particularly relevant, for example, in relation to the impact on children of all forms of domestic abuse, including where they see, hear, or experience its effects. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or extra-familial contexts by those known to them or, more rarely, by others. Abuse can take place wholly online, or technology may be used to facilitate offline abuse. Children may be abused by an adult or adults, or by another child or children.

Staff: refers to all those working for or on behalf of the setting in either a paid or voluntary capacity, full time, or part time. This includes parents, Owners, Committee members and Trustees. It also includes child-minding assistants or co-childminders working together in a child-minding setting.

Child: refers to all children who have not yet reached the age of 18. On the whole, this will apply to children from our own setting; however, the policy will extend to visiting children from other establishments, teenage parents, students, and children on work experience placements.

Parent: refers to birth parents and other adults who are in a parenting role e.g., carers, stepparents, foster parents, grandparents, and adoptive parents.

5.0 Prevention:

Children's understanding of how to keep themselves safe is promoted. Staff support children in an age-appropriate way to recognise and manage risks in different situations, including when using the internet and social media, being able to judge what kind of physical contact is acceptable and unacceptable, recognising when pressure from others, including people they know, threatens their personal safety and well-being and supporting them in developing effective ways of resisting pressure.

The setting has established an ethos where:

- Children feel secure in a safe environment in which they can learn and develop.
- Children are encouraged to talk and are actively listened to. Staff consult, listen, and respond appropriately to all children
- Clear risk assessments are in place and staff respond consistently to protect young babies and children whilst enabling them to take age-appropriate and reasonable risks as part of their growth and development.
- Children know that there are adults in the setting whom they can approach if worried or in difficulty.
- Consistent approaches are in place to promote positive behaviour that is appropriate for individual children's stages of development.
- All adults recognise that safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility and are aware of the signs that children may be at risk of harm either within the setting or in the family or wider community outside the setting.

- Parents are partners in the setting and are encouraged to have an understanding of their obligations regarding Child Protection by intervention as and when appropriate
- Adequate signposting to external sources of support and advice is in place for staff, parents, and children *and can be found on our notice board.*
- There is always a Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or Deputy DSL in the setting who has the seniority and skills, undertakes appropriate safeguarding training, and is given the time to carry out this important role.
- All adults feel comfortable and supported to draw safeguarding issues to the attention of the manager and/or the Designated Safeguarding Lead and are able to pose safeguarding questions with “respectful uncertainty” as part of their shared responsibility to safeguard children.
- Staff are aware of the DfE guidance contained in ‘[What to do if you are worried a child is being abused](#)’ – guidance for practitioners March 2015.
- We comply with ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children’ 2023 and support the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children’s Partnership (CESCP) [Right Help, Right Time - Delivering effective support for children and families in Cheshire East, Multi Agency Threshold of Need Guidance](#), this document supports professionals to access the **right help and support** for children and their families at the **right time**
- We systematically monitor children’s welfare, keeping accurate records, speaking to parents, and notifying appropriate agencies when necessary.
- All staff are aware of children with circumstances which mean that they are more vulnerable to abuse/less able to easily access services and are proactive in recognising and identifying their needs
- There is a commitment to the continuous development of staff with regard to safeguarding training.
- The setting has procedures for dealing with allegations of abuse against any member of staff or adult on site, including an allegation of abuse against the DSL/Manager
- The setting carries out an annual review of the Safeguarding policy and procedures.
- All staff are aware of setting guidance for their use of mobile phones, cameras and other electronic devices with imaging and sharing capabilities and have discussed safeguarding issues around the use of mobile technologies and their associated risks.
- We ensure that appropriate filters and appropriate monitoring systems are in place for devices with internet access.
- All staff are aware that children may not feel ready or know how to tell someone that they are being abused, exploited, or neglected, and/or they may not recognise their experiences as harmful. For example, children may feel embarrassed, humiliated, or being threatened; this could be due to their vulnerability, disability and/or sexual orientation or language barriers.

This should not prevent staff from having a professional curiosity and speaking to the DSL if they have concerns about a child. Staff determine how best to build trusted relationships with children and young people which facilitate communication whilst ensuring safer working practices.

6.0 Early Help:

All staff understand the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership (CESCP) 'Threshold of Need Guidance' and Child Protection procedures; Right Help, Right Time - Delivering effective support for children and families in Cheshire East, Multi Agency Threshold of Need Guidance – (see link in previous section) to ensure that the needs of our children are effectively assessed; decisions are based on a child's development needs, parenting capacity and family & environmental factors. We ensure that the most appropriate referrals are made. We actively support multi agency planning for these children and, in doing so, provide information from the child's point of view; bringing their lived experience to life as evidenced by observations or information provided. Staff know how to pass on any concerns no matter how trivial they seem.

Staff members always act in the interests of the child and are aware of their responsibility to take action as outlined in this policy. In our setting staff are aware that they must be prepared to identify those children who may benefit from early help. The staff are alert to the potential need for early help for a child who:

- Has a disability or certain health conditions and has specific additional needs
- has special educational needs (whether or not they have a statutory Education, Health and Care Plan)
- has a mental health need
- is a young carer
- is showing signs of being drawn into anti-social or criminal behaviour, including gang involvement and association with organised crime groups and county lines
- is frequently missing/goes missing from education, care or from home
- is at risk of modern slavery, trafficking sexual or criminal exploitation
- is at risk of being radicalised or exploited
- has a family member in custody, or is affected by parental offending
- is in a family circumstance presenting challenges for the child, such as drug and alcohol misuse, adult mental health issues and domestic abuse
- is misusing drugs or alcohol themselves
- has returned home to their family from care
- is a 'privately fostered child'
- is at risk of 'honour'-based abuse such as Female Genital Mutilation or Forced Marriage
- is persistently absent from education, including persistent absences for part of the day
- is a refugee
- are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

If there are concerns about a child's welfare that do not meet the thresholds of child abuse the setting will consider whether the Early Help approach should be considered. Staff are aware that early identification of concerns and the use of Early Help to develop a multi-agency plan for the child can reduce the risk of subsequent abuse.

The multi-agency threshold framework is a guidance tool that all agencies, professionals and volunteers can use to consider how best to meet the needs of individual children and young people.

This support can be provided on a single agency basis or a multi-agency basis. The stepped approach aims to reduce risk and vulnerability and meet needs at the appropriate level of support and/or intervention. Access to effective early intervention and prevention services is essential to achieving this.

Our setting is an Operation Encompass setting which means that we are able to give proactive support to those children and their families where domestic abuse is identified. Support is bespoke to each case but our children and families know they will be listened to and directed to agencies in the local area and beyond, to help them.

If a member of staff has concerns about a child, they will need to decide what action to take. Where possible, there should be a conversation with the Designated Safeguarding Lead to agree a course of action, although any staff member can make a referral to children's social care / consult with Cheshire East Consultation Service (ChECS) / contact the police. Other options could include referral to specialist services or early help services and should be made in accordance with the referral threshold set by the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership (CESCP).

The pyramid of support will help us to identify what advice and guidance is available and who to contact at each different level on the continuum of need. The Family Hub model in Cheshire East will strengthen existing partnerships in each locality making it easier for practitioners to get support for families.

In the first instance staff should discuss 'Early Help' requirements with the Designated Safeguarding Lead. If early help is appropriate the Designated Safeguarding Lead will support the staff member in liaising with other agencies and setting up an inter-agency assessment as appropriate.

As staff may be required to support other agencies and practitioners and parents/carers and children in an extra help plan or targeted help plan; all staff are aware of the relevant assessments and appropriate support is given to them when they undertake an early help assessment. We have a suite of screening tools which may also help to identify the level of need, the best pathway of support, and the interventions you can be provided for children, young people and families.

<https://www.cescp.org.uk/ce-scp-multi-agency-toolkit/ce-scp-multi-agency-toolkit.aspx>

Concerns assessed as being at **lower tier Targeted Help** level for complex early help concerns will be triaged and managed by the **Family Help** front door.

Where early help and or other support is appropriate, we ensure that the situation for the child is kept under constant review. If the child's situation doesn't appear to be improving, we take appropriate action.

The children in our setting know that there are adults whom they can approach if worried or in difficulty.

There is adequate signposting to external sources of support and advice for staff, parents, and children that can be found on our notice board

7.0 Early Help, Child in Need and Child Protection

In our setting we ensure that we follow [Cheshire East's Multi-agency Practice Standards Agency roles and responsibilities](#) to ensure that our work, on behalf of our children, is of a consistently good standard. We use these standards to challenge other workers on behalf of children where the standards are not being met. The DSL is aware of the Cheshire East Escalation Procedure [Procedure for Multi-Agency Professional Challenge and...](#)

8.0 Concerns about a child- recording and reporting:

Our recording procedures are in line with those outlined in Cheshire East's "[Recording and Reporting Guidance](#)."; the Designated Safeguarding Lead and the Deputy Lead are aware of this document.

Where a member of staff is concerned that a child is in immediate danger or is at risk of harm, they should report this to the Designated Safeguarding Lead, or their Deputy, without delay. A written record should be made of these concerns as soon as possible following the disclosure/concern being raised; this must be on the same working day.

Where staff have conversations with a child who discloses abuse, they follow the basic principles:

- listen rather than directly question, remain calm
- never stop a child who is recalling significant events
- never ask a child if they are being abused
- make a record of discussion to include time, place, persons present and what was said (child language – do not substitute words)
- advise you will have to pass the information on
- avoid coaching/prompting
- never take photographs of any injury
- never undress a child to physically examine them
- allow time and provide a safe haven / quiet area for future support
- At no time promise confidentiality to a child or adult
- All victims are reassured that they are being taken seriously, regardless of how long it has taken them to come forward and that they will be supported and kept safe
- Nor should a victim ever be made to feel they are a problem or ashamed for making a report
- Where abuse has occurred online or outside of the setting it will not be downplayed and will be treated equally seriously

Staff are aware that they should not question the child; other than to respond with TED - [Tell me what you mean by that](#), [Explain what you mean by that](#), [Describe that](#). Staff will observe and listen, but do not probe/ask any leading questions.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead will obtain key information and agree relevant actions after making a timely assessment of the information.

We recognise that parents may hold key information about incidents/allegations therefore, **in the majority of situations; the Designated Safeguarding Lead will speak to the parents and gain their consent** to discussing the situation with others. Staff are aware that there will be very few instances where, to speak to the parents, could further endanger the child. In those situations, they would still consult/refer, but would have clearly recorded reasons as to why they had not gained parental consent.

The following situations are the instances in which parental consent would not be gained prior to a referral:

- Discussion would impede a police investigation or social work enquiry
- Sexual abuse is suspected
- Organised or multiple abuse is suspected
- Fabrication or induced illness or perplexing presentations is suspected
- Honour Based Abuse e.g. forced marriage, FGM etc is a possibility/is suspected

Additional consideration re parental consent would be needed in the following circumstances, particularly if there are concerns around parental involvement or influence:

- Extremism or radicalisation is suspected
- County Lines activities are suspected

Staff are also aware that, even in situations where the parent does not give consent, the best interests of the child are paramount and therefore, they would share their concerns. In addition, the referral will not be delayed if it has not been possible to contact the parents/carers.

For non-urgent contact for a referral or request to the front door, the **appropriate portal form** needs to be completed. There is one for children's social care where you feel the child / young person has reached their threshold for support (**upper tier Targeted Help and Statutory / Specialist Help**).

Phone – Immediate Safeguarding concerns:

0300 123 5012

Option 3 – Cheshire East Consultation Service (ChECS)

Choose Option 2 – ChECS / Immediate Safeguarding concerns

Anything you submit to ChECS that is deemed as meeting threshold for social care will be processed within either 2 hours or 24 hours as per statutory guidelines dependant on risk.

Please see Appendix 1 for Staying Safe poster.

A consultation will take place with Cheshire East Consultation Service (ChECS) and/or the police immediately. Where a child lives in a different authority the Designated Safeguarding Lead follows the procedures for that authority.

Where possible we ensure that contacts with outside agencies are through the Designated Safeguarding Lead or their Deputy; however, staff are aware that anyone can make this contact. Where a member of staff makes contact, they ensure that they make the Designated Safeguarding Lead aware as soon as possible.

Safeguarding Records are held as hard copies and kept in a locked cabinet. Reports relating to Safeguarding and Child Protection concerns are kept in a separate, confidential file, securely stored away from the child's main file. Authorisation to access these records is controlled by the Manager and Designated Safeguarding Lead, information should be kept confidential.

All records should be dated and signed, with the name of the signatory clearly printed, and filed in chronological order. For electronic record keeping systems a separate signature is not necessary if individuals have their own log in and any changes to a record are automatically logged.

The setting ensures that safeguarding information, including Child Protection information, is stored, and handled in line with the principles of the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) ensuring that information is:

- used fairly and lawfully
- for limited, specifically stated purposes
- used in a way that is adequate, relevant, and not excessive
- accurate
- kept for no longer than necessary
- handled according to people's data protection rights
- kept safe and secure.

The Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR do not prevent the sharing of information for the purposes of keeping children safe. Fears about sharing information must not be allowed to stand in the way of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare and protect the safety of children.

We ensure that information is transferred safely and securely when a child with a Safeguarding Record transfers to another setting. We also ensure that Key workers or social workers are notified where a child leaves the setting (as appropriate). Where children leave the setting, the Designated Safeguarding Lead should ensure their safeguarding file is transferred to the new setting as soon as possible. Within 5 days for an in-year transfer or within the first 5 days of the start of a new term. This allows the new setting to have support in place for when the child arrives. See the Cheshire East Record Keeping Guidance.

9.0 Safe Working Practices

Use of mobile phones, cameras, and internet:

The setting and staff take safeguarding seriously and understand this policy is over-arching. We refer staff to our 'Mobile phone, camera, smart watch and recording device policy' and 'Staff Behaviour policy', 'Code of conduct' and [Professional and Personnel Relationships \(saferrecruitmentconsortium.org\)](https://saferrecruitmentconsortium.org).

Personal mobiles and electronic devices:

Personal mobile phones, tablets, cameras, laptops, smart watches etc) are never used by staff at the setting. If staff have personal phones or devices, these are stored securely in the cupboard in the corridor and will be switched off or on silent whilst during the day.

Electronic devices should be password protected so that content cannot be accessed by unauthorised users.

It is the responsibility of the staff member to ensure that there is no illegal or inappropriate content stored or used on their device when brought on to setting premises.

Mobiles belonging to visitors:

We request that mobiles belonging to visitors are stored securely in the cupboard in the corridor, on entering the setting.

Mobiles belonging to older children:

Have signed consent from their parents' giving permission for the child to have a mobile and agreeing that they will be stored securely and be switched off or on silent whilst in the setting.

Dedicated setting devices:

To protect children, we will ensure that the dedicated setting mobile phone and/or tablet: remains the property of Astbury Merecats and in using them staff will follow the 'Mobile phone, camera and internet policy' ensuring it

- is stored securely when not in use.
- is protected with a password, is clearly labelled and its use is open to scrutiny. All staff are vigilant and alert to any potential misuse.
- is only used by allocated people who have a clear understanding of what constitutes misuse and know how to minimise the risk. These staff are responsible for their own behaviour regarding the use of the phone and avoid putting themselves into compromising situations which could be misinterpreted and lead to potential allegations.
- is not used in areas such as toilets, changing rooms, nappy changing areas, and sleep areas and

Cameras, photography, and images:

Astbury Merecats obtain parents' and carers' written consent for photographs to be taken or published (for example, on our website or in newspapers or publications).

Staff will ensure the setting's designated camera or recording devices (tablets, cameras, laptops etc) is only used in the setting and any images taken will not be emailed as it may not be secure. (In some instances, it may be required to seek parental permission to email images, but the potential risks must be made clear to parents).

Staff will ensure that children are appropriately dressed, and that they do not use the child's name with an image on a photograph.

Staff will ensure that parents personal cameras are not used to take photographs, video, or audio recordings in our setting without prior explicit written consent from the setting, for example, for a special event, such as Christmas plays.

Staff will ensure that all images are stored securely, and password protected. Where images are stored, the setting will register with the Information Commissioners Office (ICO), in accordance with data protection laws.

Where professional photographers are used DBS, references and parental consent will be obtained prior to photographs being taken.

Ensure 'acceptable use' rules regarding the use of cameras by children are embedded in practice.

Staff will ensure that the use of cameras is closely monitored and open to scrutiny.

Online safety:

On setting equipment, we ensure that appropriate filters and appropriate monitoring systems are in place.

Working off setting premises:

Where staff take setting computer/digital equipment / or records in paper form, off the setting site, they do so with the view that they abide by the staff 'General Data Protection Regulation policy' (GDPR) and 'Mobile phone, camera, smart watch and recording device policy.'

Staff are reminded that information, both in paper or electric form, is sensitive and protected under data protection and GDPR and should be safe and securely stored off the premises and during transport.

10.0 Allegations against staff

"Registered providers must inform Ofsted, or the CMA with which a provider of CoDP is registered, of any allegations of serious harm or abuse by anyone living, working, or looking after children at the premises. This must happen whether the allegations of harm or abuse are alleged to have been committed on the premises or elsewhere, for example, on a visit. Registered providers must also notify Ofsted/ their CMA of the action they have taken in response to the allegations. Ofsted/the CMA must be notified as soon as is reasonably practicable, but in any event within 14 days of the allegations being made. A registered provider who, without a reasonable excuse, fails to do this, commits an offence."

Para.3.10. Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage 2025

Support and advice are sought from Children's Services or the Local Area Designated Officer (LADO), and our Personnel/Human Resources advisor whenever necessary.

At Astbury MereKats we recognise the possibility that adults working in the setting including; directly employed staff, volunteers and supply staff may harm children; that they may have:

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child
- committed a criminal offence against or related to a child or
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates that they are unsuitable to work with children
- behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.

These can include incidents outside of the setting which do not involve children but could have an impact on their suitability to work with children

Any concerns of this nature, about the conduct of other adults, should be taken to the Manager without delay or, where that is a concern about the Manager, to the Chair of Committee/Owner and the LADO.

Staff are aware that this must be done on the same working day.

The setting will not internally investigate until instructed by the LADO.

We make all staff aware of their duty to raise concerns. Where a staff member feels unable to raise an issue or feels that their genuine concerns are not being addressed, other whistleblowing channels may be open to them:

- NSPCC whistleblowing advice line is available. Staff can call 0800 0280285 – 08:00 to 20:00, Monday to Friday and 09:00 to 18:00 at weekends. The email address is: help@nspcc.org.uk. Alternatively, staff can write to: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), Weston House, 42 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3NH.
- Ofsted provides guidance on how to make complaints about a provider: [Complaints procedure - Ofsted - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complaints-procedure-ofsted).
- General guidance on whistleblowing can be found via: [Whistleblowing for employees](#).

As part of our whole setting approach to safeguarding we promote an open and transparent culture in which all concerns about adults working in or on behalf of the setting (including supply staff, volunteers, and contractors) are dealt with promptly and appropriately. This includes allegations which do not meet the harms threshold, also known as low level concerns.

Low level concerns

We understand that the term 'low-level' concern does not mean that it is insignificant. A low-level concern is any concern – no matter how small, and even if no more than causing a sense of unease or a 'nagging doubt' – that an adult working in or on behalf of the setting may have acted in a way that:

- is inconsistent with the staff code of conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work, and;
- does not meet the harm threshold or is otherwise not serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO.

Examples of such behaviour could include, but are not limited to:

- being overfriendly with children
- having favourites
- taking photographs of children on their mobile phone, contrary to setting policy
- engaging with a child on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or behind a closed door, or
- humiliating children

Such behaviour can exist on a wide spectrum, from the inadvertent or thoughtless, or behaviour that may look to be inappropriate, but might not be in specific circumstances, through to that which is ultimately intended to enable abuse.

Low-level concerns will be reported in the same way as a concern in relation to allegations and concerns that meet the harms test i.e. to the Manager or to the Chair of Committee/Owner if the concern is about the Manager.

Records of low-level concerns will be reviewed so that potential patterns of concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour can be identified and responded to.

Where a pattern of behaviour is identified, the Manager will decide on a course of action. This might be internal disciplinary procedures, or referral to the LADO if the harms threshold is met.

The Manager will consider if there are any wider cultural issues in setting that enabled the behaviour to occur and if appropriate policies could be revised or extra training delivered to minimise the risk of recurrence.

11.0 Safer Recruitment

The setting pays full regard to DfE guidance 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' 2025 and with reference to the 'Position of Trust' offence (Sexual Offences Act 2003). We ensure that all appropriate measures are applied in relation to everyone who works in the setting who is likely to be perceived by the children as a safe and trustworthy adult. We do this by:

- Operating safe recruitment practices; including highlighting the importance we place on safeguarding children in our recruitment adverts and interview questions, appropriate Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and reference checks, verifying identity, academic and vocational qualifications, obtaining practitioner references, checking previous employment history, and ensuring that a candidate has the health and physical capacity for the job. It also includes undertaking interviews and checking the Children's List and right to work in England checks in accordance with DBS and Department for Education procedures
- Ensuring that staff and volunteers adhere to a published code of conduct and other professional standards at all times, including after setting activities. Staff are aware of social media/ on-line conduct policies
- Ensuring that all staff and other adults on site are aware of the need for maintaining appropriate and professional boundaries in their relationship with children and parents, following our code of conduct
- Requiring all staff to disclose any convictions, cautions, court orders, reprimands and warnings that may affect their suitability to work with children (whether received before or during their employment at the setting). [Disqualification under the Child Care Act 2006 \(amended following the 2018 Regulations\)](#)
- Maintaining an accurate, complete, up to date Single Central Record

12.0 Staff training and updates:

In our setting there is a commitment to the continuous development of all staff, regardless of role with regard to safeguarding training:

Providers must ensure that all practitioners are trained in line with the criteria set out in Annex C (EYFS 2025). Providers must ensure that practitioners are supported and confident to implement the setting's safeguarding policy and procedures on an ongoing basis. Providers should read '[What to do if you're worried a child is being abused: Advice for practitioners](#)'. Basic Safeguarding Awareness training must be renewed every two years. Providers may consider whether any staff need to undertake annual refresher training during any two-year period to help maintain basic skills and keep up to date with any changes to safeguarding procedures or as a result of any safeguarding concerns that occur in the setting, (for example, via email, e-bulletins, and staff meetings). All staff will complete a two years Cheshire East Basic Safeguarding course and regular additional online training will be allocated to employees by the manager.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and any Deputy must provide support, advice and guidance to all practitioners on an ongoing basis, and on any specific safeguarding issue as required. The DSL must attend a training course consistent with the criteria set out in Annex C (EYFS 2025).

The Designated Safeguarding Lead, and/or Deputy attend the Designated Safeguarding Leads Meetings held each term coordinated by the Early Years Team, therefore enabling them to remain up to date with Safeguarding practices and be aware of any emerging concerns/themes within Cheshire East. The setting acknowledges findings from local and national practice learning reviews and shares lessons learned with all staff.

13.0 Cared for children (Looked after children) and previously cared for children

In Astbury Merecats we ensure that staff have the skills, knowledge and understanding necessary to keep Cared for Children safe as we are aware that children often become cared for as a result of abuse and/or neglect. We have identified a designated lead for our Cared for Children; this person works closely with the Virtual school.

14.0 Children with special needs and disabilities

We ensure that staff are aware that children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) or certain medical or physical health conditions can face additional safeguarding challenges both online and offline. We ensure that staff have knowledge and understanding of the additional barriers which can exist when recognising abuse and neglect in children with special needs/disabilities.

These barriers can include:

- assumptions that indicators of possible abuse such as behaviour, mood and injury relate to the child's disability without further exploration
- children with SEN and disabilities being disproportionately impacted by things like bullying – without outwardly showing any signs; and
- communication barriers and difficulties in overcoming these barriers

We aim to build the necessary skills in staff so that they can safeguard and respond to the specific needs of this group of children.

15.0 The use of 'reasonable force'

There are circumstances when it is appropriate for staff in settings to use reasonable force to safeguard children. The term 'reasonable force' covers the broad range of actions used by staff that involve a degree of physical contact to control or restrain children. This can range from guiding a child to safety by the arm, to more extreme circumstances such as breaking up a fight or where a child needs to be restrained to prevent violence or injury. 'Reasonable' in these circumstances means 'using no more force than is needed'. Settings will need to ensure staff are appropriately trained, that all incidents must be reported and fully recorded in a different way to the way in which safeguarding incidents are reported and recorded. This should be detailed in the settings Behaviour policy and/or Reasonable Force policy.

16.0 Private Fostering

Private Fostering is a type of 'Kinship Care'. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 provides further examples of this type of care and information and guidance around supporting children living in these arrangements. To support kinship carers, the role of virtual heads will be extended to supporting every child in the care of friends or family. We recognise that our setting has a mandatory duty to report to the local authority when we become aware of, or suspect that, a child is subject to a private fostering arrangement. To aid our awareness we ensure that we establish parental responsibility for every child; we take steps to verify the relationship of the adults to the child when we register them.

A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately (without the involvement of a local authority) for the care of a child under the age of 16 years (under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative, in their own home, with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more.

A close family relative is defined as a 'grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt' and includes half-siblings and stepparents (by marriage or where a legal order has been made, such as a Child Arrangement Order); it does not include great-aunts or uncles, great grandparents, or cousins.

Parents and private foster carers both have a legal duty to inform the relevant local authority at least six weeks before the arrangement is due to start; not to do so is a criminal offence.

Whilst most privately fostered children are appropriately supported and looked after, we recognise that they are a potentially vulnerable group who should be monitored by the local authority, particularly when the child has come from another country. In some cases, privately fostered children are affected by abuse and neglect, or are involved in trafficking, child sexual exploitation or modern-day slavery.

Where a member of staff becomes aware of private fostering arrangements, they are aware that they need to notify the Designated Safeguarding Lead. The Designated Safeguarding Lead will then speak to the family of the child involved to check that they are aware of their duty to inform Cheshire East. The setting would also inform ChECS of the private fostering arrangements.

17.0 Children who are absent from education

At Astbury MereKats we have a duty to follow up on absences in a timely manner especially as a child going missing from education is a potential indicator of abuse or neglect.

We ensure that we are rigorous in our attendance procedures; these are outlined in our attendance policy. All staff are aware that children going missing, particularly repeatedly, can act as a vital warning sign of a range of safeguarding possibilities. This may include abuse and neglect, which may include sexual abuse or exploitation and child criminal exploitation. It may indicate mental health problems, risk of substance abuse, risk of travelling to conflict zones, risk of female genital mutilation, so called 'honour'-based abuse or risk of forced marriage. Early intervention is essential to identify the existence of any underlying safeguarding risk and to help prevent the risks of a child going missing in future.

If children do not attend our setting, we have a duty of care to ensure they are safe. This may involve visiting the child's home to ensure their welfare and safety and will always be done in the best interests of the child. The setting will always endeavour that parents / carers and the child/ren themselves are involved in this process. If we are unable to be assured of the child's safety, we will, through our Designated Safeguarding Lead, seek advice from other agencies such as ChECS or the Police, if deemed necessary.

Where a child's destination is unknown when they have left our setting, we ensure we carry out all necessary checks. Staff are aware of the trafficking of children and the importance of rigour around our attendance procedures to reduce this as a threat to our children's safety.

18.0 Children who need a social worker (Child in Need and Child Protection Plans)

Children may need a social worker due to safeguarding or welfare needs. Children may need this help due to abuse, neglect and complex family circumstances. A child's experiences of adversity and trauma can leave them vulnerable to further harm, as well as educationally disadvantaged in facing barriers to attendance, learning, behaviour, and mental health.

Our Designated Safeguarding Leads will be aware of the fact a child has a social worker and will use this information so that decisions can be made in the best interests of the child's safety, welfare, and educational outcomes.

Where children need a social worker, this will inform decisions about safeguarding (for example, responding to unauthorised absence or missing education where there are known safeguarding risks) and about promoting welfare.

19.0 Children requiring mental health support

We recognise that settings have an important role to play in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their children.

Staff are aware of how experiences of children can affect emotional wellbeing, mental health and attendance. We acknowledge that mental health problems can, in some cases, be an indicator that a child has suffered or is at risk of suffering abuse, neglect or exploitation.

We ensure we have specific training and clear systems and processes in place for identifying possible mental health problems, including routes to escalate and clear referral and accountability systems, as outlined in our Mental Health and Well-being Policy. Regular supervision sessions are available to all staff as a confidential way to raise any concerns.

20.0 Educational Outcomes

Our Designated Safeguarding Lead ensures that staff know the children who have experienced or are experiencing welfare, safeguarding and child protection issues so that, as relevant, we know who these children are and understand their developmental progress; this means that we are able to make necessary adjustments to help these children to achieve. In this way we maintain a culture of high aspirations for this cohort. This includes children with a social worker and those previously known to social care; we ensure that staff are made aware of those children in this category.

21.0 Specific safeguarding issues

All staff have an awareness of safeguarding issues. They are aware that these safeguarding issues may not directly involve the child in our setting but could be happening to their siblings or parents. This includes the importance of understanding intra-familial harms and support for siblings where there is intra-familial harm.

They are also aware that some issues could be happening in the lives of staff members.

Staff are supported in accessing and completing the relevant screening tools [CE SCP Multi-Agency Toolkit](#).

As a setting that promotes a strong culture of safeguarding and being alert to the signs and indicators of abuse and harm in children, staff would be aware of the following issues identified in Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025 (Part One and Annex B) and would know how to identify and respond to them:

- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse including sexual violence and sexual harassment
- Emotional Abuse
- Neglect
- Child abduction/community safety incidents
- Children and the Court System
- Children with family member in prison/custody
- Drug/substance/alcohol misuse (both child and parents)
- Child sexual exploitation / trafficked children
- Criminal Exploitation including county lines and serious violence
- Extremism and Radicalisation, including Prevent and Channel
- Children missing from education
- Domestic abuse
- Child-on-child relationship abuse/Teenage Relationship Abuse
- Child-on-child abuse
- Risky behaviours

- Problematic and Harmful Sexual Behaviour
- Sexual health needs
- Obesity/malnutrition
- Online grooming
- Inappropriate behaviour of staff towards children
- Bullying, including homophobic, racist, gender and disability. Breaches of the Equality Act 2010
- Mental health issues including self-harm
- Honour based abuse including - Female Genital Mutilation, Breast Ironing, Forced Marriage
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
- Modern Day Slavery
- Child Trafficking
- Homelessness

Staff are aware that behaviours linked to issues such as drug taking, alcohol abuse, domestic abuse, deliberately missing education and sharing nudes or semi-nudes put children in danger.

22.0 Owner/Committee Responsibilities

Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure they facilitate a whole setting approach to safeguarding. This means ensuring safeguarding and child protection are at the forefront and underpin all relevant aspects of process and policy development. Ultimately, all systems, processes and policies should operate with the best interests of the child at their heart. (KCSiE 2025)

As a setting we ensure that the Owners, Trustees or Committees ensure that all Trustees and Committee members receive appropriate safeguarding and child protection training at induction.

The Owner/Committee fully recognises its responsibilities with regard to Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in accordance with Government guidance.

The Owner/Committee have agreed processes which allow them to monitor and ensure that the setting:

- has robust Safeguarding procedures in place
- operates safe recruitment procedures and appropriate checks are carried out on new staff and adults working on the setting site
- has procedures for dealing with allegations of abuse against any member of staff or adult on site
- has a member of the Leadership Team who is designated to take lead responsibility for dealing with Safeguarding and Child Protection issues
- takes steps to remedy any deficiencies or weaknesses regarding safeguarding arrangements
- is supported by the Owner/Committee nominating a member responsible for liaising with the LA and/or partner agencies in the event of allegations of abuse against the Manager; this is the Chair or Owner.
- carries out an annual review of the Safeguarding policy and procedures
- carries out an annual Safeguarding Audit (section 11) in consultation with the Owner/Committee and shared with the Early Years team.

Finally:

Staff in Asbury Merekat take the safeguarding of every child very seriously. This means that, should they have any concerns of a safeguarding nature about a child or adult, they are expected to report, record, and take the necessary steps to ensure that the child is safe and protected. This

is never an easy action, nor one taken lightly. They are aware that it can lead to challenge from parents/carers, but at all times staff have the child at the heart of all their decisions and act in their best interests.

Further information on our safeguarding and related policy documents and procedures is available on request from the Manager or Designated Safeguarding Lead.