

# Vergo Safeguarding Policy and Procedure (Children and Vulnerable Adults)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

At Vergo, we deliver our services in and around nurseries, schools, colleges, hospitals, and other locations where we may come into contact with children and vulnerable adults. Vergo is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and vulnerable adults. We recognise our responsibility to protect them from abuse, harm, and neglect in all environments where we operate.

This document sets out our policy and procedure for safeguarding, ensuring that all concerns are handled consistently, professionally, and in compliance with UK law. It outlines the steps our organisation will take to prevent and respond to any suspicions or incidents of abuse or neglect and aligns with key legislation, including the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 2004, the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, and the Care Act 2014. It is also guided by statutory frameworks such as Working Together to Safeguard Children and Keeping Children Safe in Education.

This policy applies to all employees regardless of grade or status and does not form part of the employment contract, as we reserve the right to amend it at any time.

## 2. DEFINITIONS

**Vulnerable Adults** are individuals over 18 who may be unable to protect themselves from harm due to age, disability, illness, or other circumstances.

**Children** are defined by the Children Act 1989 as any person under the age of 18 years and including an unborn child.

**Safeguarding** involves protecting individuals from maltreatment, preventing impairment of health or development, and ensuring they can live safely and securely.

## 3. SAFEGUARDING PRINCIPLES

The welfare of children and vulnerable adults is paramount, and it is everyone's responsibility to safeguard children and vulnerable adults, not just those who work directly with them. Everyone within the organisation has a responsibility to safeguard those at risk.

The welfare of the child or vulnerable adult is paramount and must take precedence over other considerations. Safeguarding should be proactive, aiming to prevent harm before it occurs. All concerns must be handled confidentially and appropriately.

## 4. RECOGNISING ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Abuse and neglect can take various forms, and staff should be aware of the different ways in which harm can occur.

**Physical abuse** involves inflicting pain, injury, or suffering through actions such as hitting, shaking, burning, or other forms of physical harm. Unexplained bruises, fractures, burns, or fear of physical contact may be indicators of physical abuse.

**Emotional abuse** includes persistent criticism, humiliation, isolation, or exposure to distressing situations, causing long-term damage to an individual's emotional well-being. Signs may include low self-esteem, withdrawal, sudden outbursts of emotion, or a reluctance to engage with others.

**Sexual abuse** involves any form of sexual activity without consent, including grooming, exploitation, inappropriate touching, and forced engagement in sexual acts. Children or vulnerable adults experiencing sexual abuse may display fearfulness, regression in behaviour, or an unusual knowledge of sexual matters for their age.

**Neglect** occurs when a child or vulnerable adult is deprived of basic needs such as food, shelter, medical care, or emotional support. Chronic hunger, poor hygiene, unattended medical conditions, or persistent fatigue can indicate neglect.

**Domestic violence** refers to abusive behaviour within a close relationship, often involving coercion, control, and physical or emotional harm. Children exposed to domestic violence may exhibit anxiety, aggression, or difficulties forming relationships.

**Modern slavery** includes forced labour, human trafficking, and exploitation. Signs may include individuals appearing withdrawn, unable to speak freely, showing signs of malnutrition, or living in poor conditions with restricted movement.

**Institutional abuse** occurs when safeguarding practices are ignored within care settings, leading to mistreatment or neglect. It can involve rigid routines, lack of personal choice, and failure to address medical or emotional needs.

**Financial abuse** involves the exploitation or coercion of vulnerable individuals for financial gain. This can include theft, fraud, or undue pressure to change financial arrangements. Sudden changes in financial circumstances, missing valuables, or reluctance to discuss finances may indicate financial abuse.

Staff should remain alert to these signs and respond sensitively to any concerns. If a child or vulnerable adult appears to be in distress, withdraws from usual activities, displays sudden behavioural changes, or shows signs of abuse or neglect, staff should take appropriate action immediately.

## 5. PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

Vergo is committed to robust safeguarding through stringent recruitment and screening processes. As part of the pre-employment process, all job applicants must disclose any unspent criminal convictions. Screening includes identity verification, employment history checks, and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks, with enhanced DBS checks required for roles in regulated environments.

DBS checks are conducted by third-party employment screening experts. A **basic disclosure** is required for all employees, showing unspent convictions. For roles requiring additional safeguarding measures, such as work in hospitals or schools, an **enhanced DBS check** is completed. This includes details of spent and unspent convictions, cautions (subject to filtering rules), and local police records. While not all criminal convictions automatically disqualify a candidate, decisions are made on a case-by-case basis, ensuring proportionate action while prioritising the protection of children and vulnerable adults. Refusal to undergo a DBS check will be considered a failure to meet the company's essential safeguarding requirements and may result in withdrawal of an offer of employment or disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

All staff undergo mandatory safeguarding training covering abuse recognition, reporting procedures, and organisational policies. Training is delivered during induction and refreshed regularly to ensure ongoing awareness and compliance.

Employees are expected to uphold the principles outlined in Vergo's **People Charter** when interacting with children and vulnerable adults. Clear reporting mechanisms ensure concerns are addressed promptly, fostering an open culture where individuals feel safe reporting issues without fear of reprisal.

## 6. RESPONDING TO A DISCLOSURE

A **disclosure** in safeguarding refers to the process by which a child or vulnerable adult shares information about abuse, neglect, or harm they have experienced or are experiencing. This may be voluntary, where the individual chooses to confide in someone, or prompted by questioning when a concern has been raised.

Disclosures can be:

- **Direct** – when the individual explicitly states they have been harmed or are being harmed.
- **Indirect** – when concerns arise from behaviours, comments, or physical signs that suggest abuse or neglect, even if the individual does not openly acknowledge it.

Staff must respond to disclosures with sensitivity, remaining calm and listening carefully without pressing for details. It is essential to report any concerns appropriately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or relevant authorities.

When someone discloses abuse or neglect, staff should avoid leading questions and must not make assumptions. They should provide reassurance, ensuring the individual feels heard and understands that their concerns are being taken seriously. It should also be explained that the information will need to be shared with the appropriate professionals to ensure their safety.

All disclosures must be recorded accurately and reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) without delay.

## 7. REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS

Employees must report all safeguarding concerns to a **Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)** as soon as possible. Vergo has two appointed DSLs, the HR Director and the Head of QHSE. If a DSL is unavailable, concerns should be raised with a member of the HR team, either in person or in writing.

Reports should include the date, time, and location of the disclosure, along with the name and details of the individual involved. A factual account of the disclosure should be provided, using the individual's exact words where possible. Any observations, such as visible injuries or changes in behaviour, should be recorded, along with details of actions taken and the names of those involved. The reporting employee must include their name, signature, and the date on the report. Employees are encouraged to maintain accurate records of any incidents witnessed, actions taken, or discussions held.

All safeguarding concerns will be taken seriously and acted upon promptly. This includes notifying the organisation and relevant authorities, completing a safeguarding report, and implementing necessary

measures to protect the individual. Support will also be provided to any employee affected by safeguarding concerns.

If an allegation is made against an employee, a thorough investigation will be conducted in line with the company's disciplinary procedure. Appropriate action will be taken as required, and findings will be shared with the relevant authorities where necessary.

## 8. ESCALATION AND EXTERNAL REPORTING

The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will assess the concern and determine the appropriate next steps. This may involve contacting local safeguarding authorities, reporting the matter to the police if a crime has been committed, or seeking advice from the NSPCC or another safeguarding organisation.

In general, staff should report safeguarding concerns to the DSL in the first instance. However, an employee should contact the police directly if they believe there is an **immediate threat to someone's safety**, such as:

- A child or vulnerable adult is at **imminent risk of harm or danger**.
- A crime is in progress, or there is an immediate **threat of violence**.
- They witness an act of **physical or sexual abuse** occurring in real time.
- There is an urgent need for **medical assistance** due to an assault or other safeguarding concern.
- They are unable to reach the DSL or other designated safeguarding contacts in a situation requiring urgent police intervention.

**Staff must not attempt to investigate allegations themselves.** Any concerns should be reported through the appropriate safeguarding channels. If an employee believes that a concern is not being addressed appropriately, they should escalate the matter by following the Whistleblowing Policy.

## 9. SAFEGUARDING INVESTIGATIONS - HANDLING A SAFEGUARDING REPORT FROM AN EXTERNAL AGENCY OR INDIVIDUAL

If Vergo receives a safeguarding report regarding an employee from an external agency, such as social services, the police, or a concerned individual, it will be handled with the utmost seriousness and in accordance with our safeguarding policies and employment procedures.

If you receive a safeguarding call, email, or report:

1. **Do not investigate or attempt to resolve the matter yourself.**
2. **Immediately contact the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)** or, if unavailable, a member of the **HR Team**.
  - Provide a factual account of the information received.
  - Note down any names, times, and details shared, but do not seek additional information beyond what is offered.
3. **Ensure confidentiality** is maintained and do not discuss the matter with others unless authorised.

Upon receiving the report, the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or a member of the HR Team will review the information provided. The DSL will acknowledge receipt of the report and ensure that confidentiality is maintained as required by law.

If the concern relates to a child or vulnerable adult's safety, immediate action will be taken to assess the risk, which may include suspending the employee in question while an investigation takes place. Suspension is a neutral act and does not indicate wrongdoing but ensures that a thorough and unbiased investigation can be conducted.

An internal investigation will be launched in collaboration with the relevant authorities. If necessary, Vergo will cooperate fully with external investigations and provide any requested information to law enforcement or safeguarding agencies.

During the investigation, the employee will be informed of the allegations and given an opportunity to respond. Appropriate support will be provided to all parties involved. If the allegations are substantiated, or if action is otherwise required to prevent a safeguarding concern or to protect the company, disciplinary measures may be taken, up to and including dismissal, in line with Vergo's disciplinary procedures. Additional steps may also be implemented to safeguard the organisation's reputation, ensure legal compliance, and uphold its duty of care to employees, children, and vulnerable adults.

If the investigation finds no evidence of misconduct, the employee will be reinstated, and any necessary support will be provided to facilitate a smooth return to work, while ensuring measures are in place to prevent safeguarding risks from arising in the future. Regardless of the outcome, Vergo remains committed to maintaining a safe, compliant, and supportive work environment for all stakeholders.

The organisation will maintain accurate records of the report, actions taken, and outcomes in a secure and confidential manner. Any lessons learned from the case will be used to improve safeguarding practices and training within the organisation.

## **10. INFORMATION SHARING AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

All safeguarding concerns must be documented and stored securely in compliance with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. Information must only be shared with those who need to know, in line with legal and safeguarding requirements.

## **11. TRAINING AND AWARENESS**

All staff, volunteers, and contractors must complete safeguarding training as part of their induction. Refresher training will be provided regularly to ensure continued awareness and compliance.

## **12. REVIEW AND MONITORING**

This policy and procedure will be reviewed annually or when changes in legislation occur. Feedback from staff and safeguarding bodies will be incorporated to ensure continuous improvement.

## **13. FURTHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT**

Employees seeking further guidance on safeguarding should contact the DSL, HR team, or refer to external resources.

**The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)** – Each local authority has a LADO responsible for managing safeguarding concerns, particularly where allegations involve professionals working with children. Employees can contact their local Children's Services or Safeguarding Board for details.

**The NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children)** – The NSPCC provides confidential advice on safeguarding concerns for both children and vulnerable adults. **Helpline:** 0808 800 5000 **Email:** [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk) **Website:** [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

**The Police (Non-Emergency & Emergency)** – If there is **immediate danger**, employees should call **999**. For non-urgent safeguarding concerns, employees can contact the police via **101**.

**The Safeguarding Adults Board** – Employees dealing with concerns related to vulnerable adults can contact their local Safeguarding Adults Board for guidance.

**The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)** – For concerns about an individual's suitability to work with children or vulnerable adults, employees may need to contact the DBS referral service [www.gov.uk/report-someone-working-with-children](http://www.gov.uk/report-someone-working-with-children)

**Whistleblowing Advice Lines** – If employees feel safeguarding concerns are not being addressed internally, they can escalate matters through whistleblowing channels:

- **NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line:** 0800 028 0285
- **Protect (Whistleblowing Charity):** 020 3117 2520 ([www.protect-advice.org.uk](http://www.protect-advice.org.uk))

#### **14. EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME (EAP)**

We would like to remind you that further support is available by contacting our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), on 0800 316 9337 or by visiting their website [Wecare-cl.com](http://Wecare-cl.com) or app. You will need to register in the first instance using your personal details and access code E26970

#### **15. SAFEGUARDING DUE DILIGENCE FOR NON-VERGO PERSONNEL**

At Vergo Pest Management, safeguarding is everyone's responsibility – including those who we do not directly employ. This includes contractors, agency staff, consultants, and volunteers.

Anyone working with Vergo in a role that may involve access to children, vulnerable adults, or sensitive settings must have a valid (must be no more than 12 months old at the time of engagement) DBS check.

All non-Vergo workers must:

- Provide a clear DBS check upon request.
- Follow Vergo's safeguarding policies and procedures.
- Report any safeguarding concerns immediately to Vergo's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or HR.
- Cooperate with any safeguarding investigations.
- Attend safeguarding training if required.

If a concern or allegation is made about a non-Vergo worker:

- Vergo will take it seriously and may suspend or end their engagement.
- We will inform and work with the agency or company that supplied the individual.
- If needed, Vergo will report the issue to the appropriate authorities.

Vergo will keep records of DBS checks, training, and any safeguarding actions taken. We may carry out checks to make sure all third parties are meeting our safeguarding standards.

Please get in touch with HR via email at [HRTeam@Vergo.uk](mailto:HRTeam@Vergo.uk) with any queries or for additional support.