

Safer recruitment



What is it?

Safer Recruitment is about the processes we put in place when recruiting anyone (volunteer or paid employee) into a position or agency which works with children, young people or families. The concept of safer recruitment also applies to agencies working with vulnerable adults, for example those with learning difficulties, but this guide focuses on how safer recruitment relates to children's services.

Safer recruitment is about ensuring that only those suitable to work within organisations working with children, young people and families are recruited into such positions. These principles should be adhered to for all positions, whether they are paid or voluntary.

Safer recruitment is not merely undertaking a disclosure and barring (DBS) check on potential new employees or volunteers; it is much more than this. Organisations and individuals who work with children and young people, or are involved in providing services for them, have a duty to safeguard and promote their welfare. If you recruit staff and/or volunteers into the children and young people's workforce, you should be trained in safer recruitment practices.

Why is safer recruitment important?

We know from Serious Case Reviews and research on offender behaviour that some people will specifically seek out employment (either paid or voluntary) for the purposes of accessing vulnerable people and committing acts of abuse. In addition, some people's behaviours and attitudes are such that they

are not suited to working with children, young people or families, and their actions may be abusive or unsuitable within such settings. We also know that there are individuals who are deceptive enough that their abusive intentions are difficult to detect. Therefore, it is not possible to guarantee 'safe recruitment', but by undertaking the principles of safer recruitment we can make it more difficult for such people to gain access to children, young people or families.

The focus on safer recruitment intensified following the publication of the Bichard report into the 2002 murders of ten year olds Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman in Soham, Cambridgeshire. Ian Huntley, a caretaker at a local secondary school, was convicted of their murders. The Bichard inquiry was established to look at the safeguarding procedures of Humberside Police and Cambridgeshire Constabulary, both of whom were in possession of information and intelligence relating to previous concerns about Huntley's conduct in relation to young women. The inquiry raised concerns about the safeguarding and vetting procedures in place at that time, which had allowed Huntley to work in a school despite this intelligence. Within the inquiry report Bichard stated: 'For those agencies whose job it is to protect children and vulnerable people, the harsh reality is that if a sufficiently devious person is determined to seek out opportunities to work their evil, no one can guarantee that they will be stopped. Our task is to make it as difficult as possible for them to succeed'. (Bichard 2004, p12).

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5 Minute Facts

What are the principles of safer recruitment?

Safer recruitment is based on four principles:

1. **Deter** - deter applicants with inappropriate motivations from applying for positions, by making it clear that the organisation is not a 'soft target' for abuse (e.g. by referring to safeguarding policies in application processes or job advertisements)
2. **Reject** - identify and reject inappropriate people from the employment process (e.g. through interviews)
3. **Prevent** - ensure that there are no opportunities for abuse by managing the environment, assessing risk and establishing clear standards of behaviour (e.g. through appointment and induction processes)
4. **Detect** - identify inappropriate behaviour or abuse within the workplace at the earliest opportunity, and respond appropriately (safe working culture)

When recruiting, organisations should ensure that their processes reflect these principles, and that they have a safe working culture. There are a number of good practice steps which should be undertaken throughout the employment process, all the way from identifying a vacant post to employment and induction.

What is a safe working culture?

A safe working culture is one where everyone is committed to ensuring that practice is undertaken in the best and most appropriate way to ensure children and young people in their care are safe. In addition, staff should

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be supported, and know how to respond to concerns regarding the behaviour or practice of others. Key features include:

- An open culture, with no secrets
- A belief that abuse could happen here
- Clear procedures to report concerns about the behaviour of practitioners
- Support for children and adults who raise concerns, and commitment to act on them
- Policies and procedures being used, and people made accountable for their use
- Good induction and use of probationary periods
- A commitment from all who work there to safeguard and protect children and to maintain an ongoing culture of vigilance

Where can practitioners go for training and support?

Bolton Council strongly recommends that at least one member of any interview panel responsible for recruiting individuals to work with children, young people or families has undertaken safer recruitment training. A suite of training is available to all those responsible for the recruitment of paid staff and/or volunteers.

For more information...

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