

Prisoners Education Trust

Policy on protection of vulnerable adults (POVA) and children

Approved by the Board 25th March 2009

The Prisoners' Education Trust extends and enriches education offered in prisons partly by meeting the fees for distance learning courses. It has also developed mentoring schemes for HM prisoners, by training volunteer prisoners to help their peers with learning programmes. Staff at the Trust principally work with prisoners through correspondence, but also may work in person with prisoners in delivering specific services in prison. Although the Trust's main focus is prisoners aged over 18, it is possible that exceptionally the Trust may assist young people under 18, and young people or children may be present at Trust events, which this policy also covers. This policy takes account of legislation which comes into force in October 2009 in which prisoners are classed as vulnerable adults

The Trust's policy with respect to vulnerable adults and children is to maintain the highest professional standards in its work, prevent harm to prisoners and to any other children or vulnerable adults with whom it comes into contact, and protect its own workers. This document contains the Trust's commitments, responsibilities and Good Practice Guidelines to enable it to adhere to this policy.

Who is a Vulnerable Adult? A vulnerable adult is defined in the Government's Guidance on Adult Abuse as: - 'a person aged 18 years or over, who is in receipt of or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation'.¹

The Trust is committed to:

- working supportively with prisoners, prison staff and other partners in championing prisoner's education and learning,
- offering prisoners access to, and support for, the widest range of education and training opportunities, thus making a positive difference to their lives,
- improving their self-esteem and enabling them to choose a more constructive way of life,
- seeing prisoners as individuals, and focusing on their potential, not their past,
- ensuring its staff and volunteers are honest, reliable and efficient, and are trained appropriately.

The Trust's responsibilities include:

- registering any employees or volunteers working in person with HM prisoners with the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) which collaborates with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) to produce a list of people barred from working with vulnerable adults and children,

¹ <http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/social/adultprot/adultprotection.htm>
[Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults](#)

- fulfilling existing pre-employment responsibilities, taking up references, and checking on gaps in a curriculum vitae,
- fulfilling a statutory duty to provide information that the Trust already holds about employees to the ISA on request,
- if any employee is found to be unsuitable to continue working with vulnerable adults or children, the Trust must refer this information to the ISA,
- if an employee reports to the Director of the Trust any concerns about preventing serious harm or serious crime, or an infringement of prison rules, the Director or another designated person will check that the appropriate authorities have been notified, and record the report and action taken,
- discussing with the Trust staff and trustees the Policy Document and Good Practice Guidelines for safe and appropriate working with prisoners, and gaining employees' acceptance of the Good Practice Guidelines before they are allowed to work directly with prisoners.
- Ensuring appropriate briefing is given to any visitors whom the Trust takes into prisons to ensure their safety and awareness of POVA issues.

Good Practice Guidelines for working with Vulnerable Adults and Children in Prison or Young Offender Institutions

The following code of practice applies to all Trust staff, trustees and volunteers whether acting in a paid or unpaid capacity:

- When working in HMP Prisons or Young Offender Institutions, employees must find out what security measures and regulations are in force with respect to working with prisoners, and observe them at all times. Security measures are likely to differ according to the classification of the prison, and you must find out what applies in each prison. You may be briefed by the prison about security; if not, ask the Education Department staff or a prison officer *where the security button is in each room you occupy*.
- If you are by yourself and any incident occurs, such as fighting between prisoners, or any physical assault -however minor- do not intervene. You must press the security button, then leave the room, and find the nearest member of staff (Education department staff or prison officer) to report the incident. Breaking the prison rules such as smoking must also be reported.
- If you are in any way concerned about preventing serious harm or serious crime, you should speak without delay to the appropriate prison authority and to the Trust's Director. The Education Manager or other education staff are your first point of contact.
- Ask the education staff for advice about anything that disturbs you; don't allow minor situations to escalate.
- *You must always be accompanied or monitored by a member of the education staff in a room or area where you are working with prisoners.* Remember to use lavatory facilities when prisoners are not in the building, so that you can be accompanied there by staff who will unlock them for you.
- Unnecessary or potentially inappropriate physical contact must be avoided at all times.

- You will not make suggestive or inappropriate remarks to, or about, a vulnerable adult or child even in fun, as this could be misinterpreted.
- You will remember that those who abuse vulnerable adults or children can be of any age (even other children and vulnerable adults), gender, ethnic background or class, and it is important not to allow personal preconceptions about people to prevent appropriate actions taking place.
- HMPS requires all prisons to have a diversity and race policy, and a designated officer in the prison. You should report any inappropriate behaviour, e.g. use of racist language, at the earliest opportunity.
- Everyone working with vulnerable adults and children is asked to:
 - Treat all people with respect and dignity, reflecting their age, background, culture and special needs.
 - Develop ways of co-operative working using positive reinforcement, and making clear any criticism relates to work not to the person.
 - Encourage vulnerable adults and children to feel secure and trusting enough to point out attitudes or behaviour with which they do not feel comfortable.
 - Provide opportunities for them to communicate about any concerns they may have.
 - Not permit abusive peer behaviour, e.g. bullying.

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HOW TO RESPOND TO A VULNERABLE ADULT OR CHILD WANTING TO TALK ABOUT ABUSE

Abuse refers to physical (including sexual) and psychological abuse. It is not easy to give precise guidance, but the following may help:

GENERAL POINTS

- Show acceptance of what the vulnerable adult or child says (however unlikely the story may sound)
- Keep calm
- Look at the vulnerable adult or child directly
- Be honest
- Tell the vulnerable adult or child you will need to let someone else know - don't promise confidentiality
- Even when a vulnerable adult or child has broken a rule, they are not to blame for the abuse
- Be aware that the vulnerable adult or child may have been threatened or bribed not to tell
- Never push for information. If the child decides not to tell you after all, then accept that and let them know that you are always ready to listen.

HELPFUL THINGS YOU MAY SAY OR SHOW

- I believe you (or showing acceptance of what the child says)
- Thank you for telling me
- It's not your fault
- I will help you

DON'T SAY

- Why didn't you tell anyone before?
- I can't believe it!
- Are you sure this is true?
- Why? How? When? Who? Where?
- Never make false promises
- Never make statements such as "I am shocked, don't tell anyone else"

CONCLUDING- You Must:

- Reassure the vulnerable adult or child that they were right to tell you and show acceptance
- Inform the appropriate prison authority and the Director of the Trust immediately.
- Let the vulnerable adult or child know what you are going to do next and that you will let them know what happens.
- Make notes as soon as possible (preferably within one hour of the vulnerable adult or child talking to you), writing down exactly what the child said and when s/he said it, what you said in reply and what was happening immediately beforehand (e.g. a description of the activity). Record dates and times of these events and when you made the record. Keep all hand written notes, even if subsequently typed. Such records should be kept safely for an indefinite period.
- Consider your own feelings and seek support if needed.

(Adapted from UCL Speech and Language Therapy guidelines)