



Child & Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy

The **North Essex Astronomical Society** will make provision for children, young people and vulnerable adults to ensure that:

- The welfare of the child/vulnerable adult is paramount.
- All children/vulnerable adults, whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, religious beliefs and/or sexual identity, have the right to protection from abuse.
- All suspicions and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.
- All members of the North Essex Astronomical Society have a responsibility to report concerns to the designated Society officer.

Note: For the remainder of this document – all statements identifying “children” shall be assumed to include “Vulnerable adults” unless stated. “Parents” should be assumed to cover both parents and guardians, as appropriate.

C & VA Protection Policy Statement

The **North Essex Astronomical Society** has a duty of care to safeguard all children and vulnerable adults involved in **Society events** from harm. All children and vulnerable adults have a right to protection, and the needs of disabled children and others who may be particularly vulnerable must be taken into account.

The **North Essex Astronomical Society** will ensure the safety and protection of all children and vulnerable adults involved in **Society events** through adherence to the Child Protection guidelines adopted by the **North Essex Astronomical Society (NEAS)**.

A child is defined as a person under the age of 18 (The Children Act 1989).

Policy aims

The aim of the C & VA Protection Policy is to promote good practice:

- Providing children and vulnerable adults with appropriate safety and protection whilst in the care of the **North Essex Astronomical Society**.
- Allow all members/volunteers to make informed and confident responses to specific C & VA protection issues.

Promoting good practice

Child and vulnerable adult abuse, particularly sexual abuse, can create strong emotions in those facing such a situation. It is important to understand these feelings and not allow them to interfere with your judgement about the appropriate action to take.

Abuse can occur within a wide range of situations. Some individuals will actively seek employment or voluntary work with young people in order to harm them. Any member who will have regular contact with young people can be an important link in identifying cases where they need protection. All suspicious cases of poor practice should be reported following the guidelines in this document.

Good practice guidelines

All members should be encouraged to demonstrate exemplary behaviour in order to protect themselves and the Society from false allegations. The following are common sense examples of how to create a positive culture and climate.

Good practice means:

- Always putting the welfare of each young person first.
- Treating all young people/disabled adults equally with respect and dignity.
- Giving enthusiastic and constructive feedback rather than negative criticism.
- Always working in an open environment, avoiding private or unobserved situations and encouraging open communication.
- Being an excellent role model – this includes not smoking or drinking alcohol in the company of young people or vulnerable adults.
- Building balanced relationships based on mutual trust and empowering children and vulnerable adults to share in decision making.



- Recognising the developmental needs and capacity of young people and disabled adults and not pushing them against their will.
- Involving parents/carers and, wherever possible, encouraging them to take responsibility for their own children.
- Carefully considering the views of parents/guardians regarding manual support.
 - Ensuring that if any form of manual/physical support is required, it should be provided openly and according to guidelines provided by the NSPCC.
- Securing parental/guardian consent in writing:
 - To act in loco parentis, should the need arise to administer emergency first aid and/or other medical treatment.
 - If Society members are required to transport C or VA in their own vehicles.
- Keeping a written record of any injury that occurs, along with details of treatment given.

Practices to be avoided

The following should be **avoided** except in emergencies. If a case arises where these situations are unavoidable (for example, the child sustains an injury and needs to go to hospital, or a parent fails to arrive to pick a child up at the end of a session), it should be with the full knowledge and consent of a Society officer or the parents/guardian of the C or VA.

Otherwise, **avoid**:

- Excessive amounts of time alone with children/vulnerable adults away from others.
- Taking or dropping off a child/vulnerable adult to an event.

Practices never to be sanctioned

The following should never be sanctioned. You should never:

- Engage in rough physical or sexually provocative games, including horseplay.
- Allow or engage in any form of inappropriate contact or touching.
- Allow children/vulnerable adult to use inappropriate language unchallenged.
- Make sexually suggestive comments to a child/vulnerable adult, even in fun.
- Reduce a child/vulnerable adult to tears as a form of control.
- Allow allegations made by a child/VA to go unchallenged, unrecorded or not acted upon.
- Do things of a personal nature for children/disabled adults that they can do for themselves.

NB It may sometimes be necessary for members or volunteers to do things of a personal nature for children/vulnerable adult, particularly if they are young or are disabled. These tasks should only be carried out with the full understanding and consent of parents, guardians or carers involved. There is a need to be responsive to a person's reactions. If a person is fully dependent on you, talk with him/her about what you are doing and give choices where possible. This is particularly so if you are involved in any dressing or undressing of outer clothing, or where there is physical contact, lifting or assisting a child to carry out particular activities. Avoid taking on the responsibility for tasks for which you are not appropriately trained.

Incidents that must be reported/recorded

If any of the following occur you should report this immediately to another colleague and record the incident. You should also ensure the parents of the child are informed:

- if you accidentally hurt a child (or you see another person hurt a child)
- if a child is hurt or injured in any way during the course of a Society event
- If he/she seems distressed in any manner
- if a child appears to be sexually aroused by your actions
- If a child misunderstands or misinterprets something you have done.

Use of photographic/filming equipment at Society events

There is evidence that some people have used community events as an opportunity to take inappropriate photographs or film footage of young and disabled people in vulnerable positions. All members should be vigilant and any concerns should be reported to the Chairman. If in any doubt when considering taking photographs, seek further assistance and clarification from a designated Society officer or parent/guardian/carer present



Recruitment and training of volunteers

North Essex Astronomical Society recognises that anyone may have the potential to abuse children in some way and that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure any person considered unsuitable are prevented from working unsupervised with children.

Pre-selection checks must include the following:

- All Society members who will potentially be working in related circumstances should complete an application form. The application form will elicit biographical information about an applicant and a self-disclosure regarding any criminal record.
- Consent should be obtained from an applicant to seek information from the Criminal Records Bureau.
- Two pieces of evidence of identity should be provided (for example, passport or driving licence with photo together with e.g. a recent utilities bill).

All Members who are to work with children will be required to undergo an interview, which will be carried out to acceptable protocol and recommendations, during which:

- A check should be made that the application form has been completed in full (including sections on criminal records and self-disclosures) and that any qualifications have been substantiated.
- The requirements of the task and responsibilities of the member should be clarified.
- The member should read and sign up to adhere to the NEAS Child & Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy.
- Any specific training needs are identified.

In addition to pre-selection checks, an ongoing safeguarding process includes review and training to help members and volunteers to:

- Analyse their own practice against established good practice, and to ensure their practice is likely to protect them from false allegations.
- Better recognise their responsibilities and report any concerns about suspected poor practice or possible abuse.
- Respond to concerns expressed by a child or young person.
- Work safely and effectively with children.

North Essex Astronomical Society requires:

- Relevant personnel who volunteer to work with children ensure their practice is exemplary and facilitates the development of a positive culture towards good practice and child protection.
- Relevant personnel to undergo national first aid training (where necessary).

Responding to allegations or suspicions

It is not the responsibility of North Essex Astronomical Society to decide whether or not child abuse has taken place. However, there is a responsibility to act on any concerns through contact with the appropriate authorities.

North Essex Astronomical Society will assure all members/volunteers that it will fully support and protect anyone who in good faith reports his/her concern that a colleague is, or may be, abusing a child.

Where there is a complaint against a member there may be three types of investigation:

- a criminal investigation
- a child protection investigation
- A disciplinary or misconduct investigation.

The results of the police and child protection investigation may well influence the disciplinary investigation, but not necessarily.



Action

1. Concerns about poor practice:

- If, following consideration, the allegation is clearly about poor practice, the committee and/or designated officer will deal with it as a misconduct issue.
- If the allegation is about poor practice by the committee and/or designated officer, or if the matter has been handled inadequately and concerns remain, it should be reported to the Social Services who will decide how to deal with the allegation and whether or not to initiate further proceedings.

2. Concerns about suspected abuse:

- Any suspicion that a child has been abused by either a member or a volunteer should be reported to the designated officer, who will take such steps as considered necessary to ensure the safety of the child in question and any other child who may be at risk.
- The officer will refer the allegation to the Social Services department which may involve the police, or go directly to the police if out-of-hours.
- The parents or carers of the child will be contacted as soon as possible following advice from the Social Services department.

Confidentiality

Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned. Information should be handled and disseminated on a need to know basis only. This includes,

- the Society committee and designated officer
- the parents/guardian of the person who is alleged to have been abused
- the person making the allegation
- social services/police
- The alleged abuser (and parents if the alleged abuser is a child). Note: Best practice is to seek advice from Social Services on who should approach the alleged abuser.

Information should be stored in a secure place with limited access to designated people, in line with data protection laws (for example that information is accurate, regularly updated, relevant and secure).

Internal enquiries and suspension

- The North Essex Astronomical Society committee will make an immediate decision about whether any individual accused of abuse should be temporarily suspended pending further police and social services inquiries.
- Irrespective of the findings of the social services or police inquiries the North Essex Astronomical Society Committee will assess all individual cases to decide whether a member can be reinstated and how this can be sensitively handled. This may be a difficult decision, particularly where there is insufficient evidence to uphold any action by the police. In such cases, the North Essex Astronomical Society Committee must reach a decision based upon the available information, which could suggest that on a balance of probability; it is more likely than not that the allegation is true. The welfare of the child should remain of paramount importance throughout.

Support to deal with the aftermath of abuse

- Consideration should be given to the kind of support that children, parents and members of staff and indeed the alleged perpetrator may need. Use of help-lines, support groups and open meetings will maintain an open culture and help the healing process. The British Association for Counselling Directory is available from The British Association for Counselling, 1 Regent Place, Rugby CV21 2PJ, Tel: 01788 550899, Fax: 01788 562189, Email: bac@bacp.co.uk, Internet: www.bacp.co.uk

Allegations of previous abuse

Allegations of abuse may be made some time after the event (for example by an adult who was abused as a child or by a member who is still currently working with children).

Where such an allegation is made, the club should follow the procedures as detailed above and report the matter to the social services or the police. This is because other children may still be at risk from this person. Anyone who has a previous criminal conviction for offences



related to abuse is automatically excluded from working with children. This is reinforced by the details of the Protection of Children Act 1999.

Action if bullying is suspected

If bullying is suspected, the same procedure should be followed as set out in the 'Responding to Suspicions or allegations' section above.

3. Concerns outside the Society environment (e.g. a parent or carer):

- Report your concerns to the designated officer, who should contact social services or the police as soon as possible.
- The officer will determine whether or not the persons involved in the incident play a role in North Essex Astronomical Society and act accordingly.
- If the officer is not available, the person being told of or discovering the abuse should contact social services or the police immediately, who will determine a course of action.
- Maintain confidentiality on a need to know basis only.

4. Information for social services or the police about suspected abuse:

To ensure that this information is as helpful as possible, a detailed record should always be made at the time of the disclosure/concern, which should include the following:

- The child's name, age, date of birth, home address and telephone number.
- Whether or not the person making the report is expressing their own concerns or those of someone else.
- The nature of allegation, including dates, times, special factors and relevant information
- Make a clear distinction between what is fact, opinion or hearsay.
- A description of any visible bruising or other injuries. Also any indirect signs, such as behavioural changes.
- Details of witnesses to the incidents.
- The child's account, if it can be given, of what has happened and how any bruising or other injuries occurred.
- Have the parents been contacted? If so, what has been said?
- Has anyone else been consulted? If so, record details.
- If the child was not the person who reported the incident, has the child been spoken to? If so, what was said?
- Has anyone been alleged to be the abuser? Record details.
- Where possible referral to the police or social services should be confirmed in writing within 24 hours and the name of the contact who took the referral should be recorded.

If you are worried about sharing concerns about abuse with a senior colleague, you can contact social services or the police direct, or the **NSPCC Child Protection Helpline on 0800 800 5000**, or **Childline on 0800 1111**.

Declaration

On behalf of **North Essex Astronomical Society** we, the undersigned, will oversee the implementation of the C & VA Policy and take all necessary steps to ensure it is adhered to.

Signed:

Name (Print):

Name (Print):

Chairman

Outreach Officer

Date:

Date:
