Safeguarding adults at risk and children

Policy and procedures

Becky Walsh | Registered Member 417265 MBACP
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1. Purpose and scope

I provide in-person counselling for adults aged 18 and over in Weston-super-Mare, England. As a sole practitioner, I take responsibility for safeguarding decisions within my practice. Although I do not counsel children, concerns about a child or another adult may arise through my work with adult clients.

My aim is to help people remain safe while respecting their dignity, privacy, autonomy and right to make decisions. I work in accordance with the BACP Ethical Framework 2026, particularly Core Responsibility 2.4, and the relevant law and local safeguarding procedures in England.

2. My approach to safeguarding

I aim to work collaboratively, compassionately and without discrimination. I will listen to what matters to the person, consider their wishes and involve them in decisions wherever it is safe and appropriate to do so. Any intervention should be necessary, proportionate and as least restrictive as possible.

Autism, ADHD, disability, mental ill health or emotional distress do not, in themselves, establish that a person is at risk or lacks mental capacity. I will not assume that someone needs protection because of a diagnosis or because they communicate differently.

I will offer reasonable adjustments, including clear language, time to process information and alternative ways to communicate. Under the Mental Capacity Act 2005, I presume capacity, support decision-making and recognise the right to make an unwise decision. Capacity is specific to the decision and time. If capacity is in doubt, I will seek appropriate advice and act within my competence, applying best interests and least restrictive principles where relevant.

3. Recognising safeguarding concerns

Adults at risk

Under section 42 of the Care Act 2014, a local authority has a duty to make enquiries where it has reasonable cause to suspect that an adult:

- Has care and support needs, whether or not these are being met;
- Is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect; and
- Because of those needs, is unable to protect themselves from the abuse or neglect or the risk of it.

Concerns may include physical, sexual, emotional or psychological abuse; domestic abuse and coercive control; financial abuse; discriminatory or organisational abuse; neglect, self-neglect, modern slavery or exploitation. I will consider patterns and context rather than relying on a diagnosis or a single sign.

People who do not meet the section 42 criteria may still need support or protection. I will consider other suitable routes, such as domestic abuse services, health services, police or community support, with the person's involvement wherever possible.

Children and young people

A child is anyone under 18. Concerns may arise when a client describes harm to their own child, another child, or past abuse by someone who may still have access to children. I will consider physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect, exploitation, domestic abuse and online harm.

I will take emerging concerns seriously and seek advice or refer when appropriate. I do not need proof of abuse to raise a concern. I will not wait for significant harm to occur before seeking help for a child.

Immediate risk and mental health crises

Suicidal thoughts, self-harm or distress do not automatically constitute an adult safeguarding concern. I will consider the nature and urgency of risk, protective factors and available support, and work collaboratively on safety where possible. If someone is in immediate danger or requires emergency medical help, I will contact emergency services. Counselling is not a crisis service.

4. Procedure when a concern arises

1. Respond to immediate danger. Call 999 if someone is in immediate danger or needs emergency medical assistance. Take reasonable steps to support safety without placing anyone at further risk. Do not wait for supervision.

2. Listen and clarify. Take the disclosure seriously. Listen without judgement, avoid leading questions and clarify only what is necessary to understand the concern, who may be at risk and whether urgent action is needed. Do not investigate, confront an alleged perpetrator or promise absolute secrecy.

3. Consider the risk and the person's wishes. Explore what is happening, immediate and ongoing risks, whether anyone else (including children) may be affected, safe ways to communicate, and the person's preferred outcomes. Consider capacity and coercion, without making assumptions.

4. Seek advice and decide. Consult my clinical supervisor and/or the appropriate safeguarding service where helpful, using anonymised information when possible. For an adult at risk, seek agreement to a referral wherever safe and appropriate. For a child, prioritise their welfare; do not seek agreement if doing so would increase risk, cause delay or compromise protective action.

5. Refer or take other action. Contact the appropriate adult or children's safeguarding service promptly when concerns warrant it. If a child may be suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, refer without delay. Share information with the police, health services or other appropriate authorities when necessary. Use the local authority for the person at risk, rather than assuming it is North Somerset.

6. Record and follow up. Make a factual record as soon as possible. Confirm that a referral has been received, follow up if necessary and escalate unresolved concerns through the relevant service or police. Review safety and appropriate ongoing support with the client, within the boundaries of counselling.

5. Confidentiality and information sharing

I explain confidentiality and its limits at the start of counselling. I will normally discuss proposed disclosures with clients and seek their agreement. I may need to share information without agreement where required by law or where a lawful, proportionate disclosure is justified to protect a child or prevent serious harm, including risk to others. I will consider an adult's refusal carefully, respecting a capacitous decision unless there is sufficient lawful justification to override it.

6. Records, accountability and review

When sharing information, I will identify the applicable UK GDPR lawful basis and, for sensitive information, the relevant special category condition and any Data Protection Act 2018 requirements. I will consider the duty of confidentiality separately, share only what is necessary with the appropriate recipient through secure means, and record my reasoning. Data protection law does not prevent justified safeguarding disclosures.

I will record the date, time, source and nature of the concern; relevant facts and the person's own words; their wishes and any capacity or consent issues; risk assessment; advice received; decisions and reasons (including decisions not to share); details of any disclosure or referral; and follow-up actions. Records will be kept securely in line with my privacy notice and retention arrangements.

I will maintain suitable adult and child safeguarding training, use clinical supervision to reflect on decisions, and review this policy annually or sooner following an incident or changes in law, guidance or practice. I will provide this policy to clients on request and explain how to access it in my counselling agreement.

7. Raising a concern and useful contacts

My practice: becky@beckywalsh.com | 07769 220833. You may contact me or raise a concern directly with the services below. You do not need my permission.

Immediate danger: 999. Urgent mental health support: NHS 111, mental health option. Non-emergency police: 101.

North Somerset adult safeguarding: Care Connect, 01275 888801 (Mon–Fri, 8am–6pm).

North Somerset child safeguarding: Children's Front Door via Care Connect, 01275 888808 (Mon–Fri, 8am–6pm).

Out of hours (adult and child): Emergency Duty Team, 01454 615165.

Concerns about my professional practice: BACP, 01455 883300. You can contact BACP directly; this does not replace an urgent safeguarding referral.

Reference and reporting links

BACP Ethical Framework 2026, section 2.4: Open guidance

North Somerset adult safeguarding (including referral form): Open guidance

North Somerset child safeguarding: Open guidance

BACP complaints: Open guidance

Care Act statutory guidance, chapter 14: Open guidance

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026: Open guidance