

Working with children and young people

British Waterways is committed to ensuring that children and young people are safe in all respect when involved in BW activities.

We aim to do this through our policy and procedures which are designed to protect and safeguard children. Adherence to our policy and procedure will also protect employees.

Under The Protection of Children Act 1999, a child is defined as anyone under 18, apart from where children are in employment, when the age is under 16. The scope of this policy includes children and students from schools and college under 18 who are on placement and work experience.

Policy

Employees will be provided with information, support and training in matters relating to the care and protection of children, as appropriate. Employees should be full aware of their responsibilities in dealing with children.

Roles identified, through the role profile which require employees to work directly with or assume responsibility for children will be subject to additional reference checks and vetting through the Criminal Records Bureau.

Unless specifically stated as part of their role, employees should not directly supervise children, eg on school visits the group leader is responsible for the supervision and conduct of the visit and employees should not assume sole responsibility for children at any time.

BW will comply with any legislation relating to the care and protection of children e.g. the Protection of Children Act 1999, supplemented by the Care Standards Act 2000.

If at any time, there is concern regarding an employees conduct towards a child, a sensitive approach will be taken and no assumptions of guilt should be made unless and until an actual conviction has been obtained in child protection proceedings. However, there may be sufficient concerns which, will be dealt with in accordance with our disciplinary policy and procedure and may result in dismissal.

Procedure

If managers/supervisors identify that an employee's role will mean that they will work directly with or assist in activities involving children, the following must be carried out:

- A detailed application completed by applicant
- A face to face interview involving careful scrutiny of the applicant's details
- Appropriate background checks, including asking for and taking up references
- Application to the Criminal Records Bureau once the position has been offered to an applicant

Before commencing their duties employees must be advised of BW guidance on Working with Children and Young People, and attend training as appropriate.

Good recruitment practices and continued vigilance are crucial to a successful child protection policy.

Forms

- Managers who engage volunteers to work directly with or assist in activities involving children, must ensure that the volunteer has completed a specific volunteer information form and understand that references will be taken up which may involve police screening.
- The Manager is responsible for ensuring that the necessary checks are carried out and this at the very least should involve obtaining two references.
- Employees who are appointed from 1 May 1999 to a role which means that they are required to work directly with, or assume responsibility for children or young persons must complete the additional information form when invited for interview. This requirement should be identified through the role profile. By completing this form employees are giving their consent for checks in addition to usual recruitment procedures to be carried out eg. police screening. This will be administered by Personnel.

Safety, Working with children and young adults

Guidance notes for employees and volunteers who deal with children

Children and young people are involved in many aspects of BW as visitors, volunteers and through education and community programmes. BW must show that all reasonable steps are taken to:

- Provide a welcoming secure and comfortable environment for the benefit and enjoyment of children and young people
- Keep them safe from harm while in the care of its people and volunteers
- Comply with relevant statutory requirements
- Support and protect the interests of people and volunteers who have contact with, or access to, children and young people
- Safeguard the reputation of BW.

The Children Act 1989 gives children, and young people with special needs up to the age of 18, certain rights, including to:

- Be listened to
- Talk about any worries they have
- Be protected if they are in danger or at risk of harm in any way.

For the purposes of this guidance the definitions of 'child' and 'young person' used in recent legislation are used:

- A Child is anyone under the minimum school leaving age (just before or just after their 16th birthday)
- A Young person is anyone under 18 years.

This guidance should also be taken into account when dealing with older vulnerable adults with special needs, such as people over 18 with learning or physical disabilities.

Activities and involvement with children and young people

Activities and involvement that come within the scope of this document:

- Visits to BW property by young people, either unaccompanied or with families, schools or youth organisations

- Children's activities - Rosie and Jim events, storytelling, guided walks and educational visits
- Young members of voluntary groups
- Schoolchildren on holiday jobs
- Children and students under 18 on placements from school and college.

In welcoming and working with young children, BW aims to:

- Provide a friendly welcome for young people and promote their general welfare
- Recognise that young people have rights as individuals and should be treated with dignity and respect
- Consistently apply fair and objective methods of selecting employees and volunteers who will work with young people
- Plan activities involving young people with care to minimise risks to their health and safety and opportunities for them to suffer harm or injury
- Raise awareness of the dangers to which young people are susceptible
- Develop appropriate procedures for responding to accidents, incidents and alleged or suspected harm.

Planning activities involving young people and children

Activities involving young people and children must be planned with care to minimise risks to their health and safety and opportunities for them to suffer harm or injury.

Planning and supervision

Whenever an employee or volunteer works with young people (whether or not carers remain ultimately responsible) the following guidelines on appropriate planning and supervision must be observed to reduce the risk of harm.

Carefully plan activities involving young people to ensure that maximum possible protection is provided at all times.

Give particular attention to health and safety requirements, seeking appropriate advice from your line Manager, Events Organiser, local safety specialist, or the Safety Team at Watford.

Ensure that parents, teachers, leaders, carers or other accompanying adults are with young people wherever possible.

If you are solely responsible for any young people at any time, know exactly who you are responsible for, the extent of that responsibility, where they are and what they are doing. BW would strongly recommend that all young people and children are in the care of a responsible adult and do not become the direct responsibility of BW employees or volunteers.

Arrange for an appropriate number of adults to be present, bearing in mind the type of activity, the number and age range of the young people attending and any special needs.

Try to have responsible accompanying adults for every educational group of young people in a ratio of 1:10 or better (1:8 desirable for children under 8).

Ensure that at least one other BW employee/volunteer or an external adult, eg parent/teacher, will be available to help.

Try to have both male and female helpers where practical.

Code of conduct

Some actions, no matter how well intentioned, may be misinterpreted and leave all parties vulnerable. The following points give guidance on appropriate conduct for employees and volunteers.

Be alert to any potential harm or inappropriate behaviour in relation to young people.

Inform young people about the safety issues involved in visits to BW property and the best way of coping with them.

If circumstances arise where a single child needs attention, offer to stay with a class or group of children while the teacher/carer attends to the individual.

At all costs, a one to one situation should be avoided, but if unavoidable, ensure it is for a short period only, within earshot and preferably sight of others and never behind closed doors. Tell someone where you are going, with whom and for how long. Speak to your line manager if you are worried that you are going to be left on your own with a young person or you are concerned about a young person's safety.

You should not take a young person alone on a car journey, however short, or take them home without parental approval, except where unavoidable in emergencies.

You should not allow or engage in suggestive remarks, gestures or touching of a kind which could lead to misunderstanding.

Do not hesitate to tell your line manager if you have any concerns regarding the behaviour of any young people or other employees/volunteers who come into contact with them.

General health and safety

Health and safety requirements must be carefully considered when planning and carrying out activities involving young people. Particular points to be considered are:

- The suitability of the task to be tackled by young people
- The provision of safety information to leaders and participants
- The provision of first aid facilities should also include trained personnel wherever possible
- Communications and emergency procedures, including action in the event of an accident
- Fire precautions
- The provision of appropriate training.

Risk assessments for young employees

The Health & Safety (Young Persons) Regulations 1997 give additional protection to young people at work and are relevant when BW employ anyone under the age of 18, including young persons on training schemes and children on work experience.

The regulations require BW to:

- Assess risks to the health and safety of an employee under 18 before they start work, taking account of their experience, immaturity and lack of awareness of existing or potential risks

- Let parents of school-age children (not necessarily in writing) know the key findings of the risk assessment and the control measures taken via the school by the placement/visit organiser
- Provide appropriate and correct size PPE
- Where accidents occur these should be recorded as per BW accident reporting
- Prevent young people from undertaking work:
 - beyond their physical or psychological capability
 - where they are unlikely to recognise or avoid the risks owing to their insufficient attention to safety, lack of experience or training
 - where they might be exposed to toxic, carcinogenic, or harmful substances, radiation, extreme cold or heat, noise or vibration
 - where prohibited by legislation, ie operation of certain type of machinery.

These prohibitions do not apply where young people over minimum school leaving age are doing work necessary for their training, under proper supervision by a competent person, and providing risks are reduced as far as is reasonably practicable.

Awareness of the dangers to which young people are susceptible

Types of harm/abuse

Physical where young people receive physical hurt or injury.

Neglect where adults fail to care for young people and protect them from danger, seriously impairing their health, well-being or development.

Emotional where young people are intimidated by threats, taunts or bullying.

Sexual where young people are encouraged or forced to observe or participate in any form of sexual activity.

Who can harm

An abuser is most often someone known to the young person, whether a parent, sibling, other relative, family friend or neighbour. Not only adults harm young people, they may suffer abuse from other children and young people. Sometimes the abuser may be an adult who holds a position of authority over young people. There is no certain way of identifying a would-be abuser. They can be people from any background and do not appear different from the rest of society.

Responding to alleged or suspected harm

If a young person wants to talk about something that is concerning them, it is essential that the employee or volunteer:

- Never promises to keep it a secret
- Listens carefully and calmly to what the young person is saying
- Reassure them and if possible get advice from your Manager
- Explain to the young person that to help them someone else must be told and that you cannot promise secrecy
- Reassure them that they are not to blame
- Is aware that they may have been threatened if they tell!

- Does not push for more information and never ask leading questions eg. Did someone hurt you?
- Let them know what will happen next and keep them informed
- Write down what they say as soon as possible.

If a young person has talked about harm or harm is suspected, the employee or volunteer must not act alone, start to investigate or make assumptions of guilt or innocence.

The employee or volunteer must immediately:

- Notify their line manager/Events Manager and Personnel. The incident should not be investigated internally. The police should be informed and will call on the local Social Services Child Protection Team.
- Contact the police, social services or NSPCC directly if a young person is in imminent danger and or your line manager/Events Manager or personnel are not available. Any relevant employees should be informed as soon as possible. The local Social Services Child Protection Team has the main responsibility for investigating abuse of young people and they will normally liaise with the police.
- Notify relevant employees if they suspect a member of BW or a volunteer is involved in harming a young person. The employee/volunteer should be immediately removed from access to young people, be assured that no presumptions will be made and that any allegations will be fully investigated by the authorities. If gross misconduct is reasonably suspected, it may be appropriate to require (or possibly suspend) the person so as not to attend the office or property whilst the investigation is being conducted. These matters will be dealt with through Line Managers with Personnel Department assistance.

Any employee or volunteer who discloses abuse of any kind may feel that they need to speak to a child care professional to reassure themselves that they have done the right thing. The NSPCC operate a 24 hour advice line for anyone concerned about a child 0800 800500. This number should not be used in an emergency.

Accurate notes, confidentiality and sensitivity

Full and accurate notes must be written as soon as possible, recording the date and time of the alleged incident or disclosure, parties involved, what was alleged and action taken. Records must be kept as they may be valuable to the investigation and used as evidence in court.

Although it is important that all relevant employees are informed, confidentiality must be maintained at all times since the allegations or suspicions may prove to be unfounded.

A sensitive approach should be taken with the accused to explain why an investigation has to take place and to reassure them that the matter will be handled discreetly and fairly by BW.

No assumptions of guilt should be made unless and until an actual conviction has been obtained in child protection proceedings. However, there may be sufficient concerns which could warrant termination of contract or voluntary work. These matters will be dealt with through Line Managers with the assistance of the Personnel Department.