

London Nightline Safeguarding Policy

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London Nightline offers a confidential, night-time listening service to students in distress. The service is delivered by specially trained student volunteers, overseen by a volunteer student executive committee, with overall coordination provided by a paid member of staff.

We are committed to ensure that our organisation and the service that we offer embraces the two core elements of safeguarding – that we cause no harm and that we promote wellbeing.

If you have an immediate safeguarding concern, see the “what to do” section at the end of this document.

Introduction and Purpose

London Nightline is a registered charity that offers support related to the mental health and wellbeing of adult students, via a helpline operated by highly trained student volunteers. Our responsibility for safeguarding focuses externally – to our service users – and internally to our volunteers and staff.

We do not provide support services to children and if we are made aware that a child is using the Nightline services, they are re-directed to Childline. However, we include safeguarding children in our policy so that staff and volunteers within the organisation are informed of the procedures to follow should they become aware, through their work with Nightline, of a child experiencing or at risk of experiencing harm or abuse.

The purpose of this policy is:

- to protect students who directly receive Nightline's services
- to protect volunteers and staff who deliver Nightline's services
- to provide staff and volunteers with the principles and the legal framework that guides Nightline's approach to safeguarding

This policy statement and procedures must be followed by anyone working for London Nightline including all staff, trustees, volunteers, interns, or anyone else working on behalf of the charity.

Safeguarding framework

We understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, and that different people, depending on their roles, experience and backgrounds, need different types of support to discharge that responsibility.

Therefore we meet both our duty and our commitment to safeguarding adults and children through a comprehensive safeguarding framework. This framework is comprised of the following elements:

1. **Risk profile** – this details the principal features of our activity and enables us to identify any particular areas where safeguarding could be of particular relevance or concern. It drives any approaches we take to safeguarding.
2. **Safer Recruitment** – this ensures that we consider carefully the people who work, support and volunteer for us
3. **Induction** – this ensures that people are clear about any safeguarding risks and that they are clear on what to do if they have a concern
4. **Training** – this ensures that everyone has training on safeguarding relevant to their role
5. **Policies and procedures** – both specifically about safeguarding, but also that these ensure we have considered safeguarding in other policies and properly documented our approaches to maintaining good practice

6. **Reporting, recording and monitoring** – ensures we have systems to capture any concerns to support reflection and learning
7. **Reflection, learning and continuous development** – so we are always learning and improving our practice
8. **Culture** – we promote and maintain a safe and open culture within the organisation, which is central to any effective approach to safeguarding
9. **Governance** – ensures we regularly review our approach

The detail for each of these is included below.

Legislation and Definitions

Key overarching legislation and guidance relating to this policy are:

- Children Act 1989
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Care Act 2014
- The Domestic Abuse Act 2021

Child Safeguarding

Safeguarding is the action that is taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm. We take child safeguarding to mean:

- protecting children from abuse and maltreatment
- preventing harm to children's health or development
- ensuring children grow up with the provision of safe and effective care
- taking action to enable all children and young people to have the best outcomes (NSPCC)

Adult Safeguarding

The Care Act (2014) statutory guidance defines adult safeguarding as:

"Protecting an adult's right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect. It is about people and organisations working together to prevent and stop both the risks and experience of abuse or neglect, while at the same time making sure that the adult's wellbeing is promoted including, where appropriate, having regard to their views, wishes, feelings and beliefs in deciding on any action. This must recognise that adults sometimes have complex interpersonal relationships and may be ambivalent, unclear or unrealistic about their personal circumstances."

What do we mean by abuse?

For children

- Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment of a child

- Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm.
- Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting, by those known to them or, more rarely, by a stranger for example, via the internet.
- They may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children.

Different types of abuse and signs to be aware of are:

- Physical abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Child Sexual Abuse
- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Female Genital Mutilation
- Neglect
- Harmful Sexual Behaviour
- Online Abuse
- Bullying

For adults

The Care Act (2014) recognises 10 categories of abuse that may be experienced by adults.

The different types of abuse and signs to be aware of are:

1. Self-neglect
2. Modern Slavery
3. Domestic Abuse
4. Discriminatory
5. Organisational
6. Physical
7. Sexual
8. Financial or Material
9. Neglect and Acts of Omission
10. Emotional or Psychological

London Nightline procedures

Users of the Nightline service

London Nightline is a service delivered for students by students, who are attending universities across London. We accept calls, emails and instant messages about any topic big or small. The term “caller” in this policy, equally refers to a service user getting in touch via any of our different channels.

Our approach

- Nightline is a non-directive active listening service, meaning that we will explore topics, thoughts, and feelings with callers, but won’t guide them to a specific conclusion or outcome.
- We are an open-access service, which means that students do not need a referral or to join a waiting list in order to be able to contact Nightline.
- Students do not need to give any level of personal information (such as name or university attended) in order to access the service.
- We are an anonymous service, meaning that our service users’ identity is not disclosed outside of Nightline or between volunteers, and that our systems are designed to anonymise incoming phone numbers.. All instant message threads are deleted automatically once the chat has been closed. Students can also email but email addresses are not encrypted. A record of each conversation across all platforms is logged in order to monitor volunteer wellbeing and trends amongst callers, but with minimal description and no identifying information.

Suicide and self-harm policies

- At Nightline, callers are welcome to discuss any topic that would be useful to them, including all aspects of mental health. This includes both historical and present instances of self-harm behaviour, as well as suicidal thoughts or actions.
- When self-harm is discussed, we remain non-directive and discuss the issue as we would any other call, as opposed to automatically viewing it as a potentially life-threatening behaviour. Callers mentioning this topic often use Nightline as a coping mechanism to prevent themselves from self-harming, and therefore having a ‘typical’ Nightline conversation can be an effective course of action.
 - If someone has taken action to self-harm in a way that puts their life in immediate danger and are expressing concern for their wellbeing or asking us for practical help, we would defer to the suicide policy, as below.
- There are only two situations in which times we can become directive (offer action or indicate that a specific outcome is preferred) during a call at Nightline. This is when a caller is having a panic attack, or when implementing the suicide policy.
 - Our panic attack procedure involves clarifying that they are having a panic attack, and offering to talk them through exercises provided by NHS England which aim to reduce the impact of this and speed up recovery, such as breathing and grounding exercises.

- Our suicide policy clearly differentiates between suicidal ideation and intention.
 - Ideation refers to thoughts around suicide, often without intention. In the case of this, we would clarify that the caller has no intention of taking their life, and continue on being non-directive as we would with any other call.
 - If there is apparent suicidal intention, we would move to clarify whether this is immediate. If not, we would continue the call as normal.
 - If, when asked if they had taken any steps to end their life, the caller clarified that they had, we would offer to call the emergency services for them if this is what they want, whilst also explaining that it's quicker for them to do so themselves if possible.
 - If the caller consents to us calling the emergency services on their behalf, another volunteer in the office would call 999 and liaise with the emergency services responder, whilst the volunteer on the phone would ask for the caller's address, details on what had happened, and information on how to get into the building if required.
 - If they do not wish for us to call the emergency services, the call will continue as normal. After talking for 20 minutes, or at a time that seems appropriate to do so, such as if there's a shift in tone, the volunteer can once again offer to call 999.

If a child calls the service

- If a volunteer has reason to believe a caller is under 18, such as from the content discussed (e.g discussing school or GCSEs), they will clarify the caller's age.
- If the service user tells the volunteer that they are under 18 then the volunteer should end the contact and signpost to Childline. This can be done by saying: "Thank you for reaching out, you did the right thing as it seems like an tough situation. Nightline is a listening service for students who are 18 and over, so we won't be able to take the call/instant message. If you would like to talk to someone you can contact Childline at 0800 1111 or Samaritans at 116 123 as they will be able to help you. I am going to have to end the call/chat now."
- At the end of the contact, the volunteer should inform the Coordinator that a call or instant message was taken where the service user was under 18.

Breaking confidentiality

Child protection

- If a conversation mentions a child experiencing abuse or neglect, we may need to break confidentiality in order to keep a child safe from harm:
 - The volunteer should inform the caller that they are here to keep listening but based on what's been said so far, they may have to pass on any information if it's needed in order to keep a child safe.
 - The volunteer should not try to dig for information but use the regular Nightline listening skills.

- Afterwards, the volunteer should fill in the log with as much detail as possible even if it doesn't feel like a complete picture. If any names, dates or situations were described, these should be included.
- After the call, the volunteer should inform the Coordinator, who is the safeguarding lead, and they will assess if further action needs to be taken. This may include contacting the police or Childline. If there are any doubts, this can be discussed with the Lead Trustee for Safeguarding.

Terrorism Policy

- Here, terrorism refers to the use of violence for political ends.
- If a call contains reference to terrorist acts in the past, present or future, according to the Prevention of Terrorism Act (2005), it must be reported to the police as soon as possible, even if considered a hoax by the caller themselves.
- If this happens, the volunteer must inform the Coordinator, who will contact the police with all recorded information from the call.

Volunteer Safeguarding

Recruitment

- When prospective volunteers apply to join London Nightline, they fill in an application form with their personal details and information on why they would like to join. Within this form, we explicitly ask about past mental health issues. Any previous mental health experiences are discussed fully with the applicant. If they are successful in becoming a volunteer, a support plan is put in place beforehand in order to allow them to safely undertake the role. This plan is reviewed regularly, taking into account any changes in the volunteer's wellbeing.
- The listening volunteer role involves directly supporting others in talking about their emotions and experiences, often during periods of mental health crises, and this can be emotionally challenging for the volunteer to do. We offer volunteers the opportunity to speak to the Coordinator in advance if they aren't sure if the role is suitable for them. If a volunteer decides part-way through the training or induction process that it's not right for them at this time, they will receive complete understanding from the Nightline team and they would be welcomed back at a later date should they choose to re-apply in the future.
- The volunteer role is assessed against current government guidance as to whether this role requires a DBS check, and background checks are taken up as appropriate.

Training and refresher training

- Training is a three- day process, consisting of two full days of 'Pre-selection' training, then an assessed appraisal, and then one further full day of 'Induction' training.

- Volunteers are encouraged to speak to the trainers or the Coordinator about any potential triggers before training commences, and about anything that comes up for them during the sessions.
- Volunteers are told they can take a break at any time, even mid-session, and are given advanced notice about particularly triggering topics that will be discussed. If a volunteer does take a break, a training officer will check in with them.
- Training on all topics is mandatory and thorough. If someone is particularly affected by a topic, they are still required to be trained, but adjustments may be made to do this in a way that allows them to be more comfortable.
- During training, volunteers are taught the active listening techniques that they need to use to support callers using Nightline's non-judgemental and non-directive approaches. They practice using pre-written role plays, and receive feedback and guidance before undertaking an assessed appraisal in order to become a listening volunteer.
- Day 3 of training goes into depth on specific topics and London Nightline policies. Volunteers are taught about safeguarding, and practice implementing the suicide policy. They are taught about and practice how to handle abusive calls. As always, they can take a break at any time, and are encouraged to inform training officers of any emotional difficulties that may come up. Difficult topics are introduced slowly, with frequent check-ins. All policies are explained thoroughly using evidence and anecdotal experience, to ensure that volunteers not only feel comfortable and confident enacting them, but also that they understand their importance.
- Refresher training takes place once per term with specific topic suggestions coming from individual volunteers or from the executive committee on what could be enhanced. This is a required part of volunteering and happens digitally, but volunteers are also provided with materials to practice on shift with other volunteers should they wish.

Induction / Becoming 'experienced'

- All Nightline shifts have to have a minimum of two listening volunteers, a support officer, and a duty lead. At least one of the volunteers on every shift must be 'experienced'.
- To become experienced, a volunteer must have completed a minimum of four shifts. They then are asked to fill in a form assessing their confidence on policy and procedure, and how able they would be to explain these policies to other less-experienced volunteers. A sub-team of committee members discuss their typical performance, sometimes consulting others who have been on shift with the individual. They develop a plan to transition the volunteer from 'newbie' to 'experienced', typically involving at least one shift with a member of the sub-group, further discussions, and observed calls.
- Once the team has seen a high level of skill in answering the phone, enough knowledge to guide other, less experienced volunteers, and a thorough knowledge of safeguarding procedures, they discuss with the volunteer. This ensures they feel comfortable in their new status being the most experienced person on shift, and

thus the most experienced in the building, before officially confirming them as an 'experienced' volunteer.

Challenging calls and volunteer wellbeing support

Volunteering with Nightline can be a rewarding experience, with volunteers seeing first-hand the difference they have made by being there to support a student in a difficult situation.

However, there will be some calls that a volunteer finds more challenging. This could be for any number of reasons, for example:

- The caller describes particularly difficult topics, such as suicidal thoughts or abuse
- The caller describes themes that personally resonate with the volunteer and their own experiences
- The conversation lasts for a long time or is circular
- The caller is abusive and mis-uses the service. This could include the caller sending spam, or being manipulative, threatening or sexually explicit, all behaviours that we view as a misuse of our service and are not tolerated.

Volunteer training covers how a volunteer should deal with a caller who is mis-using the service. In order to reduce the number of contacts of this nature:

- Callers keeping their phone number withheld will not get through. We outline this policy on our website, so that callers are aware and are able to get through on a non-withheld number.
- Abusive callers have their phone number blocked so they can't call again.
- Abusive Instant Messages (IMs) can be flagged by volunteers, which logs the chat as abusive and sends the IP address and details through to the system administrators for review. Volunteers should not open any links sent across during an IM conversation, and our IT security prevents any malicious websites from being unintentionally viewed.
- After following our internal procedures, we let the volunteer know that the abusive caller has been blocked, so they can feel confident and comfortable in knowing they won't have to speak to them again.

The support measures in place for volunteers are:

- A supportive Nightline community is promoted from training onwards, through communications such as group chats, regular socials, and the office set-up, which is designed to be relaxing and friendly. Nightline has a culture of talking about personal wellbeing as a strength, with regular conversations around wellbeing as standard.
- All calls and IMs are kept confidential within the Nightline community, which means that volunteers can discuss calls with one another. This is often a helpful method of peer support, and can help volunteers debrief especially after tough calls. This means that both immediately after a call and in subsequent conversations volunteers can debrief and discuss their feelings surrounding certain calls and topics.

- If needed after a challenging call, a volunteer can take a 'cooling off' period, where they take a break before answering calls again.
- A Duty Lead is available on each shift, and they are the first point of contact for volunteers. They can be contacted if there are any issues in the office, concerns about calls, or questions in general. They check with volunteers in before, during, and after the shift, and can escalate issues to support officers or the Coordinator.
- Support officers check in with volunteers after a difficult call, talking it through with the volunteer, discussing if they need any extra support or measures such as time away from volunteering.
- The Coordinator is available for volunteers to call if others are unavailable or if they have a wellbeing concern they'd like to discuss in more detail.
- Shifts patterns can be selected flexibly by volunteers themselves, and the frequency of shifts is recommended to be capped at one per week. Volunteers are instructed not to exceed this, but in some cases with exceptional circumstances (particularly social motivations) this may be overridden by the Coordinator.
- We run a Sister Nightline scheme, whereby any Nightline volunteers can contact our Sister Nightline to receive anonymous support from Nightliners they do not know. Full details and contact details of our current Sister Nightline are available on posters in the office.

Staff safeguarding

Safer recruitment

Our recruitment process consists of candidates submitting a full CV and employment history, a covering letter, completing a task, and then having an interview with the Director and/or members of the trustee board. Two references are obtained before appointments are finalised. Other checks including DBS are carried out as appropriate to the role and following current guidance.

Training

All staff complete an internal induction that covers safeguarding, and must attend external safeguarding training that is relevant to their role. Safeguarding training must be refreshed every two years as a minimum.

Charity culture and staff wellbeing

Staff wellbeing is a high priority for the organisation. We maintain a professional yet relaxed culture for staff, with flexible working and open communication across all levels including the trustee board. Staff have monthly 1:1s and an annual appraisal to check in on wellbeing as well as wider aspects of professional development. Additionally, the Coordinator has a confidential monthly clinical supervision with a supervisor who is external to the charity.

This is designed to provide space for processing and reflection of tough topics that as Coordinator of the helpline they may encounter.

Reporting of concerns and whistleblowing

Any concerns that a member of staff has about service provision or the conduct of staff or trustees should be reported to their line manager or a member of the trustee board. All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made to keep the complainant's identity anonymous should they prefer.

Governance

Overall responsibility for the charity including safeguarding sits with the board of trustees.

- We have a named lead trustee for safeguarding.
- We have a safeguarding subcommittee of the board who meet every quarter. The subcommittee maintains oversight of any live or recent safeguarding issues.
- All safeguarding concerns are logged centrally on the shared drive. These are brought to the attention of the Coordinator and charity Director when they happen, and discussed at safeguarding meetings.
- There is a standing item on the board agenda for safeguarding concerns, to ensure that awareness of how the charity is dealing with safeguarding issues is known at every level.
- Any safeguarding concerns are discussed, with learnings taken forward to improve future practice.

What to do if you have a safeguarding concern

If you are a **volunteer**, you should immediately raise your concern with the experienced volunteer on shift. We have a flowchart on the wall of the call room that guides volunteers through escalating concerns, which is recreated here:

1. Experienced volunteer in the office
2. Call the Duty Lead
3. Call the Support Officer
4. Call the Coordinator

If you are a **member of staff**, you should raise your concern with the Chair of Trustees at chair@nightline.org.uk

If you are a **student or any other member of the public**, then you should contact the Coordinator at london@nightline.org.uk