

Executive Summary of Royal Astronomical Society Safeguarding Policy and Code of Practice

The Royal Astronomical Society (RAS) has the strategic aim of engaging a range of audiences with astronomy, geophysics and other closely related branches of science. Key groups for this work are children and young adults.

This procedural guidance refers to the RAS Safeguarding Policy and Code of Practice for safeguarding children, young people and adults at risk of abuse.

The Safeguarding Policy and Code of Practice apply to all staff, Fellows and representatives of the RAS. This includes senior managers, Council members and trustees, paid staff, unpaid employees, casual workers, volunteers, students, sessional workers, agency staff and anyone working on behalf of the RAS for events either hosted by the RAS, or in which the RAS participates, such as the National Astronomy Meeting.

These guidelines give information on working with children, young people and adults at risk of abuse. They offer advice on what to do in the event that you suspect a child, young person or adult at risk of abuse may be experiencing harm, or where you reasonably consider a child, young person or adult at risk of abuse may be at risk of harm.

The policy seeks to assist all staff, volunteers and Fellows who may find themselves engaged in regulated activities for or with children, young people or adults at risk of abuse. It is intended to be overarching so that all participants should know what principles and procedures should be followed when doing so. Being a trustee of a charity that works with children or adults at risk of abuse is not a regulated activity (even though the RAS carries out regulated activities). But the trustees should seriously consider whether it would be appropriate to have a trustee who is barred by the Disclosure and Barring Service, taking account of potential risks to the charity's reputation and beneficiaries.

The purpose of the policy is:

1. To protect children, young people and adults at risk of abuse who receive any RAS services, including the children of adults who use our services.
2. To provide staff, Fellows and volunteers with the overarching principles and procedures which guide our approach to safeguarding and child protection.
3. To provide staff, Fellows and volunteers who have contact with children, young people and adults at risk of abuse with guidance to protect them from potential false allegations or accusations, for example due to the misinterpretation of actions.

Under English law, a person under 18 is regarded as a child. Whilst there is no specific statutory duty on the RAS to safeguard children, the common law duty of care is enhanced as a result of the age of the Protected Person.

The policy sets out the minimum requirements for safeguarding when staff, volunteers or Fellows are acting on behalf of the RAS. Staff, volunteers and Fellows should satisfy themselves that the procedures are adhered to and do not contradict the principles of safeguarding set out in the policy.

Although children, young people and adults at risk of abuse would normally be directly engaged with the RAS via teachers, parents and carers, from time to time RAS staff, Fellows and volunteers may engage directly with children, young people and adults at risk of abuse, and it is wise for the RAS to minimise the risk of inappropriate behaviour, however innocent that might be or appear to be.

It must be emphasised that many people involved in some way with the RAS will not be engaging with children, young people and adults at risk of abuse. Many will be trustees or staff doing their normal jobs as part of their contract of employment with the RAS, and most of the volunteers and Fellows will be engaging with the media, industry, universities, government and clubs rather than children, young people and adults at risk of abuse directly. But for those that might engage with children, young people and adults at risk of abuse, a Safeguarding Policy is required.

The project assumes that individuals affiliated with the RAS but working for associated organisations and universities will also be expected to adhere to local procedures. The RAS does not seek to impose safeguarding policies and practises on other organisations; nevertheless it does seek consistency in our work with these different partners.

Effective safeguarding practice starts with having in place effective procedures. Lines of responsibility must be clear, with leadership from the highest level. Representatives from across the RAS should be involved in implementation and in contributing to a culture in which safeguarding is taken seriously. The policy sets out whose responsibility it is to implement processes to meet the duties owed (reinforced below). Staff with particular responsibilities will require appropriate training and all staff will need to be aware of the Safeguarding Policy and Code of Practice.

The first part of the policy sets out relevant legislation and guidance; the purpose of the policy; responsibilities under it and useful definitions relating to the persons to whom and circumstances to which it will apply, to enable an understanding of the necessity to adopt and follow the procedures set out within it.

It then establishes the processes which should be followed prior to undertaking and during provision of any activity involving children, young people and adults at risk of abuse, and whose responsibility it is to implement those processes.

Finally, it provides guidance on procedures to be followed in the event of a safeguarding incident including how that should be responded to and reported, together with details of individuals from whom further advice and information can be obtained, and associated policies and guidance which may be applicable.

The policy is supplemented by more detailed and specific advice. Appendix 1 contains an incident or cause for concern reporting pro forma including a body map and guidance. Appendix 2 contains a flowchart to follow if you have a concern about the welfare of a child, young person or adult at risk of abuse.

The following highlights the key points in the RAS Safeguarding Policy and Code of Practise for safeguarding children, young people and adults at risk of abuse, and is intended as a summary only.

What happens if you suspect abuse or an allegation is made?

The seven main areas of abuse are:

- physical
- neglect
- sexual
- emotional/psychological
- discriminatory
- financial
- domestic violence.

These may come to your attention in a number of different ways.

Some (nonexhaustive) examples:

- unexplained or serious injuries
- unexplained changes in behaviour
- a child, young person or adult at risk of abuse describes what appears to be an abusive act
- someone else expresses concern about a child, young person or adult at risk of abuse

If a child, young person or adult at risk of abuse tells you about abuse then they see you as “safe”.

Listen to them and take what you are told seriously. You should help to reassure them.

If a child, young person or adult at risk of abuse speaks to you in confidence:

- react calmly and listen carefully to what they are saying
- avoid making promises to keep secrets
- reassure them that they were right to tell
- allow them to continue at their own pace
- make a full and written record of what has been said, heard and/or seen as soon as possible.

The Procedure

If you suspect abuse, a child, young person or adult at risk of abuse confides in you, or a complaint is made about any person or about you, it is your responsibility to report it.

If a child, young person or adult at risk of abuse tells you about abuse by someone else:

- react calmly and listen carefully
- reassure them that they were right to tell
- explain that it is likely that the information will need to be shared
- ensure their safety
- allow them to continue at their own pace
- do not interview them or other witnesses
- keep questions to an absolute minimum and make sure that they are not leading questions
- tell them what you will do next and with whom the information will be shared
- make a full written record of what has been said, heard and/or seen as soon as possible which must be signed and dated
- relay the information immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO) at the RAS (usually the Education, Outreach and Diversity officer) or the Executive Director (ED).
- maintain confidentiality and do not discuss with other persons
- do not contact parents, carers or guardians until advice is taken from Children's or Adult's Social Care.

In an emergency (where a child, young person or adult at risk of abuse is at immediate risk of harm) contact the police directly. Inform the DSO or the ED of the action you have taken and why.

If you have a concern about a Child and/or Vulnerable Adult's safety and wellbeing:

- record the concerns and any conversations with them and their parents, carers or guardians. The written record must be dated and signed.
- report the concerns to the DSO or ED immediately

If you receive a complaint or allegation about any person, including yourself:

- write careful notes of what you have witnessed, heard or are told. Sign and date them
- pass your notes to the DSO or ED immediately.

Anyone working for or on behalf of the RAS has the right to report any concerns or suspicions about any of their colleagues in confidence and free from harassment.

The RAS does not expect its staff, members, volunteers or representatives to be experts at recognising potential abuse nor should you investigate any alleged abuse. However, you do have a responsibility to act in accordance with the Policy if you have any concerns about the behaviour of anyone (adult or child) towards children, young people or adults at risk of abuse.

Further information about the Policy and guidelines can be obtained from the Education, Outreach and Diversity officer.