



Volunteer Handbook 2025/26

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Introduction

We are delighted that you have decided to volunteer with Equipping for Life and are willing to give your time, skills and experience to help children *unlock potentials and shape futures*. As you interact, pray, play and read with the children, may you be blessed.

“For if you give, you will get! Your gift will return to you in full and overflowing measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over. Whatever measure you use to give—large or small—will be used to measure what is given back to you.”

Luke 6:38, The Living Bible

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A. Safeguarding

Every child can potentially be hurt, put at risk from harm or abused, regardless of their age, gender, religion or ethnicity.

Safeguarding means that:

- children are protected from mistreatment
- a child's health, or development, is protected
- children grow up with safe and effective care
- action is taken to ensure the best outcomes for all children

Safeguarding is the action we take to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm.

Every adult working or volunteering in a school has a responsibility to ensure that appropriate safeguarding procedures are followed. These procedures are both straightforward and easily understood.

What is Child Protection?

This is the process of protecting children who may be suffering from, or at risk of, significant harm. This includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, exploitation and emotional harm.

Child protection promotes the rights and welfare of all children. Each school we work in will have a Designated Teacher(s) for Child Protection and a Deputy Designated Teacher for Child Protection who are responsible for speaking to parents if concerns arise, and making referrals to Children's Social Services with, or without, parental permission.

Any safeguarding concerns you have for children will probably come through one of two ways:

- a disclosure from a child and/or
- what you observe.

All concerns are passed on to the relevant member of the school's teaching staff and inform EFL's Safeguarding Officer, Darrin Barr, that a referral has been made. No details of the referral must be discussed with anyone else.

Responding to a Disclosure or a Concerning Observation- The 5 Rs

- **RECEIVE** – listen to what the child says but do not ask leading questions except to show you have understood;
- **REASSURE** – ensure the child is reassured that he/she will be safe and that their interests come first, do not promise confidentiality as the report must be given to the Designated Teacher;
- **RESPOND** – only to ensure that the child is safe and secure;
- **RECORD** – make note of what you have seen or heard and the date and time; and
- **REPORT** – report to the Designated Teacher (or Deputy) as soon as you have any concern for a child and before you leave the school building (no delay principle) . Inform EFL's Principal Safeguarding Officer (or Safeguarding Officers) that a report has been forwarded to the Designated Teacher on the same day.

Procedure when an Equipping for Life Volunteer has a concern about the possible abuse of children:

(See Appendix 1 for definitions of abuse)

Make a hand-written record of what you have observed/been told.



Immediately Inform Designated Teacher

or

Deputy Designated Teacher

or

EFL Team Leader

Give hand-written record to the above person as soon as possible in an envelope marked 'highly confidential'. Let the EFL Principal Safeguarding Officer know that you have given a report to the School.

NB: If a case goes to court your notes may be required as evidence.
Keep report factual – **NO** opinions and **NO** leading questions.

Procedure when an Equipping for Life Volunteer has a concern about the possible abuse of children (continued):

1. Where there is cause for concern about a child, the volunteer will notify the Designated Teacher **on the same day** (no delay principle). They will record their concern/incident/disclosure using the **Safeguarding and Child Protection Record Sheet** (Appendix 2) or the school's relevant pro forma and pass this to the Designated Teacher (or Principal).
It is imperative that only factual information is recorded, i.e. the date, time, place, members of staff/other children involved, conversations and any action taken (if appropriate). Signs of physical injury observed should be described in detail, but *under no circumstances should a child's clothing be removed*. If necessary, physical injury could be represented on a drawing to indicate the location and shape of the injury.
2. If a complaint is made against a volunteer working in a school, it will be treated in the same manner as complaints against a person who is not on the school's staff, and the same procedures followed. If the Principal has any concern that a child may be at risk, the services of the volunteer will be terminated immediately. If a complaint is made against a volunteer, the school will inform EFL's Principal Safeguarding Officer immediately.

What is the difference between a leading and an open question?

A leading question implies or contains its own answer. It subtly prompts the respondent to answer in a particular way. Leading questions can lead a disclosure off track, prompting the respondent to answer in the way they think you want to hear or are comfortable with rather than what they want to share. Examples of leading questions are things like "who hurt you?" or "did your uncle do this to you?" They are leading questions because there is a presumption on the part of the questioner as to what happened.

An open question (non-leading) would be "how did that happen?" or "can you tell me how you got that bruise?". Open questions invite whatever information the respondent wishes to provide and do not imply a direction for the answer or a limited range of options to choose from. Other examples of open questions are: "Tell me more about...", "How did it happen?", "What happened?", "And then what happened?", "Who was there?".

Appendix 1

Types of Abuse

Emotional Abuse

Possible Indicators:

- Sudden speech disorder
- Signs of self-harm or mutilation
- Compulsive stealing or scrounging
- Signs of drug or solvent abuse
- Eating problems
- Wetting and/or soiling
- Attention-seeking behaviour
- Poor peer relationships
- Continual self-deprecation
- Neurotic behaviour (e.g. rocking, hair twisting, thumb-sucking)
- Reluctance for parent liaison
- Fear of new situations
- Chronic runaway
- Inappropriate emotional responses to painful situations

Sexual Abuse

Possible Indicators:

- Chronic ailments such as stomach pains or headaches
- Difficulty in walking or sitting
- Frequent urinary or yeast infections
- Be chronically depressed or suicidal
- Inappropriately seductive or precocious behaviour
- Use of sexually explicit language
- Low self-esteem, self-devaluation, lack of confidence
- Recurring nightmares/fear of the dark
- Outbursts of anger or hysteria

Physical Abuse

Possible Indicators:

- Unexplained bruises or burns, particularly if they are recurrent
- Human bite marks, welts or bald spots
- Unexplained lacerations, fractures or abrasions
- Untreated injuries
- Self-destructive tendencies
- Improbable excuses given to explain injuries
- Chronic runaway
- Aggressive or withdrawn
- Fear of returning home
- Reluctant to have physical contact
- Clothing inappropriate to weather – worn to hide parts of the body

Neglect

Possible Indicators:

- Constant hunger
- Poor state of clothing and/or personal hygiene
- Untreated medical problems
- Emaciation/distended stomach
- Constant tiredness
- Lack of social relationships
- Compulsive stealing or scrounging
- Frequently absent or late
- Low self-esteem

Exploitation

Possible Indicators:

- Sexual knowledge that is beyond their age or developmental age
- Acting in sexually explicit ways towards adults
- Going missing from school, home, care
- Extreme relationship difficulties with parents / carers / school staff
- Substance or drug misuse
- Suddenly having unexplained sources of money
- Association with older people, particularly men, outside the usual range of contacts
- Phone calls/messages from adults outside the normal range of contacts
- Self-harm
- Isolation
- Urinary tract Infections / sexually transmitted infections
- Stomach pains or headaches
- Bruising or other marks on the body
- Pregnancy
- Not in class / frequently going AWOL

Domestic Abuse

Violence against women and men in the home is a serious crime, which causes enormous health and social problems and emotional and psychological damage, not only to the victims, but also to their children. The law now recognises that children exposed to domestic abuse are victims of this crime in their own right. Children are often witnesses and are necessarily affected by the anxiety and personal threat to themselves. Domestic violence is the most common form of interpersonal crime and also the least reported.

We should be aware that children may not only overhear or observe violence in the home, but may become direct victims, either accidentally or deliberately. The social pressures to remain within a violent home and the stigma that parents perceive in relation to living in refuges or temporary accommodation as single parents should not be underestimated. It is important for leaders of our ministries to be aware that agencies such as PSNI and Health & Social Care Trusts have developed policies to help in situations of domestic violence and that advice, support and help are available from the Women's Aid Federation. Men experiencing domestic violence may also have to seek refuge; accommodation may be available in the Simon Community.

The impact of domestic violence on children can lead to physical, psychological and behavioural disorders and may subsequently affect them when they become parents.

Appendix 2

Safeguarding and Child Protection Record Sheet

Date: _____

Child's Name: _____ Class: _____ Class Teacher:

N.B. It is imperative that only factual information is recorded.

Details:

Concern/incident/disclosure – day, time, place, members of staff/other children involved, conversations, action taken (if appropriate).

Name:

Signature:

This form should be delivered to the Designated or Deputy Designated Teacher or EFL Team Leader before leaving the school building. Inform EFL's Principal Safeguarding Officer (or Safeguarding Officers) that a report has been forwarded to the Designated Teacher on the same day.

Appendix 3

How to protect yourself

Reduce the Risk of False Accusation

A Do Not:

1. Be alone with a child.
2. Take children alone in a car, even for short journey.
3. Take a child/children to your house.
4. Have your mobile phone in view (please keep your mobile telephone out of sight at all times).
5. Take photographs or videos of the children.

B Never:

1. Engage in horseplay, only structured sports activities.
2. Allow or engage in inappropriate touching or physical gestures (eg kissing).
3. Allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged.
4. Let allegations made by children go unchallenged or unrecorded.
5. Do things of a personal nature for children.

Giving gifts is a lovely way of expressing gratitude and it may be agreed, within your Team, to give a small gift to all of the children in your group as an appropriate way to mark the end of a term or a Christian holiday. If a volunteer is given a gift by a pupil please inform the Team Leader (if the gift is for the Team Leader, please let Darrin Barr know). Informing the Team Leader will ensure that gifts are given and received in an appropriate manner.

B. Volunteer Code of Conduct

At Equipping for Life (EfL), we are accountable for the ways in which we work and have a duty to keep ourselves and others safe. This is achieved by maintaining a respectful, caring and professional approach to those we come into contact with and by conducting ourselves in a way that demonstrates integrity, maturity and good judgement.

As a volunteer in an Equipping for Life programme you must always:

- Be a good role model with behaviour and an attitude that are in line with our values and ethos.
- Be friendly, courteous and kind at all times.
- Treat everyone with dignity and respect.
- Respect other people's privacy and boundaries.
- Communicate with others in an open and respectful way.
- Be responsible and accountable in the way you carry out your role.
- When volunteering in a school, adhere to the school's policies, procedures and rules.
- Not act fraudulently or dishonestly or do anything that brings, or is likely to bring, EfL into disrepute.

We are all committed to providing safe and supportive environments for everyone involved in our organisation – a place where people want to work together, individuals want to engage, and organisations want to do work with us to give young people the inspiration, motivation, knowledge, skills and opportunities they need to help them achieve their potential.

All volunteers must comply with this code and EfL policies and procedures including those in the initial documentation emailed to volunteers and those highlighted at your induction meeting. Breaches will be taken seriously and may result in removal from our database of volunteers.

Safeguarding Children Statement

EfL takes safeguarding very seriously and has robust procedures to address safeguarding issues. If we receive a complaint or concern about any volunteer's or individual's conduct, we will follow our set procedures. Where appropriate, external referrals to Safeguarding Authorities or Social Services may also be made.

A copy of our Safeguarding Policy is available on request and on our website.

C. Role of the Volunteer Mentor

- Obtain the email address and telephone number of the Volunteer Team Leader, to keep in touch.
- Be willing to take directions from the Volunteer Team Leader and the Centre Office / leadership.
- Be present and on time every week, unless there is an emergency.
- Plan to arrive not less than ten minutes before the designated time
- Please inform the Volunteer Team Leader as soon as possible if you are unable to attend for any other health or circumstantial reason.
- You should be matched with the same child each week, where possible.
- The weekly session lasts for one hour. Each volunteer will have two children, one for each half hour.
- Occasionally you may have to take two children, if another volunteer is unable to attend.
- Adhere to the Child Protection Policy.
- Ensure that you have the set prayer for the child and that you say the prayer with them before you start reading.
- If difficulties arise speak with the Volunteer Team Leader.
- When the children have gone, the team should pray together for the school and the district. Some groups have this prayer when they first gather, before the children come. The Centre Office will provide copies of this prayer.
- If the child intimates that they are being abused, or if anything else arises which causes concern, report it to the Volunteer Team Leader, the Principal or teacher in charge of child protection. The matter must also be reported to the designated Safeguarding Officer at the Centre Office.
- Remember to pray for your two children every day, and for the school, during the week.
- A small gift is given to each child before Christmas, Easter and the summer break. The Volunteer Team Leader will discuss the arrangements with the team.
- Should you decide to stop volunteering, please inform the Volunteer Team Leader and the EfL Office as soon as possible.
- Look out for more potential Volunteer Mentors in your own circle of acquaintances.

D. Role of Team Leader

- Acquire email addresses and telephone numbers of your volunteer team.
- Try to ensure that there are enough Volunteer Mentors to provide one to one support with the pupils each week. Contact the designated lead person(s) at the Centre Office if volunteer numbers are low.
- Encourage volunteers to be present and punctual every week, unless there is an unforeseen circumstance, vacation, emergency etc.
- Volunteer Mentors must arrive on time, i.e. not less than ten minutes before the agreed start time.
- Report to Centre Office if a member of the team does not attend for a few weeks or if someone is dropping out.
- If a team member is sick, try to keep in contact. Ring, text or email occasionally. Drop them a card. Let them know you are praying for them.
- Copy all correspondence sent to the Volunteer Mentors to the designated lead person(s) at the Centre Office.
- Make sure each volunteer says a prayer for the child at the beginning. At the end of the hour, when the children have gone, the team should pray together for the school and the area. Some volunteer teams have this collective prayer at the beginning, 10 minutes before the children come. Copies of the prayers should be provided for the team.
- Before the beginning of the new term the Volunteer Team Leader should contact all the Volunteer Mentors regarding arrangements.

E. Volunteer Risk Assessments

Equipping for Life – READING VOLUNTEER RISK ASSESSMENT									
Risk Assessment location: SCHOOL						Likelihood		Consequence	
Date of assessment: DECEMBER 2024						Risk Assessment review date: DECEMBER 2025		5-Very likely	5-Catastrophic
Completed by: Darrin Barr						4-Likely		4-Major	
Work activity/ process: Reading Volunteers in Primary Schools						3-Fairly Likely		3-Moderate	
Attached: (record any attachments, if applicable)						2-Unlikely		2-Minor	
						1-Very unlikely		1-Insignificant	
Hazard	Risk rating			People affected	Mitigations	Residual risk			Action needed
	L	C	R			L	C	R	
SAFEGUARDING	2	4	8	Reading Volunteers, Efl Staff and Visitors	- Enhanced AccessNI for Mentors - Memorandum of Understanding with Schools - Efl Safeguarding Training Efl - Annual Self Declaration 'Never alone' policy - Volunteer Mentor database - Trustee oversight of Safeguarding procedures including annual approval of Policy - Avoid any physical contact with pupils.	1	4	4	
SLIPS, TRIPS and FALLS	4	4	16	Reading Volunteers, Efl Staff and Visitors	- All bags and coats stowed safely - Take care moving around school - Take extra care when floors are damp - Sensible footwear recommended - Application process to enable identification of mobility issues in volunteers - Volunteers with mobility issues must inform Efl office – bespoke risk assessment (PEEP) to be requested from school, if possible, before volunteer starts	2	4	8	

ERGONOMICS	3	3	9	Reading Volunteers, EFL Staff and Visitors	• Suitable chairs and desks provided by school to enable comfortable reading and activities with children • If Volunteers are concerned about the desks/chairs provided, Team Leader to resolve issue with School Contact • If Team Leader unable to resolve issue EFL office to be informed • If suitable furniture cannot be provided the Team will be withdrawn				
EMERGENCY EVACUATIONS	2	5	10	Reading Volunteers, EFL Staff and Visitors	• Always follow school emergency evacuation procedures • Take note of closest emergency exits • Application process to enable identification of mobility issues • Volunteers with mobility issues must inform EFL office – bespoke risk assessment (PEEP) required	1	5	5	
ELECTRICITY	2	4	8	Reading Volunteers, EFL Staff and Visitors	• Always adhere to school procedures				
LONE WORKING	3	4	12	Reading Volunteers, EFL Staff and Visitors	• EFL's 'never alone' policy • If, due to absences, only one Volunteer is available, the session must be cancelled	1	4	4	
INFECTION	3	3	9	Reading Volunteers, EFL Staff and Visitors	• Wash hands before and after session • Use of a mask if required • Do not attend if unwell • Maintain reasonable social distancing	2	3	6	
MEDICAL EMERGENCY	2	5	10	Reading Volunteers, EFL Staff and Visitors	• Mobile phones available at all times but out of sight. • In event of an emergency an adult is to go to reception and ask for help/First Aider • If in doubt, dial 999 • Principal/Team Leader (or designated deputy) to use Emergency Contact information to contact an emergency contact • Contact EFL as soon as possible after all of the above is done	1	5	5	

