



MERCi

Child Protection and Vulnerable Adults Policy and Procedures

MERCi is open to the public and conducts activities and events both inside and off the premises of Bridge 5 Mill. Our work often involves contact with children, and in order to protect them, we have a duty to apply clear guidelines for our paid and unpaid workers to ensure:

- Bridge 5 Mill and places where MERCi run activities are safe for children and young people
- Support is offered to paid and unpaid workers to implement child protection procedures
- Working practices promote safety for children, young people and workers

1.0 Child Protection Statement

It is the policy of MERCi to safeguard children and young people from physical, sexual and emotional harm while taking part in MERCi activities.

We take all reasonable steps to ensure that relevant procedures and training are implemented- thus ensuring that children and young people are in a safe environment.

2.0 Recruitment procedure

People who come into consistent contact with children need to be vetted in some way. While group care environments for over eight's do not require adult carers to be vetted by law, it is strongly advised that some form of guarantees of child safety is undertaken.

The Disclosure process provides access to records held on the Police National Computer, the Department of Health (DH) and the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) through the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). It enables us to make informed decisions about the suitability of those seeking to work in positions of trust. For work at MERCi, Standard Disclosures will be required for people who are working in positions in a paid or voluntary capacity, which bring them into regular contact with children, or vulnerable adults.

2.1 Advertising

Any description of a post that requires Disclosure should state:

- a) That the successful candidate will be asked to apply for a Disclosure.
- b) The level of Disclosure required for the successful candidate.
- c) That further information can be found at www.disclosure.gov.uk
- d) Include in application forms or accompanying material a statement to the effect that a criminal record will not necessarily be a bar to obtaining a position, in order to reassure applicants that Disclosure information will not be used unfairly.



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2.2 Recruitment

At MERCi volunteers should be interviewed, have a clear role or job description and receive an induction. Volunteers who will have regular contact with children will undergo a Disclosure as well as providing a reference from people who can give information about their suitability to work with children and adults. This reference needs to be followed up by a member of MERCi staff.

If the volunteer has no previous experience of working with children they should provide a character reference and must undergo a Disclosure. They must also spend a probationary period while their suitability for work with children and young people is evaluated.

Every body should be clear about their responsibilities and understand the role they will take in activities with children. They should read guidelines on good working practice included in the “Child Protection Guidelines for City Farms and Community Gardens”, Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens and be fully briefed by MERCi staff before any activity begins.

Volunteers should receive appropriate training for work with children and young people. A list of volunteers will be kept at MERCi and updated regularly.

3.0 The Disclosure Process

MERCi is not a Registered Body able to ask exempted questions (ie. asking about details of criminal offences). Therefore an Umbrella Registered Body must countersign applications completed by the MERCi volunteer/worker. We are currently using Life Opportunities for this purpose. See Guidance for Disclosure Applicants (in the child protection file) which describes the process in more detail.

In accordance with the CRB's Code of Practice (enclosed in this file), the civil rights of individual applicants for disclosures will be protected and the information used fairly. The Code also seeks to ensure that sensitive personal information is handled and stored appropriately and is kept for only as long as necessary. The code of practice requires MERCi to observe the following:

- MERCi will not unfairly discriminate against the subject of the disclosure information on the basis of conviction or other details revealed.
- Recruitment of applicants will be done in line with the MERCi policy on equal opportunities.
- MERCi will handle the Disclosure information correctly

We will ensure that it is not passed on to people not authorized to receive it and that access to the information will only be available to those who need to have it in the course of their duties. The Disclosures will be securely stored in a locked filing cupboard only accessible to those who need access in the course of their duties, the key to which will be kept by the volunteer coordinator. The disclosures will be disposed of no later than 6 months after a decision has been made to recruit that person.

3.1 How to carry out a disclosure

- Ask the volunteer or staff member who will be working with children, to read the Child Protection policy contained in this file.
- Explain that they will need to send off for a Disclosure from the Criminal Records Bureau. An explanation of what this is and how to carry one out is in the child protection file.



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4.0 Dealing with abuse

Staff and volunteers should deal with any concerns in a positive, non-judgemental way if there is suspicion of abuse. You should share your concern with the appointed worker, but concerns should not be discussed with anyone else.

4.1 Being informed of abuse

Children may want to confide in adults they trusts, This could include telling adults at MERCi.

The appointed worker will be responsible for recording information and liaison with social services.

4.2 Sanctions

No intimate behaviour will be acceptable with children or adults.

If an incident occurs, a verbal warning will be given by the MERCi worker in charge. This warning will be logged and if a second incident occurs a letter will be sent by the Management Committee dismissing the volunteer.

4.3 If allegations of abuse are made

The volunteer will be suspended immediately until the allegations have been investigated and reported to the social services.

5.0 Good practice guidelines (General Responsibilities and Duties: Working with Young People¹)

5.1 Duty of Care

People supervising children have a legal duty to act as a careful parent would = a duty to provide adequate supervision. This can mean giving adequate advice and instructions.

How far the duty extends depends on the activity. If the club is a drop-in, the duty of care is much lower and the responsibility remains with the parents to make arrangements with the child. If the session is supervised and of a fixed length have to ensure they do not leave without permission of the person in charge.

As a matter of good practice, parents should be informed of the nature of the activity and whether children can come and go at will.

5.2 Protecting Children

The Children's Act protects under 16's specifically from cruel treatment. The general law on assault applies to adults, children and young people. Any form of physical punishment is forbidden.

It is allowed to take necessary physical action, however, to prevent physical injury either to the child or to another child or adult or serious damage to property.

5.3 Responsibility for Premises

People in inside this building are covered by public liability insurance and this extends to the garden project and to MERCi volunteers.

5.4 Medical Treatment

When people are taking part in a trip away from their parents, parents should be asked to sign a medical consent form agreeing to necessary medical treatment in the event they cannot be contacted.

5.5 First Aid

At least one person with a relevant first aid qualification should be present at any activity with young people: a valid certificate of competence in first aid work.



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5.6 Behaviour Policy

We are in the process of developing a behaviour policy for the garden in consultation with the young people themselves that will spell out what constitutes unacceptable behaviour and what sanctions to apply.

Young people who breach it should be taken aside and explained to why their behaviour is unacceptable, calmly and clearly.

If someone is causing distress and harm to others on the project and is unable to modify his or her behaviour, the team should contact the parents. This will be handled on a case by case basis and in conjunction with the Community Network and the AYCC youth club.

5.7 Planning Trips

Plan well in advance. Make sure you have at least 2 adults and 1 adult per 10 children. Check if your insurance provides adequate cover. Carry a first aid kit. Appoint a group leader and make them responsible for consent forms.

This document was compiled with reference to the following documents:

“Subject Access Guidance Notes- PSA 98”, Manchester City Council Early Years and Play.

“Child Protection Guidelines for City Farms and Community Gardens”, Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens

Criminal Records Bureau Guidance

References

[1] From ‘Working with Young People: Legal Responsibility and Liability’. The Children’s Legal Centre.