

Protocol 2 - Code of Conduct and Guidance for Staff

This also applies to postgraduate students who have contact with vulnerable individuals during their scheme of study.

Code of Conduct for Working with Vulnerable Persons

1. Values and Principles

1.1 Aberystwyth University has a responsibility to provide a safe environment for vulnerable persons and will take seriously any suspicions or allegations of abuse or inappropriate behaviour and respond appropriately.

2. Aims of the code of conduct

2.1 The Code of Conduct aims to help Aberystwyth University provide a positive and supportive environment for vulnerable persons. It is intended to:-

- provide guidance for staff on good practice in working with vulnerable persons;
- reduce the risk of harm to vulnerable persons;
- reduce the risk of complaints or allegations being made against staff.

3. To whom does the Code of Conduct apply?

3.1 The Code of Conduct relates to all vulnerable persons who participate in or are affected by University activities, *whether or not they are accompanied by their parents*, including:-

- students
- staff or volunteers
- vulnerable persons on University premises
- vulnerable persons in the care of staff or students
- vulnerable persons in contact with staff through placements or research activities.

4. Guidance on behaviour towards vulnerable persons

4.1 The University expects all members of staff to treat vulnerable persons with the same professional standards of respect and care given to either students or members of the public. However, in your contact with vulnerable persons you should also take into account:-

- the developmental needs of the vulnerable person when planning activities;
- additional legal requirements or responsibilities due to the vulnerable person's age. This might include considerations such as the age of consent; drinking alcohol; gaining the consent of a parent or guardian to activities;
- It is illegal for someone aged under 18 to buy alcohol. It is illegal to buy alcohol for someone aged under 18;
- Touching and physical contact should be avoided, as these can easily be misinterpreted.

Use positive and appropriate language

- avoid swearing
- never shout or use derogatory language
- challenge inappropriate language by vulnerable persons
- challenge sexually suggestive jokes or comments to any person

Use of physical contact

- be aware that any kind of touching or physical contact can be misinterpreted

Avoid being alone with a vulnerable person

- in tutoring or mentoring situations, be aware of your surroundings
- do not arrange to meet a vulnerable person alone unless as part of a specific role such as personal tutor
- on residential premises, never enter a vulnerable person's room unless it is absolutely necessary. If you do enter a vulnerable person's room you should be accompanied by another adult
- do not give lifts to a vulnerable person unless the parent or guardian is present in the case of a child under 18.

5. Guidance on sexual relationships

5.1 Members of staff should be aware that sexual intercourse and other sexual activity with a child under the age of 16 years and certain categories of vulnerable persons are criminal offences. Any incidents will be reported to the Police.

5.2 Members of staff should be aware that personal relationships with a participant in Aberystwyth University activities who is capable of giving legal consent may give rise to professional conduct issues; the provisions of the University's policy of Family Relationships should be followed as appropriate (see para 1.15 Family Relationships, Quality Handbook).

5.3 If you feel that a vulnerable person is behaving in a manner which is inappropriate you should report this to the Designated Reporting Officer.

6. Guidance on alcohol

6.1 Children under 18 must not be encouraged to drink alcohol. You must not buy a drink in a pub for a child under 18.

7. Guidance on photography

7.1 As with all students, written consent must be gained for photographs or video. In the case of children under 16, the written consent of parents or guardians must be gained.

8. What to do if you are worried about a vulnerable person

8.1 Any member of staff may report a concern about the wellbeing of a vulnerable person. You should not assume that someone else has raised a concern simply because other members of staff may have more direct contact than you with a vulnerable person. You might raise an issue of concern if:

- i. you have witnessed an incident in which a vulnerable person is harmed or abused.
- ii. a vulnerable person has disclosed or hinted at abuse or harm.
- iii. you have concerns about a vulnerable person because of their behaviour or appearance. This might include seeing injuries, or signs of distress such as uncharacteristic lack of self-care, showing fear, anxiety, withdrawal or depression.
- iv. you have concerns about a vulnerable person because of the behaviour of an adult or because of something an adult has said.
- v. you are concerned about the behaviour of another member of staff.

8.2 You may raise concerns about any vulnerable person. The vulnerable person does not have to be a student or participant in Aberystwyth University's programmes or activities. For example, an adult student might disclose information in relation to a child; or the behaviour of an adult student who has the care of a child might give rise to concern.

8.3 You should report your concern, even if it seems trivial, to the Designated Reporting Officer

8.4 If you think that the vulnerable person is in immediate danger of serious harm, you should phone the police (999) or the relevant Social Services Authority in England and Wales, (In Ceredigion :-Social Services on 01545 574 000 (office hours) or 0845 601 5392 (out of office hours). Once you have done so, please inform the Designated Reporting Officer or the Lead Safeguarding Officer as soon as possible.

9. What to do if a vulnerable person discloses abuse to you

9.1 If a vulnerable person tells you about abuse they have experienced, this can be a difficult and distressing experience. The guidelines below can help both you and the vulnerable person.

Listen and show concern

Assure the vulnerable person that it is right for them to be telling you.

Don't interrupt.

Don't ask too many questions – especially not leading questions. Your role is not to establish exactly what happened. Do not in any way formally interview the vulnerable person nor hold any enquiry into the allegations. Simply make a record of what has been said to you keeping strictly to the facts. Remember not to make any judgement or give an opinion regarding the allegations disclosed to you. Do not agree or disagree, accept or reject.

Do not express strong emotions, e.g. of shock or anger. If you show strong emotions it can add to the vulnerable person's anxiety or feeling that they are 'causing trouble'.

Don't make promises which cannot be kept

Let the vulnerable person know that you take what they have said seriously but don't make promises you can't keep such as 'it will all be ok now'.

Don't promise to keep it confidential. Let the vulnerable person know that you will pass the information on to those who need to know.

Make a record

Write down as soon as possible all you can remember of your conversation. Use the vulnerable person's own words as much as you can remember. Note down what you said and did. Keep the original notes securely.

10. Confidentiality

10.1 Children have the same right to confidentiality as adults. Concerns about vulnerable persons will be treated as sensitive information which will be carefully stored; shared with the minimum number of people necessary; and anonymised in reporting whenever possible.

10.2 It is important to note that the need to protect vulnerable persons overrides the right to confidentiality.

