



Detailed Safety and Support Policy

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Responsible for Implementation: Director

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Please also refer to our Course Agreement: <https://youmysister.org.uk/courseagreement>

1. About This Policy

This policy applies to all our services and outlines how we keep staff, volunteers and our beneficiaries safe and supported. All our services are co-produced and co-delivered with peers, women with lived experience of the sex trade.

The purpose of all these services is to ensure a genuinely supportive environment to enable peer support (but not therapy) for survivors of abuse. This necessitates safety and confidentiality as a founding principle, clear boundaries and preventing abuse. It also necessitates looking after those who deliver the service. We have a number of procedures in place to help ensure this.

Please take care to read Section 8 and 9

2. TRAINER SAFETY, SUPPORT & WELL BEING

We work hard to ensure the safety, support and well being of staff from recruitment onwards.

Peer Recruitment

The first step in ensuring the wellbeing of staff is ensuring the right people are in post – ie that the work is going to work for them. The Job Description and Personal Specifications, interview and recruitment process are designed to ensure the correct individual is in post. This does not necessarily require prior experience – individuals do need the appropriate personal attributes and the potential to deliver our services. This includes: being well progressed in their own recovery, an understanding of the mental health impact of abuse and a personality that can promote free discussion within appropriate limits. This is crucial for both the safety and success of the service and for the peer's wellbeing.

Peer Training

Peers will be guided and trained to ensure the service they help deliver fulfills its potential and they are fully supported in their role. Training is likely to involve:

- Induction of all policies and procedures and the work involved to deliver the service
- Ongoing guidance, training and support (including supervision)
- Taking part in our courses as a student, where possible
- Other training eg AET (Award in Education and Training) Level 3 - to gain a qualification to teach in an adult community setting

Peer Support

Peers will be supported through:

- Being made aware from the recruitment stage onwards, that delivery can potentially bring up difficult emotions at varying times and that management is always available to offer support
- Being encouraged to utilise a Wellness Action Plan, (WAP) as recommended by MIND
- Regular supervision
- Regular communication and 'checking in'
- Reassurance that the co-trainer and/or supervisor and other named individuals in the organisation are always available to talk
- Adequate admin support
- A clear time table and plan of work

3. BENEFICIARY SUPPORT, SAFETY & WELL BEING

Please also refer to our Course Agreement: <https://youmysister.org.uk/courseagreement>

Our Legal Responsibilities to Students

Our services are delivered:

- a) online
- b) for adults only
- c) not delivered to, *or suitable for*, adults who are classified as 'vulnerable' (ie going through mental health crises or in care)
- d) we go through several steps to ensure no one who is highly vulnerable takes part in our services - and to immediately attend to them if they do - instead directing them to support services that might be more appropriate

Our primary legal responsibility is to ensure that no one who is highly vulnerable takes part in our services as these are not suitable for such individuals.

How we Ensure Beneficiary Well being

We have a number of measures in place to ensure the wellbeing of our beneficiaries

Overview

1. It is made clear from the outset and reiterated at other times that our services are not therapy and that the individuals running it are not therapists.
2. It is made clear from the outset and reiterated at other times that our support is not appropriate during times of upheaval or crises, but that our door is always open.
3. It is made clear from the outset and reiterated at other times that our services can bring up difficult emotions, albeit in a supportive environment.
4. We work hard to cultivate supportive interactions from the moment a student first communicates or engages with us (whether via email/twitter) and in all other interactions, including those on the course.

5. Well being tools (such as breathing/relaxation techniques) are constantly used in our services to help participants enter and leave in a calm space and for them to use at any other time.
6. We have an enrolment process for our courses that clearly reiterates the above.
7. We have clear a Course Agreement with clear codes of conduct, including safe guarding measures, that all beneficiaries must agree to in order to take part and which are reiterated, discussed and agreed upon again during service delivery (eg during the first session of a course and revisited during all subsequent sessions):

Our Course Agreement: <https://youmysister.org.uk/courseagreement>

8. We have clear guidelines on dealing with beneficiaries who appear distressed.
9. We monitor and report on all issues – adjusting our services as necessary and practical.

Codes of Conduct

Our Course Agreement: <https://youmysister.org.uk/courseagreement>

During our Courses

Our courses are structured, which in itself helps ensure wellbeing – instilling confidence and providing a clear focus and purpose. Each session also includes well being tools that can be used at any time.

Each session is led by staff and held to our codes of conduct, whilst also enabling discussion, peer bonding and support.

Preventing Distress/Issues

For our courses on Recovery After Domestic Abuse or the Sex Trade in particular, trainers talk with the entire group to ensure all students are fully aware that the course can bring up difficult emotions, that this is perfectly normal and that they, and the group, understand and are there to offer support. It could also be mentioned

that this is often a good sign, suggesting the release of emotions or perhaps, that difficult issues are being worked through.

It should be noted that certain key sessions of the Course can be particularly emotional, particularly the last session where a sense of loss in the often tightly bonded group is normal. Students should be reassured in the penultimate session and urged to come to the last session – even if anxious about this, as this is also an important and ultimately healing process. Students should also be told of any other relevant, positive news (such as vacancies with the organisation or other projects that they could take part in).

Dealing with Beneficiary Distress

To date, we have never had a significant incidence, indicating the guidelines below are working well:

Step 1: Prevention

It is made clear on enrolment and during courses that our interventions are not appropriate during times of upheaval or distress.

Anyone who appears, or discloses that they feel, distressed, or that they *anticipate* a difficult time prior or during a course will be contacted separately by one of the trainers as soon as possible. The trainer will discuss with the client if the course is right for them at this time, reassure them that they can join another course whenever they are ready and sign post to other services if necessary. Trainers will maintain a degree of contact with the client (eg by email) to ensure occasional 'check ins' (whether or not the client starts or remains on the course).

Step 2: Low Level

If a beneficiary does become distressed eg during a course, the environment would likely be such that everyone in the group will tend to rally around. This can be very effective and empowering for the group and assist others in thinking how to deal with upsetting issues they might experience. The trainers can work to help rive this happens and this in itself is likely to provide sufficient support.

Trainer(s) will stay on line with the client after the course for a chat and help problem solve. As above, the trainer will discuss with the client if the course is right for them at this time, be reassured that they can join another course whenever they are ready and sign post to other services if necessary. Trainers will maintain a

degree of contact with the client (eg by email) to ensure occasional 'check ins' (whether or not the client starts or remains on the course).

Step 3: Higher Level

In the unlikely event of higher and/or more prolonged distress, one trainer will remain with the group online and the other will take the distressed user aside into an online 'chat room' to talk quietly together. Here they can listen to them - allowing them to unload, they could also talk to them about breathing or relaxation techniques.

If necessary, the trainer could talk with the beneficiary about any wellbeing tools they have in place. This will include any relaxation and therapeutic techniques they usually make use of or who to contact for support (eg friend, family member, Doctor, counsellor). They should talk to the client about her contacting one of her key contacts herself. If it seems necessary for them to get support straight away, the trainer should stay with them while they do so. The beneficiary should not be left if they still seem highly distressed.

Step 4: Significant Distress

In the *highly* unlikely event that the Practitioner is concerned the service user might harm themselves, or others, they should call the emergency services, whilst trying to keep the student in Zoom conversation.

Aftercare

If the service user is calmed, the Practitioner should talk to them about re-joining the group – letting them know what issues are being covered, reassuring them that they are there for them and that they will be welcomed back.

The Practitioner should check in with the distressed student after the session and potentially again a few days later, depending on the level of incident and whether it had appeared resolved.

Aftercare for Other Beneficiaries

Trainers should work to restore the group to a clam dynamic during the session after any incidents. They should also check in with all beneficiaries at the end of the session and remind them that they can talk to them in between sessions if they feel the need.

Debrief & Record keeping

Immediately after the session, trainers should talk together for emotional support and to debrief. They should also contact their supervisor/manager who will seek to talk with them as soon as possible. After this, management will regularly 'check in' to ensure Practitioner wellbeing, with a full debrief including any procedural changes that might be needed shortly after.

A full record of any incidents and concerns must be kept including what happened, how it was dealt with, what worked and what didn't work.

Disruptive & Challenging Behaviour/Altercations

We have never experienced anything other than mildly challenging behaviour. This has only ever taken the form of 'oversharing' or individuals tending to dominate conversations (for which we have policies in place). We have never encountered disruptive behaviour and certainly not altercations:

Step 1: Mildly Challenging

If anyone becomes mildly disruptive or there is a mild altercation, staff will act swiftly, yet fairly to immediately de-escalate the situation and to remind everyone of our codes of conduct. This might be all that is required and it will be up to the trainers' discretion as to whether any further action is necessary.

Our codes of conduct talk about respectful behaviour, not attending whilst under the influence and that our support services are not places to discuss ideologies of any nature.

Step 2: More Challenging

If the disruption/altercation was more serious, one trainer will place the individuals involved in individual break out rooms and discuss what happened with them and how it can be resolved

Step 3: Highly Challenging

In the unlikely circumstance of a highly abusive or disruptive incident, staff will mute and even remove participant(s) from the meeting if Step 1 and 2 cannot de-escalate the situation.

The Practitioner should try and talk to disruptive individuals after the session about what happened and why.

If necessary, disruptive individuals will be banned from further sessions.

Aftercare for All Service Users

The trainers should work to restore the group to a clam dynamic during the session. They should also check in with all beneficiaries at the end of the session and remind them that they can talk to them in between sessions if they feel the need.

Debrief & Record Keeping

Debrief and record keeping as above

Record Keeping & Supporting Staff

Logs of all incidences and any concerns, no matter how minor, will be kept and regularly reviewed to see if our systems and procedures are working or need adjusting.

4. Monitoring and Evaluating Safety, Success and Wellbeing

Well being Monitoring

Prior to taking part in our services every beneficiary is asked to fill in a pre-evaluation form. After each course, every beneficiary is asked to fill this in again, along with specific questions about the service itself.

Beneficiaries are also always asked how they are feeling before and after every course session and told they are welcome to contact trainers in between sessions if they have any issues or concerns.

Equal Opportunities Monitoring

All beneficiaries/staff/volunteers/job applicants are asked to fill in an equal opportunities monitoring form. It is made clear that there is no obligation to fill this in, that individuals need only answer questions they are comfortable with and that all answers are fully anonymised.

5. SAFETY SUPPORT AND WELL BEING OF OTHER STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

All staff and volunteers will be supported in the same way as peer trainers (See section 2).

6. Additional Documents

- Induction form
- Codes of Conduct
- Pre Evaluation Monitoring Forms
- Post Evaluation Monitoring Forms
- Equal Opportunity Forms
- Supervision Template
- WAP Template (Wellness Action Plan, adapted from MIND)

7. Related Policies and Procedures

- Data Protection Policy
- Disciplinary Policy

8. APPROPRIATE PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES – CODE OF CONDUCT

As a member of staff, a volunteer, or a Trustee of You My Sister you must follow the guidelines below which set out the professional boundaries you must maintain.

You are expected to remain alert to these issues at all times and to discuss them openly and proactively at support and supervision sessions. If urgent concerns arise, you are expected to raise them with the Chair of Trustees.

1. You must maintain a professional relationship with service users at all times.

- This means that you must not form a sexual or personal relationship with service users.
- Part of your role is to befriend service users but this does not mean that you 'become friends' with them.
- You need to be aware that service users may develop strong or close feelings about you, but you have a responsibility to manage this within the boundaries of your role as a professional.
- To allow your relationship to develop beyond the boundaries of a professional one would be to abuse your relationship with the service user, given the power imbalance between you.

2. You must not initiate or respond to any unprofessional physical contact towards or from service users.

Our services operate online, however if it is possible staff, volunteers, trustees or service users might on occasion see each other in person (eg at conferences or events). In this case:

- No contact should be made which could reasonably be perceived as sexual.
- No contact should be of such force that it causes harm.
- All contact should be within the boundaries of what is considered fair and reasonable in the circumstances.
- You should not act in such a way that you put yourself or others in a position of danger. Retreat from physical danger is always the most favoured option.
- No action should be reasonably perceived as threatening.

3. You must not impose your own personal, cultural, religious, philosophical or other beliefs on service users.

- You must operate within our value systems.
- You must be sensitive to the cultural needs and differences of service users.
- You should not seek to persuade or influence a service user in terms of your own personal beliefs.
- Where directly asked for a personal opinion or belief from a service user, you may state this whilst making it clear that it is your own personal view. You should remain aware of the imbalance of power in your relationship with a service user before acting in this way. You also need to be aware of your own prejudices before offering a personal view.

4. You must act in a way that promotes and safeguards the well being and interests of service users, staff members and the organisation at all times.

- There may be times when you feel that there is a conflict between the interests of these various parties.
- You are therefore expected to raise any such issues in support and supervision sessions or more immediately with a colleague or the Trustees and when they arise.

5. You must not disclose any personal information to service users relating to yourself or other colleagues without the prior consent of that person.
6. You must not give your home telephone number or address to service users.
7. You must not lend money to service users.
 - You must not lend your own money or make personal gifts.
8. You must not borrow money or property from service users.
9. You must not witness wills for service users or act as a named executor.
10. You must not act as a God Parent for a child of a service user.
11. You must not sell or buy property from service users.
12. You must not accept free services from service users where such services would normally be charged for.
13. You must not give service users gifts.
14. You must declare gifts from service users.
 - You must never solicit gifts from service users or their families.
 - If you are offered a gift you may accept it where to refuse it would give offence. However, you must declare the gift and explain to the service user the policy and procedure for dealing with gifts and that you will declare the gift to the Management
 - If the gift is deemed inappropriate, you may be instructed to return the gift.
 - Alternatively, gifts may be donated to charity.
15. You must declare gifts from service providers or firms with which You My Sister works.
 - You My Sister has contact with other firms, organisations and individuals and the utmost discretion must be exercised if gifts or hospitality is offered.
 - You must always declare such gifts and offers of hospitality and explain the Iris Trusts' policy on gifts and hospitality.

- You may be instructed to decline the gift or offer of hospitality if it is deemed inappropriate.
- If the gift is inexpensive, it may be accepted (with the Chair of Trustees' authorisation) and shared amongst staff/volunteers and service users or raffled.

16. All interactions with service users outside the workplace must be conducted on a professional basis.

- You must not arrange to meet service users when not in work.
- If a chance meeting occurs you must bear in mind your professional relationship at all times and inform the Chair of Trustees of any significant conversation or contact.
- If a chance meeting occurs when outside of work and in a social context, you have the right to choose whether to engage with the service user or not.

17. You must not take service users into your own home.

- This applies at all times except in exceptional circumstances and then only by the prior arrangement the Management (for example where a child care arrangement has broken down unexpectedly).

18. You must not take your friends or family into the workplace.

19. You must not take your family or friends on outings with service users.

20. You must not consume alcohol or drugs on duty or be unfit for work through the consumption of alcohol or drugs.

- During social events with service users which have been arranged by You My Sister or during chance encounters in which you have decided to engage with a service user you may consume alcohol in moderation.
- However, you should always remain fit for work.

21. You must not take any action that could undermine the position of any staff members in the eyes of service users.

- You are expected to support decisions and actions that have been made within Trust policies, procedures and delegated authorities.
- You should not discuss or denigrate other staff or team members with service users.
- This does not supersede your right and your responsibility to raise issues of concern through the Protection from Abuse policies and procedures.

22. Relationships between employees

- We do not encourage the formation of relationships between employees because this can cause tensions and conflicts within an organisation or a team.
- However, we recognise that relationships can develop and in this event you must declare this to the Management .
- Where a relationship does exist, you must conduct it outside the workplace.
- You must ensure that your relationship does not impinge on your work in any way.
- You may not directly supervise or be supervised by the person with whom you are having a relationship.

9. Preventing Abuse

We are committed to protecting all who use our services from abuse. We will not tolerate any kind of abusive behaviour regardless of the age, status or position of the perpetrator and the age, status or position of the person experiencing the abuse.

Abusive behaviours include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Physical or sexual violence
- Sexual, racial or any other harassment
- Bullying
- Threatening, intimidating or aggressive behaviour or language

- Emotional or psychological abuse (which may include humiliation and degradation) including verbal insults

We are committed to providing a service delivery environment free from abuse. We will therefore:

- Ensure that staff, volunteers, service users and the Board of Management maintain appropriate boundaries at all times
- Operate confidential reporting systems so that anyone who suspects that abuse is taking place or is concerned about it can report it
- Take action against staff, volunteers, service users and Board of Management members who use their positions, or any influence, power or authority they may have to abuse others or the organisation.

In upholding this commitment to an abuse-free environment, we will provide training, support and supervision to staff along with clear policies and procedures to which they must work.

In turn, staff will provide the necessary support to service users to assist them to uphold an abuse-free environment.

Anyone who suspects or knows that abuse is taking place must raise their concerns by reporting the abuse to the Facilitator, the Director of any of the Trustees.

You My Sister will work hard to create an environment where anyone feels able to report abuse or suspected abuse.

TAKING ACTION AGAINST ABUSE – Allegations against members of staff, volunteers or Trustees

If allegations of abuse are made against a member of staff, volunteer or member of the Board of Management, the person in question will be suspended immediately with pay so that the allegations can be thoroughly investigated using the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

Should the investigation determine that there is a case to answer, the staff member, volunteer or Board of Management member will be subject to disciplinary action, as set out in the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure. The police may also be contacted to pursue legal action against them.

Should the investigation determine that there is no case to answer, the staff member, volunteer or Board of Management member will be offered additional support and supervision to assist them in returning to work.

TAKING ACTION AGAINST ABUSE – Allegations against service users

Within 24 hours of the abuse being reported, the Director or a member of the Board of Trustees will be appointed to investigate the allegation – the Appointed Investigator.

Within the next three days the Appointed Investigator will speak to the person who has made the allegation, and will speak separately to the alleged abuser, and will record any comments made by both parties. These records will be signed by all persons present.

The findings of these investigations will be reported back to the Trustees, and a decision will be made on the appropriate action to be taken within the next 10 days.

If allegations of abuse are made against a service user, You My Sister reserves the right to stop that service user from using or taking part in any services provided until an investigation is carried out.

Should the investigation fail to find that there is a case to answer, the service user will be permitted to continue using or taking part in any services provided.

Should the investigation find that there is a case to answer, You My Sister may notify the police as appropriate.

TAKING ACTION AGAINST ABUSE – Allegations against visitors

Should a visitor to any of You My Sister's projects be subject to an allegation of abuse, they will be excluded from the project until an investigation has been carried out. We may involve the police in such an investigation if deemed appropriate.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The organisation will keep a log of all allegations of abuse that are made, along with the accompanying monitoring forms and records relating to the allegations.

An internal report will be created annually outlining all allegations of abuse that have been made and providing details of all action taken.

All documentation relating to an allegation of abuse will be treated and destroyed in accordance with You My Sister's Data Protection Policy.