

# Youth work in private dwellings

Safety first, no compromise

This guidance was produced after extensive consultation with safeguarding experts, youth organisations, youth workers and young people.

It was developed in response to direct requests from the youth sector. It aims to create a sector that is safer and offers better protection, wherever young people engage with youth work or sector activities.

The National Youth Agency (NYA) would like to thank everybody who responded to surveys and questionnaires, participated in focus groups or took part in critical dialogue to help frame these considerations.

We would like to give particular thanks to the panel of national experts who supported, shaped and ratified the final document:

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# Introduction

**We have a legal and moral duty to safeguard the young people we work with. All work with young people in the youth sector must be free from harm and danger – there should be no compromise in standards. The NYA believes that youth work and youth sector activity delivered in private dwellings is fundamentally unsafe and should not take place.**

The youth sector includes all individuals and organisations that are delivering youth work, enrichment activities, and out-of-school opportunities with children and young people that are all recognised collectively as the local youth offer (as part of the sector's statutory duty and those delivering youth work as part of the local authority's statutory duty).

Youth work and youth sector activity involves working with young people aged 8 to 25 years. In safeguarding terms, older young people aged 18 to 25, including those with special needs or disabilities, would be termed 'adults at risk'. Some youth sector organisations work with children as young as 4 years – this work is classed as early years work, not youth work.

Youth work and youth sector activity may be delivered in a variety of spaces and places (indoors and outdoors). These are usually either public venues (for example, schools, parks) or business premises (community centres, youth centres, Scout or Girlguiding huts). The places

and the organisations that deliver youth work within them are covered and protected through insurance, procedures such as risk assessments and organisational governance. They therefore provide a measure of protection for both youth workers and young people.

Within this report, we will be referring to '**private dwellings**'. By this we mean any part of any structure that is occupied as a residence, or any part of any structure of outdoor living that is accessory to and used wholly for the purposes of residence. These may include, for example, gardens, garden rooms, garages and houses.

These include two contexts:

- 1 A private dwelling that is the home of the youth worker, organisation or other adult.
- 2 A private dwelling that is the home of the young person receiving a service.

The NYA believes that youth work and youth sector activity delivered in private dwellings (within the current context of no support, guidance or legislative framework) is fundamentally unsafe. This is because the lack of support infrastructure, safeguarding mechanisms, training, and health and safety checks create a significant risk of harm to both young people and youth workers.

Despite this, we recognise that there are circumstances where youth work and youth sector activity is happening in private dwellings for a variety of reasons. One is the lack of local accessible locations and resources for youth work delivery. Others include the need to:

- meet specific needs of the hardest to reach young people (for example, those experiencing poor mental health);
- create extraordinary opportunities (such as camping and outdoor activities); and
- respect cultural and faith differences.

We understand that the needs of some young people and settings might mean that youth work in a private dwelling is the safest thing to do to support that young person. But we believe that these circumstances should make youth work in private dwellings the exception rather than the rule. Whenever possible and as a general rule, a safe and appropriate space should be secured that is not a private dwelling.

We want to protect young people as well as youth workers and leaders. We make no apology for highlighting the fact that there are cases of people wanting to hurt young people, and that practice isn't always safe. We recognise that most people who work with young people through youth work have integrity and are well-intentioned in their desire to support them and create opportunities for them. But there are circumstantial risks even with well-intentioned people. We all have a duty to work together to protect and safeguard young people against these.

We believe there are aspects that can be put in place at national and local policy level, and embedded in practice, that can make youth work in private dwellings safer. This will not eradicate all risk from harm, but it will provide some level of protection and reassurance.

This report will set out recommendations for both policy and practice change. We worked with an expert panel (see the annex) to develop the recommendations and ensure that the findings were robust enough to keep people safer.

# The WHY

## 1. NYA Covid-19 guidance inbox

During Covid-19, the NYA supported the youth sector around guidance. Its guidance inbox had numerous enquiries around work with young people in private spaces such as gardens, garden studios and homes. The queries also suggested that organisations and individuals had been carrying out activities in private spaces with inconsistent safeguarding and risk measures, and a lack of formal support. There was a clear need and request for support from many individuals and organisations.

This document responds to this request and the findings of further research we conducted to understand wider need for a formal support and guidance framework.

## 2. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

**I hope by hearing all of us that society learns to take note of what we say to take away the pain of what was done, and learn from the mistakes.**

### **Anonymous, Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse**

During 2015, the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) was commissioned by the Home Secretary to understand the extent to which state and non-state institutions failed in their duty of care to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation. The report<sup>1</sup> published in 2022 included 20 recommendations, 19 of which are being adopted. The report highlighted

risks that could be linked to the use of private dwellings: for example, the Position of Trust, professional boundaries being blurred and positions of power misuse. It also highlighted missed opportunities for victims and survivors who wanted to share what was happening to them but didn't know where or how to; the lack of safeguarding support structures was evident. Poor monitoring also added to the cycle of abuse.

## 3. Statutory guidance for out-of-school settings

This guidance is to be used alongside the out-of-school settings guidance and code of practice,<sup>2</sup> from the Department for Education, which provides a broad baseline of safeguarding practice for out-of-school activities. This guidance covers a wide spectrum of providers offering activities ranging from home tuition to dance lessons and after school clubs.

However, there is limited reference within this guidance to the use of private dwellings.

As the Professional Statutory Regulatory Body for youth work, we have developed this guidance to support specific youth-focused organisations around the implications, recommendations and considerations in delivering safer youth work for young people in private dwellings.

<sup>1</sup> [The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse | IICSA Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Keeping children safe during community activities, after-school clubs and tuition: non-statutory guidance for providers running out-of-school settings - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

## Our response: research and focus groups

In August 2022, the NYA launched a survey to further understand the use of private dwellings for working with young people. We also aimed to explore what the sector needed regarding support around safeguarding practice and risk management.

The survey received 1,301 responses. These were coded, categorised and used to inform deeper exploration through a range of focus groups and interviews. Overall, from our consultation we have had representation from:

- regional youth work leads
- the faith sector
- uniformed youth groups (such as scouts and girl guides)
- designated safeguarding leads
- young people.

## Our key findings

### Professional boundaries and balance of power

The findings emphasised that people were concerned and anxious about issues of relationship and location boundaries – for example,

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**If you meet repeatedly with young people in a casual setting, does it blur relationships?**

**Respondent, Survey**

”

There were also queries about whether this would be different in a formal setting and – if so – how it might manifest itself:

“

**Concerns about groups of young people meeting in private dwellings could lead to the space becoming a place to go for support when youth workers are not there. Serious consideration about how to manage this appropriately needs to be in place for a wide range of safeguarding concerns.**

**Respondent, Survey**

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The issue of power and balance was a common thread across all focus groups. Respondents were concerned that the current training available to the voluntary sector might not be enough to manage this. Further complexities were identified around the qualification and experience of those working with young people. These raised concerns and questions on the impact a lack of qualification could have on the ability to understand power dynamics in professional relationships. This is an area that is covered in professionally qualifying programmes.

“

**... Good practice guidelines should be in place, around where, and how we make sure young people are safe from predators posing as youth workers, how professional boundaries are maintained. I think part of it has to relate to qualifications. Being able to do a few weeks' course and call yourself a youth worker is too easy.**

**Expert Panel Discussion**

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## Case study

# Positive Youth Foundation

All staff in this organisation adhere to the principle of legitimate contact for all work with young people. This sets out the parameters for all engagement with young people outside preplanned sessions. This ensures that all contact with young people has a legitimate purpose and sets safer boundaries around this contact. Examples include that contact should only be through organisational channels and not personal accounts; contact should be with young people who have completed consent forms; evidence of all communication must be retained.

Read here: [www.nya.org.uk/legitimate-contact](http://www.nya.org.uk/legitimate-contact)

## Values and beliefs: cultural context

Some respondents felt very strongly that working in private dwellings (especially in homes) was part of a way of life: such practices had continued for generations. This approach was intrinsically part of the identity of the organisation (and community) and so they found it hard to understand why it was now being considered as potentially risky. Some commented that without this way of working, work with young people could not happen:



**Some young people and parents actually feel offended and stigmatised by me refusing to come into their home. Hospitality is a huge part of so many cultures within the UK, so to refuse an invitation to enter a home,**

or to bring a small group of young people over, does not go down well among parents.

Respondent, Survey

**Many Gypsies and Travellers would and do use there [their] private dwellings because of cultural issues and practices.**

Respondent, Survey

**For years faith communities have been welcoming young people into their homes and stopping this practice would severely impact the overall work that is done with young people.**

Respondent, Survey



## Appropriate governance

There was concern over the level of governance and scrutiny that is already in place compared with what should be in place to provide protection and mitigate risks.

Some survey responses suggested that delivery in private dwellings should be monitored and inspected by a designated safeguarding lead from the organisation delivering services. Further responses suggested that inspection and monitoring is conducted by programme leaders or those directly delivering. Only a few respondent types believed that spot checks from a regulatory body were needed.

Focus groups, however, provided a different perspective. Respondents raised questions about the suitability of governance that is already in place (often little or none depending on the infrastructure of an organisation).



There were concerns about how this could be effectively managed with an owner of a property also being responsible for all safeguarding and risk management without external support, checks and balances. How can people know what is required if there is no standardisation of approach? There were also concerns about the monitoring and evaluation of activities. Participants raised concerns about staff working in an insular manner with no external networks or teams to rely on. This was a particular concern when related to the level of training and understanding of the practitioner involved.

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## Changing the narrative

Most respondents, across both research methods, felt that robust internal processes and planning systems could support the safeguarding element of activities. There was a tension between people recognising current risks and dangers (and a desire to improve safeguarding) versus the resistance to an external body to provide regulation. Concerns were raised that external regulation would increase barriers to delivery and engagement, and potentially create a culture of fear around the system. Focus group participants were keen to find a safe middle ground, where safeguarding was a priority and not considered an additional burden. They identified a desire to create a culture of support and guidance through external networks and infrastructure. It was felt that this would create integrity of practice, enhance protection of young people and provide reassurance for stakeholders including young people and their families. Focus groups identified that there should be no compromise, wherever this work takes place.

Respondents also wondered whether there was a way to ensure that safeguarding becomes intrinsic to community life. They meant that additional processes should not be necessary to support young people – whether delivered in private spaces or not. There was a desire to create a culture where safeguarding checks

were completed because it helped the community grow and were looked at as learning opportunities and not a punitive measure, thereby changing the narrative to one that was deemed positive and inclusive by all.



**Safeguarding is a way of thinking and a way of doing life. Whatever I'm doing, at home or on the bus. We need to stress this with all of our volunteers, it's a way of thinking and doing things in a right way. ... How do we keep these people safe because they are special, and we want them to flourish?**

**Participant, Focus Group**




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## Community context

There was a recognition from a variety of respondents of the need for contextualised understanding of communities. Accessibility, community resources, transport links and facilities are varied. It was acknowledged that, for some young people, delivery happened in a private dwelling because it was the only venue available.

Nonetheless, it was understood that there was a need to build a standardised baseline of safety and safe practices. There was a suggestion that this was best delivered by drawing on the expertise of local networks and infrastructure to build a community of safe practice. Respondents highlighted a call for cultural competency and meeting the individualised needs of young people. They also identified opportunities to build capacity and capital within communities in order to ensure sustainability of safer practice.

## Case Study

# Norfolk



We are an infrastructure group, sometimes we've heard that there is a youth group can you help them ... Then it gets complex. [A local group were delivering youth services from a converted garage attached to a private house], we ended up getting involved and it was difficult to have that conversation.

The [local authority] asked us to support a youth group that was operating from their garage in a rural community. The work was really important as there were no other services in the local area for the young people. They were identified as being vulnerable.



This is an unusual situation because

- a it was identified by the local authority as a potential area of concern, and
- b they were able to signpost an infrastructure youth organisation to consider risk.

The organisation was able to work with the individual and undertake comprehensive risk assessments to support their delivery and bring greater safety for the young people.



In rural churches that don't have a church hall, and that have pews in the church building that make it difficult to adapt, there is no other space for youth work.

Respondant, Survey

... the expense and difficulty of a young person needing to travel ... can be prohibitive to the session actually going ahead. This is especially true of SEND young people, those with physical disabilities and refugees.

Respondant, Survey

We have also had youth club sessions and activities at specialist studios in people's private houses (for example, art workshops). We live in a rural area and these things are quite common.

Respondent, Survey

If there were community spaces that could be used, but there are tiny hamlets that don't have them. Are we willing to deprive young people from that? If we are putting too many barriers in the way, are we stopping youth work from happening?

Participant, Focus Group



## Dispelling the complex

There were concerns that building guidelines for safer practice in private dwellings would create burdensome processes. There were also concerns that embedding frameworks for support could be complex and intrusive, or undermine the good work that was happening – particularly from community volunteers.

The focus groups explored this idea further in terms of dispelling the myths that surround safe practice and safeguarding. Operating from the basis that people involved in work with young people are committed to keeping them safe, there would be a need to build supportive mechanisms that recognise the expertise of those involved and create simple ways for them to engage with support and guidance to make their practice safer.

## Creating a system of expectation

Young people, guardians and families all expect services to be operating to the same standard of safeguarding. It is not widely understood that there is a lack of regulation or standardisation for services that are delivered in private dwellings rather than business premises.

**Despite the lack of legislation around the use of private dwellings for youth work delivery, it is our collective responsibility to employ best practice. Just because there is no current legislation does not mean that we do not do this. We should always be doing our best to keep young people safer.**

Respondents agreed that young people and families should be able to receive the same professional standards of support from individuals or youth organisations wherever the service is delivered from. They recognised that establishing a culture with consistent mechanisms across all environments would increase safety and set a new standard for 'normal'. If guidance was in place to set a minimum standard, then anything that didn't meet this would fall outside the norm and be highlighted as something to be improved.

# The WHOM

We have a collective responsibility to work together to ensure that youth workers, young people and communities become safer. Transparency in how we do this is key to the integrity of youth work and to a wide range of stakeholders.

## The NYA asserts that:

- 1 Young people deserve to know** that wherever they go to experience youth work they won't be harmed or at undue risk of harm. They also need to be aware that there are clear processes and systems in place to protect and safeguard them. These should include clear reporting processes so that they will feel able to share information if they need to. A national set of recommendations that is adopted by all those working with them in private dwellings will strengthen young people's confidence in this.
- 2 Family and friends who love the young people deserve to know** that young people's safety is never compromised, whatever the location of the delivery. Parents, carers and guardians need to feel confident that the spaces that young people access are checked, people delivering work are appropriate and the standard of safety will remain high. They should never be put in a position where they feel undermined or uncomfortable to query practice or an approach.
- 3 Youth workers deserve to know** that their safety is important. Those working within private dwellings may face additional situational risks. They should be aware of the support that is available to them in the form of supervision and appropriate training specific to this role and activity. Those in private dwellings can also pose additional risks to young people and this needs to be managed effectively.
- 4 Organisations deserve to know** that there is responsibility, accountability and support available to them to provide safer youth work opportunities. Similarly, commissioners, partners and other accountable stakeholders deserve to know that the youth work offer that they are engaging will be staffed by safe people and delivered in a way that prioritises safety and minimises risk, wherever it takes place.

# The HOW (and what should happen)

**We believe that there is a need for significant changes to be made to the legislative, policy and practice landscape to support those who work with young people with regard to private dwellings.**

We believe that the appropriate degree of structural support would enable higher quantities of safer youth work delivery to take place. It would provide cost-effective and efficient mechanisms for safe working practices across both statutory and voluntary sector providers. It would also provide reassurance of safety compliance for young people and their families.

This structural support should set out the non-negotiables that must be in place for all delivery.

It should also provide a baseline for operating conditions for the local youth offer in communities.

Finally, it should be created with authenticity, consideration and positive regard for cultural differences but underpinned by the notion of no compromise on safety. This would ensure co-operation from the young people and communities that it seeks to protect.

# Recommendations for policy

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- 1 A **national policy framework should be developed**, underpinned by legislation.

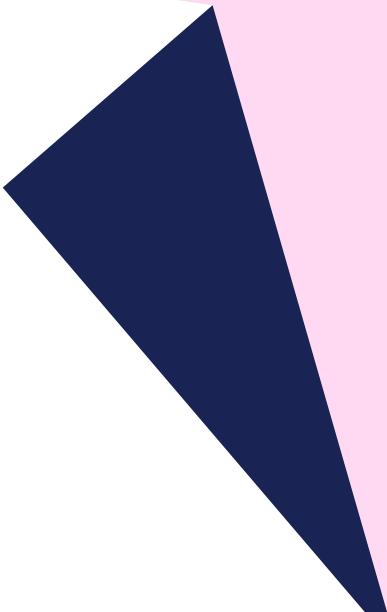
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  - 2 This framework should clearly set out the responsibilities and accountability of relevant bodies. It should **place local authorities at the heart** of local safeguarding within the voluntary sector (including for private dwellings delivery). This may require adaptations to local authority funding settlements.

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  - 3 It should **set out in legislation** the requirement for providers to register all spaces used for youth work. Also, there should be the same requirements for appropriate insurances and standards to be in place as there are for public venues and statutory organisations.

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  - 4 To ensure robust standards, there should be **national guidance** developed to support local authorities with delivery against this duty. This would not create an additional burden of duty for local authorities, but set out how the local voluntary, faith and community sector providers should be integrated into the local safeguarding infrastructures. This would include equal access to the Local Authority Designated (Safeguarding) Officer training and registration mechanisms and how these can be clearly laid out for all stakeholders as part of the Local Plan. The national guidance should also support local authorities to understand how to implement this framework through co-production with key stakeholders including young people and community leads.
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# Recommendations for delivery

Support is available to help you embed the changes below. This can be accessed through the NYA Safeguarding and Risk Management Hub, the NSPCC and your Regional Youth Work Unit.

The recommendations in this guidance are categorised into “People, Place, and Practice” for clarity and organisation.

# People

This section refers to the various individuals who are involved either in delivery or in the organisation and planning of activities, including all paid staff and volunteers. It includes owners or managers of premises, leaders, trustees, visitors, external staff and contractors. It also refers to young people and those who might be living within the private dwelling as participants.

Whatever their role, every adult is responsible for creating the systemic conditions for the safe delivery of activities. While training and background checks are critical and bound by legal frameworks for working with young people, it is equally important to consider elements such as power dynamics, personal and professional boundaries, individual values and the cultural context to reduce areas of potential risk.

**All eligible people are to sign up to the Youth Work Register<sup>3</sup> whether they are employed, self-employed or volunteering.**

**All organisations are to complete the Youth Work Census<sup>4</sup>:**

- 1 **Checks:** All staff and anyone above the age of 18 years present in a private dwelling during an activity should be DBS checked at the correct level. Consideration should be made to staff or volunteers who do not need to be DBS<sup>5</sup> checked where references and appropriate induction processes should be in place and documented. Safer recruitment guidelines should be applied including two references and the use of the self-disclosure forms. (Should there be any risk flags, please speak to your local safeguarding children and adults' partnerships, NYA or the NSPCC). Consideration should also be given to the adoption of Warner report<sup>6</sup> and its principles. Our focus groups indicated that leaders consider 'home-based checks' completed by DBS experts as evidence that an address is safe (within set parameters). These check the address to highlight if there are any issues with individuals connected with the home, or if the address is connected to anything inappropriate or risky. Many roles are not eligible for home-based checks<sup>7</sup> DBS home checks do not assess the suitability of a property.

3 <https://www.youthworkone.org.uk/youthworkerregister>

4 <https://www.nya.org.uk/national-youth-sector-census/>

5 <https://www.gov.uk/find-out-dbs-check>

6 [The closed world of warner: a comment on "choosing with care" \(scie-socialcareonline.org.uk\)](https://www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk/)

7 [DBS home-based positions guide - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/344442/dbshomebasedpositionsguide.pdf)



- 2** If staff or volunteers intend to carry out activities in private dwellings, they should be affiliated with a registered organisation or charity or working on behalf of the local authority. Regional Youth Work Units, the local authority, the Young People’s Foundation or the local Council for Voluntary Service should be able to guide enquirers to reputable provision in the area. There should be access to support from infrastructure services through regular catch-up meetings and non-managerial supervision.

“Most people who have established relationships with the Church. I’d be less keen to see practice where there aren’t established relationships.”

Participant, Focus Group

“The most important thing, it shouldn’t just be a personal invite. It has to have a sense of initiative, like something linked to a bigger organisation or initiative.”

Participant - Young person, Focus Group

- 3 Household members:** Other household members (adults and children) should not be left unsupervised with young people attending the private dwelling for activity. Names and details of other people in the house during delivery should be recorded and retained along with session information.

- 4 Visitors:** If visitors attend private dwellings belonging to the organisation during young people’s activities and are not verified by the organisation, they should be asked to leave. Verification includes following policy and procedures (for example, not being left unsupervised with young people. If visitors arrive while 1:1 work is being carried out at a young person’s home, any decisions made on the session continuing should be dependent on the needs of the young person and the dynamic risk assessment conducted by the worker.

- 5 Training and qualifications:** Staff should have completed relevant and up-to-date safeguarding training (and risk management) that has been ratified by the organisation they work for (recognised by the local authority and/or NYA), and all staff should be aware of the organisation’s policy on safe delivery in private dwellings. First aid training should be considered depending on the nature of the activity and the appropriate risk assessments in place. Organisations wanting to deliver activities in private dwellings should adapt their standardised safeguarding training to include awareness of risks and managing professional boundaries in this setting.

“... at the moment there’s no guidance. So, it leaves organisations to make up their own guidance. So, something that’s been agreed would be helpful. But how it’s been applied to different settings, it’s important to be able to adapt and deliver it. We know our own groups and youth workers best. We know how to deliver to the audience we’re speaking to.”

Participant, Focus Group

**6 Substances:** Staff must abstain from consuming alcohol or drugs before or during an activity. If taking prescription medication that could impair practice or judgement, they should seek advice from a medical professional or the local authority's safeguarding support. If a young person appears under the influence of drugs or alcohol, they should be supported to access health advice as required and removed from the group situation safely (following organisational policy).

**7 Supervision support:** During supervision (peer supervision, group supervision, clinical supervision), issues relating specifically to the use of private dwellings should be discussed. Staff must be able to bring any concerns, risks and mitigations to supervision for reflection, and these must be recorded in a timely manner using the organisation's own supervision policy. Managers should ensure that concerns are addressed and that staff continue to be supported in terms of their skills, confidence and ability to safely deliver any activity. Supervision of staff should offer space for them to identify gaps in learning; provide opportunities for professional development; and strengthen resilience.

**8 Staff meetings or networks:** These should offer opportunities to explore values, personal beliefs and biases. This is especially important in a hyper-local context where youth workers may face conflicts of interest. Attention should be paid to safe processing of lived experience and creating a culture that promotes safeguarding and safety. Discussing what worked well, including what could have been better, what risks could have been avoided and so on, will support the development of a culture that has safety and the wellbeing of young people at the forefront. Create a culture of learning whereby mistakes are an opportunity for individuals to develop and grow, not to be blamed:

**“To deliver youth work, I would expect people to be trained [to] think about safety, quality of delivery, quality and intention...”**

**Participant, Focus Group**

**“Regardless of where you deliver youth work, a private dwelling or a local council youth club or a voluntary building, it's about who is delivering it, what experience and knowledge they have and if they can deliver it in a healthy environment.**

**We are supporting professional judgement in situations. Thinking I don't feel comfortable in this situation, I am going to remove myself.”**

**Participant, Focus Group**

**“We do a lot of speaking to staff about past experiences. It is important for staff to talk about times they felt uncomfortable and left the situation. We have a young staff here and it is important for the demographic that we work with. I think there is a pressure on the 20-year-old member of staff that they won't be as well-equipped as the 30-year-old manager. It is important that we support them, and they have good judgement in those situations.”**

**Participant, Focus Group**

- 9 Clothing:** Appropriate clothing should be worn, whatever the venue, to reflect a working environment. For example, it would not be appropriate to wear night-wear, even if within your own home, when delivering youth work activities. This is to protect both staff and young people. Staff should understand and reflect the cultural sensitivities of the young people and communities being served.
- 10 Professional boundaries:** Professional boundaries should be predetermined and applied universally across all youth work. For example, there are increased risks of interpersonal relationships and from the impact of young people coming into a home who aren't part of the service or activity. These risks – and the boundaries that are put in place to mitigate them – should be clearly communicated to all staff and participants to ensure that they are understood and will be applied by all.
- 11 Concerns:** Young people should receive a clear briefing to ensure that they understand what to expect from youth workers during an activity. They should also be made aware of whom to contact both inside and outside the private dwelling if they have any concerns
- 12 Ratios:** There should be a minimum of two staff members present. These staff members should be unrelated to each other, with at least one of them not owning or renting the dwelling. If the group is a mixed-sex group, it is preferable to have mixed-sex staff present. For 1:1 activities held in a private dwelling, it is recommended that parents or guardians be present. If they are not available, alternative arrangements should be made and/or a risk assessment completed that reflects lone working recommendations and safe working practices:

**“If not (parent not around), we have a doorstep visit and do not enter the home. Or you can do a walk around the local area.”**

**Participant, Focus Group**

# Place

Places where youth work happens are diverse, including houses, gardens, sheds, garages, fields and privately owned farms. The space used may dictate the type of activities that can take place. For example, outdoor spaces are ideal for camping and lighting fires, while indoor settings are more commonly used by faith-based groups for mentoring and other group work activities.

Those delivering youth work should assess each case and venue individually to ensure that the guidance and recommendations are applied appropriately.

- 1 Location for 1:1 work:** 1:1 activities (in a young person's own residence) must take place at their residence with a parent or guardian present in the house. The choice of room for the activity should be determined on a case-by-case basis but must only take place in the common shared spaces in the home (for example, kitchens) and not in personal living spaces such as bedrooms.

1:1 sessions should not take place in a youth worker's private dwelling under any circumstances.

- 2 Risk assessments:** A risk assessment of the space should be completed, and the specific location and venue noted. Young people who are participants (and not part of the household) are not permitted to roam freely around the house but must stay within identified locations.

- 3 Toilets:** Each toilet must have lockable doors. Only one person should use the toilet at any one time except when personal care assistance is required. If possible, a toilet should be available that doesn't necessitate access to private living spaces (for example, a downstairs toilet away from bedrooms). We recognise that this is not always possible.

- 4 Substances:** Alcohol and medication must be removed from any room accessible to young people and kept locked away securely.

- 5 Personalisation:** If delivering youth work in a space belonging to adults (for example, a youth worker's kitchen), then consider the appropriateness of photographs and artwork that are in the space, and how these may have an impact on relationships, boundaries and psychological safety. Safely store valuable items and personal correspondence to safeguard young people and yourself. Reflect on whether displaying images (for example) could compromise professional identity and boundaries.

Example: family beach photographs in swimwear:

**“The average home has photos of family and their children. I don't want people knowing who my family are. And they are private.”**

**Participant, Focus Group**

**6 Fire safety:** As for all business venues, clear fire safety measures and protocols should be in place and all electrical appliances that may be used should be PAT tested. Clear fire escape routes should be planned and shared with all participants and staff. Risk assessments should be recorded. The Health and Safety Executive's website<sup>8</sup> has information to support this.

**7 Insurance:** All venues must have appropriate business use and public liability insurance to cover the space, the people and the activities provided.

**8 Size and space:** All venues must be suitable for the activity being delivered. Risk assessments should be completed to ensure that there is enough room for the people and the activity planned. There should be enough space for people to move freely around, and to respect personal and physical boundaries and different needs.

**“Is it appropriate to have young people cramming into a sofa? Where you can't help but touch accidentally? Thinking about things like that.”**

**Participant, Focus Group**

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<sup>8</sup> [HSE: Information about health and safety at work](#)

# Practice

The safeguarding of young people is of the highest priority. To do this, the right policies and procedures should be in place to support youth workers and young people. For practice to be robust, these should be co-created with all the staff, young people and families involved in the organisation and activities. This will ensure that they are understood, accessible and able to be applied by all.

The focus groups and survey verified the need for stronger processes within delivery in private dwellings including recording of sessions and visits for 1:1 work.

- 1 **Policy, procedure and protocol:** All organisations must have a clearly understandable safeguarding policy that covers the use of private dwellings. It should be freely available to carers, parents and young people. It should include reference to the physical suitability of the space. It should follow and adhere to legislation for access to business premises to ensure the physical safety of all young people. The policy should be reviewed at least annually. Or, if an incident takes place, then more frequently. It should be ratified by the trustees and governance. For best practice, it should be peer reviewed by the community it serves as identified in the youth work safeguarding standards<sup>9</sup>. Within the policy, it should make clear that the delivery of the activity will be within a private dwelling, and the address for this should be explicit and non-transferable.

**“... community assessment. The community of faith should have safeguarding policies and procedures. ... then we become accountable to the whole community.”**

**Participant, Focus Group**

There should be specific policies and protocols for staff working in potentially unsafe environments (due to the nature of their work). This should reference, for example, lone working, travel and community contextual safeguards. There should be protocols in place for 1:1 delivery in private dwellings that are homes of young people. All staff must be appropriately trained on these.

**“We have a protocol where if something has happened within that time, we will use a phrase ‘I’ve just got to ring the office’ and they know to ask you the question ‘are you safe?’ And they know. If we are doing one-to-one work with the person, the other person will be in an earshot.”**

**Participant, Focus Group**

**“The only thing I would say about private dwellings is in my previous role; we would visit children at risk from fire. We would get fire fighters getting attacked by dogs, being held hostage and a number of issues.”**

**Participant, Focus Group**

**2 Auditable activity:** Organisations should include private dwellings delivery within their internal auditing of all delivery. This would create a trail and history that is accessible for future review against best practice in safeguarding.

**3 Risk assessment review:** Specific ‘dwelling’ risk assessments should be checked by another staff member not connected to the property. This could be a peer from the local authority or another organisation if there isn’t another individual suitably trained ‘in house’. This is to provide critical review and eliminate the risk of bias.

“It’s an environment we can’t control, we’re going on someone else’s turf, we don’t know who is entering or exiting. There might be pets that are allergenic or distress people.”

Participant, Focus Group

**4 Dwelling checks:** Physical checks of private dwellings must be completed on an annual basis. There should be consideration given as to who does this. Potentially, this could be a peer from another organisation, the local authority or an infrastructure support network.

“If you home school you could potentially get a home visit. That is your home and children. So why shouldn’t someone who is inviting other children into their home have the same visits and checks?”

Participant, Focus Group

**5 Safeguarding support:** A clear framework and reporting flowchart should be available and easily accessible to all staff, young people and families. This should identify safeguarding support that is available outside the organisation. This framework should be regularly reviewed.

**6 Record-keeping:** Clear records of activities in private dwellings (including 1:1 home visits) should be kept, which can be accessed by senior staff and designated safeguarding leads, or appropriate safeguarding personnel from the local authority. Records should be securely maintained and stored in line with agreed local systems and GDPR<sup>10</sup>

**7 Residential:** No overnight activities should take place within a private dwelling house. Overnight activities such as camping could take place in a garden or field with access to an outside toilet, safeguarding and risk measures in place, and appropriate levels of supervision and training of staff if no other venue is able to be secured.

**8 Food safety:** If food or drink is being provided then the youth work organisation should embed food safety legislation and appropriate food hygiene practices and training as part of their risk assessment processes. This should include adopting the principles of Natasha’s Law<sup>11</sup>.

**9 Timing and access:** Young people should be made aware that provision and activities are for a certain time and date (for instance, Tuesdays from 7–8 p.m.). There should not be young people attending the residence for activities outside set and specified times.

<sup>10</sup> Data protection: The Data Protection Act - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))

<sup>11</sup> Introduction to allergen labelling for PPDS food | Food Standards Agency

# Conclusion

Currently, there are no appropriate frameworks, legislation, protocols or practices in place to ensure that youth sector activities delivered in private dwellings are safe for all young people. With this in mind, **we would not advise youth work or enrichment activities to be delivered in private dwellings.**

In limited, mitigated and extenuating circumstances (where there would be no alternative available, or in situations that would otherwise exclude young people from being able to access the support and guidance of professional youth work relationships and activities), then there may be a case for delivery. This should only be as a last resort. And it should always follow the recommendations as set out in this document.

If you are having to deliver youth work in a private dwelling, then you should seek support from your local authority, Regional Youth Work Unit<sup>12</sup> (or other infrastructure body), the NYA or the NSPCC, and ensure that you have relevant training, insurance and procedures in place to safeguard all staff and young people.

**The safety and wellbeing of all young people is always of paramount concern. If we hold this as the central principle of our work, following guidance and adhering to 'safety first, no compromise' principles, then we can make youth sector activity safer for all young people and those who work with them.**



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