

Further guidelines for The Reader staff working with children and vulnerable adults

Please refer to The Reader's Vulnerable Adult and Child Protection Policies for an overview of procedures.

Introduction

Care of the children and vulnerable adults who use our service is very closely bound up with the ethos of The Reader, and we expect all staff to treat all of our beneficiaries equally, and with kindness, respect and compassion.

We aim to employ staff for whom the impulse of kindness is genuine, who are prepared to go the extra mile to engage those we read with, but it is very important that every employee is aware that there should be boundaries in relationships with beneficiaries and that these boundaries protect both staff members and the experience of those using our service.

A rigid set of rules does not allow for flexibility, common sense, and the complexities of particular circumstances and could also compromise our core ethos which is founded on genuine human connection. It is therefore very important that staff members give regular, detailed feedback to their line managers who will be able to advise them week-by-week about their relationships with individual group members, help with managing group dynamics, and provide opportunities to talk over any concerns. **If in doubt about any issue, no matter how small, talk to your line manager or to The Reader's Child and Vulnerable Person Officer.**

FAQs and examples

Can I give a lift to a reading group member to an event or reading group session?

Current Reader policy is that we shouldn't be giving group members a lift.

Can I accept a gift from a reading group member?

Common sense is required: e.g. if an individual keeps buying gifts for you, clearly an attachment is forming and you will need to speak to him/her. If a group buys you a Christmas or birthday gift – no problem. If a looked after child gives you a bookmark he/she has made – no problem – but if they have clearly spent a lot of their pocket money on you, this would be a cause for concern and you would need to speak to them/their carer.

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Should I physically help a frail or disabled reading group member?

Unfortunately, we cannot guarantee that a facilitator will always be able to help a group member into a taxi etc as this may mean waiting around for some time when the member of staff concerned may have other commitments. We need to encourage group members to ask a friend or relation to help if assistance is required on a regular basis or use a disabled person's transport service (as several group members do). In a care home, we should always ask for a member of staff to be present who will help with assisting frail people into the group. If you are helping someone put on their coat etc, please make sure that there is another person present in the room with you.

Should I answer out of hours phone calls?

This is discretionary and again should be dictated by common sense. Phone calls after 6pm and at weekends should not be encouraged – you need some time off! Text communication can seem less intrusive, but experience has shown that if it gets out of hand, this can skew relationships with some vulnerable people.

Can I socialise with The Reader's beneficiaries outside my job?

Maintaining a warm, genuine, but ultimately professional relationship between facilitator and group member is very important, and the vulnerable adult and child protection policies clearly state that behaving in a way which may be seen as favoritism is contrary to good practice. Crossing a boundary may mean that the very person you are trying to help may lose the valuable support which GIR offers, as the neutral, accepting space created by the group session may become muddied by external issues. For example, it may seem kind and friendly to go for lunch with a group member or to accept an invitation, but, as well as putting yourself in a vulnerable position, you may be compromising them, both in relation to other group members and their own experience within the group, where 'real life' issues are tackled indirectly through the literature rather than in concrete practical terms. Through conversation within the group, you may learn that a group member is having trouble with their neighbour which is causing stress and anxiety. You may wish to research housing associations and pass on phone numbers, but you should not go with them when viewing a flat.

How can I protect myself when reading one-to-one in people's homes?

All project workers who conduct one-to-one reading sessions in people's homes should have a designated 'buddy' who is kept up to date with their weekly timetable. They should send a text when they leave the house of the person they are reading with and inform their 'buddy' if the session has been delayed or overruns. Project workers who read with children should always leave the door of the room in which the session is taking place ajar. Carers and relatives of elderly people who are offered shared reading sessions should be made aware of the service that is being provided. Home visits for other purposes should only be made under exceptional circumstances.

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