

A.S.G (Autism Social Group)

Safeguarding Policy

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurological condition that, by definition, is not a recognised disability but rather a spectrum of neurological conditions that affect each individual differently based on how the condition impacts them. Therefore, when it comes to safeguarding service users with Autism, it is important to treat and assess each person as individuals and attend to their needs accordingly.

ASG makes every effort to be as inclusive as possible. However, it should be noted that due to the nature of the activities/settings provided, it might not be suitable for everyone with Autism, due to the wide-ranging effect of Autism on each individual.

The first responsibility of safeguarding vulnerable people must be with the primary care giver. It is therefore their responsibility to contact ASG pre-participation on behalf of the service user so we can assess whether the service ASG provides would be suitable for the vulnerable person in question.

As defined by the NHS, a vulnerable person is not just someone with a disability but rather a member of a minority group with protected characteristics that have a higher likelihood of being vulnerable to discrimination/abuse, including but not limited to elderly and young people. In respect of this, ASG requires that any and all of the following who might be vulnerable in the social setting provided be accompanied with a carer at all times:

- Any young person under the age of 16.
- Those with severe neurological conditions that impacts their ability to interact safely without proper monitoring.
- Those who would otherwise have trouble navigating a social environment without being accompanied at all times.

1. Empowerment (People being supported and encouraged to make their own decisions and informed consent):

As stated within our mission statement, ASG's mission is to empower those on the Autism Spectrum by providing a social platform for individuals with autism to connect with each other in an all-inclusive environment where they can reach their full potential.

We host a plethora of activities and events that not only help build upon the confidence, communication and creativity of our members, but also raise awareness and acceptance of Autism Spectrum Disorder.

We provide our members empowerment by ensuring they have an equal voice in what activities and events ASG provides as well as the event locations. We do this via surveys and by offering an "open door policy" so service users and carers can contact ASG with their suggestions at any time, via text, phone call or email.

2. Prevention (It is better to take action before harm occurs):

We have a number of measures in place to ensure no harm comes to our service users, volunteers and directors. This includes:

2.1 Group rules: We have a list of clearly defined group rules (code of conduct) which all participants are made aware of when joining ASG no matter what their capacity/role. These rules are as follows:

2.2 Group Supervision: Regular monitoring of chat forums and admin in attendance at all times during group meetings to ensure participant safety is monitored at all times.

2.3 Vulnerable people need to be accompanied at all times:

As previously mentioned, each member is assessed individually upon joining to determine whether the groups regular activities are suitable for them and if any adaptations can be made to assist with participation.

If any person wishes for a vulnerable individual that they are responsible for to join the group, then we will have a conversation with them and the service user when possible to help determine the potential service user's suitability and what safeguarding measures can be put in place for that individual.

2.4 Environment: We will never host meetings in an environment that is unsafe or unsuitable for participants, and we give a clear description of what upcoming meetings will involve so service both users and carers can assess suitability for them.

3. Proportionality (The least intrusive response appropriate to the risk presented):

If a service user or carer approaches us with an issue or concern, we will examine said issue on a case-by-case basis to see what appropriate action needs to be taken. If the issue is related to abuse being received then we will take into account the severity of the case before taking action; all reports of abuse or risk are dealt with on a case-by-case basis, but as a general approach, ASG will follow a traffic light system to deal with each case presented:

Green: Green represents if a minor case of risk or concern of abuse is brought to the attention of the administrative team such as disputes between participants. In this event, we would look at the complaint/concern raised and would investigate appropriately looking at the case from all points of view and attempt to resolve the situation through dialogue with participants and ideally no need for formal action.

Amber: Amber represents if evidence of a serious dispute/concern/complaint of risk or abuse has been brought to the administrative team's attention. In this case, we would investigate and gather any evidence available on the concern reported. This would include reviewing messages on public forums and/or group chats when needed as well as requesting any evidence that the individual or individuals have available to them.

This would be followed by a formal meeting and document of the complaint as well as a meeting to discuss the issue with all parties involved. If those being accused are found guilty of perpetrating abuse against individuals such as serious verbal assaults or any breaking of

the group rules, they will be given a formal warning and a possible suspension or ban if absolutely necessary.

Red: Red represents any type of abuse that constitutes an immediate suspension or ban from the group, including any serious, malicious and/or intentional attack on the group and/or any of its participants, as well as any criminal abuse. In the case of any severe criminal action such as physical or sexual assault, immediate action would be taken to ensure the victims safety, ensure the chain of evidence is preserved and kept confidential, while a report is made to the police.

4. Protection (Support and representation for those in greatest need):

As previously stated, ASG maintains an “open door” policy, meaning we are open to any feedback or concerns from participants or the general public. As part of ASG’s core values, ASG puts a priority on being inclusive to people from all backgrounds regardless of age, ethnic background, sexual orientation, gender identity or disabilities and open to equal opportunity regardless of any health conditions that people might have.

As also previously mentioned, we work with individuals and carers to adapt the setting however possible to suit their needs. We monitor what categories of participation we have in the group and make every effort to reach people from all backgrounds and ensure they have a fair say and representation within the group.

5. Partnership (Local solutions through services working within communities):

At every opportunity, ASG endeavours to collaborate and share relevant information with organisations that share similar goals and interests to ours. This can include working to host projects and day trips for service users as well as sharing relevant information on services that participants will find beneficial. This might include local events as well as support services that ASG is not directly able to provide.

This method of partnering with organisations helps build a network that looks to ensure participants and organisations can receive the best access to support and resources available.

6. Accountability (Ensuring ASG is held accountable to its functions and services):

Accountability plays a vital part in our safeguarding measure because it helps ensure that ASG has independent sources of scrutiny that can help keep the service ASG provides relevant and safe for all and prevent any bias upon review.

6.1 Who we are accountable for: We have a list of clearly defined group rules (code of conduct) which all participants are made aware of when joining ASG no matter what their capacity/role. These rules are as follows:

Participants and Carers: ASG are a participant-orientated organisation, thus we are held accountable by our members as to the specific services that we provide.

As mentioned under Safeguarding Categories 1 and 4 (Empowerment, Protection), we provide our members empowerment by ensuring they have an equal voice in what activities and events ASG provides as well as the event locations. We enable this via surveys and by offering an “open door policy” so service users and carers can contact ASG with their suggestions at any time, via text, phone call or email.

Further to this, should any carer or participant have a complaint they wish to bring to ASG’s attention, we will immediately offer a confidential meeting at the nearest opportunity and take steps to resolve the issue/concerns raised. Should a meeting need to take place, the content and outcome of said meeting will be documented and kept fully confidential.

Donors and Financial backers: As a non-profit organisation ASG is largely reliant on donations and grants from financial backers. With this in mind, any money obtained by grant providers must be used for an explicit purpose which ASG must make clear when making grant applications. Equally when requesting donations, ASG must make clear what purpose the donations will be used for. We will provide grant providers documents clearly outlining the costing of the project/event that the funds will go towards; this will be provided when an application is submitted and ASG will also provide proof of transactions should grant providers request this information.

Companies House: As a registered Limited Company, we are registered under companies house which is the UK Government’s database for all UK companies. Much of ASG’s official documentation including but not limited to our certificate of incorporation which outlines our aims/goals and how we function as an organisation. This ensures that ASG’s status is closely monitored and that relevant documents are open to public view.