

Safeguarding in Scouting



Scouts Safeguarding Policy, updated May 2024

13. Pre-existing relationships

Through this Policy, we aim to ensure that there is clarity and transparency about pre-existing relationships, and appropriate measures are taken to keep people safe.

Where there is the potential for young people to turn 18 during a scouting event or activity, the leaders of the event or activity must make participants aware of this policy and the steps to be taken prior to its commencement.

The [Yellow Card](#) states, 'Do not overstep the boundaries between yourself and children or young people by engaging in friendships or sexual relationships.' This is an important factor to prevent any breaches of the position of trust, to make sure that all volunteers act appropriately toward young people to prevent grooming and child abuse occurring. However, in line with section 24 of the Sexual Offences Act 2002, there are circumstances where a pre-existing relationship will be accepted.

13.1 Circumstances

The circumstances are as follows:

- The relationship is consensual, and
- an 18-year-old (Adult) has become an adult volunteer or Network member, and
- the relationship is with a youth member within Scouts who is aged over 16 that began prior to the individual taking on the role as leader or becoming Network member, and
- the adult has informed their line manager and local lead volunteer of the pre-existing relationship prior to taking their appointment or becoming a Network member.

In the above circumstances, the line manager and local lead volunteer must be notified and satisfy themselves that the above conditions are in place. A meeting must be held with the youth member and their parent/carer to make sure that there's a full understanding of the situation and agree any restrictions that are deemed necessary to be put in place. An agreement will be undertaken and strictly adhered to that the adult will not volunteer or be placed in a position of trust in the Group or Unit, that the youth member that they're in a relationship with attends.

13.2 Pre-existing relationships and attendance at Scouting Activities

Where a pre-existing relationship has been disclosed as defined above and both the adult and youth member wish to attend the same scouting activity, the following will apply:

- All pre-existing relationships where there will be an over 18 and an under 18 at any point, from planning stage to the end of the event must be disclosed to the line manager, local lead volunteer and event organisers at the earliest opportunity.
- Parents and Carers for any individual under 18 to which this policy applies, must be consulted with by the Lead Volunteer, specifically in relation to the activity detail to agree any safeguarding measures to be taken and authorise attendance with full knowledge of the pre-existing relationship.
- Should participants not be willing to disclose a pre-existing relationship to parents or carers then they will not be able to attend the activity together.
- All involved will be explicitly reminded of their obligations in relation to the Safeguarding Policy and [Yellow Card](#). Under no circumstances will the sharing of accommodation be permitted at any stage of an event, including the planning stages, between under and over 18-year-old participants regardless of any pre-existing relationship.
- All involved will ensure their interactions, actions and behaviours both online and when attending scouting activity together in a pre-existing relationship are appropriate and do not bring the movement into disrepute.
- The over 18 adults will not be permitted to be in a leadership position or position of trust with responsibility for the person they are in a pre-existing relationship with at any scouting activity.
- The HQ Safeguarding Team can provide guidance if further mitigations or considerations are required. These next steps may include (but not be limited to):
 - Development of specific case mitigations and action plans
 - Discussing with the adult participants agreed behaviour and boundaries during the event.
 - Where it is deemed mitigation of any risk is not possible the adult will not be permitted to attend the event.

Any concerns that this guidance is not being followed, and may be being abused, must be reported to the HQ Safeguarding Team.

This exception to the [Yellow Card](#) can only be used in the specific circumstances stated and strict adherence of this must be monitored to avoid abuse in the guise of a pre-existing relationship. A framework for conversations regarding pre-existing relationships is in Appendix E.

If any volunteer or staff member has a concern regarding any of these areas, [contact the HQ Safeguarding Team](#) for advice and guidance.