



ANGLING TRUST

**Responding to disclosures of abuse:
Guidance**

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1. Purpose of guidance

It can be difficult for both children and adults to speak out about abuse due to fear of negative consequences, concerns that they will not be believed, or a lack of awareness that they are being abused. Additionally, the shame and stigma associated with disclosing certain types of abuse can create significant barriers. It is essential to recognise that all disclosures of abuse are profoundly challenging for the individual making them and can be equally distressing for those hearing them.

When faced with a disclosure, it is essential that individuals respond appropriately to support the person making the disclosure and foster an environment where others feel safe and confident to speak out. Within an angling club or fishery, ensuring individuals feel listened to and secure is critical. It is equally important to handle disclosures in a way that does not compromise any future investigations or statutory follow-up, which could occur as a result of asking inappropriate questions or making incorrect statements.

This guidance provides Welfare Officers, Angling Trust staff, and others within the scope of the Angling Trust Safeguarding Policy with essential knowledge on how to respond effectively when a disclosure is made.

2. How a disclosure happens

To reiterate from other guidance, abuse may be disclosed by adults or other individuals in various ways, including:

- **Direct Disclosure** – Making clear verbal statements about the abuse they have experienced.
- **Indirect Disclosure** – Using ambiguous verbal statements that suggest something may be wrong, but not explicitly stating what has occurred.
- **Behavioural Signs** – Displaying behaviour that indicates something is wrong, whether or not it is intentional.
- **Non-Verbal Communication** – Communicating through writing, drawing, or other forms of expression, such as gestures or body language.

It is important that staff and volunteers recognise these different forms of disclosure and respond appropriately to ensure the safety and well-being of the individual/others. It is important to note that while a staff member or volunteer may recognise signs of abuse, the adult, or individual sharing the information on their behalf may not always recognise or acknowledge that they are being abused. In some cases, it may not be immediately clear what type of abuse is occurring, or whether abuse is taking place at all.

For this reason, it is crucial that any concerns are not kept in isolation. All information should be properly recorded and reported, ensuring that appropriate actions are taken to safeguard the individual involved.

3. Overcoming barriers to disclosure

In the **Recognising Abuse** guidance documents for both adults and children, the barriers individuals face when disclosing abuse or safeguarding concerns are outlined. When dealing with a disclosure of abuse, it is crucial to understand that the individual has had to overcome significant personal barriers to share their experience. Alternatively, the professional involved may have helped to overcome these barriers through effective safeguarding practices, such as recognising the signs of abuse or creating a supportive and safe environment.

This highlights the importance of sensitive, informed responses that validate the individual's experience and maintain trust in the safeguarding process.

4. Research shows

When a child discloses abuse, the following key interpersonal skills can help ensure they feel listened to, understood, and taken seriously (Baker et al, 2019). These skills are also transferable to adults.

1. **Show You Care – Help Them Open Up**
 - Give the child your full attention and maintain open, encouraging body language.
 - Be compassionate and understanding, reassuring them that their feelings are important.
 - Use supportive phrases such as, *"You've shown such courage today,"* to validate their experience and build trust. Phraseology can be changed for different ages/abilities.
2. **Take Your Time – Slow Down**
 - Allow the child to share their story at their own pace.
 - Avoid interrupting and respect pauses in the conversation.
 - Pay close attention to their body language and be mindful that it may take multiple conversations for them to feel comfortable fully disclosing.
3. **Show You Understand – Reflect Back**
 - Demonstrate genuine interest in what the child is saying.
 - Reflect back their words to confirm your understanding, using their language to acknowledge that this is their unique experience.

5. Responding to disclosures: Do's

If a disclosure is made to you directly or indirectly, please do the following:

Stay Calm and Reassure: Maintain a composed and supportive demeanour, reassuring the individual that they have done the right thing by speaking out.

Actively Listen: Give your full attention, respond to body language, and let them speak at their own pace without interruptions.

Be Mindful of Support Needs: Consider their mental state and provide reassurance or guidance if they appear distressed.

Explain Next Steps: At an appropriate moment, inform them about your responsibility to share the information with relevant authorities and outline what might happen next (what, where, when, why).

Gain Consent Where Possible: For adults, seek their consent to share information unless doing so poses further risk. Further guidance is available in Mental Capacity, Decision Making and Consent guidance.

Maintain a Non-Biased Approach: Ensure that anyone disclosing abuse feels listened to and taken seriously. At the same time, remain impartial and avoid forming judgments or assumptions about the alleged abuser. Follow your organisation's safeguarding procedures to handle the disclosure

fairly and transparently, ensuring the individual receives the protection and support they need while allowing for a thorough and unbiased investigation.

Record Accurately: Document all details factually, including dates, times, locations, and any actions taken. Distinguish between fact and opinion. Make notes during the disclosure if this is appropriate.

Report Promptly: Follow your organisation's reporting procedures and inform the Welfare Officer, if this is not the person receiving the concern, the Angling Trust Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or appropriate statutory agency.

6. Responding to disclosures: Don'ts

If a disclosure is made to you directly or indirectly, please ensure you don't do the following:

Panic or Show Disgust: Avoid emotional reactions that may discourage the individual from continuing to disclose.

Ask Leading Questions: Do not suggest answers or ask questions that might compromise future investigations.

Make Assumptions or Speculate: Stick to what has been shared without adding your interpretation or guesses.

Promise Confidentiality: Never guarantee to keep the disclosure a secret, as safeguarding requires information sharing.

Rush into Actions: Avoid acting impulsively or taking measures outside your safeguarding procedures.

Discuss with Unauthorised Individuals: Share the disclosure only with those directly involved in safeguarding, such as the DSL or statutory agencies.

Take Sole Responsibility: Always pass concerns on to the appropriate authority instead of trying to manage the situation alone.

Investigate concerns that meet statutory agency thresholds (such as police, social care or LADO): Always pass disclosures to trained professionals or statutory agencies for an official investigation. Angling organisations should only conduct their own inquiries if the official investigation has been completed or if it has been determined that the case does not meet the statutory threshold. Suspensions, support or protective measures can be inputted by the club, fishery or federation in order to protect individuals.

7. TED Approach

To ensure you are not accidentally affecting a disclosure, utilise the **TED Approach** (*Tell me, Explain to me, Describe*) in the place of asking any leading questions. This is a highly effective way of responding to safeguarding concerns for several reasons:

Encourages Open Communication

- Using open-ended prompts like *"Tell me," "Explain to me,"* and *"Describe"* allows the individual to share their experience in their own words, without leading or influencing their narrative.

Avoids Leading Questions and preserves integrity of disclosure

- The TED approach reduces the risk of leading the individual to provide specific answers or altering their account, which is critical in safeguarding to ensure information remains factual, unbiased and unaltered by input from the person receiving the disclosure.

Supports Clarity and Understanding

- Encouraging the individual to explain and describe their situation helps to provide clear and detailed information, which is vital for assessing risks and determining appropriate safeguarding actions.

8. Training and other guidance

The Angling Trust offers free training for Welfare Officers and committee members through a three-hour online session. This training includes discussions on recognising abuse and detailed guidance on applying the **4 R's of Safeguarding**—Recognising, Responding, Recording, and Reporting. The training booking link, additional policies and resources are available in the safeguarding section of the Angling Trust website.