

ACA (UK) Fellowship Safeguarding Policy and “Duty of Care” Explained

The members of Adult Children of Alcoholics & Dysfunctional Families (ACA UK) support each other in self-regulating groups (the ACA Fellowship) which are autonomous from the ACA UK Intergroup. Whilst the purpose of the ACA UK Intergroup is to serve the ACA Fellowship, the Groups which make up the ACA Fellowship are autonomous groups which have no independent constitution.

ACA members do not require DBS or Disclosure Scotland checks for 12th Stepping or Sponsoring, as they are members of self-regulating groups. As individuals, however, ACA members should be aware of their duty of care to others and hence follow the law and best practice on safeguarding, when acting in ACA's name.

The basic principle

Everyone should recognise that all individuals, regardless of age, disability, gender, racial heritage, religious belief, sexual orientation or identity, have a right to equal protection from all types of harm or abuse.

ACA arms this principle in the context of its common welfare, primary purpose and anonymity.

The ACA Traditions give general guidance to all those in understanding the duty of care owed by one ACA member to another, as well as those they come into contact with, through the ACA Fellowship.

Who does the Policy protect?

This Policy applies to the safeguarding of all ACA members, ACA Intergroup Representatives, ACA Intergroup Committee Members and those they come into contact with when acting in ACA's name.

Disseminating best practice

It is important that all ACA members, ACA Intergroup Representatives, ACA Intergroup Committee Members understand and learn about safeguarding in order to ensure a safe environment for ACA members, and those they come into contact with, when acting in ACA's name.

New members should be given the newcomers pack which includes the ACA WSO safeguarding card which can be found here: <https://adultchildren.org/preventing-unsafe-behaviour-in-aca/>

The ACA World Service Organisation is in the process of creating a Service Manual for ACA, a draft of which can be found here: <https://acawso.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ACA-Service-Manual-March-2021.pdf>

ACA UK Intergroup has recommended to the ACA Fellowship that within the ACA structure ACA groups appoint Local ACA Safeguarding Representatives who are able to provide a DBS certificate, and who can help signpost members to the appropriate agencies should the need arise. (Note: payment for a DBS certificate to be agreed by IG)

ACA UK Intergroup has safeguarding guidelines for its members on the ACA UK's website.

DBS Checks for members attending prisons

Prisons will carry out identification checks, and may ask ACA volunteers to provide a DBS certificate. This includes any member who, in ACA's name, attends a prison or may have unsupervised contact with a vulnerable adult. We do not allow under 18s or minors in ACA meetings because it is not appropriate.

It is the establishment's duty, and not that of the Fellowship, to ensure that the requisite DBS checks are completed. As a matter of best practice, any members acting in ACA's name, should be willing to provide a DBS Certificate or sign up to the DBS Update Service for repeat checks, if requested.

If any Group Secretary or ACA member is unsure whether any role undertaken in ACA's name requires a criminal record check of any sort, they should consult the following governmental guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service>.

Managing meeting safety

The following is an extract from the Big Red Book:

Safety in Meetings

Our experience shows that ACA meetings are safe, affirming, and orderly. In rare instances, however, ACA groups have had to address the problematic behavior of a group member. This is not uncommon among the various Twelve Step programs. ACA wisdom offers a wealth of common-sense actions, so that a group can maintain its safety while also not over reaching with exclusionary rules. In addition to these suggestions below, please review [Chapter Nineteen – Twelve Traditions](#) – to learn more about how ACA groups handle disruptive or bothersome situations. It is important to remember that all group members are responsible for group safety and order. Actions that address disruptive behavior should be taken by the group and with group support. Do not act alone in these situations. Ideas to address disruptive behavior in your group are:

1. Keep Tradition One in mind in all decisions your group would make about a disruptive person. The Tradition states: “Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon ACA unity”.
2. Two or more group members can ask the disruptive person to leave the meeting and return when he or she is willing to work on recovery. Ask the person to talk to a sponsor or consider getting a sponsor.
3. If the problematic behavior persists, ask the person to take a one or two week break from the meeting.
4. If the person is disruptive and will not leave the meeting, escort him or her from the meeting if the person is not violent. Escorting is done by a group of meeting members instead of one member acting alone.
5. If the disruptive person becomes violent or threatening, shut down the meeting immediately and have all members depart for the common welfare. 6. Call the police if there is clear and present danger to lives, health or property.

Reporting safeguarding concerns

If any ACA member, ACA Group Service Representative, ACA Committee member or ACA member believes that the actions of an ACA member, or someone in contact with the Fellowship, gives rise to a safeguarding concern within ACA, they should consider taking the following action(s), as appropriate.

Preserve any evidence and report all concerns to trusted ACA member and/or local ACA Safeguarding Rep or Local Authority Adult Social Care team (about a vulnerable adult).

In an emergency: If there is immediate risk of abuse call 999 and report to the Police

If there is any doubt about whether a situation amounts to abuse, members of the Fellowship should ask the advice of their Local Safeguarding Representative. Any individual who has reported their concerns to the Local

Authority Adult Social Care team, Safeguarding Lead or the Police must follow the guidance and advice provided by that relevant authority contact. (Where significant harm has occurred or ACA as a whole is affected, ACA UK Intergroup has the authority to act in all matters relating to that incident)

“Duty of Care” Explained

ACA meetings are peer-led and non-professional in nature. However, in the UK, any organisation or group that meets regularly and interacts with vulnerable adults – including survivors of trauma, abuse, or those with mental health challenges – has a moral and, at times, legal duty to take reasonable steps to protect them from harm. This includes ACA groups, even if they are not incorporated or formally constituted.

The concept of duty of care means that we all have a responsibility to act prudently and compassionately where harm could be foreseeable. In the context of ACA, this might include addressing or escalating concerns about inappropriate behaviour, sexual harassment, bullying, or boundary violations that could endanger other members.

While ACA meetings are not therapy or healthcare settings, they are often attended by highly vulnerable individuals. Inaction or a dismissive culture around safeguarding concerns can result in further harm or liability for the group and its members. legal references below.

Legal References (Duty of Care & Safeguarding)

• Care Act 2014 (England):

Section 42 places a duty on organisations and individuals to prevent or report abuse or neglect of vulnerable adults. Peer-led support groups are not exempt from this duty when they are aware of a risk.

• DSD & NBV v Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis [2018] UKSC 11:

This case affirmed that failing to protect vulnerable people from known risks can breach Article 3 of the Human Rights Act (freedom from degrading treatment). This applies where groups are aware of a person posing a risk and do not act.

• ABC v St George’s Healthcare NHS Trust [2020] EWHC 455:

Established that a duty of care may extend to third parties at risk, especially when harm is foreseeable and avoidable.

• IICSA Report – Church of England (2022):

This landmark safeguarding report states: “No environment should be considered exempt from safeguarding responsibilities.” This is highly relevant for groups meeting in church premises.

We trust the above clarifies our shared responsibilities to maintain safe and welcoming spaces for all ACA members. The Safeguarding Committee is here to offer support, resources, and guidance as needed.

“Safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility – it is not confined to professionals.” – NSPCC

“The duty to act arises not from your job title, but from the knowledge of risk.” – SCIE (Social Care Institute for Excellence)