Child Protection Policy

Policy Created: September 2023

Last Reviewed: March 2026

Next Review: March 2027 (or sooner if significant changes in legislation, guidance, or organisational activities occur)

Reviewed by: Laurence Clark

Responsible Officer: CEO

Approved by: CEO

Main Contact for Queries: info@pathwaysassociates.co.uk

Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL): Lynn James-Jenkinson (or nominated deputy)

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) Contact (Lancashire): 0300 123 6720 / Out of hours: 0300 123 6722

1. Introduction and Commitment

Pathways Associates CIC is a disabled-led Community Interest Company dedicated to enabling people with learning disabilities, autistic people, and their families to live the lives they choose as equals in their local communities. The organisation fully recognises its responsibilities for child protection and is committed to safeguarding all children and young people from abuse, neglect, harm, exploitation, or discrimination in any form. This includes physical, sexual, emotional, and neglect, as well as emerging risks such as online harm, child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation, and radicalisation.

Our approach is child-centred, trauma-informed, strengths-based, and co-produced with Experts by Experience and families. It prioritises empowerment, dignity, and the right to live free from harm while supporting choice, independence, and positive risk-taking. This policy aligns with current best practice and statutory guidance, including Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 (updated June 2025 with emphasis on multi-agency collaboration and child-centred practice), Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025 (with updates on online safety and staff training), the Children Act 1989 and 2004, the Equality Act 2010, and guidance from the NSPCC, CQC, and Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships. It includes specific considerations for children with learning disabilities or autism, such as communication needs, higher risks of exploitation, and accessible support.

This policy integrates with our Safeguarding Adults and Children Policy (broader safeguarding framework), Mental Capacity Act Policy (capacity assessments for 16+), Service User Consent Policy (informed consent), Patient Safety Incident Response Policy and Plan (learning from incidents), Equality and Diversity Policy (intersectional protection), Co-production Policy (involving lived experience), and Prevent Policy (radicalisation as safeguarding).

It reflects our values of being led by lived experience (Experts by Experience shaping child protection awareness and responses), partnership (multi-agency collaboration), inclusion and respect (accessible, culturally sensitive processes), innovation (creative tools for communication and support), and integrity (transparent reporting and no-blame learning). We commit to a Just and Learning Culture where concerns are raised

without fear, incidents are reviewed systemically, and learning drives improvement.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all activities where we may engage with or support children and young people under 18, including Expert Hub, Self Advocates Training Partnership, co-production networks, training, events, workshops, Care and Treatment Reviews (CTRs), policy/strategy development, and any direct or indirect contact through our work. It covers children with learning disabilities, autistic children, and those who may need additional support. The policy applies to colleagues, associates, volunteers, Experts by Experience, partners, contractors, and families.

3. Key Objectives

The organisation aims to prevent abuse and neglect through robust recruitment, training, and risk assessments. It seeks to identify and respond promptly to concerns with compassion and without delay. Support is provided to children and those affected, involving them in decisions where appropriate. Investigations are conducted fairly, with systemic learning to improve practice. Legal duties are met, including reporting to LADO, police, CQC, and local authorities. A safe, inclusive culture is fostered where everyone feels confident to speak up.

4. Core Principles

Our child protection practice is guided by the statutory principles in Working Together to Safeguard Children: a child-centred approach with a whole-family focus, multi-agency collaboration, and building positive, trusting relationships with parents and carers. Additional principles include trauma-informed and person-centred responses, co-production with Experts by Experience, accessibility (easy-read materials, advocates, interpreters, British Sign Language), no-blame learning culture, equality and intersectionality (protected characteristics, health inequalities), and information sharing based on the 7 golden rules (be open and honest, seek advice if unsure, share with consent where appropriate, consider safety and wellbeing, ensure sharing is necessary/proportionate/relevant/accurate/timely/secure, and keep a record).

5. Roles and Responsibilities

The Board provides strategic oversight and receives quarterly anonymised reports on child protection activity. The CEO holds overall accountability for compliance and appoints the DSL. The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) manages day-to-day concerns, advises staff, investigates proportionately, and liaises with LADO, police, CQC, local authorities, and ICBs. Managers and event leads risk-assess activities and ensure safe recruitment (DBS, references). All colleagues, associates, volunteers, and Experts by Experience recognise signs of abuse, respond appropriately, and report concerns immediately. External referrals include Children's Social Care for child protection concerns, LADO for allegations against staff, police for crimes, and CQC for regulated activities.

6. Procedures

We follow the "Recognise – Respond – Record – Report – Review" process for child protection concerns.

Recognise signs of abuse or neglect, including physical (bruises, burns), emotional (withdrawal, fear), sexual (inappropriate knowledge, behaviour), neglect (poor hygiene, unmet needs), and specific risks for children with learning disabilities or autism (e.g., communication barriers, higher exploitation risk, masking behaviours). Consider online harm, child sexual/criminal exploitation, radicalisation (links to Prevent Policy), and domestic abuse.

Respond by ensuring immediate safety, listening without leading questions, and reassuring without promising confidentiality. Offer trauma-informed support and advocacy.

Record factually using secure forms (date, time, what was said/seen, actions taken). Store in restricted files.

Report internally to DSL within 24 hours (immediately if urgent); externally to local Children's Social Care, LADO, or police as appropriate. Use multi-agency strategy discussions/meetings. Override consent if sharing is necessary for safety (per information sharing guidance).

Review proportionately post-incident, develop action plans, and co-produce learning with Experts by Experience. Share anonymised lessons via Quality Improvement and Board reports.

Safe recruitment includes DBS checks, references, and training (links to DBS and References Policy). Codes of conduct prohibit inappropriate behaviour. Risk assessments for activities include child protection measures. For extended/partnership activities, we verify partner policies.

7. Training, Awareness, and Support

Mandatory annual child protection training is provided for all, covering recognition, reporting, and specific needs for children with learning disabilities/autism (accessible formats). Role-specific training is offered for DSL and event leads. Induction includes policy briefing. Awareness is raised via co-produced resources, meetings, and campaigns. Support for those raising concerns or affected includes debriefs, wellbeing checks, and referrals to NSPCC or counselling.

8. Monitoring, Review, and Continuous Improvement

The policy is reviewed annually or following incidents/legislative changes (e.g., Working Together updates). Monitoring occurs through logs, audits, and feedback. Learning is co-produced with Experts by Experience. Feedback is welcomed; annual anonymised summaries are in the CIC report.

9. Conclusion

Pathways Associates CIC is dedicated to child protection that empowers and includes. By preventing harm, responding compassionately, and learning together, we uphold our disabled-led values and create safer environments for children with learning disabilities, autistic children, and their families.

Approved by CEO — March 2026

Key Contacts

- DSL: Lynn James-Jenkinson - 07970 900226
- LADO (Lancashire): 0300 123 6720

- Police: 999 (urgent) / 101 (non-urgent)
- Children's Social Care (local): 0300 123 6720 or out of hours 0300 123 6722
- NSPCC Helpline: 0808 800 5000

This policy is available in easy-read and alternative formats on request.