

Supporting under 18s to engage in Lead Activist roles

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Distribution	Lead Activists
Owner	Safeguarding

PURPOSE:

Amnesty International UK aims to empower young people as Human Rights activists and to enable them to take part in all areas of Amnesty International UK's activism. In order to do this, we need to ensure that they are fully able to participate in a empowering and safe environment and that the adults they are working with are able to provide this.

This procedure provides clear directions for supporting an under 18 to be a lead activist and aims to help activists understand what steps need to be taken to ensure their participation is meaningful. It should be read alongside the AIUK [safeguarding policy](#) and [procedure](#), and other documents accessible on the AIUK [safeguarding web page](#).

SCOPE:

This procedure applies to circumstances of an under 18 taking on any of the following roles:

- A Network Committee member
- A Country Coordinator or Shadow Country Coordinator Role
- A Regional Representative or Shadow Regional Representative
- A Regional Media Support Officer or Shadow Regional Media Support Officer
- Youth representative to Building a Powerful Movement Sub-Committee of the Board
- Other similar roles

This Procedure does not apply to Student or Youth groups who will be within settings that have their own safeguarding processes and procedures.

DEFINITIONS:

A Child is anyone who is under the age of 18, we will refer to them in this document as under-18 activists.

A Lead Activist is anyone undertaking a role to lead and support other activists in either an elected or appointed role.

SPECIFIC PROCEDURE:

Roles & responsibilities

There are different roles with different responsibilities within committees that are needed to keep under-18 activists safe.

Where under-18 activists are part of a committee, an adult activist needs to agree to take on the responsibility of safeguarding lead. They should have the emergency contact details for those in attendance, know the safeguarding policy and procedure, and know what to do if a disclosure or concern is raised. This should all be recorded in a pre-meeting form. For more details on the role of designated safeguarding lead see the role description document.

If the event has an overnight element, the safeguarding lead and another adult in line with the ratios set out below, should be in attendance. The safeguarding lead and at least one other adult

(ideally the chair, if over 18) should have an up-to-date criminal record check in line with the AIUK [policy](#).

Alongside the safeguarding lead, all adults on the committee have a safeguarding responsibility and should act in a way which is inclusive to young members and should never ignore signs of concerns.

Individuals under 18, also have a duty of care and a responsibility to act in a way which is inclusive and safe, for example using inclusive language, not being abusive or harassing, and making sure they are not putting other young people or adults at risk of abuse or harm. Under 18s should always report any concerns they have to an adult in the committee.

Nomination/Recruitment Process

1. Ensure nomination forms/application forms identify anyone under 18 and their date of birth where under 18.
2. Provide information to under-18 activists that explains we take our responsibilities seriously and so they are elected on the proviso of parent/carer consent. E.g., consent for travelling to meetings and to meet with and enter online communication with a number of adults (including staff and other activists).
3. We will not seek to obtain consent for someone to apply or be nominated for a role but all communication following that must make clear that we will need consent to take on a role. If consent is not granted, or the individual does not want you to seek consent, alternative ways for the under 18 activist to be involved should be discussed, but ultimately they will not be able to take on a lead activist role.

Post-election/Recruitment Process

- When an under-18 activist has been recruited to a position, the committee need to understand the specific risks that an individual under 18 joining the committee creates, this should be recorded in the risk assessment for the committee and include...
 - individual's age,
 - ratio of under-18 activists to adults
 - locations of meetings e.g., need to travel, or overnight accommodation
 - topics that will be discussed
- Edit the generic AIUK consent form to make it specific to the committee, including meeting dates, role individual will be filling and purpose of the network. This will need to be reviewed annually to include new dates (more details on consent below).
- Get the parent/carers contact details and gain their consent for their child's on-going involvement in the network. They need to understand what the nature of involvement involves (including any risks as detailed more below) and be giving informed consent.
- Log health and consent forms in a secure location accessible to all those who may need it and only those people. This is likely to be the chair, the community organiser supporting the network and the safeguarding lead for the network.
- Ensure that at the safeguarding lead and one other appropriate adult (ideally the chair, if over 18) have appropriate criminal record check; this will be required where there are regular (virtual or in person) meetings (3 in 30 days) or overnight stays are required (between hours 02:00 and 06:00) – see the criminal record check policy or consult with the AIUK

Safeguarding Manager for more details on this. Only those responsible for the safety of the under 18-activist will need to be checked.

- Ensure all committee members are briefed/trained on youth engagement and appropriate ways of working with young people, and have completed the appropriate safeguarding training. See best practice guidance [here](#).
- Ensure all committee members are aware of risk assessment and of the implementation and management of any identified risks.

Joining process

When a new member joins the committee, no matter their age, certain procedures should be followed, there may be specific processes for different groups, but they should all include the following...

For adults:

- An introduction session with the chair of network – to discuss expected appropriate behaviours, what to do if there is a safeguarding concern, and details of who is responsible for safeguarding.
- AIUK Activist Code of conduct should be shared and agreed to
- Criminal record checks for all adults will need to be completed due to the regular meeting with under 18s, including overnight stays.
- Appropriate safeguarding training for all adults

For under 18 committee members:

- An introduction with staff member and chair of network - Sharing under 18s safeguarding guidance with all under 18s, explaining who to go to if they have a concern about themselves or someone else, and the different processes in place which are there to safeguard them.
- AIUK Activist Code of conduct shared and agreed to.
- Consent forms need to be signed by them and their parents before they attend any activities or join any groups, online or in person. When seeking consent, it is important to ask the under-18 activist first whether they are comfortable with us reaching out to a parent/carer to seek parental consent (and explain that this is a legal requirement). In case the under-18 activist expresses concerns or refuses for AIUK to seek parental consent (this could be due to fear of retribution at home because of their association with AIUK or involvement in activism), we will try to find a suitable solution together with the activist, while managing their expectations and explaining our legal and safeguarding duties.

When it is agreed an under 18 will take on the role of a Lead Activist, the existing members need to decide who will be the safeguarding lead, and they should contact the relevant staff team to start the process of getting the needed criminal record checks. Whilst that process is happening, the under 18 activist can join, but the safe practices noted in the rest of the document should be followed, and any higher risk activities, such as overnight stays should not take place until appropriate criminal record checks are in place.

Before Under-18 activist takes on responsibilities

Risk assess these responsibilities, specifically on factors of

1. Communication with people outside of staff and Network Committee
2. Risk of receiving distressing material (e.g., materials on executions or torture)
3. Risk of receiving stressful or upsetting communications (e.g., complaints or requests for updates/speakers from members or groups)

4. Physical risk - e.g., travelling/events

Where there is an increased risk consider if it is an appropriate role/responsibility and if you think it is, ensure additional informed consent is obtained from under-18 activist and parent/carer.

Safe practices when meeting in person

To develop a safe space, certain practices should be followed when meeting in person.

- Before meeting in person, the chair and person with safeguarding responsibility should complete the planning sheet.
- Avoid adults and under 18's being left alone, 1:1, in a private space. This does not mean you can't have 1:1 conversations but means you should have these in view of other individuals.
- All adults in the committee who are interacting with under 18s should have undertaken the AIUK required safeguarding training.
- Travel requirements for each event should be confirmed with parents beforehand, agreeing when meeting and at which point, and recorded.
- If the meeting involves having a meal or meeting in a public venue, all adults attending should be mindful of drinking alcohol. The adults with responsibility for under 18s (the safeguarding lead and any other adult who may be responsible if an overnight stay) should not be drinking, and others should avoid excessive alcohol consumption.

At events/meetings

- Check in with under 18 activists before and after meeting/event.
- Ensure necessary adults hold a satisfactory criminal record check where deemed necessary (in line with criminal record checks policy).
- Remind everyone to be aware of tone/language/content/behaviour when interacting with all other attendees.
- Ensure that meeting safeguarding lead is identified and recorded in the risk assessment/pre-meeting form and that they have consent forms readily accessible.
- Ensure that in any social activities you are considering accessibly for everyone, including those under 18.
- For more details on safeguarding at AIUK events, see the guidance [here](#).

Overnight stays

If your meeting or activity requires an overnight stay, and an under-18 activist is in attendance, when booking and arranging the stay, consider the following...

- Make sure that you have consent from and contact details for the parents/carers of the under 18. The parents/carers should also have the details of the chair or safeguarding lead who will be taking responsibility.
- If the overnight stay is happening the evening before an event/meeting, make sure a meeting place, expected time of arrival and travel arrangements are agreed in advance with the under 18 activist and their parent/carer. If plans change this should be communicated with both the under 18 and their parent/carer.
- The responsibilities of care for the under 18 activist should be agreed in advance when the overnight stay is arranged. This should be an adult who has a criminal record check and an understanding of safeguarding procedures, ideally the safeguarding lead or chair. These responsibilities are to make sure the under 18 knows where their room is, knows where the adults rooms are, knows what to do in case of an emergency (e.g. a fire) and knows where to meet and at what time the following morning.

- All this information should be recorded in the pre meeting plan and stored safely.
- Only young people between the ages of 13 and 17 should stay overnight without parental attendance. We require that those under the age of 13 to be accompanied by their own parent/carer if staying overnight. An adult who has an up-to-date criminal record check should be in attendance and take responsibility for the care of the under 18.
 - Discuss with young person and parents/carers their preferences for attending this meeting including options of dialling/video calling in, covering the cost of a chaperone, or having an adult activist stay in a hotel (separate room) with young person (following the criminal record check requirements).
 - Ratios for overnight stays – the adults taking responsibility should have done the AIUK specified safeguarding training and be criminal record checked.
 - 1-9 under-18 activists = at least 2 adults
 - 10+ under-18 activists = a ratio of one adult for every 10 under-18 activists e.g., 30 under-18 activists, at least 3 adults
 - Ideally should have one adult scheduled on stand-by in case of adult illness/unforeseen circumstances.
 - When staying overnight, the young person should know how to get in touch with the adult attending, i.e., have their number and know the room number the adult is staying in case of an emergency.

Safe practice when meeting online

- Waiting room – depending on the platform you are using, either make a waiting room or only admit people who you know should be attending. You could also use a password on some platforms.
- Appropriate behaviours – make sure that other people in your location cannot be seen or see the screen, that you are using appropriate language and not drinking alcohol.
- If discussing personal information, make sure you are in a private area.
- For more details on digital safeguarding, see the guidance [here](#).

Communicating out of meetings

- When communicating out of the main meetings, group messaging is okay, but adults should avoid messaging under 18s directly.
- Under 18s need to give their consent and parental consent to be part of a group chat. This can be sought when they join the network/role by putting it into the consent form.
- If any bullying, harassing or discriminatory language is used in a group chat, the chair/lead in the committee needs to address this and if needed individuals should be removed or the group disbanded.
- 1:1 phone calls should be avoided, but if needed should be done with the consent of parent/carer.

Consent forms

- At the beginning of the calendar year, or as someone joins, a consent form should be signed by the young person and parent/carer. The consent form should include all the meeting dates for the rest of the year and if they will be in person (with location) or virtual meetings.
- Include consent about travel and communication arrangements in the consent form too.
- If there is an unplanned trip or activity, separate, specific consent should be sought.
- If there are informal meetings which taken place out of the regular formal meetings, then this should be made clear in the consent form.

- It is important to explain to the under 18 activists the reasons for AIUK seeking consent and ask them whether they are comfortable with you reaching out to a parent/carer to seek consent. They may not want you to contact their parents/carers (this could be due to fear of retribution at home because of their association with Amnesty or involvement in activism), in this case, you should be clear that for full participation as a Lead Activist, we do need their parent/carers consent, however you could offer to meet with parents/carers to ease any fears, or suggest alternative ways that they could be involved with AIUKs work. E.g. starting up a school youth group, being an activist but not a lead activist.

USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS:

Know the contact details for the parents/carers of any lead activists under 18.

Know your staff liaison's details

AIUK Designated Safeguarding Lead:

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