

WWOOF UK

Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults within the WWOOF exchange

WWOOF UK is a membership charity, teaching people about organic growing and low-impact lifestyles through hands-on experience in the UK. Within the exchange between WWOOF hosts and WWOOF volunteers, we don't want anyone to feel their personal safety is at risk. WWOOF exchanges work on a basis of mutual trust and respect, and in the vast majority of cases there is no cause for concern or complaint.

If you have children or vulnerable adults in your care during a WWOOF exchange, their safety and welfare remain your responsibility at all times.

WWOOF UK acknowledges the possibility that members themselves may be vulnerable adults who require protection from abuse; the advice given in this document is aimed to support **any** vulnerable person within the WWOOF exchange.

1. What is 'safeguarding'?

- protecting vulnerable people from maltreatment
- preventing impairment of vulnerable peoples' health or development
- ensuring that vulnerable people are provided with safe and effective care
- taking action to enable all vulnerable people to have the best outcomes from situations

2. Who is responsible for the safeguarding?

The UK Government document 'Working together to safeguard children' states that *'the action we take to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm - is everyone's responsibility. Everyone who comes into contact with children and families has a role to play.'* For the purposes of this policy, 'vulnerable adults' is interchangeable with the word 'children' in the above statement.

- **WWOOF UK** – provides guidance to hosts via a 'Safeguarding' page on the WWOOF UK website;
 - template risk assessments for all members
 - general guidance is available about communication between WWOOFers and hosts before the WWOOF exchange
 - when new hosts are vetted, they are asked whether they have vulnerable people at their property and are pointed toward the 'Safeguarding' page of the WWOOF UK website
 - information provided to all members points them to the 'Safeguarding' page
- Information available on the WWOOF UK website, explains what a member should do if they think vulnerable people are at risk within the WWOOF exchange.
- **Hosts & WWOOFers** – should assess the risk to vulnerable people in their care (this includes hosts assessing whether a WWOOFer is a vulnerable person);
 - take responsibility for ensuring they are satisfied that vulnerable people are adequately safeguarded within the WWOOF exchange
 - be aware of advice about dealing with issues of safeguarding within the WWOOF exchange, and what to do if any issues arise

3. Protection & Prevention

For carers of vulnerable people;

As the parent or carer of a child or vulnerable adult you will almost certainly have thought about how to keep them safe during a WWOOF exchange, as well as how interesting and exciting an experience it will be for them and for you!

WWOOF's main advice is for you to have **your own personal 'code of conduct'** for new people interacting with the vulnerable person in your care, and make sure you **communicate very openly** with everyone involved in the WWOOF exchange so that they, including the child or vulnerable adult, know exactly what acceptable and unacceptable conduct are.

For example; are you and your child happy for someone you don't know very well to administer first aid, or comfort the child? Does the vulnerable person in your care have safe personal boundaries when it comes to physical contact?

WWOOF UK provides a risk assessment template for you to consider how to prevent and manage risks to vulnerable people in your care within the WWOOF exchange (Please see point 4 below). This is for you to use, or not, however you wish, for your own particular circumstance. We know that risk assessments don't necessarily stop bad things from happening, but they can help you to think about what you'd do in an upsetting situation or even to foresee and prevent a potential problem.

For hosts and WWOOFers who may be vulnerable

If you consider yourself to be vulnerable to abuse, or to have become vulnerable during your time WWOOFing or hosting, you are encouraged to think very carefully about whether you should continue your WWOOF activities. However, WWOOF UK does not intend to discriminate against members who could be considered as vulnerable, and the information below about support available is relevant to anyone who is concerned about safeguarding.

4. Support

During the WWOOF exchange, if you feel someone is behaving in an unacceptable way towards a child or vulnerable adult (including towards yourself), you are strongly encouraged to **make it very clear why that behaviour is unacceptable** and ensure any necessary boundaries are very obvious to everyone.

If you observe (or experience) unacceptable conduct towards a vulnerable person within the WWOOF exchange, which you think is seriously threatening that person's well being, please let WWOOF UK know even if that vulnerable person is not you, or is not in your care, and even if you have dealt with the situation yourself.

If at any time during a WWOOF exchange you feel unable to say something to a host or WWOOFer about a safeguarding problem, please contact WWOOF UK via the complaints process - by e-mailing complaints@wwoof.org.uk.

If at any time during a WWOOF exchange you think that a safeguarding issue could be considered a criminal offence, **please contact the police in the first instance**, and then also contact WWOOF UK via complaints@wwoof.org.uk.

You are under no obligation to continue with a WWOOF exchange if you or anyone else is made to feel uncomfortable. If in doubt, contact the WWOOF UK team.

5. Photographs and sensitive data

Please bear in mind that any information you make available on your WWOOF profile can be seen by any WWOOF member, including WWOOF UK staff members and directors. If you are uncomfortable about having information and photographs of you, your children or anyone else in your care widely available online then think carefully about what you include in your profile. Of course, we encourage you to give hosts and WWOOFers plenty of detail about yourself, but if you consider any of that necessary data to be sensitive then you should only share it in private exchanges when communicating about the WWOOF exchange.

It's common, of course, that WWOOFers and hosts alike enjoy taking photos and even film and audio recordings of each other during a WWOOF exchange, indeed, we actively encourage you to record your experiences and share them with us and the wider world! Inevitably, these photos can find their way onto the internet, via social media etc, and could become openly available outside of your or WWOOF UK's control. If you have any reservations about photos of you, your children or anyone else in your care being 'out there' in the wider world, you must make this very clear at the outset of a WWOOF exchange.

6. Advice on the WWOOF UK website

- This document is available on the Safeguarding area of the WWOOF UK website, where you will also find links to the following;
 - Safeguarding vulnerable people risk assessment template
 - Links to the websites of agencies specialising in safeguarding children or vulnerable adults
- General information about what to expect of the WWOOF exchange is available on [this page of the website](#). Please see the quotes from that page (*in italics*) below, which are particularly relevant with regard to safeguarding vulnerable people.

'As a WWOOF host you can expect to... choose which volunteers you will accept

You only can choose which WWOOFers you will welcome, when, and for which length of time.

Furthermore you don't need to justify your choice.'

- i.e. if a host assesses a WWOOFer as unsuitable on safeguarding terms, or if a host is perceived by a WWOOFer as too vulnerable for them to safely be a host, they can justify this in the terms above, without worrying about causing offence. However, WWOOF UK would appreciate feedback about any member about whom there are concerns; this can be carried out by e-mailing details of the concerns to complaints@wwoof.org.uk

'As a WWOOF host you can expect to... be treated with respect at all times

The host - WWOOFer partnership is one based on mutual respect and trust. A WWOOFer is not subordinate to you, nor you to them. Any uncomfortable feelings should be discussed through open and honest dialogue.'

- i.e. hosts are encouraged to talk to WWOOFers about the boundaries in the host home and property in general - including how WWOOFers interact with any vulnerable people in the host's care. If a WWOOFer behaves in a way that the host perceives as unacceptable towards vulnerable people, the WWOOFer must be told what is acceptable.

'As a WWOOFer you are expected to... treat your host with respect at all times and respect their privacy and family life

The WWOOFer should be polite at all times with their host and with other people on the premises. As a WWOOFer you are welcomed into the home of your host. You should be conscious and sensitive to their needs for privacy and family time.

- There are some useful answers to some Frequently Asked Questions, available on [this page of our website](#); the following links take you specifically to ones that are relevant to safeguarding;
 - [22. Are there any age restrictions?](#)
 - [27. Can I take my children?](#)
 - [31. What happens if things go wrong and I want to make a complaint?](#)