

Home-Start Cotswolds (Home-Start)

Confidentiality Policy & Procedures

Policy Statement

Home-Start recognises that the legitimate use of confidential information underpins our service. All information about parents and families is treated as confidential, to be shared only as necessary in support of the volunteer and to assist the family. Home-Start ensures that personal and operationally sensitive information is maintained confidentially by the scheme. Any disclosure of confidential information about a family to another person for the purpose of assisting the family is only undertaken with the expressed permission of the parent/s, *except* To protect the welfare of a child or vulnerable adult *or* In very limited and extremely rare circumstances where a person is suspected of a disclosable offence^[1] or terrorism.

Home-Start's position on confidentiality is made clear to all connected with it. The trustees of Home-Start are responsible for ensuring that the requirements of this policy are met throughout the scheme. Breaches of confidentiality are treated seriously and may result in the individual concerned being required to leave the scheme.

[1] Disclosable offence: drug trafficking; drug money laundering

All new trustees, employees and volunteers are provided with a copy of the Home-Start Confidentiality Policy as part of their induction / training. All are expected to abide by this policy and procedures.

Procedure

1 Families: Information and consent

- 1.1 Families are given clear information, verbally and in writing, which explains Home-Start's position on confidentiality
- 1.2. At the initial and/or review visit consent is sought from the family to share general information about the kind and level of support Home-Start is providing
 - With the referrer
 - With other agencies currently involved with the family
- 1.3. Consent is sought from families who have self-referred to inform their Health Visitor or other agency, that they have requested Home-Start support and to share general information with them (see 1.2 above)
- 1.4. Specific consent is sought from the family in order to share additional information as part of local multi-agency arrangements.
- 1.5. Families are informed of any communication between Home-Start and other agencies unless this will impact on the safety or welfare of a child or vulnerable adult
- 1.6. Family records are held securely at the scheme premises; families are aware that they have the right to request to see their record

2 Safeguarding

- 2.1 Where it is considered necessary for the welfare and protection of a child or vulnerable adult, information is shared with the appropriate authority in line with Home-Start's Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Children / Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults policies
- 2.2 Where there are concerns about the safety or wellbeing of a child or vulnerable adult, adherence to Home-Start policies for Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Children and Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults over-rides this confidentiality policy

3 Trustees

- 3.1 Information provided to the Board of Trustees about families relating to the nature and level of referrals, local trends or case studies to illustrate the work and outcomes of Home-Start are all made anonymous.
- 3.2 Trustees and staff attending Board meetings are aware that information relating to families and the operation of the scheme is treated in confidence
- 3.3 Where there are concerns for the safety or welfare of a child or vulnerable adult, the Strategic Lead for Safeguarding has access, if needed, to: a relevant trustee, a specialist safeguarding adviser or an external expert to ensure that the most appropriate process is being followed within the scheme and to ensure the best possible support of the family. The family is not normally identified in such cases
- 3.4 Minutes of Board meetings are shared appropriately with scheme staff, with external advisers to the Board, and with HSUK as requested Confidential Board discussions relating to personnel issues or sensitive operational matters are minuted separately as a confidential item and their circulation is appropriately restricted.
- 3.5 Trustees ensure that the confidentiality of families, volunteers and staff, and confidential information relating to the operational work of the scheme is maintained at all times in line with this policy and procedure.

4 Staff

- 4.1 Organisers/co-ordinators discuss the support of families with their line manager, in a confidential setting, for the purposes of supervision and to ensure the best possible support to the family
- 4.2 Staff ensure that the confidentiality of families and volunteers and confidential information relating to the operational work of the scheme is maintained at all times in line with this policy and procedure

5 Volunteers

- 5.1 Volunteers discuss their support of families with their organiser/co-ordinator, in a confidential setting, for the purposes of supervision and to ensure the best possible support to the family
- 5.2 Volunteers meeting together for peer support do not share information that may identify or breach the confidentiality of the family they support
- 5.3 Volunteers ensure that the confidentiality of families and other volunteers is maintained at all times in line with this policy and procedure

6 Family Groups

- 6.1 Home-Start staff explain the importance of respect and confidentiality as part of a family's introduction to a group, and to any visitors; and this is reiterated in written information provided about the group

7 Referrers and external agencies

- 7.1 The scheme accepts referrals only where the family has consented to the referral
- 7.2 Communication with the referrer is the responsibility of the organiser/co-ordinator
- 7.3 General updates about the family are shared as appropriate with the referrer, in line with the general consent obtained from the family (see 1.2 above)
- 7.4 Specific consent of the family is sought before information is shared with referrers and other agencies. Consent need not be sought if there are reasonable concerns that to do so might endanger a child's welfare or safety
- 7.5 Case studies provided to funders or other stakeholders in order to illustrate the work and outcomes of Home-Start are made anonymous
- 7.6 Any third party contractor (eg an IT engineer) accessing personal, sensitive information incidental to their work for the scheme will sign an undertaking ensuring strict confidentiality will be maintained

8 Written records

- 8.1 Home-Start complies with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the principles of good practice
- 8.2 Home-Start ensures that all manual or electronic records, or backed up data, containing personal information, including family, volunteer or personnel files, are kept securely
- 8.3 Access to volunteer and family files is carefully restricted to the appropriate scheme personnel, the trustee/s responsible for spot-checking files, and to HSUK and external reviewers for the purpose of Quality Assessment review or external audit (see 9.1 below)
- 8.4 Access to personnel files is restricted to the individual's line manager, to trustee/s if appropriate, and to HSUK reviewers for the purpose of Quality Assessment review (see 9.1 below)
- 8.5 Care is taken to ensure that minimal information about the supported family is recorded within the volunteer file
- 8.6 Care is taken to ensure that families are not identified on notice boards, whiteboards, accessible card index files etc
- 8.7 Trustees, staff and volunteers are aware that information is held about them and that they have the right to request to see it; personal information is not shared with external agencies without permission.
- 8.8 Family, volunteer and personnel records are securely destroyed in line with Home-Start's Record Keeping and Retention Policy
- 8.9 Statistical information about the number and location of families supported and the type of work undertaken may be shared with funders in line with the requirements of

the Service Level Agreement or contract. Information that may identify a family is not shared except with the specific permission of the family

9 Confidentiality within Home-Start

- 9.1 The trustee/delegated adviser responsible for sampling files for the purposes of safeguarding audits, and HSUK personnel sampling family, volunteer and personnel files for the purpose of Quality Assurance sign and date the Record of Access Form on the inside front cover
- 9.2 Where a family moves area, seeks support from a new Home-Start scheme and the family has given consent, appropriate information is shared with the new scheme in order to ensure the best possible support
- 9.3.1 If consent is not given and there are or have been safeguarding concerns in the family concerned, the scheme will share appropriate information with the new scheme

10 External proceedings

- 10.1.1 External auditors accessing family files for quality auditing purposes do so in the presence of the organiser/co-ordinator and sign and date the Record of Access Form on the inside front cover
- 10.1.2 If Home-Start is requested or required to provide evidence in court proceedings, and the request does not fall within one of the exemptions identified in this policy; evidence will normally only be provided in response to a subpoena
- 10.1.3 Where Home-Start is asked by the Police to provide information, the trustees are made aware of the request and Home-Start guidance is followed. Whilst Home-Start would not wish to be obstructive in a police investigation, confidentiality to our service users is of the utmost importance and this will mean that we would normally not pass information to the police unless it fell within one of the exceptions identified in this policy or was subject to an order of a court requiring disclosure.