

Home-Start Volunteer Guidance: Safe and Respectful Handling of Babies and Children



At Home-Start, our approach is built on trust, partnership and respect for parents as the experts on their own children. Volunteers play a supportive role and walk alongside parents, never a substitute for parental care. This guidance sets out what is safe, appropriate and expected when handling babies during Home-Start support whether this is a volunteer in the home, a volunteer supporting a group or a creche worker.

1. Consent and Clear Boundaries (in the Reconnect creche permission will be received from parents at the initial session).

- **Parents remain responsible for their baby at all times.**
Volunteers offer support alongside parents, not instead of them.
- **Always ask for consent before touching, lifting or soothing a baby.**
Never assume permission.
- **Never handle a baby when the parent or carer is out of sight, unless they have given you permission.**
Volunteers do not provide unsupervised care unless agreed with parents or carers in a group setting or in the home.
- **No kissing or close facial contact.**
This protects both families and volunteers and is a core safeguarding expectation.
- **No personal care tasks.**
Volunteers do not carry out personal care tasks such as feeding, nappy changing, bathing or putting babies to sleep, unless there is specific agreement with the parent. (Please make your Coordinator aware if you will be carrying out personal care tasks as you support a family).
- **No photos or videos**
No photos or videos of babies or children at any time without express permission of the parent. It is advisable to use a parents' phone to take a photo of them with their children and parents may then share digital photos of their children with you. Please keep photos safe and do not share with anyone else. If you feel that the safety of these photos has been compromised speak to your Coordinator.

2. Volunteer Mobility and Personal Safety. We value the wellbeing of our volunteers. You should only lift or hold a baby if you feel safe, balanced and physically comfortable doing so.

- If you have limited mobility, back pain, reduced strength or concerns about your balance, it is absolutely fine to say no.
- Choose body positions that support your joints * but only if comfortable to do so*, for example kneeling, sitting on a low stool or moving closer to the baby rather than leaning from a distance.
- When lifting a child stand in front of them with your feet apart and your leading leg forward. Your weight should be even over both feet. Do not twist your body prior to lifting the child.
- Never push through discomfort or take risks with your own mobility.

3. Safe Handling of Babies

- **Always support the head and neck**
Use one hand to support the head and neck whenever you lift or hold a baby.
- **Use slow, steady movements**
Gentle handling helps babies feel calm and secure.
- **Hold babies close to your body with both hands**
Keeping the baby close reduces wriggling and gives you greater stability.
- **Stay responsive to the baby's cues**

If the baby becomes unsettled, stiffens or cries in a distressed way, pause and check with the parent.

4. Picking Up a Baby from the Floor

There may be times when a baby is on the floor and crying, and the parent would like your help. If so, follow these steps:

- **Ask first**
- **Check your own mobility.** Only lift the baby if you feel strong, balanced and safe. If not, gently decline.
- **Position yourself safely:**
 - Move close to the baby.
 - Kneel or sit on a low stool if that helps you stay stable.
 - Clear the area around you.
- **Place your hands correctly:**
 - One hand under the head and neck.
 - One hand under the bottom and back.
- **Lift smoothly and slowly:**
 - Keep the baby close to your chest and rise using your legs, not your back.
- **If the baby remains distressed**
 - Offer them back to the parent. They know their baby best.

5. Safe Handling of Children. If a child is mobile, they must always be encouraged to move independently. On the occasions a volunteer has to carry or pick up children the following must be observed:

- If the child is able, ask them to move to a position that is easy to pick up and ask them to hold onto you as this will support you and the child when lifting.
- Do not place the child on your hip; carry them directly in front of you in order to balance their weight equally.
- Wherever possible, avoid carrying the child a long distance.
- Where a child is young and is unable to hold onto you, ensure you support them fully within your arms and/ or close to your body.
- Avoid carrying anything else when carrying a child.
- If a child is struggling or fidgeting whilst you are carrying them, stop, place them back down and use reassuring words to calm the child before continuing.

Absolute Donts – a reminder

- Do not shake a baby.
- Do not lift a baby by their arms, wrists or underarms only.
- Do not attempt to get up from the floor whilst holding a baby.
- Do not force limbs into clothing or awkward positions.
- Do not leave a baby on a raised surface without a hand on them.
- Do not walk around the home with a baby unless the parent has asked you to.
- Do not give medical advice. If you have concerns, speak to your Coordinator.

Home-Start Approach

Our goal is always to empower parents, build confidence and create safety for everyone involved. Handling a baby is always done with consent, transparency and respect, and only when the volunteer feels physically safe and comfortable.