



SMCC Safeguarding Policy and Procedures

1 Definitions

1.1 For the purposes of this policy:

- a) A 'child' is someone under the age of 18 years.
- b) A 'vulnerable adult' or 'vulnerable relative' is someone who may be unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.
- c) 'Abuse' covers all types of physical, sexual, psychological, financial, material and discriminatory abuse, including neglect and acts of omission.
- d) A 'Club Caving Trip' is a pre-arranged visit to a cave or mine that is organised or publicised by SMCC for the benefit of existing or prospective members of the Club.
- e) 'Club Activities' are Club Caving Trips, home and away meets, and other social activities organised by SMCC.

1.2 Caving is a 'risk activity' so 'neglect' in terms of caving must be taken to include 'failure to minimise risk' by ensuring adequate or sensible precautions are undertaken for physical safety, adequate/appropriate nutrition and protection against hypothermia, drowning, rock-fall, injury through falling, etc.

2 Policy

2.1 Shepton Mallet Caving Club Limited (hereafter SMCC or 'the Club') recognises that the welfare of children and vulnerable adults is paramount and acknowledges its duty of care to safeguard children and vulnerable adults so that they:

- a) Have a positive and enjoyable experience of caving in an environment that is appropriate to their needs.
- b) Are protected from abuse whilst engaged in Club Activities, staying at the Club's hut, and communicating online with other SMCC members.

2.2 SMCC is committed to ensuring that robust safeguarding arrangements and procedures are in operation that comply with statutory responsibilities and government guidance and are in accordance with the British Caving Associations (BCA)'s Safeguarding Policy and Guidelines (available at <https://british-caving.org.uk/about-bca/safeguarding/>).

2.3 SMCC takes all reports of abuse seriously and will respond promptly to any safeguarding concerns.

2.4 This policy and procedures are mandatory for all SMCC members. Failure to comply with the policy and procedures will be addressed without delay and could ultimately result in exclusion from SMCC.

3 Responsibilities of parents

- 3.1 Parents of children and vulnerable adults wishing to join SMCC and participate in Club Caving Trips must complete a consent form (Appendix A) to:
 - a) Confirm that they understand the nature and risks of caving.
 - b) Confirm they are aware of the proposed caving and accommodation arrangements.
 - c) State the needs of the child / vulnerable adult, their previous caving experience, and any health, dietary or other information necessary from a safeguarding perspective.
 - d) Notify who will be responsible for accompanying and supervising the child / vulnerable adult (see 3.2 and 3.3 below).
- 3.2 Children and vulnerable adults must be cared for and supervised by a parent at all times when engaged in Club Activities and staying at the Club hut.
- 3.3 Alternatively, a parent may give consent to another adult to care for and supervise their child (if aged 13-17 years) or vulnerable relative when engaged in Club Activities or staying at the Club hut. This adult must be a relative, family friend or SMCC member who is well known to the parent, not a member of the Club that they have only recently met. This is an arrangement between the parent and the person taking the child or vulnerable adult. The person taking the child or vulnerable adult will be *in loco parentis* and this requires them to exercise a duty of care that would be provided by a reasonably prudent parent.
- 3.4 A parent must give written permission for their child (if aged 16-17 years) or vulnerable relative to use the Club's social media channels (for example, WhatsApp and Facebook groups), and must supervise their subsequent usage of such channels.

4 Procedures

Roles and responsibilities

- 4.1 SMCC will appoint a Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and a Designated Safeguarding Deputy (DSD), who are responsible for ensuring the safety of children and vulnerable adults in the Club.
- 4.2 The DSL is by default the Membership Secretary, although the committee reserves the right to appoint a different committee member if they choose. The DSD may be any other Full Member of the Club appointed by the committee.
- 4.3 The duties of the DSL are to:
 - a) Promote this policy and procedures to all members of the Club so that everyone understands their roles and responsibilities in respect of safeguarding and is provided with resources to recognise, identify and respond to signs of abuse, neglect and other safeguarding concerns relating to children or vulnerable adults.
 - b) Ensure that appropriate safeguards, as set out in these procedures, are put in place.
 - c) Maintain a register of committee-approved Youth Cave Leaders (see 0 below) and ensure that they understand and abide by SMCC's Good Practice Guidelines for adults caving with children and vulnerable adults

- (Appendix B).
- d) Ensure that appropriate action is taken in the event of incidents or concerns of abuse, and that support provided to the individual(s) who raise or disclose the concern.
 - e) Keep SMCC's safeguarding policy and procedures up to date.
 - f) Ensure that confidential, detailed and accurate records of all safeguarding concerns are maintained and stored securely in line with data protection laws.
- 4.4 The DSD will support the DSL in discharging their duties and act as a second point of contact for reporting any safeguarding incidents or concerns.
- 4.5 For clarity, the DSL and DSD are not responsible for:
- a) Authorising Club members to supervise and take care of children or vulnerable adults.
 - b) Making judgements in cases of reported inappropriate behavior towards children or vulnerable adults.

Reporting and responding to safeguarding concerns

- 4.6 Information about how to contact the DSL and DSD about safeguarding incidents, disclosures and concerns will be made clearly available at the SMCC hut and on the SMCC website.
- 4.7 SMCC acknowledges that its members are not experts at recognising abuse but expects members to raise any concerns they may have with regard to the welfare of a child or vulnerable adult immediately with the DSL or DSD.
- 4.8 The DSL and DSD will respond promptly to any reported safeguarding concerns in accordance with the BCA's Safeguarding Policy (Appendix C).
- 4.9 SMCC will make every effort to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned. Information will be handled and disseminated on a need-to-know basis only.

Caving trips

- 4.10 Children or vulnerable adults participating in Club Caving Trips must be a Member, Junior Associate or Temporary Associate of SMCC and have a consent form (Appendix A) completed by a parent.
- 4.11 To ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults on Club Caving Trips, the SMCC committee shall appoint Youth Cave Leader (YCLs) who meet all of the following criteria:
- a) A Full Member or Honorary Member of SMCC.
 - b) At least two years of caving experience.
 - c) Demonstrate the necessary skills, temperament and good judgement to safeguard children and vulnerable adults underground.
- 4.12 YCLs do not need to be youth workers, qualified cave leaders, or DBS checked as long as children / vulnerable adults are accompanied by a parent or other adult *in loco parentis* (see 3.2 and 3.3 above).
- 4.13 All Club Caving Trips involving children or vulnerable adults must be led by a designated Youth Cave Leader (YCL), who will be responsible for ensuring

that the planned trip:

- a) Is well within their own capabilities.
- b) Is appropriate to the age, experience and ability of the child or vulnerable adult (taking into account any information provided by the parent on the consent form, see 3.1 above).
- c) Has an appropriate number of adults (as a minimum, the YCL plus one other experienced adult caver).

4.14 A second YCL must either assist in leading the trip or approve the proposed trip in advance to ensure it meets all of the requirements in 4.13 above.

4.15 The role of YCLs is limited to organising and leading individual Club Caving Trips involving children or vulnerable adults.

4.16 Members and Probationary Associates of SMCC may arrange private caving trips between themselves that are for the benefit of the participants only and not publicised to the wider SMCC membership. Responsibility for these trips and their participants lies solely with the individual members and not SMCC.

4.17 All Club members, including YCLs, must adhere to SMCC's Good Practice Guidelines (Appendix B) when caving with children or vulnerable adults.

Other Club Activities

4.18 Children and vulnerable relatives of SMCC Members and Associates may attend Club meets and social activities as guests.

4.19 To ensure that Club meets are appropriate for children and vulnerable adults, the SMCC committee may, at its discretion:

- a) Designate some Club meets as adult-only or impose a curfew for children and vulnerable adults, for example when visiting groups are expected to be present.
- b) Arrange family-only meets that are exclusive to Club members and families.

4.20 SMCC is not responsible for accommodation provided by other organisations on away meets. Parents are responsible for ensuring that they are satisfied that accommodation arrangements at away meets are appropriate, and must supervise their child or vulnerable adult accordingly at all times.

Use of the Club hut

4.21 Children and vulnerable relatives of SMCC Members and Probationary Associates may stay overnight at the Club hut.

4.22 Family groups shall have priority over, and sole use of, the side bunk rooms (the 'Old Library' and 'Family Room').

4.23 Children and vulnerable adults sleeping in the main bunk room must always be accompanied by a parent or nominated adult *in loco parentis*.

4.24 SMCC does not supervise visiting groups and cannot hold responsibility for their behaviour. Parents should therefore use their discretion when deciding whether or not to bring their child or vulnerable relative to the Club hut when

other visiting groups are staying.

4.25 When a visiting group including children or vulnerable adults is using the hut, SMCC's Hut Warden will:

- a) Avoid booking in additional visiting groups.
- b) Inform SMCC members that a youth group will be present.
- c) Restrict SMCC members to using the members-only bunk room.

4.26 SMCC Members, Associates and their guests must adhere to the rules governing use of the hut as set out in SMCC's Byelaws and Code of Conduct.

General procedures

4.27 SMCC will publicise this policy and procedures to Club members, their guests and visiting groups.

4.28 The SMCC committee will put safeguarding on it's meeting agenda on an annual basis.

4.29 The SMCC committee will review this policy at intervals of not more than two years, or in the following circumstances:

- a) A change in legislation and/or government guidance.
- b) As required by any bodies that provide grant aid to SMCC.
- c) As a result of any other significant change or event.

Revision History

Revision	Date	Changes
1.0	14 March 2025	First issue

Appendix A: SMCC Consent Form for children and vulnerable adults

Confidentiality and data protection: the information given on this form will be shared with:

- a) SMCC's committee member(s) responsible for supervising the activities.
- b) The specific adults who are providing the activities.
- c) Only if necessary, other agencies such as the British Caving Association national council or local authorities, if safeguarding action or medical treatment are required.

Name of child or vulnerable adult:	
Age:	
Date of birth:	
State any medical conditions they have, and any medication they take:	
State any dietary requirements:	
State any special needs, and in the case of vulnerable adults, what their vulnerability is:	
Describe how much caving they have already done, if any, provide details of the caves visited:	
Supervision – please tick one of the two statements below:	
Either myself or another adult member of my family will be present to supervise and care for our child or vulnerable adult at all times when they are engaged in Club activities.	
I am entrusting the supervision and care of my child or vulnerable relative to a long-term family friend who will act <i>in loco parentis</i> on my behalf. The name of that adult is:	

Accommodation – If staying overnight, I have been informed about the nature of the accommodation and the likely sleeping arrangements.

Medical consent – In the event of illness or an accident requiring emergency medical treatment, I authorise the adult named above to sign on my behalf any written form of consent required by the health authorities.

Safeguarding – I have read and understood SMCC's Safeguarding Policy (available at: www.shepton.org.uk/docs/safeguardingpolicy.pdf) and agree to follow the safeguarding procedures detailed therein.

Full Name of Parent or Legal Guardian:	Address:
Signature:	Date:

Appendix B: SMCC Good Practice Guidelines for adults caving with children and vulnerable adults

The following guidelines incorporate and build upon the British Caving Association (BCA)'s good practice guidelines.

When planning activities for children and vulnerable adults:

- Plan activities that are well within your own capabilities, and those of other adult cavers on the trip, so that you can focus your attention on the care and welfare of the children and vulnerable adults in the group.
- Consider the needs, capabilities and experience of everyone in the group, and plan activities that are appropriate. For example, avoid trips that are overly physical or too wet, given the age and experience of your group. Aim for them to have fun and want to come back for more.
- Ensure that children and vulnerable adults are wearing clothing, footwear, helmet and lighting that are appropriate for the caving environment.
- Ensure any other equipment (for example, harnesses) is appropriate for the size of the participant and in good condition.
- Carry a first aid kit and spare light in your group. If doing vertical caving, carry a spare rope of the length of the tallest pitch, so that rescues can readily be effected.
- Ensure children and vulnerable adults cave in an environment where risk is kept to a minimum. For example, experienced adult cavers will sometimes traverse a cave passage at a high level when progress lower down is difficult or impossible, confident that their caving skill will prevent a fall. Children and young adults are unable to make that judgment. Thus you should pick venues where such risks are minimised, or use traverse ropes or safety lines that you might not bother with when caving with adults.
- Always use a lifeline when climbing ladders.
- Do not allow children or vulnerable adults to cave when injured, if the injury could be made worse or could impact their ability to cope.
- Think about arrangements for changing. Children and vulnerable adults are less able to think ahead, so if a change of clothes or a towel might be needed, check that they have these things.
- Motivate children and vulnerable adults through positive feedback and constructive criticism.
- Ensure that all participants hold BCA Public Liability Insurance cover. BCA insurance is free for children, either directly from the BCA or as a benefit of SMCC membership.

During activities with children and vulnerable adults:

- Ensure that the welfare of children and vulnerable adults is paramount.
- Treat everyone with dignity, respect, sensitivity and fairness as well as with equality.
- If physical support is required, for example when tackling an awkward section in a cave, ensure the individual is aware of what is happening and has consented to this physical help. If possible, ensure that your help is visible to other members of your group. Avoid physical contact that could be misconstrued, for example helping with a climbing move by pushing on someone's bottom. In some situations, other children or vulnerable adults in your group may be better placed to provide help, under your supervision.
- Explain why you are doing something and try to facilitate, as far as is practical, an open and inclusive approach to the activity. People often respond better if they feel they are part of the process.
- Respect children's and vulnerable adults' need for privacy when changing. For example, they could change inside a vehicle, or maybe they could stand at the back of a vehicle whilst adult members stand at the front.

Avoid:

- Taking children and vulnerable adults alone on car journeys, or spending time alone with a child or vulnerable adult. This might become necessary in emergencies, or if a youngster has to leave a cave before the rest of the group. In such an event, maintain a respectable distance (for example by sitting them in the back of the vehicle) and ensure that their parent or guardian is aware.

The following must never happen:

- Taking a child or vulnerable adult alone to your home.
- Making sexually suggestive comments to a child or vulnerable adult, even in fun.
- Doing things of a personal nature for a child or vulnerable adult that they can do themselves.
- Allowing allegations made by a child or vulnerable adult to go unchallenged, not acted upon or not recorded.
- Allowing children to consume alcohol or take illegal recreational drugs.
- Allowing any physically rough or sexually provocative, contact or games.

Incidents that must be reported/recorded:

If any of the following occur, or you have any other safeguarding concerns, you should record the incident and report this to SMCC's Designated Safeguarding Lead and/or Designated Safeguarding Deputy as soon as possible. You should also ensure the parents of the child are informed:

- If you accidentally hurt a child.
- If a child seems distressed in any manner.
- If a child misunderstands or misinterprets something you have done.

Appendix C: How to respond to a disclosure, suspicion or allegation

The following advice is reproduced from the British Caving Association (BCA)'s Safeguarding Policy.

Advice to members:

A child or vulnerable adult in your care may indicate to you that they are being abused in some way or information may come to you of possible abuse. On receiving this information you should:

- React calmly: do not rush into inappropriate action. What you are told may be very shocking but it is important you give the child or vulnerable adult some stability.
- Reassure the child or vulnerable adult that they are not to blame and that they did the right thing to tell someone, i.e. you, about the incident.
- Take the child or vulnerable adult seriously and listen carefully to them. Recognise how difficult it was for them to tell you.
- Only ask questions which help to clarify the situation. Do not question any more than is strictly necessary, and avoid asking leading questions.
- If possible allow only one adult to talk to the child or vulnerable adult to begin with.
- Try not to make the child or vulnerable adult repeat their account unnecessarily.
- Do not make promises you cannot keep. Explain that you may have to tell other people in order to stop what is happening but that you will endeavour to keep the incident as confidential as possible.
- Make a full record of what has been said, heard or seen as soon as possible, using the BCA safeguarding incident report form (available from the BCA website or a SMCC Designated Safeguarding Lead).
- Notify your club's chair or other senior committee member,
- Notify BCA's National Safeguarding Officer,
- If criminal behaviour is suspected, then either you or a member of your club's committee should make a referral to police or social services.

Do not:

- Take sole responsibility for further action.
- Approach or try to contact the alleged abuser.
- Ignore what has happened.
- Make promises you cannot keep.
- In cases of suspected criminal behaviour, it is not your job, nor that of club or BCA Officers, to investigate.

What happens if you are accused of an abusive action

In the event of an accusation:

- Make notes of all your actions/contacts with the child or vulnerable adult in question as soon as possible.
- Seek access to professional and legal advice.
- Ensure that you are no longer working with the child/children or vulnerable adults making the allegation.
- Follow the procedures laid out in the Safeguarding Policy and supporting documents.
- Accept that colleagues may not be in a position to discuss the matter with you while the investigation is underway.

- Accept that you may be barred from club premises or club activities when children or vulnerable adults are present.

Such events are difficult for all concerned. SMCC and the BCA will do its utmost to remain impartial in all matters relating to an accusation. The main concern with any incident is the welfare of the child or vulnerable adult. For an individual against whom an allegation has been made this will be a difficult time. It is important to seek help and support.

Responding to allegations – actions for clubs and BCA

There are many possible scenarios. Here are some examples:

- Criminal behaviour is suspected. In this event a referral to police or social services must be made, either by the person first discovering the situation, or by a club officer. That referral must be made promptly, i.e. within a few hours.
- SMCC may become aware of an allegation or investigation taking place, that is entirely unrelated to the club, but involves a Club member, outside of a club setting.
- Club member(s) may have concerns about the behaviour of a club, that don't appear to be criminal, but which do need to be investigated.

Protection of children and vulnerable adults whilst an investigation is underway

SMCC has a duty of care and will act to protect children and vulnerable adults in one of the two following ways:

1. Limited suspension

This involves barring a Club member from using club facilities or participating in Club activities, where children or vulnerable adults are expected to be present. However, the Club member may continue with activities when children or vulnerable adults are not expected to be present.

To put this in context, if someone is under investigation by police for possession of illegal images of children, such investigations generally last many months and involve considerable stress on all involved. Being able to continue with leisure activities during this time, where those activities do not involve youngsters, would be of great value to someone who is under investigation.

Given that SMCC has only limited amounts of activity by children, the club may determine that it is reasonable to bar a member from activities that involve children, but to permit other activities to continue. This is at the discretion of the committee.

2. Full suspension

SMCC's committee may determine that it is in the best interests of the Club for the member to be suspended from all use of Club facilities or participating in Club activities, at all times.

Confidentiality

SMCC will take reasonable steps to ensure that limited or full suspension is complied with. It is highly unlikely that this would involve notifying all members, but members who participate in club activities very regularly may have to be notified so that they would notice if a member did not comply with their suspension.

Similarly, the SMCC Designated Safeguarding Lead may feel that it is necessary to notify membership secretaries of other clubs, in order to prevent a member over whom there are concerns from moving to

other clubs. This would be decided on a case-by-case basis, by the SMCC and/or BCA Safeguarding Officer and at least one other council member, and clubs who were notified would be asked to keep the matter confidential – only key club officers would need to know.

Liaison between clubs, BCA Council and insurers

In all situations where there are suspicions, investigations or a member is suspended, the decisions of SMCC's committee will be forwarded to the BCA's Safeguarding Officer. Very rarely, the BCA's Safeguarding Officer or BCA Council may feel that more stringent protective steps are required SMCC has already taken. SMCC's committee may then either comply with those steps, or refuse to do so. BCA provides liability insurance for all members and in this event, BCA would have to notify the insurers who would determine whether the club's insurance would be suspended. It is very much hoped that such a scenario will never play out.

Outcomes once an investigation is complete

Again, there are several possible outcomes:

- It may be that it is decided that the concerns or suspicions had no merit.
- It may be that there are legitimate concerns, but which do not imply criminal behaviour.
 - SMCC's committee may decide to offer advice to a member about their future behaviour.
 - Or the committee might decide permanently to limit a member's activities, for example by not allowing them to participate in activities where children or vulnerable adults are present. The committee might feel that the issue would be re-visited after a suitable period of time has elapsed.
 - Or, the committee may feel that the outcome of the investigation means that the member has to be permanently excluded from membership.
- It is essential that SMCC notifies the BCA Safeguarding Officer of their decisions.
- As described above, BCA may feel that other clubs would need to be notified.

Recording information

Information that is passed on to the BCA, Social Services and the Police must be as helpful as possible. Hence there is a necessity for making as detailed record as possible. This should endeavour to contain:

- The nature of the incident.
- A description of any visible injuries.
- The child's account.
- Times, dates or other relevant information.
- A clear distinction between what is fact, hearsay and opinion; and;
- A record using the BCA's Safeguarding Incident Form.

Allegations of previous abuse

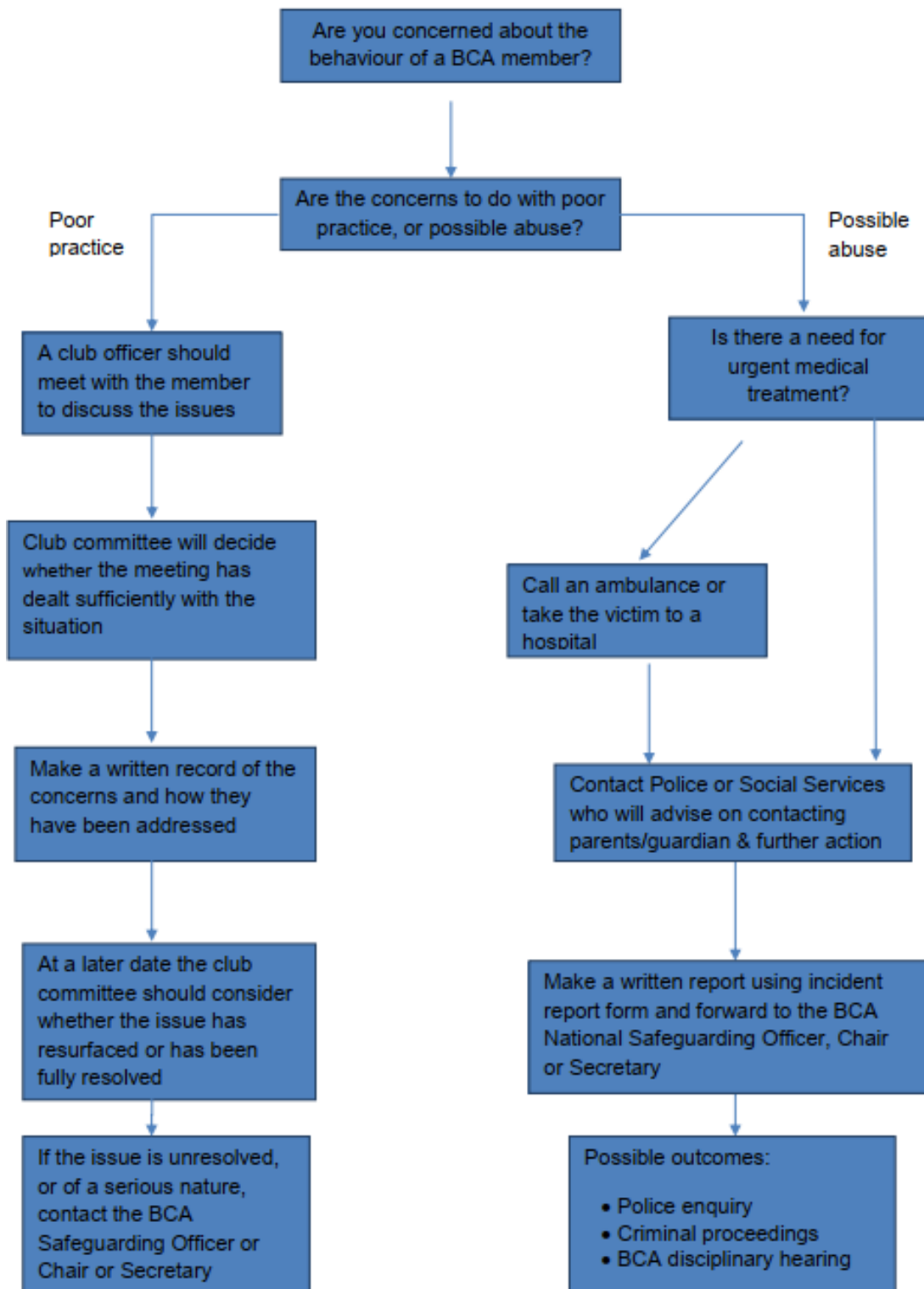
Allegations of abuse may be made a long time after the event (e.g. by an adult who was abused as a child or by a member of staff who is still currently working with children or vulnerable adults). Where such an allegation is made, SMCC will proceed in the same manner as described above, i.e. make a written record and refer on to police or social services, with a copy to the BCA Safeguarding Officer.

Storage, Access to and Retention of Recorded Information

Information passed to the BCA in accordance with this policy will be kept securely, with access strictly controlled and limited to those who are entitled to see it as part of their duties. These records will be

retained for 30 years.

Dealing with concerns, disclosure or allegations about BCA members



Concerns about abuse outside a SMCC/BCA setting

If this happens you should ensure the safety of the child or vulnerable adult. If he or she requires immediate attention call an ambulance, inform a doctor of your concerns and ensure that they are aware that this is a safeguarding issue.

If a formal referral is made make it clear that it is a safeguarding issue. Police forces have specialised Safeguarding Units which deal with allegations of abuse within the family and by people in positions of trust. In a real emergency, or if completely unsure as to what to do, telephone 999.

Parents/carers should only be contacted **after** advice from Social Services.

It can be especially difficult for children or vulnerable adults from an ethnic minority or who are disabled to disclose abuse to others. Adults should be especially vigilant with these groups and be aware that their own prejudices may block them from believing these groups. It is important to give thought as to how adults respond in these situations.

In all cases it is important that the welfare of the child or vulnerable adult is paramount and that every effort is made to maintain confidentiality.