



Purpose

This advice note is intended to set out the responsibilities of Business Owners for Safeguarding in an Equestrian Riding School setting. It sets out the legal basis that underpins safeguarding and provides guidance on policy.

Reference is also made also to the Whyte Review, which was an independent investigation commissioned by Sport England and UK Sport into allegations of abuse and mistreatment within British gymnastics. Published in June 2022, this review has had wide-reaching implications across the sports sector, which is reflected in the advice provided.

Legal Basis

The legal basis for the key responsibilities of business owners for safeguarding, and the associated practical implications, are as follows:

- **Duty of Care**
 - **Legal Basis:**
 - Children Act 1989 & 2004
 - Care Act 2014 (for adults)
 - Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
 - Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014
 - **Practical Implications**
 - Establishes the **duty to safeguard and promote welfare**
 - Riding schools must **prioritise the welfare** of all participants.
 - Staff are expected to **recognise signs of harm or neglect** and act promptly.
 - The **Whyte Review** highlighted failures in recognising emotional harm and overtraining—emphasising the need for a **culture of care**, not just compliance.
- **Safeguarding Policies and Procedures**
 - **Legal Basis**
 - Working Together to Safeguard Children (England)
 - National Guidance for Child Protection (Scotland)
 - Keeping Learners Safe (Wales)
 - Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006

- **Practical Implications**
 - Must have a **written safeguarding policy** for children and adults.
 - Include:
 - Reporting procedures
 - Whistleblowing
 - Anti-bullying
 - Managing allegations
 - The **Whyte Review** recommends **clear complaint pathways**, independent oversight, and **regular policy reviews**.
- **Safer Recruitment**
 - **Legal Basis**
 - Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
 - Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) / PVG Scheme (Scotland)
 - **Practical Implications**
 - All staff in **regulated activity** must undergo **enhanced DBS/PVG checks**.
 - Must not employ anyone **barred from working with children or vulnerable adults**.
 - The Whyte Review calls for **robust vetting** and **ongoing suitability checks**, not just one-off clearances.
- **Staff Training**
 - **Legal Basis**
 - Statutory guidance across all nations requires safeguarding training for those working with children/adults.
 - **Practical Implications**
 - Minimum: **3-hour face-to-face safeguarding course**, refreshed every **3 years**.
 - Training should cover:
 - Recognising abuse
 - Responding to disclosures
 - Maintaining boundaries
 - The Whyte Review stresses **mandatory safeguarding education** for all staff, including volunteers.

- **Record Keeping**
 - **Legal Basis**
 - Data Protection Act 2018 / UK GDPR
 - Safeguarding guidance across all nations
 - **Practical Implications**
 - Maintain secure records of:
 - DBS/PVG checks
 - Training completion
 - Incident reports
 - Safeguarding referrals
 - Records must be **confidential, accurate, and accessible to safeguarding leads.**
 - The Whyte Review recommends **transparent documentation** and **audit trails** for safeguarding decisions.
- **Health and Safety**
 - **Legal Basis**
 - Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
 - Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
 - Equestrian-specific guidance from the ABRS+
 - **Practical Implications**
 - Risk assessments for:
 - Riding activities
 - Supervision ratios
 - Equipment and facilities
 - Emergency procedures must be in place.
 - The Whyte Review links **physical safety** with **emotional wellbeing**, urging environments that are **safe, supportive, and empowering.**

How an Owner of a Riding School Fulfils These Duties

The following sets out how an owner of a riding school will meet their legal responsibilities; this is then set out in Policies (which are described below).

Area	Practical Steps
Appoint an Equestrian Safeguarding Officer	Name a trained Equestrian Safeguarding Officer, who will act as the Designated Safeguarding Lead responsible for handling concerns. Publicise their name and contact details.
Written Policy	Create, publish, and annually review a safeguarding policy covering both children and adults-at-risk.
Training	Ensure all staff and volunteers have safeguarding induction and refreshers every 3 years.
DBS & Recruitment	Follow safer recruitment: job descriptions, application forms, references, DBS/PVG checks, probation.
Code of Conduct	Set clear behaviour standards for staff, volunteers, and clients (e.g., no unsupervised one-to-one time unless risk-assessed).
Safe Environment	Risk assess all activities; ensure supervision ratios; have chaperones for under-18s where appropriate.
Clear Reporting Path	Flowchart for staff showing what to do if they suspect abuse or receive a disclosure.
Partnership Links	Know your Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP)/ Child Protection Committees and Safeguarding Adults Board/Adult Protection Committees contacts.
Incident Records	Keep records locked and secure; log all safeguarding-related incidents, concerns, and actions.
Culture of Vigilance	Encourage open communication so riders feel safe raising concerns.

Core Policies

The essential policies a riding school should have for both staff and clients, their link to safeguarding and the purpose they serve are detailed below. It should be noted that some of the policies detailed below are also required (or strongly recommended by employment law).

Policy Area	Safeguarding Link	Purpose
Safeguarding Policy	Central to protecting children and vulnerable adults.	Outlines procedures for reporting concerns, managing allegations, and ensuring safe practice.
Code of Conduct (Staff & Clients)	Sets behavioural expectations to prevent	Promotes respectful, safe interactions and

Policy Area	Safeguarding Link	Purpose
	abuse, bullying, or exploitation.	accountability for all participants.
Safer Recruitment Policy	Ensures staff are vetted and suitable to work with children and vulnerable adults.	Prevents unsuitable individuals from gaining access to regulated roles.
Training and Induction Policy	Ensures all staff understand safeguarding responsibilities and procedures.	Builds a knowledgeable workforce capable of identifying and responding to concerns.
Complaints and Whistleblowing	Provides safe channels for reporting poor practice or abuse.	Encourages transparency and protects whistleblowers.
Health and Safety Policy	Physical safety is integral to emotional wellbeing.	Minimises risk of injury and promotes a secure environment.
Digital Communication Policy	Addresses risks of online grooming, bullying, and inappropriate contact.	Protects children and adults from digital harm and sets boundaries for online engagement.
Equality and Inclusion Policy	Prevents discrimination and promotes inclusive access to equestrian activities.	Ensures all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully.
Anti-Bullying Policy	Covers peer-to-peer harm	Outlines prevention, detection, and response to bullying among riders or staff.
Data Protection Policy	Safeguards sensitive information, including safeguarding records.	Ensures confidentiality and compliance with UK GDPR.
Photography & Filming Policy	Prevents misuse of images	Consent procedures for taking/using images of riders; no mobile use in changing areas.
Social Media & Communications Policy	Protects online safety	Rules for how staff communicate with clients online; prevents inappropriate contact.

Policy Area	Safeguarding Link	Purpose
Incident Reporting Procedure	Enables timely and accurate documentation of safeguarding concerns.	Creates a clear audit trail and supports appropriate follow-up.

Policies in a riding school should be proportionate to its size and staffing levels to ensure they are both practical and effective. The ABRS+ recommends the following but Local Authorities or other statutory agencies may impose their own requirements that differ from this:

- **Small Riding Schools (e.g. 1–5 staff, limited client base):**
 - Policies can be simplified but must still meet legal safeguarding standards.
 - Policy documents can be combined to reduce administration burden
 - Utilise templates from ABRS+ to ensure coverage without overcomplication.
- **Medium to Large Riding Schools (e.g. 6+ staff, multiple client groups):**
 - Require more detailed policies, including role-specific guidance (e.g. Coaches vs volunteers).
 - May need departmental procedures (e.g. separate safeguarding protocols for riding lessons vs stable management).

Position of Trust in Riding Schools

A **position of trust** is when staff/volunteers have power, authority or influence over children or adults-at-risk (e.g. as Coach, coach, groom, yard supervisor). Coaches and other staff often form close, mentoring relationships with riders. The law recognises this imbalance of power and protects participants from exploitation or abuse. This may have an impact on staffing and how you use your staff.

Legal Basis (UK):

- Sexual Offences Act 2003 (extended in 2022) – makes sexual activity between **adults in positions of trust and 16–17-year-olds** in their care a criminal offence (not just schools, but sports & extracurricular activities).
- **Equivalent protections apply for adults-at-risk** under safeguarding law (Care Act 2014 / Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007 / Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014).

Staffing Ratios

While supervision ratios in sport are not mandated, a failure to adhere to best practice could be considered as a breach of duty of care and/or insurance provisions.

- **Children.** The following are drawn from the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) and are recommended by the ABRS+:

Age group	Recommended ratio	Notes
Under 8 years	1:6	One adult for every six children
8 years and over	1:8	One adult for every eight children
Mixed gender groups	At least one male and one female adult	To safeguard dignity in changing and emergencies
Minimum adults present	Always two adults present	Protects both the children and the adult from allegations and supports emergency response

Riding has extra considerations due to risk factors:

- Horses are large, unpredictable animals
- Riders may fall or be injured
- Grooming/tacking areas can be hazardous

ABRS+ recommends:

- Lead rein or beginner sessions: Often 1:1 (one leader per horse) plus coach
- Small group lessons: Usually capped at 6–8 riders for flatwork, fewer for jumping
- Off-horse activities: Can follow general sports ratios (1:6 or 1:8 depending on age)
- You should have a minimum of two adult members of staff on duty when lessons are in progress; at least one of these should have first aid training.
- **Adults-at-Risk.** There is no fixed legal ratio, but supervision must be adequate for the needs of the group:
 - Consider mobility, communication, and behavioural support needs
 - Use a risk assessment to decide the number of supervisors
 - Always ensure staff are trained in safeguarding and disability awareness

ABRS+ Safeguarding Training Framework

To support a safe and inclusive environment, ABRS+ offers a tiered safeguarding training programme tailored to the roles and responsibilities within a riding school. These resources ensure that everyone—from designated safeguarding leads to young riders—understands how to recognise, respond to, and prevent harm.

- **Equestrian Safeguarding Officers Course**
 - **Audience:** Equestrian Safeguarding Officers (Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs))

- **Purpose:** Provides in-depth training on safeguarding legislation, managing disclosures, reporting procedures, and leading safeguarding practice within the organisation.
- **Validity:** 3 years
- **Recording:** Completion should be documented in staff training records and reviewed prior to expiry.
- **Safeguarding for Equestrians**
 - **Audience:** Coaches and any staff or volunteers with unsupervised access to children or vulnerable adults
 - **Purpose:** Covers practical safeguarding responsibilities, recognising signs of abuse, maintaining professional boundaries, and responding appropriately to concerns.
 - **Validity:** 3 years
 - **Recording:** Must be logged in personnel files and monitored for renewal.
- **Online Safeguarding Awareness**
 - **Audience:** Support staff, adult clients, and parents
 - **Purpose:** Offers foundational awareness of safeguarding principles, including how to raise concerns and support a safe culture.
 - **Validity:** No fixed expiry, but periodic refreshers are recommended
 - **Recording:** Participation should be noted in general training logs or induction records.
- **Safeguarding Workbooks for Children**
 - **Audience:** Young riders, grouped by age and understanding
 - **Levels:**
 - **Beginner:** Ages 4–9 – Introduction to safe behaviour and trusted adults
 - **Intermediate:** Understand what it means to feel safe or unsafe, how to recognise early warning signs and who to go to for help.
 - **Advanced:** How to spot when something doesn't feel right, and what they can do to keep themselves and others safe in equestrian sport
 - **Purpose:** Empowers children with age-appropriate knowledge and confidence to protect themselves and others.
 - **Validity:** No set expiry; can be revisited as part of ongoing education
 - **Recording:** Completion can be tracked in rider progress files or safeguarding engagement logs.

- **Recording and Monitoring**

- All safeguarding training should be **recorded centrally**, with:
 - Dates of completion
 - Expiry dates (where applicable)
 - Role-specific requirements
- Records should be **reviewed annually** to ensure compliance and identify gaps.
- For children, workbook engagement can be used to demonstrate **active safeguarding education** and support inspection or accreditation processes.

Safeguarding Reporting in a Riding School Setting

- **Internal Reporting (within the Riding School)**

If you have a concern about a child or adult at risk:

1. **Recognise** – Be alert to signs, disclosures, or unsafe behaviour.
2. **Respond** – Stay calm, listen, don't promise confidentiality (explain you may need to tell someone who can help).
3. **Record** – Write factual details (what happened, when, who was present). Sign and date your report.
4. **Report** – Pass it immediately to the **Riding School's Equestrian Safeguarding Officer**.

- **External Reporting (outside the Riding School)**

If someone is in immediate danger → 999 (police) immediately.

If not immediate but still serious:

- The **Equestrian Safeguarding Officer** (or you if necessary) should contact the **Local Authority Safeguarding Team**:
 - **England** → Children's Social Care (MASH) / Adult Social Care
 - **Scotland** → Social Work Department (Child Protection Team / Adult Protection Team)
 - **Wales** → Local Authority Children's Services / Adult Services

Non-emergency police → 101 (all nations)

- **Sector-specific and BEF routes**

- **If affiliated to a BEF member body** (BHS, ABRs+, Pony Club, BD, BS, BE):
 - Contact your **governing body's Safeguarding Lead**.

- **BEF Safeguarding Team** can be contacted directly if you believe the riding school has not handled it appropriately.
- **BEF Safe to Play** (safetoplay.org.uk):
 - Independent, confidential advice and signposting.
 - Resources to recognise grooming, abuse, or unsafe situations.
 - Contact points for BEF safeguarding services and helplines.
 - Can be used by **anyone** (rider, parent, staff, volunteer) at any stage — internally *or* externally.
- **Golden Rules**
 - Report **on the same day** the concern arises.
 - You do **not** need proof — just reasonable concern.
 - You are **legally and morally responsible** to ensure concerns are passed to someone who can act.
 - If you ignore a concern, the complainant can and should go **direct to local authority, police, ABRs+ (or other Member Body), BEF or Safe to Play.**