



## **Procedure for working with people at risk of harming themselves or others**

### **Policy Statement**

This policy outlines Mind in Croydon's actions when assessing and responding to the needs of vulnerable service users who are at significant risk of harm because of their, often, complex needs that are related to their mental health difficulties and disorders. It includes service users who might place themselves in risky and dangerous situations, who are self-harming or at risk of self-harming in some way, including from self-neglect, or who are at risk of taking their own life. It also includes those who are at risk of harming others. It should be read in conjunction with the **SAFEGUARDING ADULTS AT RISK POLICY** and **SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN (CHILD PROTECTION) POLICY**.

Mind in Croydon and its staff and volunteers have a duty to protect service users from the injurious effects of their actions and to promote their wellbeing to prevent them from coming to harm. Mind in Croydon adopts the following approach, which it considers are in line with its duty of care and the regulatory framework in which it works alongside. This includes the following.

1. The Care Act 2014 requires local authorities in partnership with care providers to promote people's wellbeing while at the same time keeping them safe from harm through the interventions of local safeguarding boards.
2. The Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations (2014) require providers to deliver person-centred care within a care environment and ethos that also ensures service users' safety.

### **Defining Harm and Associated Risks**

The situations and behaviours covered by this policy are very wide, but possible situations are as follows.

#### **a) Exposure to Dangerous Situations**

A person can deliberately expose themselves or others to possible danger for different reasons, and not necessarily with a view to carrying out any expressed or implied threats, but all such actions must be taken seriously. The actions could include: threatening to jump off heights, walking or crossing busy roads or railway lines, cutting or holding electricity cables, running the risk of drowning, threatening to use sharp instruments, or guns etc. These threats may be made towards other individuals, including those not at the location.

#### **b) Harming and self-neglect**

Examples include:

- self-mutilation using knives razors and other sharp instruments ("cutting" behaviour)
- punching or hitting oneself, pulling out hair, head banging and burning with cigarettes, lighters etc
- repeated alcohol, toxic substance and drug abuse or overdose
- eating disorders, through starvation or compulsive eating
- severe neglect, which might result in increased vulnerability to illness and infection, failure or refusal to take prescribed medication that could be life – saving such as insulin injections, or without administration could seriously impair the person's health and put him or her further at risk.

Harming behaviour can be triggered at any time, often when the person is feeling angry, frustrated or holding an extreme negative view of themselves. For anyone at risk of harming, Mind in Croydon staff should be aware of the potential triggers and be prepared to act to prevent escalation.

For example, they should:

- look out for unexplained cuts, bruises or cigarette burns on e.g. wrists, arms, thighs and chest, or hair pulling

- note any behaviour suggesting the person is concealing the signs e.g. keeping themselves fully covered inappropriately
- be aware of changes in mood, signs of emotional distress, expressions of self-hate and self-punitive ideas
- sudden expressions of low self-esteem and feelings of failure and worthlessness.

### **c) Suicidal Ideation**

The service recognises that people who self-harm do not necessarily do so with a view of suicide, though signs and symptoms might be similar, and people with suicidal thoughts might not express them at all. Mind in Croydon staff must still pay serious attention to service users with a history of suicidal behaviour and any who clearly express suicidal thoughts and intentions e.g. anyone who:

- seems to be overwhelmed and unable to cope
- expresses complete feelings of hopelessness and despair that they will never get any better
- seems totally powerless and unable to cope with daily life any longer
- expresses feelings of worthlessness, shame, guilt, self-hatred, feels that no one cares or others would be better without them
- expresses fear of losing control or harming self or others
- becomes very sad, withdrawn, tired, apathetic, anxious, irritable or prone to angry outbursts
- shows a declining interest in relationships, friends or activities previously enjoyed
- neglects personal welfare and physical appearance deteriorates
- drastically changes their sleeping or eating habits
- begins to starve themselves, mismanage their diet or disobey medical instructions
- becomes depressed at difficult times such as holidays and anniversaries
- reacts adversely to diagnosis of major or minor illnesses, prospects of going into hospital, of operations, etc
- fails to accept emotionally that they have recovered from illness or an operation
- appears depressed after discharge from hospital.

This list is not exhaustive.

### **Risk Assessment**

The service will respond to any person who then presents or is subsequently found at risk of putting themselves or others into dangerous situations, of self-harming by ensuring that they are formally assessed by appropriately trained and qualified mental health professionals to decide how the person can be best supported and to know how to act if they engage in any dangerous behaviour.

### **Procedures in the Event of an Incident**

Mind in Croydon recognises that on occasion that it's staff might have to deal with an event of a person who has exposed themselves or others to danger or harm. This could be an unexpected event, which has occurred without there being any evidence of risk, or because the person has carried out their intentions despite preventive measures having been taken.

Staff are not expected to be an expert in identifying harm or investigating potential harm, instead it is their duty to report any concerns to your line manager or other senior person in the organisation and support them in taking action where required. In line with the Pan London Adult Safeguarding policy the organisation's alerting manager is the person tasked with making referrals to the local authority.

Where and when the incident takes place could vary, for example, it could be outside the office setting or within a person's home. Typically the following procedure would apply;

1. Where there is a clear known risk, staff should always have support available, and where possible there should be a co-worker accompanying them. There should be the means to summon help immediately using a call system or mobile phone.
2. With a person having seriously hurt themselves or others, staff will need to make a brief immediate assessment to decide the urgency of the situation before reporting it and summoning the appropriate help.
3. The staff member should reassure the person that help will be forthcoming and stay with the person (assuming it is safe to do so) until help arrives.

4. In all cases of visible self-harm, the person will need first aid or medical attention, and in some cases further medical assessment to check any inadvertent adverse effects of the harmful act.
5. If a person is injured or in immediate physical danger, or if a crime has been committed, contact the police and other appropriate emergency services – dial 999.
6. Contact Alerting Manager - As within our Safeguarding Policy at Mind in Croydon, we have identified Alerting Managers as being the Manager of each service, and in their absence, Head of Service, Director of Service or the Chief Executive. When an incident takes place the Alerting Manager should be contacted as soon as possible. In situations in which the Alerting Manager cannot be contacted all staff and volunteers should ring the Croydon Council Social Services Safeguarding line of 020 8726 6500. Or email [referral.team2@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:referral.team2@croydon.gov.uk)
7. After any incident a de-brief will be held amongst all staff involved

### **Training**

All staff members receive training to make sure they understand the service's policy regarding adults at risk who need specific measures to keep them fully safe.

Staff receive further and more specialised training in the care of adults at high risk of harm in line with their roles and responsibilities.

Training will include:

- Understanding signs and symptoms of people at risk of harming or injuring themselves and /or expressing suicidal ideation
- Observing and reporting of concerning behaviour and how to deal appropriately with it
- Risk assessments and management planning
- Emergency procedures

### **Supporting Staff**

Mind in Croydon Staff have access to the Employee Assistance Programme and are able to access Mind in Croydon's Counselling Service where support is required having been affected by having to deal with distressing situations and behaviour. Staff receive regular supervision, reflective practice and access to HR welfare meetings.

*Reviewed and Updated by the Board of Mind in Croydon – Feb 2023*