

What adults with learning disabilities say about safeguarding



An easy read report of Healthwatch consultation workshops carried out by Opening Doors during November 2024



What is in this report

Topic	Page number
Key facts about safeguarding	3
2018 Safeguarding Survey	4 - 5
What we did and key notes about the process	6 - 8
About the people we spoke to	9
What we found out	
What does safeguarding mean to you?	10
Understanding of abuse and changes needed	11 - 12
What stops me reporting a safeguarding concern	13
Where I would feel safe to raise a safeguarding concern	14
Who I trust to talk to about a safeguarding concern	15
The ways people contact Norfolk County Council	16
Next Steps and recommendations	17
Full results	
Understanding different types of abuse	18 - 19
What stops me being able to report a safeguarding concern	20
Where I would feel safe to raise a safeguarding concern	21 - 22
Who I trust to talk to about a safeguarding concern	23 - 24
Opening Doors information	25



Key facts about safeguarding

Safeguarding and people with learning disabilities



Safeguarding means protecting people and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect.

Norfolk County Council (NCC) is in charge of keeping people safe in Norfolk and must respond to safeguarding reports.



In 2023-24 there were a total of 6,385 safeguarding concerns raised to Norfolk County Council (NCC).

There is no information available on the national dashboard about how many of these reports were by, or about people with learning disabilities.



People with learning disabilities are more vulnerable to abuse and neglect, including domestic abuse (ONS, 2021)



People with profound learning disabilities and/or communication needs often rely on others to recognise and report concerns.

Previous Safeguarding Survey in 2018



In 2018 Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board (NSAB) ran a survey to get feedback on their work and to help identify their priorities.

<https://www.norfolksafeguardingadultsboard.info/about-us/latest-news/nsab-2018-survey-headline-results>



NSAB asked Opening Doors to help to ensure people with learning disabilities were included. We produced an accessible survey and ran one workshop to support people taking part.



We supported 36 people with learning disabilities to engage with the survey.
Not everyone answered every question.



We tested things out with people – like trying out calling Norfolk County Council to see if people could navigate the system. Most could not manage the options.



We will look at the most significant information from people with learning disabilities on the next page ➔



Yes	22
No	10
Don't know	1

Most people had heard of adult safeguarding



Yes	28
No	1
Don't know	4

Most people said they **would** report abuse if they saw it

People said **who they would tell** about abuse. The top 4 were ↓



Friend or family member **27**



Police **22**



Norfolk County Council **14**



Carer/Support worker **14**

The reasons people **would not** report were ↓



Don't know where to report it



Don't want to get involved



It is none of my business



Too scared to



I might be wrong



Nothing would be done

What we did



Opening Doors Health Experts group (Norfolk and Waveney ICB funded) voted 'safeguarding' as the topic the Healthwatch workshops should focus on.



We met with Healthwatch to agree what we would do and how much it would cost. We signed an agreement and a budget.



We coproduced the questions with a worker from Norfolk Adults Safeguarding Board. We made resources and tested them out.



We visited groups across Norfolk and ran the accessible workshops there. Peer trainers lead the workshops - this was very important so people with learning disabilities felt safe to have their say.



Some people were sent Easy Read workbooks they could complete at home. We checked they would have support around if they found it upsetting.



We made sure everyone who took part received a certificate, bag, safeguarding leaflet and important support phone numbers to take away with them.



Each person who took part was invited to fill in a sheet to say if they felt safe or unsafe. Every sheet was checked and individual appointments made where requested.



Self advocates worked on counting up the answers. Independent supporters and sessional workers helped with this too.



Two staff members at Opening Doors worked with self advocates to put the report together.



We met with a worker from Healthwatch to check how much analysis they wanted in the report and how much data to include.



A staff member and a self advocate met to look through the report together. Any changes needed were made.



We delivered the final report to Healthwatch in early March 2025.

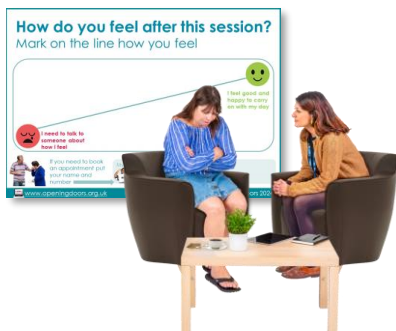
Things to note



Safeguarding is a tricky subject.
We made sure there was a trigger warning at the start of each workshop and when the questions were asked 1:1.



We provided individual support and made time adjustments where needed.
We adapted to suit the person's needs.



Where someone said they needed more support we provided 1:1 time with an Advocacy Adviser.

This was an unpaid extra we do because we know it is needed.

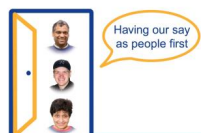


People who could not get transport to the workshops themselves were excluded from taking part.



We need to be mindful that the person supporting someone to speak up may be the abuser.

Who we spoke to



Opening Doors



In total **55 adults with learning disabilities** took part in the safeguarding consultation.

Some of these people are Opening Doors members, others are not. We asked people what other services and groups they access.

**Some people go to more than one place so 3 responses could be one person. ↓*



Day Activities

54 responses*



Community Groups

12 responses*



Learning Disability Social Clubs

27 responses*



In receipt of care/support

12 responses*

Residential home/care at home

Things to note and what could change



Almost all the people we spoke to **access support** from another organisation in some way.



These other providers and settings offer a chance to improve understanding and awareness of safeguarding.

What does safeguarding mean to you?

<div><div>Good understanding</div><div></div><div>5</div></div> <div><p>Keep myself and others safe from abuse.</p><p>Report if I am concerned.</p></div>	<div><div>Some understanding</div><div></div><div>14</div></div> <div><p>Keep myself and others safe from abuse.</p></div>
<div><div>Some understanding</div><div></div><div>7</div></div> <div><p>Either keep myself safe, or others safe or report it.</p></div>	<div><div></div><div>29</div></div> <div><p>Do not know</p></div>

What we found out

<div><div></div></div> <div><p>More than half (53%) do not know what safeguarding means</p></div>	<div><div></div></div> <div><p>Only 9% fully understand safeguarding and refer to reporting</p></div>
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Recommendations for possible next steps

<div><div></div></div>	<div><p>Provide Awareness Training about safeguarding with and for adults with learning disabilities.</p><p>Use Easy Read materials and peer support to help spread awareness and experience.</p><p>Address barriers to reporting where possible.</p></div>
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Understanding of different types of abuse

For the full results go to pages 18 and 19

Important things to note about these results



The most understood types of abuse were **physical** and **financial** abuse.

Some people understood **neglect and self neglect** but few people understood the need to report this type of abuse.



There was poor understanding of **organisational abuse, modern slavery** and **discrimination**.

People talked most about race and skin colour when thinking about **discrimination**.



For all types of abuse there were many people who did not respond because they did not know how to describe it.

This shows people need education.



Many people do not know what to do about abuse or neglect.

Some people understand reporting to the Police is important, but did not always know of or understand other support options.

What needs to change?



More Accessible Training & Awareness

Use easy read materials, pictures, and accessible training to help people recognise different types of abuse.



Clarify how to report issues and get help

Teach people who to report to - (not just the Police, but also Norfolk County Council, social workers, advocacy groups and care providers).

Provide clear step-by-step guidance on what to do if they suspect abuse.



Focus on less understood abuse types

More awareness is needed of **modern slavery**, **discrimination** and **organisational** abuse.

Many people with learning disabilities live in residential care settings so understanding and recognising **organisational abuse** is important.



Encourage self-advocacy & peer support

People with learning disabilities should be encouraged to support each other in recognising and reporting abuse.

Peer-led discussions can help build peoples' confidence in speaking up.



What stops me being able to report a safeguarding concern

For the full results go to page 20

What we found out



Fear and worry stops people reporting a safeguarding concern



Not knowing how to report is a significant barrier to reporting

What needs to change?



Clear and easy ways to report a concern

There needs to be different ways to report – online, phone and face-to-face.



Feeling safe to report

Help people with learning disabilities to feel safe when reporting a concern.



Improve access to reporting methods

Better access to online and phone reporting is essential.



Where I would feel safe to raise a safeguarding concern

For the full results go to pages 21 and 22

What we found out



People feel safe reporting in familiar places like their home, GP Surgery or Social Club



People feel less safe in public places like pubs, bus or train stations and at market stalls



What needs to change?



The results show that only 12 people felt safe reporting a safeguarding concern to **Norfolk County Council**, while 12 did not.



As Norfolk County Council is responsible for safeguarding services, **the Council should be seen as a safe and supportive place to report concerns.**



The Council need to improve its approach so that people with learning disabilities feel heard and supported when raising safeguarding concerns. This is likely to require **clearer communication, more accessible reporting methods, and better staff training.**



Who I trust to talk to about a safeguarding concern

For the full results go to pages 23 and 24

What we found out



People trust those they know well – family, friends, Doctors and the Police



Not many people trust strangers or people in less supportive roles

What needs to change?



Provide Education

Run workshops to make sure everyone knows **where to go for help**, who they can trust and practice asking for help.



Training Professionals and workers

Provide training for Professionals and support staff on **how to listen and support people with learning disabilities** when they discuss issues.








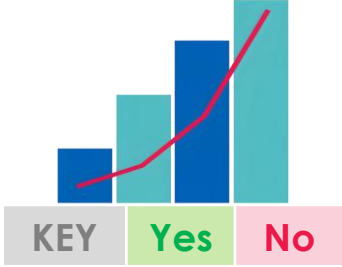
Create a culture of openness

Remind people it is okay to talk about issues – **provide reassurance** they will not get in trouble for asking for help. **Build confidence** so everyone knows their voice matters.



What we found out

The ways people can contact Norfolk County Council to report abuse

Phone call  36 people 21 people	Send an email  16 people 26 people	Write a letter  15 people 24 people
On the website  15 people 25 people	Text message  4 people 22 people	

Important things to note about these results



Making a phone call was the most common choice of how people would want to contact Norfolk County Council



However almost half the people we spoke to said they would not call.

From workshops we know people struggle to use the Norfolk County Council telephone system especially as the number is very long .



With mobile phones choosing options is even more complicated as people need to know how to ‘pull up’ their keyboard during a call in order to select options.



Where do we do from here?

Next steps and recommendations



Provide Education

Everyone involved needs a better understanding of safeguarding, abuse and reporting methods. The network of community groups and commissioned services offer an opportunity to deliver this training provided it is funded.



Address Barriers to reporting

Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board and Norfolk County Council need to prioritise simplifying how people can phone in concerns.



Improve communication and awareness

Clear, simple and accessible information which is shared widely and crucially in the places and spaces used by people with learning disabilities is essential.



Community involvement is key







Working with people with learning disabilities will be essential to ensure that steps address the problems **as experienced by this population** and not what people *think* are the issues.



Understanding of different types of abuse

We asked 55 adults with learning disabilities

Type of abuse	What people think this type of abuse is	What people think should be done
Physical Abuse 	Hitting or beating someone up 8 out of 14 responses 3 did not know	Encourage them to tell a parent or the police 7 out of 14 responses 4 did not know
Domestic Abuse 	When a partner hits or scares you 4 out of 15 responses 2 did not know	Call or tell someone about it 6 out of 16 responses 4 did not know
Neglect or ignored 	Not looking after yourself or someone else 6 out of 15 responses 0 did not know	Talk to someone about it 2 out of 15 responses 5 did not know
Emotional Abuse 	People put bad things in your head/control you 6 out of 15 responses 2 did not know	Tell someone that it is happening 2 out of 13 responses 7 did not know

<p>Sexual Abuse</p> 	<p>Unwanted touching</p> <p>4 out of 16 responses 4 did not know</p>	<p>Tell Police or a Social Worker or call 999</p> <p>5 out of 16 responses 7 did not know</p>
<p>Self-neglect</p> 	<p>When you stop looking after yourself</p> <p>8 out of 15 responses 3 did not know</p>	<p>Get more support or a welfare check</p> <p>2 out of 13 responses 5 did not know</p>
<p>Financial Abuse</p> 	<p>Taking someone's money</p> <p>13 out of 18 responses 0 did not know</p>	<p>Call the Police or dial 999</p> <p>1 out of 14 responses 9 did not know</p>
<p>Modern Slavery</p> 	<p>Migrants or others being made to work for no money</p> <p>2 out of 7 responses 3 did not know</p>	<p>Tell the Police about it</p> <p>1 out of 7 responses 4 did not know</p>
<p>Discrimination</p> 	<p>About race or skin colour</p> <p>2 out of 11 responses 0 did not know</p>	<p>Tell the Police about it</p> <p>1 out of 7 responses 4 did not know</p>
<p>Organisational Abuse</p> 	<p>Bad care homes and abusive staff</p> <p>2 out of 9 responses 4 did not know</p>	<p>Better training for Police and staff</p> <p>1 out of 7 responses 4 did not know</p>



What stops me being able to report a safeguarding concern

We asked 55 adults with learning disabilities

<p>Worries about being watched doing it</p>  <p>23 people</p>	<p>Feeling I will get into trouble</p>  <p>21 people</p>	<p>Wanting to do it face-to-face</p>  <p>21 people</p>	<p>Not knowing how to do it</p>  <p>20 people</p>
<p>Do not know the phone number</p>  <p>19 people</p>	<p>It will upset me</p>  <p>17 people</p>	<p>Can't get online</p>  <p>16 people</p>	<p>Needing support to do this</p>  <p>13 people</p>
<p>Not trusting who else will know what I said</p>  <p>13 people</p>	<p>Not knowing what a safeguarding report is</p>  <p>13 people</p>	<p>Not being confident about how to do it</p>  <p>11 people</p>	<p>Been told not to</p>  <p>9 people</p>
<p>Never left alone so can't do it</p>  <p>7 people</p>	<p>Not allowed to use a computer</p>  <p>6 people</p>	<p>The person I need to report lives with me</p>  <p>5 people</p>	<p>No money to get phone credit to call</p>  <p>5 people</p>



Where I would feel safe to raise a safeguarding concern

We asked 55 adults with learning disabilities

KEY		Yes	No
My home		29	2
GP Surgery		29	4
Learning disability social club		25	5
Police Station		26	7
Hospital		23	5
Coffee shop		21	12
Work place		21	12
Victim Support		21	6
Pharmacy		19	8
Day Centre/Hub		19	5
Samaritans		19	8
Library		18	11
Supermarket		17	15
Residential Home		16	6
Hairdressers		16	15
Restaurants		15	15

Theatre



14

15

Secure services



13

7

Local hobby club



13

15

Bus or Train Station



12

16

Sports Centre



12

15

County Council



12

12

College



12

12

Cinema



11

17

Opticians



11

16

Village Hall



11

13

Place of worship



10

16

Market stall



9

16

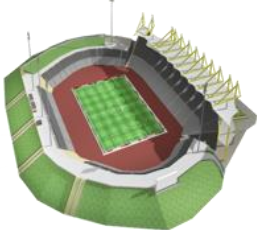
Local pub



9

18

Football ground



8

16



Who I trust to talk to about a safeguarding concern

We asked 55 adults with learning disabilities

<p>Friends</p>  <p>30 people</p>	<p>Medical staff (like a nurse or GP)</p>  <p>30 people</p>	<p>Family member</p>  <p>29 people</p>	<p>Police</p>  <p>29 people</p>
<p>Advocacy Worker</p>  <p>27 people</p>	<p>Home support staff</p>  <p>22 people</p>	<p>People I work with</p>  <p>22 people</p>	<p>Social Worker</p>  <p>20 people</p>
<p>Pharmacist</p>  <p>18 people</p>	<p>Day Centre staff</p>  <p>16 people</p>	<p>My partner</p>  <p>16 people</p>	<p>College Tutor</p>  <p>15 people</p>

Cinema or theatre staff



12 people

Library staff



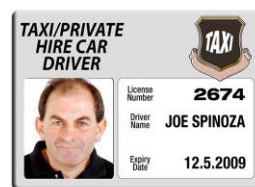
12 people

Café or shop staff



11 people

Taxi driver



11 people

Bus or train staff



11 people

Hairdresser or Barber



10 people

Neighbour



7 people

Sports Centre staff



7 people

Leader at my place of worship



6 people

Postman or woman



5 people

Pub staff



4 people

Places people go to

and get support to take part



Report written by Opening Doors



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