

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL UK

# WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

## A guide to safeguarding for Amnesty activists in the UK

### IN THIS GUIDE

- Young activists in Amnesty
- Definition of child or young person
- The responsibilities of adults
- What groups need to do
- Minimum ages
- Permission from parents or guardians
- Emails, texts and messaging
- Photographs
- Making young people feel welcome
- Further information

### YOUNG ACTIVISTS IN AMNESTY

If we want to build a bigger and more diverse Amnesty movement in the UK, we need to encourage people of all ages to take part in our human rights activism. That means we encourage young people, among others, to attend our events, speak up in our meetings, help organise our activities and shape our campaigns.

As an organisation, we are responsible for the safety of under-18s taking part in our activism. This guide is for Amnesty groups, networks and other lead activists. It outlines some simple procedures to help you make Amnesty International UK a safe and welcoming environment for young people.

Activist groups and networks play a central role in making our movement visible and welcoming to everyone in their communities. Many groups already have members aged under 18. If you are uncertain of your ability to provide a safe and suitable environment for young people, please ask for advice and support from the office (details on page 3). Everyone who wants to campaign for human rights should feel welcome at Amnesty.

**Note:** This guide is not intended for Amnesty youth and student groups, most of which are based in settings that already have strong policies and procedures for working with young people.

### DEFINITION OF CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON

Legally, a child is anyone under 18. Few people in their mid- and late teens like to be described as children, so we also use the term 'young people'. In this guide, we use both terms to mean under-18s.

### HOW TO ASK ABOUT AGE

If you think one of your fellow activists may be under 18, simply ask them 'Are you under 18?' You can explain that you are asking because Amnesty has a responsibility for the safety of under-18s. If you know the person is under 18, you should ask for their date of birth.

If your group has a membership form, it should ask whether the new member is under 18 and, if they are, to give their date of birth.

### THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF ADULTS

Under UK law, all adults are obliged to report suspected child abuse. If you are concerned about a young person's safety, you should follow our *Procedure for Children at Possible Risk of Harm or Abuse*. This explains everything you need to do, from raising a concern to reporting abuse.

### WHAT ACTIVIST GROUPS AND COMMITTEES NEED TO DO

You should appoint a safeguarding lead and, if possible, a deputy. Other group members should come to them if they have a concern about the safety and well-being of under-18s.

The safeguarding lead (and deputy if there is one) should:

- familiarise themselves with this guide and other safeguarding policies and procedures (see page 3);
- support parents or guardians and young people with any questions or concerns they may have;
- help the group to include safeguarding when planning an event, meeting or demonstration;
- maintain contact with the designated safeguarding leads at Amnesty International UK (details on page 3);
- obtain the contact details of the local authority Safeguarding Board.

### MINIMUM AGES

A young person can join Amnesty International UK, and vote at the Annual General Meeting, at 14.

Generally, someone over the age of 13 is considered able to understand the implications of signing a petition – but do explain these if you think the young person may not know.

There is no minimum age for:

- joining an Amnesty group or network
- volunteering on a stall – although on each occasion you should consider health and safety (heat, duration, suitability of materials) and ensure parents or guardians know where their children are.

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## PERMISSION FROM PARENTS OR GUARDIANS

The explicit permission of a parent or guardian is required for any activity that might put a young person in a vulnerable position. There is no set list of such activities, but examples include:

- giving a young person a lift home from a meeting or event;
- one-to-one communication on or offline, where no-one else is present;
- attending a meeting in someone's home;
- taking or publishing a photograph of a young person.

Keep a record of permissions given by the parent or guardian.

Permission is not required for a group meeting in a public space.

For a group trip to a national demonstration, you should inform the parent or guardian, and make it clear whether you will assume responsibility for the young person. If you do assume responsibility, please discuss any health and support needs with all concerned.

You should inform a parent or guardian if, for example, the young person is volunteering at a late-night event.

Always speak to the young person before you contact their parent or guardian: they have a right to be part of the discussion.

For any overnight activity, you need to follow the *Procedure for Residential Activities with Children and Young People* and the supervising adults will require safeguarding criminal records checks (see page 3).

## EMAILS, TEXTS AND MESSAGING

Always include at least one other adult in electronic communications with the young person, unless you have explicit permission for one-to-one communication from their parent or guardian. It may be appropriate to copy the parent or guardian into your communications with the young person – but check with both the young person and their parent or guardian first.

## PHOTOGRAPHS

Detailed information on photographs of under-18s can be found in our *Use of Imagery* policy. You should obtain the consent of both the young person and their parent or guardian to take and use a photograph of anyone under 18.

### Obtaining consent

- Explain clearly when and how you will publish or display the photos; how long you will keep them; and where you will store them (eg a personal computer, a locked box) tell them if you intend to share the photos on social media, or pass them on to Amnesty staff.
- Make sure they know who to contact if they want their image removed; for images sent to Amnesty staff, people should email [sct@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:sct@amnesty.org.uk).
- Use a consent and release form (see *Use of Imagery* policy and template forms).

## Storage

- Keep consent records secure (they are personal data).
- Remove images from personal phones as soon as possible.
- Store all images of children and young people on a password-protected and encrypted computer or in a secure cloud location.
- Ensure any request for images to be deleted is acted on as soon as possible and pass the message on to Amnesty staff ([sct@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:sct@amnesty.org.uk)) if they have the photos too.

## Taking photos

- Images should be respectful and dignified.
- Only take and use images of children and young people in suitable clothing, to reduce the risk of inappropriate use.
- Avoid taking photos where items in the background or symbols on a school uniform could help locate them
- Do not use the young person's full name with the image. If you need to use the child's full name with the image (for example, if they have won a competition) you must have the consent of the young person and their parent or guardian. The same restrictions apply to tagging images posted online.
- If a young person wants to participate in one of your social media campaigns, you can take the photo on their phone for them to share, tagging in your group or network. Make sure they understand how many people are likely to see the photo.
- Ask for permission before taking pictures at a place of worship – many people consider religion to be a private matter.
- Do not take photos of children engaged in private activities such as washing, bathing, dressing, and so on.
- Do not take photos of children or young people behaving recklessly or dangerously.

## Crowd scenes

You do not need written consent to take or use photos of children and young people at a crowd scene, such as a demonstration. However, it is good practice in these circumstances to let the participants know that you will be taking photos and to ask them to tell you if they do not want to be photographed – and then respect their wishes. Be particularly careful at events such as Pride, where a photo may reveal sensitive personal information.

## MAKING YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL WELCOME

Below is a list of things to consider if you want to make your meetings and events more inclusive of young people. But you should also remember the basic things that apply to all new members of a group, network or organisation: greet new people, introduce yourself and others, explain what is happening, and explain technical terms such as 'minutes and matters arising'. People of any age can get confused and intimidated by jargon and procedural detail.

### Where you meet

Try to hold your meetings in a public, easily accessible place. If you hold a meeting in someone's house, people are likely to feel they must defer to the home owner. Avoid venues such as pubs that restrict entry for under-18s.

### Where you socialise

If you usually go to the pub after a meeting and you have under-18s in your group, try to find an alternative such as a coffee shop.

## How you get to and from meetings

Most people attending your meetings expect to arrive and leave by themselves, and that should apply to under-18s too. However, many people feel uncomfortable walking down a quiet street after dark. You could agree to walk as a group to and from the nearest bus stop or train station.

In bad weather or after dark, it may be appropriate to offer someone a lift. If you do give a lift to a child or young person, you must have explicit permission from their parent or guardian. You can do this in advance by email, or on the day by phone or text. You can ask the young person to phone a parent and then speak to them yourself.

If you want to confirm a young person has arrived home safely, you can ask them to email two group members (in one email), or to WhatsApp via a group, or even ask their parents to message you.

## What you discuss and present

Think about the content of your discussion, the materials you use, the films you show, etc. Graphic descriptions or depictions of human rights violations can be extremely upsetting – and not only to young people. Think about what is appropriate for your intended audience. And remember to check the age restrictions on films.

In many cases, you can ask under-18s if they are happy to discuss difficult or potentially upsetting topics: don't make assumptions about what they know, or what they are willing to talk about.

## How you discuss things

Do not assume knowledge – but do not assume ignorance either. Avoid patronising language. Create an atmosphere where it is normal to ask questions.

## How you support people

People have different life experiences, and we all develop and mature at different rates. Therefore we all have different needs. It is important to talk to young people and their parents or guardians directly to find out what support a particular individual needs or wants. For example, a young person from a big city is likely to be more confident using public transport than someone from a rural area who relies on lifts from friends and family.

## AMNESTY MATERIALS

Most Amnesty UK materials are aimed at ages 14 and above, but some of them may also be suitable for a 12- or 13-year-old.

We also produce materials aimed at youth groups and younger children. For help finding these online, please contact [activism@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:activism@amnesty.org.uk)

Bear in mind that International Secretariat reports may contain disturbing information, about torture and sexual violence, for example.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

All Amnesty International UK policies and procedures are available at [www.amnesty.org.uk/safeguarding](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/safeguarding)

### Advice and support

We have designated safeguarding leads for children and young people, and for vulnerable people. You can email them at [safeguarding@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:safeguarding@amnesty.org.uk)

### Useful documents

[Engaging Safely with Children and Young People for Amnesty: Do's and Don'ts](#)

[Safeguarding Children Policy: Amnesty International UK Section and Amnesty International UK Section Charitable Trust](#)

[Procedure for Children at Possible Risk of Harm and Abuse](#)

[Safeguarding Criminal Records Checks Policy](#)