

## **Safeguarding: FAQs for website**

### **1. Why do we have an Exit button on our website?**

Exit Buttons allow people to move quickly to another website. When you click on an Exit Button, it will immediately take you away from the website you're viewing and open a new one in its place. Mermaids' exit button links to the Wikipedia homepage.

This is a standard feature on websites offering support to potentially vulnerable people and can be found on other charities' websites such as Childline, LGBT Foundation, Refuge and Gendered Intelligence.

Mermaids has an Exit Button to help young people accessing our website feel as safe as possible while finding support and information. Ultimately, the Exit Button helps protect someone looking at the website from being accidentally 'outed' to somebody who could have a hostile reaction.

Unfortunately, LGBT+ young people need specific safeguarding measures in place to protect them from abuse – and sometimes, hiding the webpage they were viewing from parents or those that they live with is part of that.

### **2. Why do we sometimes suggest a young person uses an email address their primary carers have no access to, as part of the process for joining our youth forums?**

The youth forum is a service available to those between 12 and 19-years-old. The youth forum is a private forum, run on a basis of confidentiality and trust. This safe space is extensively monitored by trained operators to manage and appropriately react to conversations that may raise safeguarding concerns, such as discussions around domestic abuse, actual or potential self-harm and suicidal ideation. Our safeguarding policy is implemented at all times.

There are a number of different reasons why a private email address may help to keep our young service users safe, for example:

- a. If the young person is not 'out' to the parent/carer, any access they have to messages exchanged may open the young person up to being outed unwillingly, which in turn may expose the young person to hostility and/or abuse if their parents/carers are not supportive. Unfortunately there is still a high percentage of LGBTQ+ young people living in hostile environments, some ending up homeless as a result. Suggesting a new and safe email address can therefore safeguard that young person from such risk.
  
- b. If parents/carers have oversight of their child's conversations they would also have oversight of **other** young people's private information. Therefore, this is not only a mechanism to assist in safeguarding operations, it also protects the private information of all our service users.

### **3. How do we moderate access to our forum membership?**

Mermaids has a rigorous application process in place for applications and moderations of new forum members. The process ensures, as far as possible, that the forums are available exclusively to those who fall within our service user demographic.

Should there be any violation of our terms, there are mechanisms in place to ensure these are dealt with appropriately. This could include, but are not limited to, these individuals being removed from the forum. All action taken at any time is done proportionately.

### **4. What oversight does the charity have across its member forums?**

The charity has a [safeguarding policy](#) in place to ensure, as far as possible, that every child, regardless of their age, disability, gender identity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation, has a right to equal protection from harm, including whilst using our online forums.

The charity has the welfare and wellbeing of its service users as its utmost priority at all times and all forums are strictly moderated in accordance with this policy. Mermaids has a Nominated Safeguarding Lead who has the principal objective of overseeing and ensuring that our safeguarding children, young people and adult's policy is fully implemented at all times.

All staff and volunteers are trained in data protection, safeguarding and Mermaids' own internal policies before commencing on any direct contact work for the charity. This ensures they are able to notice and appropriately react to any safeguarding concerns that may arise.

All helpline staff are trained to moderate the member forums regularly and it is only staff and not volunteers who do so. All moderators have the power to restrict conversations, reinstate full moderation for a user for all posts and if necessary, remove a user entirely. All new members of our forums have their initial posts reviewed and authorised before they are made available to other members.

The rules of our forums are made clear to all members about where people can go should they require urgent support and our service users are required to acknowledge that Mermaids does not offer crisis counselling or support prior to accessing our forums.

### **4. Do we give advice?**

Mermaids is a young person-centred support charity and does not encourage, influence or direct young people or their families to pursue any one pathway. For those seeking advice, we signpost to the relevant, trusted organisation such as the NHS.

## **5. Do we give healthcare advice?**

Mermaids does not give healthcare advice. We may provide general information on NHS clinical pathways, but are not involved in the provision of medical care or in advising around whether a medical pathway is appropriate for an individual.

## **6. When would we disclose someone's personal information without consent?**

Confidentiality is central to the trust that exists between Mermaids and service users. Data protection law makes it clear that we have a legal and ethical duty to keep service user's personal information confidential, but confidentiality is not absolute.

Broadly, Mermaids would be obligated by law to disclose personal information without breaching duties of confidentiality if we believe that (a) it is essential to do so to ensure a child's safety or (b) disclosure is otherwise required or approved by law.

Please see our [Safeguarding Policy](#) for further information.

## **7. Are there any further safeguarding processes for young people with additional needs on the forums?**

The information we publish on our forums is presented in various ways to provide for differing ages and needs. We always want to make information accessible to all. For example, we know that the demographic of young people using our services who are on the autistic spectrum generally find videos easier to engage with rather than articles or documents, so we ensure we publish resources that satisfy this requirement.

Should anyone ever have additional needs that they feel are not being met, we would encourage them to raise this with our safeguarding leads who can be contacted via our helpline, email or webchat service.