Hostlink International Student Support (Hostlink UK)

Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

---

1. Introduction

Hostlink UK is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of every child and young person placed in its homestay accommodation. We recognise that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and that all children have the right to be protected from abuse, neglect, exploitation and harm regardless of their age, gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, nationality or background.

Hostlink UK provides accommodation for international students, including those under the age of 18. We therefore have a duty of care to ensure that appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place to protect every young person placed with our homestay hosts.

This policy provides guidance for all Hostlink UK staff, directors, accommodation officers, homestay hosts and volunteers. It outlines the procedures for preventing harm, recognising safeguarding concerns, responding appropriately and reporting concerns in accordance with UK legislation and recognised safeguarding best practice.

This policy should be read alongside the Hostlink UK Code of Conduct, Health and Safety Policy, Complaints Procedure, Data Protection Policy and Homestay Agreement.

---

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- safeguard children and young people accommodated through Hostlink UK;
- promote a safe, welcoming and supportive homestay environment;
- provide clear safeguarding procedures for staff and homestay hosts;
- ensure concerns are identified and acted upon promptly;
- promote a culture where safeguarding is everyone's responsibility;
- comply with relevant UK safeguarding legislation and recognised best practice.

---

3. Scope

This policy applies to:

- Directors and Employees
- Homestay Hosts
- Anyone working on behalf of Hostlink UK
- Students under the age of 18 accommodated through Hostlink UK

All individuals covered by this policy are expected to understand their safeguarding responsibilities and follow the procedures outlined in this document.

---

4. Definition of a Child

For the purposes of this policy, a child is any person under the age of 18 years, in accordance with the Children Act 1989 and subsequent safeguarding legislation.

---

5. Safeguarding Statement

Hostlink UK believes that every child has the right to:

- feel safe;
- be listened to;
- be respected;
- receive appropriate care;
- be protected from abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Every member of staff, homestay host and volunteer have a duty to act in the best interests of children and to report any safeguarding concerns immediately.

Hostlink UK operates a zero-tolerance approach towards abuse, neglect, exploitation, bullying, discrimination and inappropriate behaviour towards children.

---

6. Legal Framework

This policy has been developed with reference to current UK safeguarding legislation and guidance, including:

- Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
- Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (Prevent Duty)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (current edition)
- Data Protection Act 2018
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)

Hostlink UK also follows recognised good practice expected of organisations providing accommodation for international students under 18.

---

7. Roles and Responsibilities

Directors and Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

The Directors and DSL are responsible for ensuring:

- appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place;
- safeguarding is adequately resourced;
- safeguarding concerns are taken seriously;
- policies are reviewed annually;
- staff receive appropriate safeguarding training.
- leading safeguarding within Hostlink UK;
- receiving safeguarding concerns;
- liaising with schools, parents, local authorities and police where appropriate;
- maintaining confidential safeguarding records;
- advising staff and hosts;
- ensuring safeguarding training is delivered;
- reviewing safeguarding procedures.

Details of the DSL are provided to all staff, homestay hosts, schools and partner organisations.

Accommodation Officer

The Accommodation Officer is responsible for:

- recruiting and approving homestay hosts;
- conducting accommodation inspections;
- carrying out host reviews;
- monitoring student welfare;
- responding to welfare concerns;
- reporting safeguarding concerns to the DSL;
- maintaining accurate accommodation records.

Homestay Hosts

Homestay hosts play a vital role in safeguarding young people.

Hosts are expected to:

- provide a safe, welcoming and supportive family environment;
- treat students with dignity and respect;
- maintain appropriate professional boundaries;
- supervise students appropriately according to their age;
- report safeguarding concerns immediately;
- follow Hostlink UK's safeguarding procedures at all times.

Staff and Volunteers

Every member of staff and volunteer must:

- **safeguard children in their care;**
- **recognise possible signs of abuse;**
- **report concerns without delay;**
- **attend safeguarding training;**
- **follow this policy and the Hostlink UK Code of Conduct.**

8. Equality and Inclusion

Hostlink UK is committed to safeguarding all children equally.

No child will receive less protection because of:

- nationality;
- ethnicity;
- disability;
- religion;
- language;
- gender;
- sexual orientation;
- immigration status;
- family circumstances.

Safeguarding decisions will always place the welfare of the child first.

---

9. Safer Recruitment and Suitability Checks

Hostlink UK operates safer recruitment procedures to ensure only suitable individuals are approved to accommodate students under 18.

Prospective homestay hosts must complete an application form providing details of:

- all household members;
- accommodation arrangements;
- previous hosting experience;
- employment history where relevant;
- references.

Before approval, Hostlink UK requires:

- two proofs of identity and address (for example, passport, driving licence, council tax bill or utility bill);
- two satisfactory references from non-family members;
- satisfactory Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks where required (when hosting under18’s);
- confirmation of suitability to accommodate young people;
- a completed Child Protection Declaration;
- a signed Homestay Agreement.

Where accommodation is provided for students under 18, enhanced DBS checks will normally be completed for all adults aged 18 and over living in the household, unless different requirements are specified by a partner school or organisation.

Where appropriate, applicants must declare that they work from their home address to enable relevant police checks to include other adults living at the property.

Existing DBS certificates issued within the previous twelve months may be accepted following assessment by Hostlink UK. Additional barred list checks may be undertaken where required.

Any information affecting suitability must be declared immediately.

Failure to disclose relevant information may result in removal from the Hostlink UK homestay register.

---

10. Homestay Inspections

Before approval, every homestay will receive an inspection to ensure that accommodation is suitable for hosting international students.

The inspection will assess:

- cleanliness;
- home maintenance;
- bedroom standards;
- bathroom facilities;
- heating and ventilation;
- fire safety arrangements;
- security of the property;
- suitability for under-18 students.

Approved homestays will normally be re-inspected at least every two years or more frequently where required by partner organisations.

Hosts must notify Hostlink UK of any significant changes to household members or accommodation.

---

11. Fire and Health & Safety

Hostlink UK requires all homestay providers to maintain a safe home environment.

Hosts are expected to:

- complete an annual Fire Risk Assessment;
- maintain working smoke alarms;
- ensure escape routes remain unobstructed;
- maintain gas and electrical appliances safely;
- keep the home clean and hygienic;
- ensure appropriate insurance is in place where required.

Students should be informed of emergency procedures shortly after arrival.

---

12. Training

Safeguarding training will be provided for relevant staff and accommodation officers during induction and refreshed regularly.

Training will include:

- recognising abuse;
- responding to disclosures;
- reporting procedures;
- Prevent awareness;
- professional boundaries;
- online safety;
- record keeping;
- confidentiality.

Homestay hosts will receive safeguarding guidance before accommodating students under 18 and will be expected to familiarise themselves with this policy before hosting.

All staff and hosts share responsibility for maintaining a safe environment and for acting promptly whenever concerns arise.

13. Homestay Host Responsibilities

Homestay hosts play an essential role in safeguarding the welfare of children and young people placed in their care. Hosts are expected to provide a safe, welcoming and supportive family environment while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries at all times.

Homestay hosts are responsible for:

- Providing suitable accommodation that is clean, safe and comfortable.
- Treating students with dignity, respect and sensitivity.
- Supporting students' emotional wellbeing and helping them settle into family life.
- Supervising students appropriately according to their age and level of independence.
- Ensuring students understand household rules and emergency procedures.
- Reporting any safeguarding or welfare concerns immediately.
- Cooperating with Hostlink UK, schools and safeguarding agencies where required.
- Informing Hostlink UK of any changes to household members, pets, accommodation or significant circumstances that may affect the placement.
- Maintaining confidentiality regarding students and their families.

The welfare of the child must always take priority over convenience or personal interests.

---

14. Professional Boundaries and Code of Conduct

All Hostlink UK staff and homestay hosts must maintain professional relationships with students and avoid behaviour that could place either themselves or the student at risk.

Staff and hosts must:

- Treat every student fairly and without discrimination.
- Respect students' privacy while ensuring appropriate supervision.
- Use appropriate language and behaviour at all times.
- Act as positive role models.
- Avoid favouritism towards individual students.
- Ensure physical contact is appropriate, necessary and never intrusive.
- Report any concerns regarding inappropriate behaviour by another adult.

Staff and hosts **must not:**

- Develop inappropriate personal or romantic relationships with students.
- Share a bedroom or bed with a student.
- Enter a student's bedroom without good reason, except in an emergency or after knocking and obtaining permission where appropriate.
- Supply alcohol, tobacco, vaping products or illegal substances to students under the legal age.
- Use threatening, intimidating or humiliating behaviour.
- Exchange inappropriate gifts or money.
- Communicate with students through personal social media accounts.
- Share photographs or personal information about students online without appropriate consent.
- Arrange private meetings outside agreed Hostlink UK activities without prior authorisation.

Professional boundaries protect both students and adults and help maintain a safe environment.

---

15. Online Safety

Hostlink UK recognises that children may be exposed to risks online, including grooming, cyberbullying, exploitation and inappropriate content.

Homestay hosts should:

- Encourage safe and responsible internet use.
- Be alert to signs that a student may be experiencing online abuse.
- Report concerns about online grooming, exploitation or harmful online contact.
- Respect students' privacy while acting appropriately if safeguarding concerns arise.

Communication between Hostlink UK staff and students should take place only through approved methods where possible.

Students should never be pressured to share passwords, personal information or social media accounts.

---

16. Prevent Duty and Radicalisation

Hostlink UK is committed to supporting the UK Government's Prevent strategy by helping to safeguard young people from radicalisation and extremist influences.

Radicalisation is the process through which a person comes to support extremist ideologies that may lead to harmful or illegal behaviour.

Possible indicators may include:

- sudden changes in behaviour;
- expressing extremist views;
- isolation from friends or family;
- accessing extremist material online;
- attempts by others to influence or recruit the young person.

Concerns should always be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead, who will determine whether referral to the appropriate authorities is necessary.

17. Types of Abuse

Abuse may occur within the family, community, educational setting, online or elsewhere. It can be perpetrated by adults or by other children.

The four main categories of abuse are:

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse involves deliberately causing physical harm to a child, including hitting, shaking, burning, poisoning or other acts resulting in injury.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse involves persistent emotional ill-treatment which may damage a child's emotional development. Examples include humiliation, intimidation, threats, bullying or rejection.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or encouraging a child to participate in sexual activities, whether or not the child understands what is happening. It includes both contact and non-contact abuse, including online exploitation.

Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical or emotional needs, including food, clothing, shelter, supervision, medical care or emotional support.

Hostlink UK also recognises additional safeguarding risks including:

- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
- Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)
- County Lines activity
- Grooming
- Domestic abuse
- Honour-based abuse
- Forced marriage
- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
- Modern slavery and trafficking
- Peer-on-peer abuse
- Bullying and cyberbullying
- Online exploitation
- Radicalisation and extremism

---

18. Recognising Possible Signs of Abuse

Abuse is not always easy to identify. Indicators may include:

Physical Indicators

- unexplained injuries;
- repeated injuries;
- poor hygiene;
- inappropriate clothing;
- untreated medical conditions.

Behavioural Indicators

- sudden changes in behaviour;
- withdrawal;
- aggression;
- anxiety;
- excessive fear;
- depression;
- self-harming behaviour;
- eating disorders;
- persistent homesickness;
- reluctance to return home;
- inappropriate sexualised behaviour;
- changes in friendship groups.

A single indicator may not confirm abuse, but repeated concerns should always be reported.

---

19. Responding to a Disclosure

If a child tells you they are being harmed, abused or feel unsafe:

- Stay calm.
- Listen carefully without interrupting.
- Allow the child to speak freely.
- Take what they say seriously.
- Reassure them that they have done the right thing by telling someone.
- Never promise to keep the information secret.
- Explain that you must share the information with people who can help keep them safe.
- Ask only open questions where clarification is necessary.
- Do not investigate or attempt to interview the child.
- Record the child's own words as accurately as possible.
- Report the concern immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

It is not the responsibility of hosts or staff to determine whether abuse has occurred. Their responsibility is to recognise concerns, respond appropriately and report them promptly.

---

20. Reporting Safeguarding Concerns

Any safeguarding concern, no matter how small it may appear, should be reported immediately.

Concerns may arise through:

- a disclosure by a student;

- observations of injuries;
- changes in behaviour;
- concerns raised by another student;
- concerns raised by parents or schools;
- concerns regarding another adult.

Where there is immediate danger, emergency services should be contacted by calling **999** before informing the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead will determine whether referral is required to:

- Children's Social Care;
- the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), where allegations involve an adult working with children;
- the Police;
- partner schools;
- parents or legal guardians, where appropriate.

Accurate written records must be completed as soon as possible after the concern is identified.

---

21. Allegations Against Staff or Homestay Hosts

Hostlink UK takes all allegations seriously.

Where an allegation is made against a member of staff, volunteer or homestay host:

- the safety of the child will be the immediate priority;
- the Designated Safeguarding Lead will be informed immediately;
- advice will be sought from the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) where appropriate;
- the individual may be suspended from hosting or duties while investigations take place;
- records will be maintained confidentially throughout the process.

No member of staff or host should attempt to investigate allegations themselves.

---

22. Missing Student Procedure

If a student fails to return home at the agreed time:

1. Attempt to contact the student by telephone.
2. Contact the school or group leader if appropriate.
3. Inform Hostlink UK's emergency contact immediately.
4. Continue reasonable attempts to establish the student's whereabouts.
5. If there are concerns for the student's immediate safety, contact the Police by calling **999**.

All actions taken should be recorded.

Where a student repeatedly breaches curfew or goes missing, Hostlink UK will review the placement and consider additional safeguarding measures.

---

23. Low-Level Concerns

Hostlink UK encourages staff and hosts to report concerns about behaviour that may not amount to abuse but could indicate poor professional boundaries.

Examples include:

- inappropriate jokes;
- favouritism;
- unnecessary private messaging;
- excessive personal contact;
- behaviour that makes a child uncomfortable.

Recording and addressing low-level concerns helps maintain a strong safeguarding culture and may prevent more serious issues from developing.

---

24. Whistleblowing

Hostlink UK encourages staff, volunteers and homestay hosts to raise concerns about unsafe practice or inappropriate behaviour by colleagues without fear of retaliation.

Any person who believes safeguarding procedures are not being followed should report their concerns to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or a Director.

Concerns raised in good faith will be treated seriously, confidentially and investigated appropriately.

25. Care of Students Under 18

Hostlink UK is committed to providing a safe, caring and supportive environment for all students under the age of 18.

All students will receive information, appropriate to their age and level of understanding, about:

- who they can speak to if they feel worried or unsafe;
- how to contact Hostlink UK outside normal office hours;
- school welfare contacts;
- emergency procedures;
- expectations regarding behaviour and curfews.

Students should always feel able to report concerns without fear of being ignored or treated unfairly.

Hostlink UK will work closely with schools, parents, guardians and partner organisations to promote the welfare of every child.

---

26. Supervision and Curfews

Homestay hosts are responsible for ensuring students receive an appropriate level of supervision according to their age, maturity and programme requirements.

The following principles apply unless alternative arrangements have been agreed in writing by the student's parent, guardian or school:

- A responsible adult approved by Hostlink UK must be present overnight.
- Students under 16 should normally not be left alone overnight.
- Students under 16 should not share accommodation with students aged 18 or over unless specifically authorised by the student's parent or guardian and agreed by Hostlink UK.
- Students under 16 should normally return to their accommodation no later than **8.00 pm**, unless participating in an organised school activity.
- Students aged 16–17 should normally return by **10.00 pm Sunday to Thursday** and **11.00 pm on Fridays and Saturdays**, unless different arrangements have been agreed.
- Homestay hosts should know the student's expected whereabouts outside organised activities.
- Any unexplained absence should be dealt with in accordance with the Missing Student Procedure.

Where requested by a partner school, hosts may accompany younger students to school on their first day or assist with agreed transport arrangements.

---

27. Visitors to the Homestay

Homestay hosts remain responsible for safeguarding students while they are in the home.

Hosts should ensure:

- visitors behave appropriately;
- students are not left alone with adults unknown to Hostlink UK;
- overnight visitors do not compromise student safety;
- students know who is staying in the property where appropriate;
- any long-term changes to household members are reported immediately to Hostlink UK.

Any adult who becomes a permanent resident of the household must be declared before further under-18 placements are accepted and may be required to undergo suitability checks.

---

28. Transport

Where homestay hosts transport students, they should ensure that:

- vehicles are roadworthy and appropriately insured;
- drivers hold a valid driving licence;
- all passengers wear seat belts;
- journeys are undertaken safely and responsibly;
- schools and Hostlink UK are informed of any significant delays or emergencies.

Hosts should avoid situations where they are regularly transporting individual students unnecessarily without Hostlink UK's knowledge.

---

29. Health, Medication and Mental Wellbeing

Hostlink UK recognises the importance of supporting both the physical and emotional wellbeing of students.

Homestay hosts should:

- be aware of any medical information provided before arrival;
- understand any allergies or dietary requirements;
- know how to access emergency medical assistance;
- contact emergency services immediately where urgent medical treatment is required;
- inform Hostlink UK as soon as reasonably possible following any medical emergency.

Hosts are not expected to administer medication unless specifically agreed beforehand.

Where students are responsible for managing their own medication, hosts should provide appropriate support while respecting the student's independence.

Staff and hosts should also remain alert to concerns relating to:

- anxiety;
- depression;
- loneliness;
- homesickness;
- self-harming behaviour;
- eating disorders;
- emotional distress.

Any concerns regarding a student's mental wellbeing should be reported to Hostlink UK promptly so that appropriate support can be arranged.

---

30. Private Fostering

Under UK law, a private fostering arrangement occurs where a child under the age of 16 (or under 18 if disabled) lives with someone who is not a close relative for **28 days or more**.

Where applicable:

- Hostlink UK will notify the relevant Local Authority Children's Services of any private fostering arrangement.
- Local Authority Children's Services may undertake an assessment of the placement and visit both the homestay and the child.
- Hostlink UK will cooperate fully with Local Authority requirements.

As a general policy, Hostlink UK does not normally provide homestay accommodation for students under the age of 16 for more than **27 consecutive nights**, unless appropriate private fostering arrangements have been agreed.

---

31. Complaints

Students, parents, schools, homestay hosts and staff have the right to raise concerns regarding safeguarding, welfare or accommodation.

Complaints may be made to:

- the Designated Safeguarding Lead;
- the Accommodation Officer;
- a Director of Hostlink UK;
- the student's school or group leader.

Complaints involving the safety or welfare of a child will always be treated as safeguarding concerns and investigated without delay.

Where appropriate, external agencies may also be informed.

---

32. Confidentiality and Information Sharing

Hostlink UK recognises the importance of confidentiality while understanding that safeguarding concerns cannot always remain confidential.

Information will be shared only with those who need to know in order to safeguard the child or comply with legal obligations.

Staff and hosts must never promise absolute confidentiality to a child making a disclosure.

Safeguarding information will be processed in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

---

33. Record Keeping

Accurate record keeping is an essential part of safeguarding.

All safeguarding records should include:

- date and time;
- names of those involved;
- factual observations;
- the child's own words where possible;
- actions taken;
- who the concern was reported to;
- the name and signature of the person making the record.

Safeguarding records will be stored securely and separately from general accommodation records.

Access will be restricted to authorised personnel only.

Records will be retained in accordance with legal and safeguarding requirements.

---

34. Health Protection and Infectious Diseases

Hostlink UK expects staff, students and homestay hosts to comply with current UK public health guidance relating to infectious diseases.

Hosts should:

- maintain good hygiene standards;
- report significant illness affecting the household where it may impact student welfare;
- follow advice provided by health authorities where appropriate.

Students requiring medical treatment should receive appropriate support in accessing healthcare services.

---

35. Monitoring and Policy Review

Hostlink UK will review this policy annually, or sooner where:

- safeguarding legislation changes;
- government guidance is updated;
- significant safeguarding incidents occur;
- organisational changes require policy revision.

The effectiveness of this policy will be monitored through:

- homestay inspections;
- safeguarding training;
- student feedback;
- school feedback;
- complaints monitoring;
- safeguarding records and incident reviews.

Effective Date: Sep 2026
Review Date: Sep 2027

36. Emergency Contacts

In the event of an emergency involving a student:

Emergency Services: 999

NHS (non-emergency): 111

Hostlink UK Emergency Contact:

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Designated Safeguarding Lead:

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (if applicable):

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Appendix A – Safeguarding Reporting Process

If you have a safeguarding concern:

1. Recognise the concern.
2. Listen calmly and reassure the child.
3. Do not promise confidentiality.
4. Record exactly what was said using the child's own words where possible.
5. Report immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.
6. If a child is at immediate risk of harm, contact the Police (999) before informing the Designated Safeguarding Lead.
7. Maintain confidentiality and complete all required records.

Never investigate concerns yourself or attempt to interview the child beyond establishing the basic facts necessary to make a referral.

Appendix B – Safeguarding Concern Record

Date: **Time:** **Student Name:**

Date of Birth (if known): **Person Reporting Concern:**

Nature of Concern:

Exact words used by the child (where applicable):

Action Taken:

Reported To:

Date and Time Reported:

Signature: