



Whistleblowing Policy

June 2024

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something wrong within an organisation. However, they may decide not to express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the organisation, or they may fear harassment or victimisation.

This policy aims to encourage people to feel confident in raising concerns, knowing that they will be protected from reprisal or victimisation for whistleblowing. It also aims to provide avenues for concerns to be raised in confidence (and if necessary, anonymously) and outline how feedback will be provided on any action taken.

A concern can relate to any unethical or unprofessional conduct relating to Autism Arena, including malpractice and abuse. This not only covers acts that have actually occurred but also those that may potentially occur. Examples of malpractice in this context may include concerns about possible fraud and corruption, financial irregularities, dangerous procedures risking health and safety to the public as well as to other employees, abuse or bullying of service users, evasion of statutory responsibilities, environmental issues, etc.

A concern may be about something that:

- is unlawful, or
- is against Autism Arena's policies, or
- falls below established standards or practice, or
- amounts to improper conduct.

The overriding concern should be that it would be in the public interest for the malpractice to be corrected and, if appropriate, sanctions applied.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 provides statutory protection to employees making disclosures and protects them from negative treatment or unfair dismissal. Autism Arena extends the principles of that Act into this policy to give employees, volunteers and service users the same route to raise concerns. Irregularities fall within the following categories, of which the majority are criminal offences:

- Fraud (Fraud Act 2006)
- Theft (Theft Act 1968)
- Handling Stolen Goods (Theft Act 1968)
- False Accounting (Theft Act 1968)
- Money Laundering (Offences - Regulation 45 Money Laundering Regulations 2007)
- Benefit Related Fraud

POLICY STATEMENT

Autism Arena is committed to the highest possible standards of openness and accountability and expects that Directors, employees and volunteers at all levels will protect Autism Arena and its resources and lead by example, ensuring high standards of personal conduct and adherence to policies and procedures.

In line with this commitment, we encourage employees, volunteers and service users with any concerns about any aspect of Autism Arena's work to come forward and voice those concerns. It is recognised that certain cases may have to proceed on a confidential basis.

Autism Arena will not tolerate any occurrence of irregularities and operates a 'zero tolerance' approach to known instances and attempts. Autism Arena will take all appropriate measures to protect its service users, volunteers and employees, and to reduce the risk of an irregularity occurring from either internal or external sources.

SAFEGUARDS

Harassment or Victimisation

Autism Arena recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make, not least because of the fear of reprisal from those responsible for the alleged malpractice. Autism Arena will not tolerate harassment or victimisation and will take action to protect you when you raise a concern.

Anonymous Allegations and Confidentiality

This policy encourages you to put your name to your allegation. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less capable of being investigated effectively, but they will be considered by Autism Arena.

The factors to be taken into account in determining whether to proceed with an anonymous allegation would include:

- The seriousness of the issues raised.
- The credibility of the concern.
- The likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

It must be appreciated that the investigation process may reveal the source of the information and a statement by you may be required as part of the evidence.

Untrue Allegations

When making an allegation you must have reasonable belief that your concerns are true, though you do not need any evidence to prove they are correct. You must be able to show that you believed that disclosing your concern was in the public interest and that it was a reasonable view to hold in the circumstances at the time. Note that it is not your responsibility to investigate the matter; that is Autism Arena's responsibility.

If you do make an allegation that you believe is in the public interest, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you. If, however, you make malicious or vexatious allegations, legal or disciplinary action may be taken against you.

HOW TO RAISE A CONCERN

This will depend on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is thought to be involved in the malpractice. All concerns should be raised within the Chief Executive

Officer. However, if there is an immediate risk call 999 for emergency services or 101 for local police.

Concerns are better raised in writing. You are invited to set out the background and history of the concern, giving names, dates and places where possible, and the reason why you are particularly concerned about the situation. Although you are not expected to prove the truth of an allegation, you will need to demonstrate that there are sufficient grounds for your concern. Under no circumstances should you investigate a concern yourself as this may risk prejudicing any investigation, which could include a criminal investigation if it is warranted.

HOW AUTISM ARENA WILL RESPOND

The action taken by Autism Arena will depend on the nature of the concern. The matter raised may be investigated internally, referred to the Police or form the subject of an independent inquiry. In order to protect individuals and Autism Arena, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take.

Where contact details have been provided within ten working days of a concern being received, Autism Arena will write to you acknowledging that the concern has been received, indicating how it proposes to deal with the matter and giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response.

Autism Arena accepts that you need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, you will receive information about the outcomes of any investigations.

The Chief Executive Director has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy.

CONTACT DETAILS

Chief Executive Director: Gillian Rogers

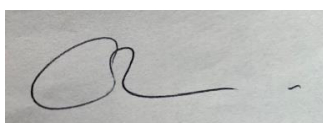
Email: gillian@autismarena.org.uk

This policy came into effect on 1st June 2024.

We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice annually.

This policy was last reviewed on:(date)

Signed:



Date: 01/06/24