THE HAVEN

Operated by the Autistic Girls Network charity — 1196655 (England and Wales), SC054837 (Scotland)

Drugs and Alcohol Policy

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The Haven is committed to safeguarding learners from the risks associated with drugs, alcohol, and substance misuse. While The Haven operates primarily online, we recognise that learners may face pressures, exposure, or exploitation linked to drugs and alcohol both in their home environments and in digital spaces. This policy sets out The Haven's preventative education, response protocols, and partnership working with families, local authorities, and external agencies.

1. Scope

- Applies to all The Haven staff, learners, parents/carers, contractors, and volunteers.
- Covers online lessons, asynchronous submissions, and all learner communications within The Haven platforms.
- Recognises that substance misuse concerns may arise in disclosures, digital language use, or observed changes in learner wellbeing or engagement.

2. Statutory Guidance and Legal Framework

This policy has due regard to:

- **Keeping Children Safe in Education (2026)**.
- **Misuse of Drugs Act 1971**.
- **Children Act 1989 and 2004**.

- **Education Act 2002 (s.175)** — duty to safeguard and promote welfare.
- **Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026**.
- **LA Safeguarding and Substance Misuse protocols**.

3. Preventative Education

- Drugs and alcohol awareness is embedded into The Haven's **PSHE/RSE curriculum**, tailored for neurodivergent learners and delivered in trauma-informed, age-appropriate ways.
- Learners are taught:
  - Risks of drugs, alcohol, and vaping.
  - Recognising exploitation, including **county lines** and online recruitment.
  - How to seek safe help.
- Staff use resources such as the **Children's Society Slang Dictionary** to stay alert to coded language and trends.

4. Identification and Concerns

Staff may identify concerns through:

- **Disclosures** in chat, voice, or written submissions.
- **Changes in attendance or engagement** (e.g. sudden withdrawal, erratic behaviour online).
- **Use of slang or coded language** linked to drugs.
- **Physical or wellbeing indicators** shared via camera (where applicable) or reported by parents/carers.

All concerns must be reported immediately to the **DSL**, recorded, and reviewed within safeguarding protocols.

4.1. Responding When a Learner Discloses Substance Use or Risk of Exploitation

If a learner discloses that they are **actively using substances**, are **in possession**, or are **being pressured, exploited or coerced** into substance use, staff must:

- **Stay calm, listen, and avoid shock or judgment.
  > ** The immediate aim is to keep the learner safe and supported, not to investigate.
- **Do not ask leading questions** such as "Who gave it to you?" or "How often?" — instead, use open, neutral prompts such as:
  - "Can you tell me a bit more about what's been happening?"
  - "Thank you for telling me — we'll make sure you get the right support."
- **Reassure** the learner that they have done the right thing in telling an adult, and explain you **cannot promise secrecy**.
- **Record and report immediately**:
  - Complete an **Incident/Safeguarding Concern Form** straight away.
  - **Contact the DSL or Deputy DSL** without delay (same day).
  - Note the learner's exact words, time, date, and who was present.

- **DSL Action:
  > **
    - Assess level of risk (e.g. exploitation, trafficking, county lines, self-harm).
    - Make referrals to external agencies (see below).
    - If criminal exploitation is suspected, the DSL must follow *Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)* guidance and liaise with police and social care.

4.2. Awareness and Online Safety in Practice

The Haven integrates **substance misuse education** into digital safety and wellbeing learning:

- **Curriculum Integration:
  > **RSHE and Wellbeing sessions explore the risks of online drug promotion, social media challenges, and substance-related grooming.
- **Digital Literacy:
  > **Learners are taught to question online content, recognise manipulation, and identify unsafe communities or “plug” accounts.
- **Tutor Vigilance:
  > **Staff are trained to notice signs of online intoxication, risk-taking behaviour, or references to drug culture in chat.
- **Safe Conversations:
  > **Tutors model open, stigma-free dialogue and know how to escalate emerging concerns via the DSL.

Every online space used by The Haven is moderated in line with the **Online Safety and Behaviour Policies** to prevent exposure to harmful or illegal content.

4.3. Referrals to External Agencies and Ongoing Support

When the DSL identifies a need for external support, The Haven may refer or signpost to:

- **Young People’s Substance Misuse Services** (e.g. local *CGL*, *We Are With You*, or *Change Grow Live*)
- **Early Help or Family Support Teams
  > **
- **CAMHS or Youth Counselling
  > **
- **Police / Exploitation or County Lines Units** (where criminal activity or coercion is suspected)
- **Specialist Charities** such as *The Mix*, *Addaction*, *Frank*, or *Kooth* for online wellbeing support

Post-incident support includes:

- A **restorative reflection meeting** with the learner and DSL to co-design a support plan.
- Regular **check-ins** by a named staff member.
- Coordination with the learner’s **parent/carer, social worker, or commissioner**.
- Curriculum re-entry or phased attendance planning where emotional safety is impacted.

No learner will be excluded solely on the basis of a disclosure of substance use. The Haven prioritises support, safety, and re-engagement.

4.4. Staff Conduct: Drugs and Alcohol

All staff, contractors, and volunteers must present fit for work and free from the influence of drugs or alcohol.

- It is **strictly prohibited** to consume or be under the influence of alcohol, illegal substances, or misused prescription medication while carrying out work duties, including during online sessions.
- Any staff member taking prescribed medication that may impair their ability to teach safely must **inform their line manager confidentially**.
- Concerns about a colleague's fitness to work should be raised in line with the **Whistleblowing Policy v10.26** or **Low-Level Concerns Procedure**.
- If a staff member is found to be working under the influence, this will be managed through The Haven's **Staff Conduct and Disciplinary Framework**, and safeguarding will take precedence.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

- **DSL**: Responsible for assessing drug/alcohol-related concerns, liaising with Children's Services, and ensuring referrals to substance misuse services if required.
- **Staff**: Maintain vigilance, record disclosures factually, avoid judgmental language, and report concerns.
- **Parents/Carers**: Encouraged to share concerns about substance use at home and work with Haven and external services.
- **Governors**: Provide oversight and ensure proportional, safeguarding-led response.

6. Response Protocols

- The Haven does **not apply punitive sanctions** for disclosures of drug/alcohol use; responses are safeguarding-first.
- If a learner discloses active use or risk of exploitation:
    - DSL assesses immediate risk.
    - Referral made to LA Safeguarding Hub or Early Help services as appropriate.
    - Where criminal exploitation is suspected (e.g. county lines), referral to police/LA under statutory duty.
- Parents/carers are informed unless doing so places the learner at greater risk.

7. Online Safety and Substance Misuse

- The Haven recognises that learners may encounter drugs/alcohol via **online sales, social media platforms, or encrypted messaging apps**.
- Online safety education includes awareness of:
    - Risks of buying substances online.
    - Digital recruitment into exploitation networks.
    - Privacy and reporting mechanisms.

8. Monitoring and Review

- Termly DSL review of all drug/alcohol-related safeguarding cases.
- Annual policy review by DSL and governors, with input from relevant LA substance misuse services.
- Immediate review if new statutory guidance or local protocols are introduced.

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