

Cadets and Pregnancy

If a member or volunteer in your unit gets pregnant, has a child or starts the adoption process, we want to make sure they get the support they need in VPC.

And we need to ensure that their rights are respected throughout.

The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to treat someone unfavourably because they are pregnant, breastfeeding or have recently given birth. For example, it would likely be unlawful to not allow a pregnant woman to take on a role just because of the pregnancy.

Sometimes, people might have good intentions and think they are being helpful by not offering an opportunity to a pregnant volunteer or to a new parent. But you shouldn't make assumptions. Less favourable treatment is still unlawful, even if it was well intentioned. Always give the member or volunteer information to help them make an informed choice about what they would like to do and be guided by them in what needs to happen next.

If a member tells you they are pregnant

Young members

The Volunteer Police Cadets provides a safe space where we support leaders to discuss healthy relationships in their own units. So sometimes a cadet might disclose to their leader or other unit volunteers if they are pregnant or think they might be. In this case the young person might be very worried. They may not be sure that they want to be pregnant and could ask if they should continue with the pregnancy, to seek an adoption or to seek a termination. You should:

- Reassure them that a mix of emotions is a normal response to the news.
- Stay calm and non-judgemental. Your role is support them to make the right choices for them.
- Help them consider what support they may be able to get from their parents or other trusted adults in their lives.
- Suggest they consider carefully who they share this news with. Remind them that this is personal information, and they have a right to confidentiality.
- Advise them to see their GP or a sexual health service to discuss their options. For links to their local service, you can visit the [Brook website](#).

Information about a young member of any age should be kept confidential unless you have reason to believe they or another person is at risk of harm. In these cases, the information must be passed on for their own safety and in line with the National Minimum standard Safeguarding Policy.

Sometimes a pregnancy can bring to light concerns about a young member or volunteer. Remember that, legally, individuals under 16 can't consent to sexual activity.

If you have concerns about a member, the nature of their pregnancy or are worried that their behaviour is a risk to their unborn child, you can contact your cadet coordinator, your Force Public Protection Unit (or equivalent) and email the National Safeguarding Manager vpc.safeguarding@vpc.police.uk

Young Mothers

The term 'young mother' is typically used to describe a young mum under the age of 19.

Young mothers may feel isolated from their peer group and community due to the unique pressures they face. They also may be under financial pressure and unable to make regular commitments to meetings.

How can being a Cadet help?

The VPC offers young mothers the opportunity to develop skills and gain qualifications outside of a formal educational environment. More importantly it is a great way for them to maintain friendships with members of their peer group, and build a support network in their local community.

Including young mothers

Plan ahead

Plan your programme ahead of time and share it with the young mother as early as possible. If childcare is limited, this will help them to plan their time and prioritise which meetings to attend.

Inclusion at residentials

Residential opportunities may not be possible due to cost and time commitment. Try to organise events that can be accessed easily on the same day by public transport, so that young parents can balance attending the event with childcare commitments.

Encourage them to stay involved

If a young member is unable to make a weekly commitment to VPC, consider other ways for them to get involved. Make sure they receive regular updates on meetings and events. Even if they decide to leave, they may still want to stay in contact and access the support that VPC can offer. Regular contact will also make re-joining a unit easier.

Be understanding about childcare

Although it's not recommended that young mothers bring their children to meetings, there may be times when childcare is not available. Children attending with young mothers should follow the adult to child ratios for children of volunteers.

Your role as a trusted adult

A young mother may wish to talk to you as an adult that they trust and have regular contact with. They may also choose to speak with any young leaders in your unit, so make sure that you are available to support young leaders too.

This is an important responsibility, so if a cadet turns to you for advice or support, make time to listen. If you are in the middle of a group activity, tell them that you will carry on your conversation after the activity has ended. Make sure that you follow through with this and are consistent. Be honest and do your best to answer any questions they might have - as long as it's appropriate for you to do so.

Adult volunteers

With adult volunteers, talk about whether they would like others in VPC to know about their pregnancy and how they would like to share the news. No one should feel they have to answer questions about their pregnancy, so make sure you and everyone in the unit respect the boundaries of what they share.

If young members are told, they are likely to have lots of questions and it could be a great discussion for a unit meeting. Some young people might not have had a chance to talk about pregnancy before or ask questions. So, the volunteer should think about how they want to respond to this curiosity before sharing the news.

Managing the Risks

If there is a pregnancy in your unit, you should work with the young member and their family or volunteer to revisit risk assessments. You now need to consider risks to the pregnant person and their unborn child, and make any adjustments needed to reduce the risks. The key is to work in partnership and not make assumptions about what they can or can't do. The risk assessment may need revisiting at various stages of their pregnancy and once they return.

Breastfeeding and Expressing

If a new parent is breastfeeding or needs to express milk, we should be welcoming of this in all VPC spaces.

Some parents may prefer a quiet space where they can sit down to breastfeed. If they're expressing milk, they'll need a clean space to prepare pumps or bottles and the ability to store milk in the fridge. Talk to them about what you can do to help make this easy for them. Don't insist they use a bathroom or toilet.

The Equality Act 2010 says that it is unlawful discrimination to treat someone unfavourably because they are breastfeeding. In Scotland, it is an offence to stop someone in a public place from feeding their child, if under two, with milk. You can be fined for preventing breastfeeding in public places. Be mindful of this in the unit meeting place and on residential and trips.

Offering support following a still birth or death in pregnancy

The death of a baby at any stage is usually unexpected and can be devastating for the parents and their family. It's important to acknowledge grief, loss and bereavement, and offer support when it's appropriate.

It's natural to worry about saying the wrong thing to a bereaved parent. However, it can be comforting for them to know they are not alone at such a difficult time. You could send a short note simply saying how sorry you are.

If it's appropriate, you can discuss if they would like the news shared and then talk about how they might like to return to guiding when they are ready. Always listen to and take the lead from the bereaved parent. Be flexible and sympathetic and remember that guiding may be a support network for them.

Support organisations

[Equality and Human Rights Commission](#) - Information about the Equality Act 2010

[Birthrights](#) - Charity improving women's experience of pregnancy and childbirth by promoting respect for human rights.

[Maternity Action](#) - Provides information on rights, health and well-being of pregnant women and their partners from conception through to the child's early years.

[Home-Start](#) - Home-Start is a family support charity which has volunteers supporting parents as they learn to cope, improve their confidence and build better lives for their children.

[Breastfeeding Network](#) - The independent source of support and information for breastfeeding women and others.

[Adoption UK](#) - Leading UK charity with information on the adoption process and support available.

[Sands](#) - UK charity to support anyone affected by the death of a baby.

[Child Bereavement UK](#) - Supporting families when a baby or child of any age dies or is dying, or when a child is facing bereavement.