

Approval Date

August 2026

Review Date

May 2027

Mobile Phone and Personal Device Policy – Children and Young People

1. Purpose of this policy

Stable Lives recognises that mobile phones are an important part of modern life. They allow young people to communicate with family and friends, access information and feel connected and safe.

However, we also recognise that excessive or inappropriate mobile phone use can affect young people's mental health, concentration, relationships, confidence and ability to engage with the people and activities around them.

Stable Lives exists to provide children and young people with a safe, calm and supportive environment where they can build confidence, develop relationships, learn new skills and experience life beyond the pressures they may face at home, school or online.

Our aim is therefore not to prohibit mobile phones unnecessarily, but to help young people develop a healthier relationship with them.

We want young people to experience the benefits of being present, participating, talking, moving, learning, being outdoors and building real-world relationships.

2. Our approach

Stable Lives will operate on the principle that:

When you are at Stable Lives, we want you to be present in Stable Lives.

To support this, Stable Lives operates a phone-free environment for children and young people during their sessions.

On arrival at Stable Lives, all mobile phones must be handed to a Team Leader or placed in the designated secure yard safe.

Phones will remain safely stored for the duration of the young person's session and will be returned to the young person when they have finished their session and are leaving Stable Lives.

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This approach is intended to:

- reduce distractions;
- encourage young people to engage with staff and peers;
- support face-to-face communication and friendships;
- encourage participation in activities;
- create a genuine break from social media and online pressures;
- improve concentration and learning;
- provide young people with an opportunity to experience life without their phone;
- support positive mental health and wellbeing.

The policy is not intended as a punishment or to remove young people's independence. It is part of creating the safe and supportive environment that Stable Lives provides.

3. Arrival and storage of mobile phones

3.1 On arrival

When a young person arrives at Stable Lives, they will be asked to hand their mobile phone to a Team Leader or place it in the designated yard safe.

The phone must be stored before the young person begins their session.

Young people should not keep their mobile phone in their pocket, bag or personal belongings during a Stable Lives session.

3.2 Team Leader storage

Where a phone is handed directly to a Team Leader:

- the Team Leader will ensure it is kept safely and securely;
- the phone will remain stored until the end of the young person's session;
- the phone will be returned to the young person when their session has finished.

3.3 Yard safe

Where a young person places their phone in the designated yard safe:

- the phone must be placed securely inside the safe;
- the safe must remain secured during sessions;
- access to the safe will be restricted to authorised Stable Lives staff;
- young people must not access the safe during their session unless authorised by a Team Leader.

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3.4 Returning phones

At the end of the young person's session, their phone will be returned to them.

Where a young person is being collected by a parent/carer, the phone will normally be returned before they leave Stable Lives.

Young people are responsible for checking that they have their phone before leaving.

Stable Lives will take reasonable steps to keep phones secure but cannot accept responsibility for loss or damage to personal devices.

4. Contact with parents and carers

Parents and carers should normally contact Stable Lives staff rather than contacting young people directly during a session where an urgent message is required.

Stable Lives will ensure that parents/carers have an appropriate contact route for emergencies.

If a young person needs to contact their parent or carer during a session, they should speak to a member of staff.

A Team Leader may authorise a young person to use their phone where there is a genuine need.

5. Phones and safeguarding

Mobile phones can be associated with safeguarding risks including:

- cyberbullying;
- harmful or inappropriate content;
- unwanted contact;
- online grooming;
- exploitation;
- sharing of images;
- image-based abuse;
- self-harm or suicide-related content;
- threats or intimidation;
- online challenges.

If a member of staff becomes concerned about something relating to a young person's phone use, they must follow the Stable Lives Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

Where there is a safeguarding concern, the matter must be referred to the Designated Safeguarding Lead and managed in accordance with Stable Lives' safeguarding procedures.

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7. Photography, filming and recording

Young people must not use personal phones or other personal devices to photograph, film or record:

- other young people;
- staff;
- volunteers;
- visitors;
- activities;
- private conversations.

Stable Lives staff will follow the charity's separate Photography, Filming and Social Media procedures when taking photographs or videos for legitimate charity purposes.

Young people must never secretly record another person.

8. Social media

Young people must not use Stable Lives sessions to:

- livestream activities;
- post photographs or videos of other young people;
- create social media content involving another young person without consent;
- identify vulnerable young people online;
- bully, threaten or harass another person;
- post abusive or discriminatory material about participants, staff or volunteers.

Any concerns about online bullying, threats or harmful content will be dealt with under the relevant safeguarding and behaviour procedures.

9. Residentials and trips

Mobile phone arrangements for residentials and trips will be explained to young people and parents/carers in advance.

Depending on the activity, Stable Lives may:

- collect phones on arrival;
- store phones during activities;
- allow access at agreed times;
- allow supervised contact with parents/carers;
- return phones at agreed times;

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- make individual arrangements where safeguarding, medical or wellbeing needs require this.
- Young people will always have an appropriate way of contacting a member of staff in an emergency.

10. Staff and volunteers

Staff and volunteers are expected to model the behaviour we ask of young people.

Personal mobile phones should not be used unnecessarily in front of young people.

Staff may use a mobile phone where there is a legitimate work-related reason, including safeguarding, emergency communication, contacting parents/carers or accessing authorised work systems.

Staff must never use a personal phone to communicate privately with a young person unless this has been specifically authorised under Stable Lives procedures.

11. What happens if a young person refuses to hand in their phone?

Stable Lives will respond calmly and proportionately.

Staff will remind the young person of the policy and explain that the phone-free arrangement applies to everyone attending Stable Lives.

The young person will be given an opportunity to hand their phone to a Team Leader or place it in the yard safe.

If a young person repeatedly refuses to follow the policy, the matter may be dealt with under the Stable Lives Behaviour Policy.

Staff should consider whether there is an underlying reason for the refusal, particularly where a young person is anxious or has additional needs.

The aim is always to maintain the relationship with the young person and avoid unnecessary confrontation.

12. Equality and individual circumstances

Stable Lives will consider reasonable adjustments where a young person's disability, medical condition, SEND or individual circumstances mean that the standard policy would place them at a disadvantage.

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Any adjustment should identify the specific circumstances in which phone access is required and should be agreed with the young person, parent/carer and relevant Stable Lives staff where appropriate.

Stable Lives does however have to provide safety and security to all who attend and if a young person feels that they can't attend their sessions and adhere to our mobile phone policy then it may be the case that a review of their support may take place.

13. Review and monitoring

The effectiveness of this policy will be reviewed through:

- feedback from young people;
- feedback from parents/carers;
- staff feedback;
- safeguarding incidents;
- behavioural incidents;
- observations of participation and engagement;
- individual support reviews.

The policy will be reviewed at least annually or sooner where legislation, safeguarding guidance or Stable Lives' activities change.