Ethics and Safeguarding

A brief guide to ethics and safeguarding when conducting social research

This guide is intended for use by teachers of both GCSE and GCE Health and Social Care. It is a reminder for both learners and teachers to ensure that they keep themselves and their participants safe during their research practice.

Ethics

The most common way of defining ethics is: *the norms for conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.*

Ethics is a huge topic area that covers a great many debates. Learners should be reminded that they need to keep themselves and their participants safe and promote other moral and social values such as:

- **Honesty**
  Strive for honesty in all situations. Honestly report data, results, methods and procedures, and publication status. Do not fabricate, falsify, or misrepresent data. Do not deceive.

- **Objectivity**
  Strive to avoid bias in all areas of research.

- **Integrity**
  Keep promises and agreements.

- **Respect for intellectual property**
  Do not use unpublished data, methods, or results without permission. Give proper acknowledgement or credit for all contributions to your research. Never plagiarise.

- **Confidentiality**
  Protect confidential information.

- **Non-discrimination**
  Avoid discrimination on the basis of age, sex, gender, disability, race, ethnicity and religion.

- **Legality**
  Know and obey relevant laws and legislation at all times.

- **Safety**
  Do not put yourself or your participants in any dangerous or unsafe situations. *THINK!* Is this something that I should be doing?

Failure to observe ethics in research can result in significant harm to the learner, participants and the public.
Safeguarding

The Care Quality Commission defines safeguarding in the following way: 'Protecting people’s health, wellbeing and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect'.

There are two ways that safeguarding needs to be considered in social research: safeguarding the participants and safeguarding the researcher or learner undertaking the task.

When undertaking their research, learners should provide an environment that promotes mutual respect – they should not endanger their participants in any way and should take extra precautions if working with vulnerable groups, such as children, to minimise avoidable risks.

Consent should be obtained from a parent or guardian of a child/children that are participants in any research practice. Learners have a responsibility to protect their participants from abuse and maltreatment to ensure prevention of harm to health or development.

Learners should also ensure that they do not put themselves in situations that are unsafe or inappropriate. This may include working with certain groups; for example, substance misusers/ex-offenders. As well as the physical environment in which the research takes place, learners must consider the context and content of their research – are the questions being asked appropriate for the target audience? What happens if there is a disclosure of personal information that may require action (for example, abuse)?

Teachers must be aware of their learners' intentions and should monitor their application of ethics and safeguarding in their research process. They should also provide a point of contact for learners to ensure that the methodologies and questions are appropriate – and be informed as to what to do if an issue or concern is raised.

References

www.niehs.nih.gov

www.cqc.org.uk

www.skillsforcare.org.uk

www.nspcc.org.uk