

Policy on working with children, teenagers and vulnerable adults

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance on our approach to working with children, teenagers and vulnerable adults.

The Microbiome Group recognises that children and some adults are particularly vulnerable because of their experiences, level of dependency, communication needs and health status. All children and vulnerable adults, regardless of age, disability, ethnicity, religion or belief, gender reassignment, sex, or sexual orientation have an equal right to high quality care and protection from all types of harm or abuse.

We are committed to ensuring that we provide a high standard of service and support to children and vulnerable people. We take responsibility for supporting their welfare and health, by creating a safe and protected space for them to receive treatment.

The Microbiome Group practitioners seek to maintain this safe space for children and vulnerable adults by valuing, listening to and respecting them. Practitioners follow our policies and procedures, and the code of ethics of their registering body.

Consent

Before treating children and teenagers under 18 years old, or vulnerable adults who are not able to independently give their consent, Microbiome Group practitioners must have written consent from their parent, carer, guardian or health & welfare attorney. Consent is the process of the parent, carer, guardian or attorney giving permission for a child or vulnerable adult to receive treatment.

Practitioners must ensure that the parent, carer, guardian or attorney has all the information they need to make a decision that they feel is right and address any questions they – or the

client – may have, during the first consultation, in order to support their decision-making. Practitioners must send the consent form to the parent, carer or attorney before the first consultation and receive the fully completed and signed form before supplying a treatment plan. Practitioners must ensure the consent forms have been correctly completed, and any existing medical conditions, accessibility needs or requirements are noted as part of the case history taking. These needs and requirements will be taken seriously and adjustments made wherever possible to allow the client to best engage with their treatment.

Some adult clients may need support from carers, members of their family or community, staff or healthcare practitioners, both during consultations and in between consultations, to follow treatment recommendations. This policy does not apply to these adults while they remain capable of consenting to treatment independently. However, we will seek written consent from them to collaborate with other healthcare practitioners or members of their support team if the client is not present to those conversations. Should an adult client become incapacitated during a treatment period and become unable to independently consent to treatment, written consent from their health and welfare attorney will be then be required.

Withdrawal of consent

Consent is an active, ongoing process, and the parent, carer, guardian or attorney has the right to change their mind about consent at any point after giving their initial consent. Upon reaching 18 years old, or upon gaining capacity for independence, a teenager or adult may also withdraw consent previously given on their behalf. In all cases, withdrawal of consent must be dated and confirmed in writing, ideally by email.

If treatment is resumed, with consent given once again at a later date, any previous withdrawal of consent will not impact the quality of subsequent treatment.

Accompanied children and adults

Once consent has been received, Microbiome Analysis consultations can often proceed without the child or vulnerable adult present. However, if a child, teen or vulnerable adult wishes to be present, their parent, carer or attorney must remain present and within view of the camera for the entirety of the first session.

For subsequent sessions, the parent, carer, guardian or attorney can leave the session if a teenage or vulnerable adult client clearly requests that they do so, and only if the practitioner agrees that it may be beneficial for the client. This agreement will be noted in the consultation notes. The parent, carer, guardian or attorney must remain nearby for the

duration of the consultation and return to the screen just before the consultation concludes, or sooner if requested by the client or practitioner.

Microbiome Group practitioners will never request a parent, carer, guardian or attorney leave the room.

Confidentiality

Practitioners undertake to maintain strict confidentiality with all their clients. The consent forms, and the information they record, will be held in accordance with our policies on data protection and UK GDPR.

In accordance with GDPR guidelines and Privacy Policy, the consent form and treatment file for a child or teenager will be kept securely until 7 years after their 18th birthday or 7 years after they conclude treatment if that is later. For a vulnerable adult, their consent form and treatment file will be kept securely for up to 7 years after they conclude treatment. After this time, all records will be safely destroyed.

Safeguarding

If, while working with a child, teen or vulnerable adult, the practitioner sees or hears signs that reasonably indicate that the client or another person has suffered, is suffering, or is likely to suffer actual harm or abuse, the practitioner will advise the relevant authorities, the client's doctor or their nominated emergency contact.

Any decision to break confidentiality will not be taken lightly. Practitioners will usually consult with the Microbiome Group Director to ensure that their response is proportional and due consideration has been given to the impact on all involved.

Clients have an ethical and legal right to know the importance of and see what is being said about them if they wish and the Microbiome Group will make every effort to include clients in this process, except in circumstances where it would harm them or others, such as child protection situations, mental incapacity or terrorism.