

# SAFE & SOUND

Providing you with news and updates around safeguarding,  
prevent and British Values

## Safeguarding Spotlight: AI Chatbots and Mental Health Support

At the beginning of September, the NHS issued an important warning urging young people not to use AI chatbots as a substitute for therapy. While these tools can feel accessible and non-judgemental, the NHS highlighted the risk of harmful or misleading advice when chatbots are used in place of qualified professionals.

This warning followed research showing more than 17 million TikTok posts about using ChatGPT as a therapy substitute, and a YouGov poll revealing that around a third of 18–24 year olds would feel comfortable discussing mental health issues with an AI chatbot instead of a real therapist. Even younger children are beginning to experiment with these tools, sometimes from Year 5 upwards.



### Balancing Positives and Risks

AI can be exciting and empowering. It can help with learning, creativity, and even provide a sense of companionship. But when it comes to safeguarding, we must balance these positives with the risks:

- Lack of professional oversight – Chatbots cannot replace trained therapists or safeguarding professionals.
- Risk of harmful advice – AI may give inaccurate or unsafe responses.
- Privacy concerns – Conversations with chatbots are not confidential in the same way as professional support.
- Dependency – Young people may rely on AI instead of reaching out to trusted adults.

### Why This Matters for Veterinary Nurse Students

As future professionals, veterinary nurse students often work closely with children, young people, and vulnerable adults in community and practice settings. Understanding the safeguarding implications of AI use is vital:

- You may encounter young people who confide in you about using chatbots for support.
- Recognising the risks allows you to guide them towards safe, professional help.
- Being informed helps you contribute to safeguarding discussions in practice and education.

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# Rethinking Masculinity and Mental Health

## Breaking the Taboo Around Male Emotion

As veterinary nurse students, you will encounter colleagues, clients, and peers from diverse backgrounds. Understanding how cultural expectations shape mental health is a vital part of safeguarding, not only for patients and clients, but also for ourselves and our profession.

Recent work by the Harmless Organisation highlights how traditional male culture often discourages emotional expression. Crying, showing sadness, or even speaking seriously about feelings can be seen as taboo. Instead, young men may be pressured to suppress emotions, with penalties for breaking these unwritten rules ranging from bullying to physical abuse.

### Why this matters for safeguarding:

- Restrictive environments: When emotions are suppressed, individuals may struggle to form healthy relationships or seek help when needed.
- Mental health impact: Suppression can lead to anxiety, depression, or harmful coping strategies.
- Professional awareness: As future veterinary nurses, recognising these dynamics helps us support colleagues and clients who may be silently struggling.



### Practical takeaways:

- Challenge stereotypes: Encourage open conversations about wellbeing among peers, regardless of gender.
- Spot the signs: Withdrawal, irritability, or reluctance to discuss feelings may signal someone is under pressure.
- Create safe spaces: In practice and study settings, model empathy and acceptance, showing that emotions are human, not a weakness.
- Know your resources: Safeguarding isn't just about protecting others; it's also about knowing where to turn if you or a colleague needs support.

This exploration reminds us that safeguarding is not only about physical safety, but also about emotional wellbeing. By rethinking masculinity and mental health, we can help dismantle harmful taboos and foster a culture of compassion in veterinary nursing.

Here are some key helplines:

- Vetlife Helpline – 0303 040 2551 (24/7, confidential support for vets, vet nurses, students, and anyone in the veterinary community)
- Samaritans – 116 123 (free, 24/7 listening service for anyone in distress or struggling to cope)
- Vet Support – [info@vetsupport.me](mailto:info@vetsupport.me) (confidential peer support and coaching for veterinary professionals in the UK and Ireland)
- Mind – 0300 123 3393 (mental health information and support across the UK)
- Student Minds / Nightline – peer-led support services for students, offering listening and wellbeing resources

# Abuse or Accident?



**Fluffy has been brought into practice, a 12-week-old kitten with a skull fracture. The owner has said that fluffy had an accident and fell off her kitty tower landing on her head. Sounds innocent enough, right? What if I told you that from the age of 6 to 7 weeks kittens have the ability to turn over mid-air to land on their feet. So, explanations of falls to explain severe head injuries, including skull fractures are highly unlikely to be accurate accounts of what actually happened. Do you still think Fluffy's injury is as innocent now?**

Every day we see pets coming into veterinary practice who have acquired injuries or have untreated illnesses, but do we ever sometimes have a feeling that these injuries are not accidental or should have come in for veterinary treatment sooner?

I'm sure we've all seen things which make us question but it is difficult to know what to do in these situations. Who do we talk to? What do we do about it?

The Links Group is an organisation whose aim is to achieve a world free from the abuse of people and animals. They raise awareness of the link between the abuse of people and animals through support, training and inter-agency working. It is likely that when animals are abused, people are at risk and vice versa.

The Links group has a lot of information to aid with recognising abuse and how to deal with these types of situations. If there is suspicion of animal abuse upon clinical examination (which could include neglect) the veterinary surgeon or veterinary nurse should attempt to discuss his/her concerns with the client if it is appropriate and they feel safe to do so.

In cases where this would not be appropriate or the clients' responses increase the level of concerns, then we should consider whether the level of neglect or abuse is sufficient enough to justify disclosing the client's information without consent. Client confidentiality and disclosure of this information is justified if animal welfare is compromised. The suspected abuse should be reported to the relevant authorities, for example: the RSPCA (Tel: 0300 1234 999 - 24-hour line) in England and Wales.

Your veterinary practice should have a protocol in place for situations of abuse or neglect so speaking to a senior member of staff for support and guidance would be a good first step. However, there are other organisations such as The Links Group or the RCVS that you can speak to for advice.

The most important thing you can do, is to take detailed notes of the consultation and any communication taken place with the owner, as this can all be used in evidence, if needed, at a later date. The more detailed the account of events, the better.

If you feel something doesn't quite add up like Fluffy's story, then just speak to someone and seek advice. I'm not saying to cross-examine every patient that comes in and interrogate clients, it's just all about looking at the bigger picture and trusting your instincts. Animals don't have a voice; we are their advocates and need to speak out to protect them and in the process of protecting them we may actually be helping and protecting a person from abuse too.

## Useful links:

Professional Conduct department of the RCVS (Telephone 020 7202 0789; email [profcon@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:profcon@rcvs.org.uk))

[www.thelinksgroup.org.uk](http://www.thelinksgroup.org.uk)

The Veterinary Defense Society [www.veterinarydefencesociety.co.uk](http://www.veterinarydefencesociety.co.uk) (Telephone 01565 652737)

[www.rspca.org.uk/utilities/contactus/reportcruelty](http://www.rspca.org.uk/utilities/contactus/reportcruelty)

# Ketamine – A Veterinary Drug with Wider Social Impacts



## Why this matters to you as veterinary nursing students:

Ketamine is a familiar name in veterinary practice. It's a widely used anaesthetic and analgesic, valued for its effectiveness in both small and large animal procedures. However, outside the clinical setting, ketamine has become a growing concern in the UK due to its misuse as a recreational drug. Understanding this dual context is vital for veterinary professionals, who must balance responsible handling in practice with awareness of its wider societal impact.

## Rising Misuse in the UK

Phoenix Futures, a leading recovery charity, recently surveyed residents and staff across its services to explore ketamine's prevalence.

Their findings paint a worrying picture:

- Once associated mainly with rave culture, ketamine has now spread into mainstream drug use.
- It is increasingly linked to dependency, mental health challenges, and physical harm.
- The charity is using these insights to strengthen support for those affected.

### THE EFFECTS OF KETAMINE ADDICTION

#### Physical Effects

- Urinary Tract Damage
- Liver Dysfunction
- Neurological Impairments

#### Psychological Effects

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Dissociation from Reality

#### Social Effects

- Relationship Problems
- Occupational Issues
- Financial Difficulties

## Professional Relevance for Veterinary Nurses

As future veterinary nurses, you'll encounter ketamine regularly in practice. This makes awareness of its misuse especially important:

- **Controlled substance responsibilities:** Veterinary professionals must ensure secure storage, accurate record-keeping, and compliance with regulations.

- **Public perception:** Knowing ketamine's reputation outside practice helps you communicate clearly with clients and the wider community.
- **Ethical awareness:** Misuse highlights the importance of professional integrity and vigilance in handling medicines

## Key Takeaway

Ketamine remains an essential tool in veterinary medicine, but its growing misuse in society underscores the importance of professional responsibility. By staying informed, veterinary nurses can safeguard both animal welfare and public trust.

## Worried about drugs or alcohol? You're not alone.

Here are some confidential helplines you can reach out to:

📞 FRANK – 0300 123 6600 | [talktofrank.com](https://talktofrank.com)

💬 We Are With You – [wearewithyou.org.uk](https://wearewithyou.org.uk)

🏥 NHS Drug Addiction Support – via GP or local services

🤝 Narcotics Anonymous – [ukna.org](https://ukna.org)

Remember: Asking for help shows courage. Support is always available.



# Uncovering your unconscious bias

**Unconscious bias (also known as implicit bias) is prejudice or judgment that is present but not consciously recognised. Every person has unconscious biases that we attribute to another person or group of people, which thereby impact our instinctual decisions and reactions. And it happens without us realising it!**

We are exposed to 11 billion pieces of information every second but our brains can only consciously capture and process about 10 pieces of information per second! Our brain has had to evolve to take shortcuts around processing information to help keep us safe, this is what has led to developing an unconscious bias. Subconsciously we decide what is safe and unsafe in our brains, we learn this by considering our memories, personal values, and social conditioning (what is most like us).

Everyone has an unconscious bias! It is not inherently bad but they do exist, but we need to look at this if it is having a negative impact on your or other's lives.

You may recognise some of your biases but you still have some hidden. However, there are ways you can change your values and become self-aware of your defaults.

To learn more watch this really useful TED talk, how to outsmart your own unconscious bias (17 min video): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GP-cqFLS8Q4>

How does  
unconscious  
bias impact  
veterinary  
medicine?



	Recruitment (who we hire)
	Admissions (who we admit to vet or tech school)
	Evaluations (how we assess students and employees)
	Workplace conflict (how we resolve or mediate disagreements)
	Recognition (who is awarded or promoted)
	Client care (how we interact with clients)

## Accident reporting

Accidents are never nice. And, no matter how many measures you have in place to prevent them, they still happen. Certain specified accidents – like fractures, amputations, and loss of consciousness, to name just a few – must be reported under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR).

What to do if you have an accident:

- Obtain first aid and seek medical advice if required.

Next, you need to log the accident in your accident book. Within your accident book, you should record details like:

- The name, gender, date of birth, and job title of the injured party;
- The date the accident happened;
- The date the accident was reported;
- The name and job title of the person logging the accident;
- Whether or not the injured party is an expectant mother; and
- Whether or not the injured party is a minor.

You should update your accident book with these details as soon as is reasonably possible after the accident has occurred. **You also need to let a staff member at Abbeydale know about your accident so we can keep a record on your student file.**

It's always good practice for a line manager to review relevant risk assessments and internal policies after an accident or near-accident has taken place, so that they can identify any potential gaps and prevent something similar from happening again down the line.

