

ETHICAL ISSUES & MITIGATIONS - ITEMS ONLY

Community Item Sharing Platform

ISSUE 1: PRIVACY & DATA PROTECTION

Description

Users must share personal information to participate: name, general location (for maps feature Sprint 4), contact details, and information about items they own. This data creates privacy and security risks.

Specific Risks for Item Sharing

High Risk:

- **Location data** reveals where valuable items are stored (could enable theft)
- **Item listings** reveal what users own (potential targeting for burglary)
- **Usage patterns** show when users are away (borrowing camping gear = away that weekend)
- **Children's items** reveal family structure and vulnerabilities

Medium Risk:

- **Profile data** could enable identity theft or harassment
- **Messages** may contain address details, scheduling information
- **Data breach** could expose personal details to malicious actors

Low Risk:

- **Browsing history** reveals what items users need (minor privacy concern)

Real-World Context

- **Facebook Marketplace** robberies when sellers invited strangers to homes
- **Airbnb** hosts targeted for burglary when properties vacant
- **Dating apps** location stalking incidents
- **eBay** seller harassment and doxxing

Legal Considerations

- **UK GDPR compliance** mandatory
- **Data Protection Act 2018** requirements
- **Right to be forgotten** (delete data on request)

- **Breach notification** (72 hours to report)
- **Consent requirements** (clear, informed, revocable)

Our Mitigations

1. Data Minimization

- Only collect essential data (name, email, general location)
- No payment details stored (money-free platform)
- No exact addresses stored (only lat/lng for distance calculations)
- Location shown as area, not pinpoint ("Richmond, London" not "123 Oak Street")
- Delete inactive accounts after 2 years
- Purge old messages after 6 months

2. Security Measures

- **Password security:** bcrypt hashing (industry standard)
- **HTTPS only:** All connections encrypted
- **Session security:** Secure session tokens, auto-timeout
- **SQL injection prevention:** Parameterized queries only
- **XSS protection:** Input sanitization and escaping
- **Rate limiting:** Prevent brute force attacks (5 failed logins = 15-minute lockout)
- **Regular updates:** Dependencies updated monthly

3. Privacy Controls for Users

- **Location precision control:** Users choose "show within 1km / 3km / 5km"
- **Profile visibility:** Option to hide profile from non-verified users
- **First name only:** No requirement for full name
- **Photo optional:** Default avatar available
- **Block/report:** Easy tools accessible from any profile
- **Message filtering:** Can ignore/block messages

4. Transparency

- **Clear privacy policy** in plain English, not legal jargon
- **What we collect and why** explained upfront
- **How data is used** with examples
- **Who can see what** explicitly stated
- **Data download:** Users can export all their data
- **Easy deletion:** One-click account deletion

- **Cookie notice:** Clear explanation of cookies used

5. Special Protection for Vulnerable Users

- **Children's items warning:** "Avoid sharing exact pickup times publicly"
 - **Verification badges:** Email verification visible to build trust
 - **Report concerns:** Easy reporting of suspicious behavior
 - **Platform monitoring:** Flag suspicious patterns (e.g., user only browsing expensive items, never requesting)
-

ISSUE 2: SAFETY & TRUST

Description

Platform facilitates in-person meetings between strangers to exchange valuable items. This creates personal safety risks and potential for theft, damage, or scams.

Specific Risks for Item Sharing

High Risk:

- **Personal safety** during meetups (robbery, assault, especially with valuable items)
- **Home invasion risk** if users invite strangers to their homes
- **Valuable items stolen** instead of returned (expensive cameras, power tools, electronics)
- **Children's safety** when parents meet at parks or homes

Medium Risk:

- **Item damage or misuse** (expensive equipment broken, not returned)
- **Scams** (fake profiles requesting expensive items with no intention to return)
- **Items not returned** (borrower disappears with item)
- **False damage claims** (owner claims item damaged when it wasn't)

Low Risk:

- **Platform misused for illegal activity** (stolen goods listed, drug deals coordinated)

Real-World Examples

- **Craigslist robberies:** Multiple cases of sellers robbed during in-person sales
- **Facebook Marketplace violence:** Buyers assaulted, items stolen
- **Gumtree scams:** Fake buyers, no-shows, lowballers

- **Airbnb horror stories:** Property damage, theft, parties
- **Library material theft:** Books never returned despite trust systems

Our Mitigations

1. Identity & Verification

- **Email verification** required for all users (no fake accounts)
- **University email** gets "Verified Student" badge (@roehampton.ac.uk)
- **Phone verification** (Sprint 4 optional): Additional trust layer
- **Photo encouraged:** Users more trustworthy with real photos
- **Social proof:** Link to other platforms optional (LinkedIn, Facebook)

2. Reputation & Trust System (Sprint 4)

- **Ratings after exchange:** 1-5 stars, both parties rate each other
- **Points system:**
 - New users start with 50 welcome points (not zero)
 - Earn 10 points when request accepted
 - Earn 5 points for lending item
 - Earn 20 points for successful swap
 - Lose 50 points for not returning item
- **Public rating history:** Last 10 ratings visible
- **Average rating displayed** prominently on profile
- **Warning flags:** Users below 3.0 stars get warning badge
- **Review text:** Allows context beyond just number

3. Safety Guidance Prominent Throughout Platform

On Every Listing Page:

SAFETY TIPS

- ✓ Meet in public places (coffee shops, library, park)
- ✓ Bring a friend or tell someone where you're going
- ✓ Don't share full address until you trust the person
- ✓ Photograph item condition before/after
- ✓ Trust your instincts - decline if uncomfortable

On Messaging Page:

SAFE MESSAGING

- ✓ Coordinate details via in-app messaging first
- ✓ Don't share personal phone number immediately
- ✓ Suggest public meeting place
- ✓ Confirm pickup/return times clearly
- ✓ Keep records of messages

On Request Acceptance:

BEFORE LENDING

- ✓ Photograph item from multiple angles
- ✓ Note any existing damage
- ✓ Save photos (evidence if needed)
- ✓ Agree on return date clearly
- ✓ Consider insurance for high-value items

4. Reporting & Moderation System

Easy Reporting:

- Report button on every profile and listing
- Report categories: Safety concern, scam, inappropriate content, item not returned, damage, harassment
- Urgent reports (safety threats) flagged immediately
- All reports reviewed within 24 hours

Consequences:

- **First offense (minor):** Warning message sent
- **Second offense:** 7-day suspension
- **Serious offense (theft, threats):** Immediate ban + police referral
- **Pattern of bad behavior:** Permanent ban, IP blocked

Block Functionality:

- One-click block from any profile
- Blocked users can't see your profile or listings
- Blocked users can't message you
- You can unblock anytime

5. Item-Specific Safety

For High-Value Items (£100+):

- Encourage written agreement (template provided)

- Suggest photographing ID exchange (optional)
- Recommend public places with CCTV (library, town center)
- Insurance recommendation prominently displayed

For Children's Items:

- Special safety tips for parents
- Encourage playground meetups during daytime
- Suggest bringing children to exchange
- Community building (not just transaction)

For Giving Away Items:

- Meet in public to hand over
- No obligation to invite people into home
- "Porch pickup" option (leave outside, message when collected)

6. Platform Liability Clarity

Clear Terms of Service:

- Platform is facilitator, not guarantor
- Users responsible for own safety
- Users responsible for items lent/borrowed
- Platform not liable for theft, damage, or injury
- Right to ban users for misconduct
- Cooperation with law enforcement

Damage/Loss Protocol:

- Encourage direct communication first
- Provide dispute resolution tips (not mediation)
- Suggest small claims court for high-value items
- Report to platform if criminal (theft, fraud)
- Rating system discourages bad behavior

ISSUE 3: EQUALITY & ACCESSIBILITY

Description

Some users face barriers to participation due to digital literacy, disabilities, language barriers, or lack of

resources. An items-only platform must ensure everyone can benefit, not just the digitally privileged.

Specific Risks for Item Sharing

High Risk:

- **Digital exclusion** of elderly, disabled, or low-income users
- **Visual impairments** preventing use of photo-heavy listings
- **Motor disabilities** making smartphone use difficult
- **Language barriers** excluding non-English speakers

Medium Risk:

- **New users disadvantaged** with no ratings or points initially
- **Users with nothing to offer** can't participate (too poor to own items worth sharing)
- **Geographic inequality** (rural users have fewer nearby items)
- **Tech requirements** (smartphone, internet access) exclude poorest

Low Risk:

- **Age discrimination** (younger users favored over elderly)
- **Bias in recommendations** (algorithm favors popular users)

Groups at Risk

- Elderly users with limited tech skills
- Users with visual or motor impairments
- Non-native English speakers
- Users without smartphones
- Low-income users with limited internet data
- New community members with no local network
- Users with nothing valuable to share

Our Mitigations

1. Accessibility Standards

WCAG 2.1 AA Compliance:

- **Screen reader compatible:** All images have alt text, semantic HTML
- **Keyboard navigation:** Full site usable without mouse
- **High contrast mode:** Option for visually impaired users
- **Adjustable text size:** Browser zoom works correctly

- **Clear focus indicators:** Always know where you are on page
- **Simple language:** Plain English, avoid jargon
- **Consistent navigation:** Same structure throughout site

Mobile Accessibility:

- Large touch targets (48x48px minimum)
- Swipe gestures optional (buttons alternative)
- Works on older devices (iPhone 7+, Android 8+)
- Low data mode available

2. Inclusive Design

Simple Interface:

- **Clear labeling:** "Lend", "Swap", "Giveaway" with icons
- **Step-by-step processes:** Numbered steps for listing items
- **Minimal clicks:** Maximum 3 clicks to any function
- **Undo options:** Can reverse actions
- **Help tooltips:** Hover/tap for explanations
- **Tutorial video:** How to use platform (with subtitles)

Multiple Ways to Search:

- Text search (keywords)
- Category browse (visual icons)
- Map view (visual/spatial)
- Filter options (checkboxes, sliders)

Image Requirements Flexible:

- Photos encouraged but not mandatory
- Stock images for categories available
- Text descriptions sufficient if no photo
- Multiple photo sizes accepted

3. Fair Participation

Welcome Points System:

- New users start with 50 points (not zero)
- Can make requests immediately
- No requirement to offer before requesting

- Points as encouragement, not barrier

Giving Away Valued:

- Giving away items earns same points as lending
- Recognition for generosity
- "Gifting" just as important as lending
- No hierarchy of exchange types

Low-Value Items Welcome:

- Old textbooks valuable to students
- Used baby clothes perfect for others
- Well-used tools better than none
- "Condition" filter allows honest description

4. Support Resources

Help Documentation:

- Step-by-step guides with screenshots
- Video tutorials with captions
- FAQ section answering common questions
- Troubleshooting guide
- Contact support option (email response within 48 hours)

Community Helpers Program (Future):

- Verified volunteers help new users
- "Digital buddies" for elderly users
- University ambassadors for student orientation
- Community center partnerships

5. Language Support (Future Sprint)

Sprint 4+ Potential:

- Interface translation (Spanish, Polish, Romanian - local demographics)
- Auto-translate listings (Google Translate API)
- Flag inappropriate language auto-detection
- Multilingual support documentation

Current Sprint:

- Simple English only
- Visual icons reduce language dependency
- Clear imagery helps understanding
- Consider emoji for emotions (👉 ❤️ 🚨)

6. Alternative Access Methods

For Non-Digital Users:

- Printable QR codes at community centers ("Scan to access platform")
- Partner organizations can help users sign up
- Phone support line (future) for registration help
- Physical bulletin boards with platform info

For Limited Internet:

- Lightweight pages (fast loading)
 - Images compressed but high quality
 - Offline capability (future PWA)
 - Works on 3G networks
-

ISSUE 4: LIABILITY & RESPONSIBILITY

Description

When items are damaged, lost, or cause harm, questions arise about legal and moral responsibility. Clear policies needed to protect platform and set user expectations.

Specific Risks for Item Sharing

High Risk:

- **Expensive items damaged or lost** (£500+ camera, power tools)
- **Items cause injury** (faulty ladder collapses, sharp tool cuts user)
- **Borrowed items cause damage** (faulty equipment damages property)
- **Children's items unsafe** (recalled products, damaged car seats)

Medium Risk:

- **Disputes over item condition** (owner claims damage, borrower denies)
- **Items not returned** (borrower keeps item, claims lost)
- **Swap disagreements** (one party unhappy with exchange)

- Platform sued for enabling theft/damage

Low Risk:

- Insurance claims involving platform items
- Third-party damage (borrowed item damages someone else's property)

Legal Context

- Platform = facilitator, not party to agreements
- UK law: contracts between users, not with platform
- Consumer Rights Act 2015: doesn't apply (not commercial sales)
- Liability limitation: Terms of Service must be clear

Our Mitigations

1. Clear Terms of Service

User Responsibilities:

By using this platform, you agree:

OWNERS (people lending/swapping/giving items):

- ✓ You own the items you list
- ✓ Items are safe and functional
- ✓ You describe condition honestly
- ✓ You accept responsibility for choosing borrowers
- ✓ You can decline requests for any reason

BORROWERS (people requesting items):

- ✓ You will care for borrowed items
- ✓ You are responsible for loss or damage
- ✓ You will return items on agreed date
- ✓ You will communicate honestly with owner
- ✓ You accept items "as is"

PLATFORM:

- ✓ We facilitate connections only
- ✓ We do not guarantee item quality or safety
- ✓ We are not liable for damage, loss, injury, or disputes
- ✓ We reserve right to remove users who breach terms
- ✓ We cooperate with law enforcement when required

2. Best Practice Guidance

For Owners Lending Items:

BEFORE LENDING CHECKLIST:

- Photograph item from multiple angles
- Note any existing damage clearly
- Test item works properly
- Clean item if needed
- Save photos with date stamp
- Agree return date explicitly
- For valuable items (£100+): consider written agreement
- For power tools: ensure safety instructions included

For Borrowers:

BEFORE BORROWING CHECKLIST:

- Inspect item on collection
- Photograph any existing damage
- Ask questions about use if unsure
- Agree return date and condition expectations
- Test item before leaving (if applicable)
- Return in same or better condition
- Clean item before returning

For Swaps:

SWAP CHECKLIST:

- Both parties inspect items together
- Take photos of both items
- Confirm both happy with condition
- Exchange is permanent - no returns
- Both rate exchange afterwards

3. Damage & Loss Protocol

What Borrowers Should Do:

If item damaged while in your care:

1. Tell owner immediately (don't hide damage)
2. Take photos of damage
3. Offer to repair or compensate
4. Discuss solution with owner
5. Learn from experience - more careful next time

If item lost:

1. Tell owner immediately
2. Offer to replace or compensate
3. File police report if stolen
4. Platform will mediate if needed

What Owners Should Do:

If item damaged:

1. Discuss with borrower calmly
2. Assess if accidental or careless
3. Give borrower chance to explain
4. Request repair or compensation if appropriate
5. Consider small claims court for expensive items

If item not returned:

1. Message borrower (may be misunderstanding)
2. Give 7-day reminder
3. Report to platform after 14 days
4. Platform will attempt contact
5. File police report for theft if valuable
6. Small claims court for compensation

Platform's Role:

- We can suspend/ban users with pattern of damage/non-return
- We cannot force compensation or returns
- We log complaints for pattern analysis
- We refer criminal matters to police
- We encourage communication and resolution

4. Risk Warnings Prominent

On Listing Creation:

LENDING REMINDER:

Items may not be returned in perfect condition. Only lend items you're comfortable sharing. For valuable items, consider insurance.

On Request Sending:

BORROWING REMINDER:

You are responsible for borrowed items. Damage or loss is your responsibility. Inspect items carefully on collection.

On Giveaway:

GIVING AWAY:

Items given away permanently. Make sure you're ready to part with it! No returns or exchanges after handover.

5. Insurance Guidance

For High-Value Items:

INSURANCE TIP:

Items worth £200+ may be covered by your home contents insurance. Check your policy's "lending to others" clause.

Consider:

- Informing insurer you lend items
- Taking out temporary coverage
- Adding rider for valuable items
- Requiring borrowers to have insurance

Platform Recommendation:

- We recommend home insurance for valuable items
- Not platform's responsibility to insure
- Users lend at own risk
- Small-value items (£0-50) typically not worth insurance hassle

6. Dispute Resolution Framework

Step 1: Direct Communication (Most Disputes Resolved Here)

- Borrower and owner discuss issue
- Both act in good faith
- Aim for fair resolution
- Most people are reasonable

Step 2: Platform Mediation Tips (Not Mediation Service)

- Platform provides dispute resolution suggestions
- Example templates for resolution messages
- Guidance on fair compromise
- But users must resolve themselves

Step 3: Rating System Consequence

- Bad behavior reflected in ratings
- Low ratings reduce future requests
- Community self-regulates through trust

Step 4: External Resolution

- Small claims court (items £100+)
- Police (theft, fraud)
- Trading Standards (unsafe items)

Step 5: Platform Action

- Ban users with pattern of bad behavior
 - Remove users who threaten or harass
 - Cooperate with law enforcement
-

ISSUE 5: EXPLOITATION & FAIRNESS

Description

Platform could be exploited unfairly by free-riders, commercial operators disguised as individuals, or those gaming the trust system. Fair distribution of opportunities and prevention of abuse is essential.

Specific Risks for Item Sharing

Medium Risk:

- **Free-riders:** Users who only borrow, never lend or give away
- **Commercial disguised as personal:** People running rental businesses through platform
- **Fake reviews:** Users creating multiple accounts to boost ratings
- **High-value item targeting:** Users systematically borrowing expensive items with no intention to return
- **Reselling borrowed items:** Borrowing to sell (or swap) elsewhere

Low Risk:

- **Popular user monopoly:** Same few users get all requests
- **Geographic inequality:** Wealthy areas have better items
- **Category imbalance:** Some categories overrepresented

Real-World Examples

- **Freecycle free-riders:** People take everything, give nothing
- **Airbnb commercial operators:** Professional landlords pretending to be individuals
- **Uber/Lyft fake reviews:** Drivers/riders manipulating ratings
- **Library abuse:** Serial non-returners, resellers

Our Mitigations

1. Points System Encourages Reciprocity (Sprint 4)

How It Works:

- **Start:** 50 welcome points (can participate immediately)
- **Earn points by helping:**
 - Request accepted: +10 points (even if you're requesting)
 - Lend an item: +5 points
 - Successful swap: +20 points (both parties)
 - Give away item: +5 points
 - Receive 5  rating: +2 bonus points
- **Lose points for bad behavior:**
 - Item not returned: -50 points
 - Rated below 2 stars: -10 points
 - Banned by platform: account deleted

Soft Limits (Not Hard Blocks):

- Users below 20 points: Warning message "Consider offering items to earn points!"
- Users below 0 points: Can't make new requests until resolved
- Users with 200+ points: "Top Contributor" badge (recognition)

Why Soft Limits:

- Legitimate new users not penalized
- Life happens (sometimes people fall on hard times)
- Focus on encouragement, not punishment
- Points visible = social pressure to contribute

2. Behavioral Monitoring

Automatic Flags:

- User only borrows, never lends (ratio 10:0) → Gentle reminder message
- User requests only high-value items (£100+) → Manual review
- User has 5+ items not returned → Automatic suspension
- User rated below 2.0 average → Warning message
- User creates multiple accounts → IP detection, ban

Manual Review Triggers:

- 3+ reports within 30 days → Staff review
- Pattern of requests followed by "lost item" claims → Investigation
- Same IP creating multiple accounts → Ban all accounts
- Obvious commercial activity → Remove listings, warn user

3. Community Guidelines

Clear Expectations:

COMMUNITY SPIRIT:

- ✓ This is a sharing platform, not a free rental service
- ✓ Give as well as receive - reciprocity matters
- ✓ Treat others' belongings with care
- ✓ Be honest about item condition and needs
- ✓ Build trust through reliability
- ✓ Support the community by participating fairly

🚫 NOT ALLOWED:

- ✗ Commercial rental through platform
- ✗ Taking without giving back
- ✗ Lying about item loss or damage
- ✗ Creating fake accounts for fake reviews
- ✗ Reselling borrowed items
- ✗ Systematic exploitation of generous community members

Visible Throughout Platform:

- Homepage explains reciprocity
- Profile pages show give/take ratio (items lent vs borrowed)
- Request page reminds users to contribute
- Success stories highlight generous users

4. Anti-Commercial Policies

In Terms of Service:

PERSONAL USE ONLY:

- ✓ Platform for individuals sharing personal items
- ✓ Not for business or commercial rental
- ✓ Maximum 10 active listings per user
- ✓ No payments outside platform allowed (money-free)

If you want to run a rental business, use proper commercial platforms.

Detection Methods:

- Many identical items listed → Flag for review
- Professional product photos → Suspicious
- Business language in descriptions → Warning
- External payment requests → Immediate ban
- Complaints from users about commercial behavior → Investigation

Consequences:

- First offense: Warning, remove commercial listings
- Second offense: 30-day suspension
- Third offense: Permanent ban

5. Fair Distribution & Recommendations

Matching Algorithm Fairness (Sprint 4):

- **New users boosted:** Recommendations show their listings more
- **Geographic balance:** Don't only show same wealthy neighborhood
- **Category diversity:** Mix different item types in recommendations
- **Rotation:** Don't always show same popular users
- **Participation reward:** Users who lend more appear more often

Preventing Monopolies:

- No user can monopolize category
- Limit 10 active listings per user
- Algorithm diversifies recommendations
- "Find similar items" shows alternatives

6. Fake Review Prevention

Technical Measures:

- Can only rate after confirmed exchange (request must be "completed")
- Both parties must rate (mutual rating system)
- One rating per exchange (can't rate same person twice for one item)
- IP tracking detects fake accounts
- Email verification required (no disposable emails)
- Time gap enforced (can't rate immediately after request sent - must complete exchange)

Review Quality:

- Both number AND text visible
 - Recent ratings weighted more heavily
 - Pattern analysis (all 5-star ratings suspicious)
 - Users can report fake reviews
-

ISSUE 6: ITEM SAFETY & QUALITY (Items-Only Specific)

Description

Unlike skills (where poor service is obvious), items can be unsafe, recalled, or not as described. Platform must balance trust-based model with user safety.

Specific Risks for Item Sharing

High Risk:

- **Recalled products** (unsafe car seats, cribs, toys with choking hazards)
- **Electrical items** (faulty chargers, unsafe appliances)
- **Safety equipment** (expired helmets, damaged harnesses)

Medium Risk:

- **Hygiene concerns** (mattresses, pillows, soft toys)
- **Contamination** (allergens, pets, smoking residue)
- **Misleading condition** (described as "good" but actually broken)

Low Risk:

- **Counterfeit items** (fake electronics)
- **Stolen property** (borrowed item was actually stolen)

Our Mitigations

1. Clear Item Description Requirements

Mandatory Fields:

- Condition (Like New, Good, Fair, Well-Used)
- Detailed description
- Photos (strongly encouraged)
- Known issues listed

Condition Guidance:

CONDITION DEFINITIONS:

Like New: Barely used, perfect working order, no visible wear

Good: Used but works perfectly, minor cosmetic wear

Fair: Functional with obvious wear, all issues described

Well-Used: Heavy use visible, still usable, significant wear

BE HONEST: Over-promise under-deliver = bad ratings!

2. Safety Warnings

For Certain Categories:

Baby & Kids Items:

⚠ SAFETY CHECK:

- Check for product recalls (gov.uk/product-recalls)
- Ensure all parts present and working
- Check for damage (cracks, loose parts)
- Car seats: Check expiry date (6 years max)
- Cribs: Must meet current safety standards
- Toys: No small parts for under-3s

⚠ BORROWERS: Inspect carefully before accepting. Your child's safety is your responsibility.

Electrical Items:

ELECTRICAL SAFETY:

- Check for frayed wires or damage
- Test item works properly
- No exposed wiring
- Original charger if possible
- Check plug is UK approved

 **BORROWERS:** Do not use if any concerns. Your safety matters!

Sports & Safety Equipment:

SAFETY EQUIPMENT CHECK:

- Helmets: No cracks, not older than 5 years
- Harnesses: Check all straps and buckles
- Bikes: Brakes and gears working
- Climbing gear: Not for life-safety use

 **BORROWERS:** Your safety is paramount. If in doubt, don't use!

3. Prohibited Items List

Not Allowed on Platform:

- Weapons (knives, firearms, etc.)
- Prescription medications
- Intimate personal items
- Recalled products (check gov.uk database)
- Counterfeit goods
- Stolen property
- Items requiring licenses
- Illegal items
- Hazardous materials

4. User Responsibility Framework

Owners Agree:

- I confirm item is safe to use
- I have checked for recalls
- I describe all known issues honestly
- I am not responsible for misuse by borrower

Borrowers Agree:

- I will inspect item before accepting
- I check item is safe for my intended use
- I use item at my own risk
- I return item in same condition

Platform Position:

- We do not inspect items
- We do not guarantee safety
- Users responsible for checking items
- Report unsafe items immediately

5. Hygiene & Cleanliness

Guidance for Owners:

CLEANLINESS STANDARDS:

- ✓ Clean items before lending
- ✓ Baby items: Sanitize thoroughly
- ✓ Soft toys: Wash before lending
- ✓ Camping gear: Clean and air out
- ✓ Sports equipment: Wipe down
- ✓ Books: Ensure no marks or damage

NOTE: Borrowers more likely to accept clean items!

Guidance for Borrowers:

HYGIENE CHECK:

- Item looks clean?
- No stains or smells?
- For baby items: Would you use this for your child?
- If in doubt, politely decline

IT'S OK TO DECLINE: If item not as described or seems unhygienic, just say "Thanks, but this isn't what I expected."

SUMMARY

We recognize that a platform connecting community members for item sharing carries significant ethical responsibilities. Our approach prioritizes:

1. **User Safety** – Through verification, ratings, prominent safety guidance

2. **Privacy** – Through minimal data collection, encryption, transparency
3. **Fairness** – Through accessible design, points system, anti-exploitation measures
4. **Trust** – Through ratings, clear policies, accountability
5. **Item Safety** – Through condition descriptions, safety warnings, user responsibility
6. **Legal Clarity** – Through Terms of Service, liability disclaimers, user agreements

Our Commitments

Throughout Development:

- Monitor ethical risks continuously
- Update policies as platform evolves
- Listen to user feedback
- Test with diverse user groups
- Consult accessibility experts

Ongoing Operation:

- Review reports within 24 hours
- Ban users who threaten safety
- Cooperate with law enforcement
- Update safety guidelines regularly
- Prioritize safety over growth

User-Centric Approach:

- Clear, simple communication (no legal jargon)
- Empower users with tools and information
- Balance trust with safeguards
- Build community, not just transactions
- Always prioritize wellbeing over engagement metrics

Items-Only Platform Advantages

Focusing on **item sharing** (not skills) simplifies some ethical concerns:

- **No service liability** (items are physical, inspectable, returnable)
- **Clearer quality assessment** (can photograph, test items)
- **Easier dispute resolution** (item either returned or not)
- **Lower harm potential** (items don't provide services that could go wrong)

However, items create unique concerns we address:

- **Item safety** (electrical, baby items, safety equipment)
- **Loss/damage** (expensive items borrowed and not returned)
- **Hygiene** (soft items, baby items, personal items)

Ethical considerations will inform every design decision throughout this project.