



Understanding Child Protection



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department for
children, schools and families



Understanding Child Protection

Child protection legislation (Children Act 1989 in England and Wales, the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995) has been established to ensure the safeguarding of children. The legislation aims to prevent unsuitable people from working with children and young adults and ensures that people with responsibilities for health, safety, education and the well-being of children are trained in the understanding of their responsibilities in relation to the law and have a duty of care to ensure their protection.

Every local authority has a duty to protect children from significant harm. As someone who works with children in a school or other education setting, you have a crucial role to play in preventing children from suffering and ensuring that appropriate action is taken to protect them. The following information provides you with a broad overview on understanding child protection, recognising child abuse and reporting.

Information should only be used as a guide. It does not replace the need to familiarise yourself with individual school policy documents and procedures. It is therefore important that you seek advice from the school's child protection officer and follow the school's procedures should a child protection issue occur whilst on assignment. It is important to also keep your local TimePlan office informed at each stage of the process.

Additional information can be found at www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters

EduCare/NSPCC child protection programmes are available online at: www.educare.co.uk. Child protection training should be undertaken by anyone working with children and young people.

For more information on Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education, visit <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk>



What is Child Abuse?

The following definition of child abuse has been formulated from a number of ideas.

“The abuse of children occurs when there is deliberate or non deliberate mistreatment or when the actions (either direct or indirect) of an individual or organisation fail to protect children from significant harm or adversely affects their physical, psychological and emotional development or wellbeing.”

Abuse can occur in any child/adult or child/child relationship and can involve more than one child. Child abuse can be categorised as physical, emotional, sexual or neglect. Although bullying is not seen as a specific form of abuse, it is often seen as a symptom of a culture where abuse goes unchallenged. It is important to familiarise yourself with a school's anti-bullying policy.

In many cases, children are subjected to a combination of abuse types. Child abuse can take place within any setting and is just as serious whether occurring due to ignorance or as a deliberate act. The impact on the child is just the same.

Staff must acknowledge their individual responsibilities to bring matters of concern to the attention of the child protection officer/senior management/Head teacher should they occur in the school setting. Although this can be difficult this is particularly important where the welfare of children may be at risk.

You may be the first to recognise that something is wrong but may not feel able to express your concerns out of a feeling that this would be disloyal to colleagues or you may fear harassment or victimisation; these feelings, however natural, must never result in a child or young person continuing to be unnecessarily at risk. Remember it is often the most vulnerable children or young person who are targeted. These children need someone like you to safeguard their welfare. It is recognised that whistle blowing can be difficult and stressful. TimePlan will be able to offer advice and support should the need arise.

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Types of Abuse

Physical Abuse is the ill treatment of a child or young person, which may or may not cause injury or discomfort but which will affect the health, emotions, well-being or development of the child.

Physical abuse may involve:

- hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child
- a parent or carer fabricating the symptoms of, or deliberately inducing, illness in a child.

Physical signs include:

- injuries which the child cannot explain, or that cannot be fully explained
- injuries that have not been treated or have been treated inappropriately
- injuries which are in different stages of healing
- unexplained bruising and or cuts on face, lips, mouth, chest, arms, back, buttocks or thighs
- clusters of injuries with regular patterns or reflecting the shape of an implement
- marks on the body including, hand, finger or bite marks
- fractures that are inconsistent with the child's developmental stage
- burns and scalds affecting unusual areas of the body such as the back, shoulders, buttocks and soles of the feet, which could have been caused by hot water, friction, cigarettes and electrical appliances

Emotional/behavioural signs include:

- a wariness of adult contact
- flinching when approached or touched unexpectedly
- reluctance to have their parents contacted for further clarification of injuries and / or reluctance to go home at the end of the school day
- attention seeking / aggressive behaviour or severe temper outbursts
- poor attendance record
- reluctance to get undressed for sporting or other activities
- the covering of arms and legs even when hot
- reluctance to leave the security of the classroom at break times
- depression or moods which are out of character with the child's general behaviour
- withdrawal or an unnatural compliance with others



Emotional Abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child causing severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development.

Emotional abuse may involve:

- conveying to a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only because they meet the needs of another person
- imposing expectations that are inappropriate to the age or development of the child - eg, over-protecting the child, limiting their exploration and learning, preventing them from taking part in normal social interaction
- seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of someone else
- serious bullying which causes the child frequently to feel frightened or in danger
- overuse of inappropriate language
- shouting and developing a culture of fear and rejection
- exploitation or corruption.

Physical signs include:

- a failure to grow or to thrive, particularly if the child thrives when away from home
- sudden speech disorders, headaches, changes in appetite and possible loss of bladder control
- delayed development, either physical or emotional.

Emotional/behavioural signs include:

- compulsive nervous behaviour or obsessive compulsive behaviour
- an unwillingness or inability to play with others
- an excessive fear of making mistakes
- depression and suicidal tendencies
- reluctance to have parents contacted
- an excessive deference towards others, especially adults
- an excessive lack of confidence
- an excessive need for approval, attention and affection
- an inability to cope with praise.



Sexual abuse occurs when a child or young person is pressurised, forced or tricked into taking part in any type of sexual activity including prostitution with an adult or young person, irrespective of whether the child is aware of what is happening.

Sexual abuse may involve:

- physical contact, including penetrative or non-penetrative acts
- non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at or producing sexual, online images, watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

Physical signs include:

- pain, itching, bruising or bleeding in the genital or anal areas
- any sexually transmitted disease
- pregnancy
- recurrent genital discharge or urinary infections without apparent cause
- stained or bloody underwear
- excessive masturbation/rubbing against objects (this can be exhibited by both male and female students)
- stomach pains or discomfort when the child is walking or sitting down
- presence of 'love bites'

Emotional/behavioural signs include:

- sudden or unexplained changes in behaviour
- an apparent fear of adult contact
- running away
- self-harm, self-mutilation or attempts at suicide
- abuse of drugs or other substances
- eating problems such as anorexia or bulimia
- poor physical and social development
- sexualised behaviour or knowledge in young children
- sexual drawings or inappropriate language
- possession of unexplained amounts of money
- not being allowed to have friends (particularly in adolescence)
- alluding to secrets which they cannot reveal



Neglect is the persistent failure, whether intentional or unintentional, to meet a child's basic physical and or psychological needs resulting in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. It is also the failure to intervene in dangerous situations.

Neglect may involve a parent or a carer failing to:

- provide adequate food, clothing and shelter – such as excluding the child from home or abandoning them
- protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger
- ensure adequate supervision, including the use of inadequate care-givers
- provide a structured and caring environment
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.
- give encouragement to develop and grow

Physical signs include:

- being constantly hungry and sometimes stealing food from others
- failure to thrive
- loss of weight or being constantly underweight
- obesity
- unkempt appearance, and frequently dirty or smelly
- poor hygiene
- being dressed inappropriately for the weather conditions
- untreated medical conditions

Emotional/behavioural signs include:

- lethargic
- frequently missing school or being late
- failing to keep hospital or medical appointments
- having few friends
- being left alone or unsupervised on a regular basis
- compulsive stealing or scavenging, especially of food.
- Abuse of alcohol and or drugs
- Seeking inappropriate affection and attention
- Appearing to take on adult responsibilities
- Poor communication skills
- Defensive and temperamental behaviour



What to do if a child tells you they are the victim of abuse

There may be occasions when a vulnerable person discloses to you about abuse that she/he has suffered. In this situation you must remember that it is not your job to investigate allegations. The child protection officer will make the decision if and when to involve external organisations such as specialist police officers and social workers. It is important to follow the school/institution child protection policy and to liaise immediately with the nominated child protection officer. If you have reported any concerns it is prudent to provide your local TimePlan office with a copy of your notes, so that ongoing advice and support can be given.

It is important to:

- remain calm, accessible and receptive
- listen carefully without interrupting
- communicate with the child in a way that is appropriate to their age, understanding and preference – this is especially important for disabled children and for children whose preferred language is not English
- be aware of the non-verbal messages you are giving
- make it clear that you are taking them seriously
- acknowledge their courage and reassure them that they are right to tell
- reassure them that they should not feel guilty
- let them know that you are going to do everything you can to help them and what may happen as a result
- make a note of what was said and who was present, using the child's actual words wherever possible.

Do not:

- allow your shock or distaste to show
- probe for more information than the child offers
- speculate or make assumptions
- ask leading questions or put words in to the child's mouth
- physically examine the child or young adult or remove, look under or open a child's/young adult's clothes
- make any comments about the alleged abuser
- make any promises that you cannot keep
- agree to keep the information a secret
- delay getting emergency help if needed



Recording and reporting Child Abuse

If you see, hear or are told something that makes you concerned about a child's safety or welfare, record it and report it to the designated member of staff with responsibility for safeguarding children. They will decide to contact social services if they believe that the child may be in need or at risk of significant harm and will follow this up with a written referral.

You will need to know:

Who the designated child protection officer is

Who you can report to if the designated person is unavailable

Where the logging concerns forms are kept

Where the child protection policy and procedures are kept

Where the whistle-blowing policy and procedures are kept

Who the designated governor for Child Protection is

The designated member of staff will probably want you to explain to the child the action you are taking and what is likely to happen next. They will also want to involve parents or carers unless this would place the child at greater risk. It is important at this stage to ensure that the information is only shared with other individuals on a purely need to know basis. From this point onwards it is important to act only on the advice from the child protection officer.



If a child tells you he/she has been abused you should make a note of exactly what was said, as soon as possible after the discussion. Date and sign the record. The designated member of staff will store it securely and separately from the child's academic records.

When recording disclosures the following points need to be considered:

- any records made at the time of the disclosure can become court evidence, it is therefore important that such records are clear, legible, free from biased opinion and a true reflection of actually what happened
- use the child's own words/phrases and vocabulary even though they may not make sense, and not your interpretation of them. Record words/phrases that are repeated.
- record your verbal and non verbal responses
- record the environmental context in which the disclosure was made and the emotional state of the child

Once concerns have been referred to childrens' social services, it is their responsibility to assess the needs of the child and, if necessary, undertake a child protection enquiry. They have a responsibility to inform the school of the action they are taking and the outcomes of any enquiry. The designated member of staff will share with you what you need to know to continue to work with the child.



Safer Working Practices

It is important that all adults working with children understand that the nature of their work and the responsibilities related to it, place them in a position of trust. The guidance document **Guidance for Safer Working Practice for Adults who Work with Children and Young People in Educational Settings (March 2009)** - www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

The guidance aims to:

- keep children safe by clarifying which behaviours constitute safe practice and which behaviours should be avoided;
- assist adults working with children to work safely and responsibly and to monitor their own standards and practice;
- support managers and employers in setting clear expectations of behaviour and/or codes of practice relevant to the services being provided;
- support employers in giving a clear message that unlawful or unsafe behaviour is unacceptable and that, where appropriate, disciplinary or legal action will be taken;
- support safer recruitment practice;
- minimise the risk of misplaced or malicious allegations made against adults who work with children and young people;
- reduce the incidence of positions of trust being abused or misused.

The underpinning principals of the guidance are:

- The welfare of the child is paramount. It is the responsibility of all adults to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. This responsibility extends to a duty of care for those adults employed, commissioned or contracted to work with children and young people.
- Adults who work with children are responsible for their own actions and behaviour and should avoid any conduct which would lead any reasonable person to question their motivation and intentions.
- Adults should work and be seen to work, in an open and transparent way.
- The same standards should be applied regardless of culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, religious belief and/or sexual identity.
- Adults should continually monitor and review their practice and ensure they follow the guidance contained in this document.

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