

PROCEDURES FOR RESPONDING TO CONCERNs ABOUT A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON'S WELLBEING – Appendix 1

Identifying concerns

Disclosure:

- Disclosure is the process by which children and young people start to share their experiences of abuse with others. This can take place over a long period of time – it is a journey, not one act or action.
- Children may disclose directly or indirectly and sometimes they may start sharing details of abuse before they are ready to put their thoughts and feelings in order.
- It takes extraordinary courage for a child to go through the journey of disclosing abuse.
- Not all disclosures will lead to a formal report of abuse or a case being made, or a case being taken to court, but all disclosures should be taken seriously.
- It is vital that anyone who works with children and young people knows how to provide them with the support they need if they have experienced abuse.

How disclosure happens:

Children and young people may disclose abuse in a variety of ways, including:

- Directly – making specific verbal statements about what's happened to them.
- Indirectly – making ambiguous verbal statements which suggest something is wrong.
- Behaviourally – displaying behaviour that signals something is wrong (this may or may not be deliberate).
- Non-verbally – writing letters, drawing pictures or trying to communicate in other ways.

Sometimes children and young people make partial disclosures of abuse. This means they give some details about what they've experienced, but not the whole picture. They may withhold some information because of:

- Fear that they will get in trouble with or upset their family.
- Wanting to deflect blame in case of family difficulties as a result of the disclosure.
- Feelings of shame and guilt

Barriers to disclosure:

Some children and young people are reluctant to seek help because they feel they don't have anyone to turn to for support.

They may have sought help in the past and had a negative experience, which makes them unlikely to do so again.

They may also:

- Feel that they will not be taken seriously.
- Feel too embarrassed to talk to an adult about a private or personal problem.
- Worry about confidentiality.
- Lack trust in the people around them (including parents) and in the services provided to help them.
- Fear the consequences of asking for help.
- Worry they will be causing trouble and making the situation worse.
- Find formal procedures overwhelming.

Spotting the signs of abuse:



Children and young people who have been abused may want to tell someone, but not have the exact words to do so. They may attempt to disclose abuse by giving adult clues, through their actions and by using indirect words.

Adults need to be able to notice the signs that a child or young person might be distressed and ask them appropriate questions about what might have caused this.

Child protection training can help increase adults' confidence in recognising the indicators of abuse and understanding the different ways a child might try to share what they have experienced.

You should never wait until a child or young person tells you directly that they are being abused before taking action. Instead, ask the child if everything is OK or discuss your concerns with our designated safeguarding lead, or the NSPCC helpline.

Waiting for a child to be ready to speak about their experiences could mean that the abuse carries on and they, or another child, are put at further risk of significant harm.

Not taking appropriate action quickly can also affect the child's mental health. They may feel despairing and hopeless and wonder why no-one is helping them. This may discourage them from seeking help in the future and make them distrust adults.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Female Genital Mutilation is a practice that involves changing, altering or removing part of a girl or a woman's natural external female genitalia. This practice is not done for medical or health reasons.

Signs FGM might happen:

- A relative or someone known as a 'cutter' is visiting from abroad
- A special occasion or ceremony is going to take place where a girl 'becomes a woman' or is 'prepared for marriage'.
- A female relative, like a mother, sister or aunt has undergone FGM.
- A family arranges a long holiday overseas or visits a family abroad during the summer holidays.
- A girl has an unexpected or long absence from school.
- A girl struggles to keep up in activities, which is unusual for her.

Signs FGM might have taken place:

- Having difficulty walking, standing or sitting.
- Spending longer in the bathroom or toilet.
- Acting differently after an absence from school.
- Reluctance to go to the doctors.

Breast Ironing

Breast Ironing also known as 'Breast Flattening' is the process whereby young pubescent girls' breasts are ironed, massaged and/or pounded down through the use of hard or heated objects in order for the breasts to disappear or delay the development of the breasts entirely. It is believed that by carrying out this act, young girls will be protected from harassment, rape, abduction and early forced marriage and therefore be kept in education. Much like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Breast Ironing is a harmful cultural practice and is child abuse.

Signs breast ironing may have taken place:

- Unusual behaviour after an absence from school or college including depression, anxiety, aggression, withdrawn.
- Fear or changing for physical activities due to scars showing or bandages being visible.
- Reduced movement during physical activity.

Upskirting – peer-on-peer abuse

Upskirting is a highly intrusive practice, which typically involves someone taking a picture under another person's clothing without their knowledge, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks (with or without underwear).

Serious Violent Crime

A child who is affected by gang activity or serious youth violence may have suffered, or may be likely to suffer, significant harm through physical, sexual and emotional abuse or neglect.

Radicalisation

Radicalisation is the way a person comes to support or be involved in extremism and terrorism. It's a gradual process so young people who are affected may not realise what's happening.

Radicalisation is a form of harm. The process may involve:

- Being groomed online or in person
- Exploitation, including sexual exploitation
- Psychological manipulation
- Exposure to violent material and other inappropriate information
- The risk of physical harm or death through extremism acts

Recognising radicalisation:

- Becoming disrespectful and intolerant of others
- Becoming more angry
- Avoiding discussions about their views
- Using words and phrases that sound scripted
- Becoming isolated and secretive
- Not wanting anyone else to know what they are looking at online.

Helping children disclose abuse

It's important to create an environment where children and young people are comfortable about speaking out if anything is worrying them. They need to:

- Be able to recognise abuse and know it is wrong.
- Know who they can talk to about it.

The people they choose to disclose to need to listen, understand and respond appropriately so the child gets the help, support and protection they need.

Talking PANTS (the underwear rule) is a simple way to talk to children as young as four about staying safe from sexual abuse. It helps children to:



- Name their body parts and know which parts should be private.
- Know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch.
- Understand they have the right to say "no".
- Think about who they trust and who they can ask for help.

Encouraging children and young people to seek help and support:

Many children and young people will seek help because they know where to go and believe that it will make a difference.

Others may not have the confidence to seek support or be too scared to ask for help. They may not get the help they need until they reach crisis point.

Make it as easy as you can for young people to find and take up the offer of help.

- Reinforce positive messages about those who seek help – seeking help is a sign of strength.
- Encourage parents to support their children in seeking help.
- Be positive about young people, their capacity for change and their resilience.
- Listen to the people you help – improve your services using feedback from service users.
- Shout about your work – lack of awareness is a significant barrier to young people seeking help.
- See the whole person – engage with young people both in terms of their strengths and their weaknesses.
- Build trust – treat young people with respect.
- Help young people to help each other – equip young people with the skills and tools to support their friends/peers and family members.
- Consider the role of new technologies – these should be complementary to other ways of support young people.

Responding to abuse

In a situation where a child discloses abuse, there are a number of steps that should be taken.

- **Listen carefully to the child.** Avoid commenting on the matter or showing reactions like shock or disbelief which could cause the child to retract or stop talking.
- **Let them know they've done the right thing.** Reassurance can make a big impact on a child who may have been keeping the abuse secret.
- **Tell them it's not their fault.** Abuse is never the child's fault and they need to know this.
- **Say you will take them seriously.** A child could keep abuse secret in fear they won't be taken seriously. They've spoken out because they want help and trust that someone will listen to and support them.
- **Don't talk to the alleged abuser.** Confronting the alleged abuser about what the child's told you could make the situation a lot worse for the child.
- **Explain what you'll do next.** If age appropriate, explain to the child that this will need to be reported to someone who will be able to help.
- **Don't delay reporting the abuse.** The sooner the abuse is reported after the child discloses the better. Report as soon as possible to your nominated child protection lead so details are fresh in the mind and action can be taken quickly.

Non-biased approach:

It's vital that any child who is trying to disclose abuse feels that they are being listened to and taken seriously.



But there can be a risk that if professionals just believe the child's account without thoroughly investigating the situation, this can lead to unfair bias against the alleged abuser as formal investigations progress.

This means it's important to maintain an unbiased approach when responding to disclosures and follow your organisation's procedures to ensure each case is treated in a fair and transparent manner and that the child gets the protection and support that they need.

Making notes:

It's important to keep accurate and detailed notes on any concerns you have about a child. You will need to share these with your nominated child protection lead.

Include:

- The child's details (name, age, address)
- What the child said or did that gave you cause for concern (if the child made a verbal disclosure, write down their exact words)
- Any information the child has given you about the alleged abuser.

Information sharing

Why information sharing is important:

Sharing information about a child's wellbeing helps professionals build a clearer picture of the child's life and gain a better understanding of any risks the child is facing.

Information sharing helps to ensure that an individual receives the right services at the right time and prevents a need from becoming more acute and difficult to meet (DfE, 2018).

General principles of best practice for information sharing are outlined below. Refer to your organisation's procedures as well as local multi-agency arrangements to ensure you are following the information sharing processes that are most appropriate for your role.

When to share information:

Timely information sharing is key to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

People who work with children, whether in a paid or voluntary role, may need to share information about the children and families they are involved with for a number of reasons. These include:

- You think someone in the family may benefit from additional support
- Someone from another agency has asked for information about a child or family
- Someone in the family has asked to be referred for further help
- A statutory duty or court order requires information to be shared
- You are concerned that a child or a member of their family may be at risk of significant harm
- You think a serious crime may have been committed or is about to be committed which involves someone in the family.

You must always have a clear and legitimate purpose for sharing a child's personal details.



What information to share:

You need to decide what specific information is appropriate to share and who to share it with.

You should follow the 5 Rules of Safeguarding to recognise, respond, report, record and refer.

- Identify how much information should be shared. This will depend on the reasons for sharing it.
- Use language that is clear and precise as different agencies may use and understand terminology differently.
- Make it clear what information is factual and what is based on opinion (yours or other people's).
- Prioritise the safety and wellbeing of the child and anyone else who may be affected by the situation.

Facts and opinions

When working with children and families you will gather information from a variety of sources. How you interpret this information can depend on:

- Any previous information received
- Your knowledge of research and theory
- Your own frame of reference.

When recording information, you should be as factual as possible. If you need to give your own or somebody else's opinion, make sure it is clearly differentiated from fact. You should identify whose opinion is being given and record their exact words.

Gaining consent to share information

Children should be given the opportunity to decide whether they agree to their personal information being shared. If a child doesn't have the capacity to make their own decisions, ask their parent or carer (unless doing so would put the child at risk of harm).

You should always get consent to share information about an adult – unless doing so would put them or someone else at risk of harm or affect the investigation of a serious crime.

Tips for getting consent:

- Be open and honest.
- Make sure the person you're asking for consent understands what information will be shared and why.
- Explain who will see the information and what it will be used for.
- Make sure the person you're asking for consent understands the consequences of their information not being shared.
- Get the consent in writing, in case there are any disputes in the future. If it's only given verbally, make a written record of this.
- Make sure the person knows they can withdraw consent at any time.

If you're not given consent to share information, you should still go ahead if you are concerned a child's safety or wellbeing is at risk:

If you're sharing information without consent keep a written record explaining:

- What steps you took to get consent.
- The person's reasons for not giving consent (if known).
- Why you felt it was necessary to share information without consent.



Pass a copy of this record on to the agency/agencies you're sharing the information with.

Reporting concerns

If a child is suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm, you can share information with appropriate agencies or professionals without the child's or their parent's consent

If a child is in immediate danger, call the police on 999.

If a child is not in immediate danger:

Follow your organisation's safeguarding policies and procedures as soon as possible. These should provide clear guidelines on the steps you need to take if a child discloses abuse. They will state who in your organisation has responsibility for safeguarding or child protection and who you should report your concerns to.

- **Contact your local child protection services.** Their contact details can be found on the website for the local authority the child lives in.
- **Contact the police.** They will assess the situation and take the appropriate action to protect the child.
- **Contact the NSPCC Helpline on 0808 800 5000 or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk.** Their trained professionals will talk through your concerns with you, give you expert advice and take action to protect the child as appropriate. This may include making a referral to the local authority.

If you have made a verbal referral to local children's services your DSL should follow this up with a written referral as soon as possible, ideally within 48 hours.

Mandatory reporting

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

It is illegal to carry out FGM in the UK. It is also a criminal offence for UK nationals or permanent UK residents to perform FGM overseas or take their child abroad to have FGM carried out.

In England and Wales, regulated health and social care professionals and teachers must make a report to the police, if, in the course of their duties:

- They are informed by a child under the age of 18 that they have undergone an act of FGM
- They observe physical signs that an act of FGM may have been carried out on a child under the age of 18.

Radicalisation

If you think a child or the people around them are involved in radicalisation and there is an immediate risk of harm, call 999 straight away.

If it isn't an emergency, call the police anti-terrorism hotline on 0800 789 321 or call the NSPCC radicalisation helpline 0808 800 5000.

Refer to our Child Protection – Staff Guidance leaflet and our Safeguarding & Child Protection Guide for quick reference on all procedures.



We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice annually.

This policy was last reviewed on: 26 February 2025

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. Lewty".

Name: Katie Lewty

Position: Operations Director