

1. Protecting children from abuse in schools: roles and responsibilities

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Staff and volunteers

All staff and volunteers should read, understand and follow the school's child protection policy and procedures, which should include a definition of abuse and information about how to respond appropriately.

They should also complete child protection training to ensure they understand the different ways abuse can take place, the indicators of abuse and how to respond appropriately.

Responding to concerns about abuse

If you work or volunteer in a school, make sure children know they can talk to you if they have a problem.

- Listen to children's concerns and respond calmly and non-judgmentally.
- Follow the school's child protection policy and procedures when you have concerns about a child.
- Report your concerns to the nominated child protection lead as soon as possible.
- Make clear records of concerns following the school's procedures.

You should never promise to keep what a child tells you a secret. Explain to the child that you need to tell someone else who can help

Preventing abuse

It's important to teach children messages about staying safe from a young age so that they're confident in recognising and assessing risk and understand where to go to get help when they need it.

Rule and understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch.

Link: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection-schools/roles-responsibilities/>

1. Podcast: anti-bullying in schools

How to implement effective anti-bullying policies and procedures in your school

It is vital that schools have a robust anti-bullying culture and procedures set in place to ensure the safety of their students, including any bullying that takes place online.

In this podcast, we are joined by Kay Joel, Senior Educational Consultant at the NSPCC who discusses:

the importance of having anti-bullying policies and procedures

why schools need an anti-bullying ethos approach

how policies and procedures have changed over the years

what makes an effective anti-bullying policy and procedure

where to go for further tips and advice on bullying.

Link: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/news/2019/may/podcast-anti-bullying-in-schools/>

3. Recognising and responding to abuse

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It can be very hard for children and young people to speak out about abuse. Often they fear there may be negative consequences if they tell anyone what's happening to them. Even if a child doesn't tell someone verbally about what's happened to them, there may be other indicators that something is wrong. People who work with children need to be able to recognise the signs and know how to respond appropriately.

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 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

3. Recognising and responding to abuse - continued

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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 adults clues, through their actions and by using indirect words (Allnock and Miller, 2013; Cossar et al, 2013).

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.

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 your organisation's 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 (Cossar et al, 2013).

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.

Responding to disclosures

We carried out research to find out how adults can better respond to a child who is disclosing abuse (Baker et al, 2019). We found three key interpersonal skills that help a child feel they are being listened to and taken seriously:

- **show you care**, help them open up: Give your full attention to the child or young person and keep your body language open and encouraging. Be compassionate, be understanding and reassure them their feelings are important. Phrases such as 'you've shown such courage today' help.
- **take your time**, slow down: Respect pauses and don't interrupt the child – let them go at their own pace. Recognise and respond to their body language. And remember that it may take several conversations for them to share what's happened to them.
- **show you understand**, reflect back: Make it clear you're interested in what the child is telling you. Reflect back what they've said to check your understanding – and use their language to show it's their experience.

If a child tells you they are experiencing abuse, it's important to reassure them that they've done the right thing in telling you. Make sure they know that abuse is never their fault.

Never talk to the alleged perpetrator about the child's disclosure. This could make things a lot worse for the child.

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.