

Child Protection Systems

A child is considered to be experiencing abuse or is at risk of abuse when the basic needs of the child are not being met, through avoidable acts of either commission or omission. This includes neglect and physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Abuse can involve children of all ages from all cultures, religious and social classes.

After children are admitted to school, teachers and other staff who are in daily contact with them are well placed to notice signs of neglect, behavioural change or failure to develop as expected, which may be indicators of abuse.

Common Signs of Abuse

Every child is unique, so behavioural signs of abuse will vary from child to child. In addition, the impact of abuse is likely to be influenced by the child's age, the nature and extent of the abuse, and the help and support the child receives. However, there are some behaviours that are commonly seen in children and young people who have been abused:

- The child appears distrustful of a particular adult, or a parent or a coach with whom you would expect there to be a close relationship.
- He or she has unexplained injuries such as bruising, bites or burns - particularly if these are on a part of the body where you would not expect them.
- If he or she has an injury which is not explained satisfactorily or properly treated.
- Deterioration in his or her physical appearance or a rapid weight gain or loss.
- Pains, itching, bruising, or bleeding in or near the genital area.
- A change in the child's general behaviour. For example, they may become unusually quiet and withdrawn, or unexpectedly aggressive. Such changes can be sudden or gradual.
- If he or she refuses to remove clothing for normal activities or wants to keep covered up in warm weather.
- If he or she shows inappropriate sexual awareness or behaviour for their age.
- Some disabled children may not be able to communicate verbally about abuse that they may be experiencing or have witnessed. It is therefore important to observe these children for signs other than 'telling'.

Remember that the above signs should be seen as a possible indication of abuse and not as a confirmation. If you are concerned about a child or young person you have a responsibility to act on those concerns.

What do you do?

If a child's behaviour/physical appearance causes you concern then report it immediately to the student's Progress Leader. The Progress Leader will decide, on the evidence available, whether to

pass this information on to a Student Counsellor or Bill Wiseman. If the Progress Leader is not available go straight to SLT, or BW

If a child volunteers information about abuse to a member of staff, it may sometimes be done obliquely rather than directly. An abused child is likely to be under severe emotional stress, and the staff member may be the only adult whom the child is prepared to trust. When information is offered in confidence, the member of staff will need to display tact and sensitivity in responding to the disclosure. The member of staff will need to reassure the child, and retain his or her trust, while explaining the need for action, which will necessarily involve other adults being informed.

A member of staff who receives a report from a child alleging abuse must not ask leading questions or proffer alternative explanations for the child's concerns. The child's report should be listened to carefully, and recorded accurately, in the language used by the child, at the earliest opportunity following its receipt. Do not undermine the trust the child has placed in you by disclosing their traumatic information. The person to whom information has been disclosed MUST see the process through to the end and MUST record the information using the exact language used on a Safeguarding witness disclosure form (in staff room). DO NOT use leading questions. TRY to pass the information on as gently as possible to BW as quickly as possible so that the appropriate course of action can be initiated.

Remember...take disclosure seriously... respond quickly and calmly... seek advice.