

Respond - how to appropriately respond to signs of abuse or a disclosure

Responding to signs of abuse

If you see a possible sign of abuse, neglect or exploitation, it is **not** your role to investigate physical signs on a child. Do not touch the children you work with or ask them to show you their injuries. It is your role to record and report your concerns. Be aware of how you respond to a physical sign; you can offer kind words but do not panic or overreact, always remain calm and professional.

You may recognise behavioural signs of possible abuse, neglect or exploitation. Be alert and keep the 'it could happen here' attitude in all schools. Again it is your role to record and report your concerns. Even if you are only meeting this child once, your observations may be an important part of a larger picture so do not dismiss your own concerns or leave the responsibility to another member of staff.

Responding to a disclosure

If a child makes a disclosure to you...

- Remain calm and open
- Listen carefully and trust the child
- Check you have understood what the child has said by reflecting back their own phrases but do not ask closed questions to gain more information
- Do not promise to keep it a secret as you may need to pass information on to keep them safe
- Do not make judgmental remarks and be aware of jumping to conclusions
- As soon as possible write down what the child disclosed using their own words as much as possible. Sign and date the record and report the disclosure without delay.

The language you use when you respond matters as it can encourage or discourage a child. For further information refer to the Barnardos Language Matters 2022 Review: https://cms.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-04/Language_Matters_2022_review.pdf

Report – best practice in reporting abuse and exploitation

Any concerns about a child should be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead in the school. Do not delay. If the DSL is not available then report to the DSL deputy. If the deputy DSL is unavailable then report to a member of the Senior Leadership Team and/or the local authority children's social care.

Remember, any information sharing concerns related to UK GDPR do not prevent the sharing of information for the purposes of keeping children safe and promoting their welfare.

Record - how to correctly record signs and disclosures of abuse

KCSIE 2024 states, “All concerns, discussions and decisions made, and the reasons for those decisions, should be recorded in writing. This will also help if/when responding to any complaints about the way a case has been handled by the school or college. Information should be kept confidential and stored securely. It is good practice to keep concerns and referrals in a separate child protection file for each child.

Records should include:

- a clear and comprehensive summary of the concern
- details of how the concern was followed up and resolved, and
- a note of any action taken, decisions reached and the outcome.”

After a disclosure, your initial notes may have been hastily recorded. As soon as possible, write your notes up so they can be clearly read and understood. Clarify any abbreviations and record as many of the child’s original words as you can remember. Date and sign the record and keep a copy in a secure place.

Refer - what happens next and your role in the process

Once you have reported your concerns to the DSL your role does not end there. Remain vigilant for any further signs and cooperate with the DSL in supporting the child and in any actions necessary following on from your report.

If you feel that your concerns are not being addressed then you can contact the NSPCC’s Whistleblowing Advice Line which offers support if you’re concerned a child protection issue is not being correctly handled: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/reporting-abuse/dedicated-helplines/whistleblowing-advice-line/>