

Dealing with allegations made against another child

This example procedure explains what to do if child protection allegations are made against another child involved with the organisation.

Aims and purpose of procedure

The aims of this procedure are:

- to ensure that children who attend (name of group/organisation), and any other children who may come to the attention of (name of group/organisation) are protected and supported following an allegation that they may have been abused by another child or young person involved with (name of group/organisation)
- to ensure that there is a fair, consistent and robust response to any allegations of this nature so that the risk posed to other children by the child/young person in question is managed effectively
- to facilitate an appropriate level of investigation into allegations, whether they relate to recent alleged activity, said to have taken place during the time that the child/young person in question has been involved with (name of group/organisation), or whether they relate to abuse which allegedly took place prior to the child's/young person's involvement with (name of group/organisation)
- to ensure that (name of group/organisation) continues to fulfil its responsibilities towards children and young people who may be subject to such investigations and are in need of support
- to ensure that there is an appropriate response in situations where allegations are unfounded or deemed to be malicious in origin.

The purpose of the procedure is to provide a clear direction to staff that are called upon to deal with such allegations and to manage investigations and care plans which may result from them.

This procedure applies to:

- any member of staff, volunteer or trustee to whom an allegation of abuse has been made which suggests that another child or young person is responsible
- anyone in a managerial position, including the designated safeguarding officer for children, line managers and supervisors, who may be required to deal with such allegations and manage investigations and care plans that result from them.

Different types of abuse – these definitions are taken from the statutory guidance Working Together 2015

Types of abuse that one child might inflict upon another are most likely to be either physical abuse or sexual abuse.

Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless and unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them, 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyber bullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or children to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts, such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of material substance abuse. Once a child is born it may involve a parent or carer

failing to provide adequate food, clothing, and shelter, including exclusion from home or abandonment; failure to protect a child from physical harm or danger; failure to ensure adequate supervision, including the use of adequate care takers; or the failure to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

There are also emerging types and methods of child abuse, including:

- Sexual exploitation
- Female genital mutilation (FGM)
- Trafficking of children in order to exploit them sexually, financially, via domestic servitude, or via the involvement in activity such as the production and sale of illegal drugs
- Abuse linked to beliefs such as spirit possession or witchcraft
- Radicalisation and the encouragement or coercion to become involved in terrorist activities
- Abuse via online methods eg from adults seeking to develop sexual relationships with children or to use sexual or abusive images of them
- Domestic violence (either witnessing violence between adult family members, or, in the case of older young people, being subjected to coercion or violence in an intimate relationship in the same way as an older person)

Ways that allegations might be made against another child/young person involved with (name of group/organisation)

- A child or parent/carer might make a direct allegation against another child or young person.
- A child or parent/carer might express discomfort with the behaviour of another child or young person that falls short of a specific allegation.
- Another child, member of staff or volunteer may directly observe behaviour from one child/young person towards another that gives cause for concern.
- The group/organisation may be informed by a parent or by the police or another statutory authority that a child or young person is the subject of an investigation.
- A child or young person may volunteer information to the organisation that he/she has harmed another child or is at risk of doing so, or has committed an offence against or related to a child.

Child protection or bullying?

When faced with a situation of one child or young person behaving inappropriately towards another, a decision needs to be made about whether the problem behaviour constitutes bullying or a child protection concern. This is a decision that needs to be reached by the designated safeguarding officer for children, in consultation with the staff member responsible for the child, the staff member's manager/supervisor and, if necessary, the local authority children's social care department.

If the conclusion is that the behaviour is an example of bullying, and if both children attend the group/organisation, it needs to be dealt with under the anti-bullying policy and procedure.

If it is behaviour that could be described as child abuse and has led to the victim possibly suffering significant harm, then it must be dealt with under child protection procedures. This should include all incidents of sexual assault and all but the most minor incidents of physical assault.

This checklist can be used to help inform the decision:

Bullying

- The difference of power between the bully and the person being bullied is relatively small.
- The bullying behaviour may be from a number of children/young people acting in a group rather than from one child acting alone.
- It may also, but not necessarily, be directed towards a group of other children rather than an individual child.
- The behaviour involves teasing or making fun of someone, excluding a child from games and conversations, pressurising other children not to be friends with someone, spreading hurtful rumours or circulating inappropriate photographs/images/drawings, cyberbullying, shouting at or verbally abusing someone, stealing someone's possessions, making threats, or harassment on the basis of race, gender, sexuality or disability.
- The behaviour has not previously been a concern and the bully or bullies may have been responding to group pressure.
- The behaviour is perceived as bullying by the victim.

Please note: physical or sexual assault, or forcing someone to do something embarrassing, harmful or dangerous is also included in the list of bullying behaviours in this resource library, but are the most likely to constitute a child protection concern if the victim suffers significant harm as a result of the behaviour.

Child protection concerns

- The difference of power between the child who is abusing and the person being abused is significant eg there is an age difference of more than two years, there is a significant difference in terms of size or level of ability, the abuser holds a position of power (such as being a helper, volunteer or informal leader) or the victim is significantly more vulnerable than the other child or young person.
- The behaviour involves sexual assault or physical assault (other than the most minor physical assault).
- The child who is the victim of the behaviour may have suffered significant harm.
- The behaviour may not necessarily be perceived by the victim as abusive, particularly if it is sexual in nature.
- The behaviour is not a one-off incident and is part of a pattern of concerning behaviour on the part of the child or young person who is abusing.
- The behaviour, if sexual, is not part of normal experimentation that takes place between children and young people.

Sexual abuse or normal experimentation?

All children and young people develop an interest in their own sexuality from a young age, and seek to learn about sex from their peers. It is important not to label normal, healthy behaviour as deviant or abusive. It is equally important not to allow sexually abusive behaviour perpetrated by one child or young person towards another to go unchecked, as this is harmful both for the victim and the perpetrator.

There are ways of assessing whether sexual behaviour between children and young people is abusive or not. Indicators of abusive behaviour include:

- there is a significant difference in age, dominance or understanding between the children/young people
- the behaviour was accompanied by the use of threats or bribes
- the behaviour was carried out in secret.

For the purposes of this procedure however, it is enough to say that if there is any question that the behaviour could be abusive, the matter should be discussed with the local authority children's social care department or with the NSPCC Helpline (0808 800 5000).

This can initially take place without the names of the children or young people being disclosed, although such information will have to be provided if the view

of the children's social care department or the NSPCC is that the behaviour may constitute significant harm and that an investigation is needed.

What to do if you have child protection concerns

Is the child who has been allegedly abused, or the child who has allegedly perpetrated the abuse, in immediate danger or does either of them need emergency medical attention?

- If either child is in immediate danger and is with you, remain with him/her and call the police if you are unable to remove the danger yourself.
- If the child is elsewhere, contact the police and explain the situation to them.
- If a child needs emergency medical attention, call an ambulance and, while you are waiting for it to arrive, get help from your first aider.
- If the first aider is not available, use any first aid knowledge that you may have yourself to help the child.
- You also need to contact your supervisor/manager or designated safeguarding officer for children to let them know what is happening.

A decision will need to be made about when and who should inform the families of both the child who has been abused and the child who has allegedly perpetrated the abuse, as well as the local authority children's social care department.

If the child who is the alleged victim is not known to (name of group/organisation), it is not our role to inform the child's family. Even if the child who is the alleged victim is known, the police and/or the social care services, should be part of the decision making process if they have been contacted.

The paramount consideration should always be the welfare of the children and young people involved. Issues that will need to be taken into account are:

- the children's wishes and feelings
- the parents' right to know (unless this would place the child who has allegedly perpetrated the abuse in danger, or would interfere with a criminal investigation)
- the impact of telling or not telling the parents
- the current assessment of the risk to the child who has been abused and the source of that risk
- the current assessment of any risk to the child who has allegedly perpetrated the abuse and the source of that risk
- any risk management plans that currently exist for either child.

Once any immediate danger or emergency medical need has been dealt with, the procedure set out below should be followed:

1. The member of staff who has been informed of the allegation or who has the concern, should make notes of what he/she has been told or of his/her direct concerns using the reporting form, and should discuss these with his/her supervisor/manager within 24 hours. The designated safeguarding officer for children should also be involved in the discussion.

2. If both children/young people are known to (name of group/organisation) and if their families do not already know about the allegation or concern, the member of staff, manager or designated safeguarding officer should discuss it with them unless:

- the view is that someone (for example the child who has allegedly perpetrated the abuse) may be put in danger by the family being informed
- informing the family might interfere with a criminal investigation.

If any of these circumstances apply, discussions with the families should only take place after this has been agreed with the local authority children's social care department.

3. If only the child who is alleged to have harmed another child is known to (name of group/organisation), then, subject to the considerations set out in above, discussions with only this child's family should take place.

4. The child who is the subject of the allegation should also be informed of what has been said about him/her. However, if the view is that children's social care or the police should be involved, the child should only be informed after discussion and agreement with these agencies. These agencies may have views about what information should be disclosed to the child/young person at this stage.

5. If there is still uncertainty about whether the allegation or concern constitutes a child protection issue, the designated safeguarding officer (or supervisor/manager if DSO not available) should discuss with children's social care department or with the NSPCC Helpline without disclosing the identity of either child/family.

6. If, having discussed the situation fully and taken advice if necessary, the manager/supervisor and the designated safeguarding person conclude that the alleged behaviour does not constitute a child protection issue, then consideration should be given to whether the anti-bullying policy and

procedure should be used (if both children are known to the organisation) and whether either or both children should be referred for other services.

7. If the view is that the behaviour does indeed amount to a child protection issue, the designated safeguarding officer should refer both children to the local authority children's social care department and confirm the referral in writing within 24 hours.
8. Pending the outcome of the referral to the children's social care department and the possible investigation or assessment that may follow from this, any risk that may be posed to other children by the child who has allegedly harmed another child will need to be carefully managed. This should be done on an inter-agency basis in accordance with procedures developed by the local safeguarding children board for children who display harmful behaviour towards others.
9. The designated safeguarding officer should enquire of the children's social care department whether these procedures are being used and, if so, should ask to be involved in or at least kept informed of inter-agency decisions made in accordance with these procedures.
10. If the procedures are not being used but (name of group/organisation) remains concerned that the child/young person could pose a risk to other children, then the designated safeguarding person and the manager should consider whether the child/young person can continue to be involved with (name of group/organisation) and, if so, on what basis. This is a situation that needs to be kept under regular review as the investigation and assessment conducted by the statutory agencies is carried out and reaches a conclusion. It may also need to be reviewed regularly following the conclusion of the assessment process, as the child or young person may be receiving support that should, with time, reduce the level of risk he/she presents.
11. If the allegation is found to be without substance or fabricated, (name of group/organisation) will consider referring the child who was said to have been harmed to the children's social care department for them to assess whether he/she is in need of services (for example, the child may have been abused by someone else).
12. If it is felt that there has been malicious intent behind the allegation, (name of group/organisation) will discuss with the police whether there are grounds to pursue any action against the person responsible.

What should I say to a child who says that he/she or another child is being abused by another child/young person?

- Reassure the child that he/she has done the right thing by telling someone about it.
- Tell him/her that you now have to do what you can to keep him/her (or the child who is the subject of the allegation) safe.
- Let the child know what you are going to do next and who else needs to know about it.
- Let the child tell his/her whole story. Don't try to investigate or quiz the child, but make sure that you are clear as to what he/she is saying.
- If possible, explain to the child's parent/carer what has happened. Do this first without the child there, and then summarise it again in front of the child so that it is an open subject between parent/carer and child. This may enable them to talk about it together more easily.
- Check out what the child would like to happen as a result of what he/she has said, but don't make or infer promises you can't keep.
- Give the child the ChildLine phone number (0800 1111).
- Make sure that the parent/carer has support too.

What should I say to a child/young person who says that he/she has abused another child?

- Reassure the child that he/she has done the right thing by telling someone about it.
- Tell him/her that you now have to do what you can to keep him/her and the child who has been abused safe.
- Let the child know what you are going to do next and who else needs to know about it.
- Let the child tell his/her whole story. Don't try to investigate or quiz the child, but make sure that you are clear as to what he/she is saying.
- If there is no risk to the child from the child's parent/carer, then explain to the parent/carer what has happened. Do this firstly without the child there, and then summarise it again in front of the child so that it is an open subject between parent/carer and child. This may enable them to talk about it together more easily.
- Check out what the child expects to happen as a result of what he/she has said. Offer reassurance where appropriate but don't make or infer promises you can't keep.
- Reassure the child that, with help, the problem can be sorted out and that what has happened does not make him/her an abuser for life.
- Give the child the ChildLine phone number.
- Remember that the child who has behaved in this way is a child in need of support.
- Make sure that the parent/carer has support too.

Recording the concerns

Use the reporting form in this toolbox to record the concern and how it is dealt with. The relevant sections of the form should be completed and signed at each stage of the procedure. It can be used to forward information to the statutory child protection authorities if a referral to them is needed.

Useful contact details

Supervisor/manager: name and phone number (insert details)

Designated safeguarding officer and deputy: names and phone numbers (insert details)

Local police (insert details)

Local authority children's social care department (insert details)

NSPCC Helpline: 0808 800 5000 help@nspcc.org.uk

ChildLine: 0800 1111 (textphone 0800 400 222) 0808 800 5000 or help@nspcc.org.uk