

Disclosures

Background

It can be very hard for children and young people to speak out about abuse, neglect or another type of harm they are experiencing. Often, they are fearful. They may have been threatened or anticipate negative consequences such as being separated from their family if they tell anyone what's happening to them.

Some may delay telling someone about abuse for a long time, while others never tell anyone, even if they want to.

It's vital that children and young people feel able to speak out and that whoever they tell takes them seriously and acts on what they've been told.

Questions for Self-Reflection,

Supervision and Team Meetings

- How do children and young people know who they can approach if they want to talk about any worries they may have? How can you approach them if you recognise signs of abuse or harm?
- What actions or protocols need to be agreed beforehand to arrange cover for pre-existing duties so time can be spent supporting the child in the event of a disclosure? e.g. class cover.
- How do we create safe spaces for children to express any worries or concerns they may have.
- How can we best support children and young people who have different communication needs or specific cultural considerations.

Even if a child doesn't tell someone verbally about abuse, 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. If you

identify signs of abuse, follow child protection procedures without delay - do not wait for a child to report abuse.

Some children may not have the language, or vocabulary to explain what is/has been happening to them.

Professional Judgment & Action

Once you have received a disclosure, you need to decide what action to take and how quickly to take it. Remember that doing nothing is not an option - never delay unnecessarily and always act promptly. Remember that a child does not need to disclose verbally for you to have protection concerns. Recognise signs of abuse, proactively talk to them and respond appropriately. Consider ethnicity, culture and communication need e.g. where English is not the first language/ non or pre-verbal children.

Follow your organisations Child Protection Procedures and / or Forth Valley Inter Agency Child Protection Guidelines.

Promptly share the information VERBALLY with your Line Manager/ Designated Child Protection Officer (CPO). If you cannot access them, directly contact the Social Work Team where the child Lives or Police (101). They will advise on the next steps.

Do not ask the child or young person to repeat the disclosure to another member of staff. The first disclosure is the most important and is what needs to be recorded.

Do not contact family / anyone involved unless explicitly directed to do so by Police / Social Work Staff. This may place the child at increased risk of harm.

It is important to keep accurate and detailed written records about any concerns you have about a child or young person. As soon as possible, complete a [Notification of Concern](#). Be factual, write what the child / young person has said in their own words and note any relevant observations - no opinions or judgments. Attach any other relevant record(s) related to the disclosure to the form.

Ensure what is recorded in the child's own words during the disclosure. When you as the worker is recording what the child has said include in your report all relevant background and influencing factors to support proportionate safeguarding approach is in being used whilst the concern information is being escalated.

What Is It?

Disclosure is the process by which children and young people start to share their experiences of abuse, neglect, exploitation or another kind of harm with others.

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.

All disclosures must be taken seriously. It takes extraordinary courage for a child to go through the journey of disclosing abuse.

It's vital that anyone who works with children and young people undertaking this journey is able to provide them with the support they need.

How Do Disclosures Occur?

Children and young people may not always be aware that they are disclosing through their actions and behaviour. Be aware of the following indicators:

- directly- making specific verbal statements about harm or abuse that has happened or is happening.
- indirectly - making comments that suggest something is wrong.
- behaviourally - displaying behaviour that signals something is not right.
- non-verbally - writing notes, drawing pictures or trying to communicate in other ways.

Stay Calm & Let Them Know You Are Listening

Hearing about abuse can be hard to listen to but it is vitally important that you focus on the child and what they are saying. Show them you are present and interested. You have an important role in helping to ensure they are heard and protected.

Show you care, help them open up

Give them your full attention and keep your body language open and encouraging. Be compassionate, be understanding and reassure them that their feelings are important.

Phrases like 'you've shown such courage today' can reassure them.

Take your time, slow down

Respect pauses in their speech and don't

interrupt them, let them share at their own pace. Be aware of, recognise and respond, to their body language and expressed needs.

Give them your full attention, demonstrate active listening by leaning in to show engagement. Keep an open posture to signal you are fully engaged to help build trust.

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Taking A Disclosure

Listen closely to what they

are telling you. Support and encourage them to tell their story in their own words or their usual methods of communicating.

Do not probe them for information or interpret what they say. Gentle reassuring non-verbal cues and phrases such as, 'can you tell me more about that' can be helpful to progress the conversation. **Remember it is not your role to investigate – only to listen, support and clarify.** The child may go on to be formally interviewed by specially trained Child Protection Interviewers.

- Let them speak freely and don't interrupt or finish their sentences.
- Do ask limited open questions if you need more information. 'Who, What, Where and When' type questions are fine to help you establish the context of what occurred, where and when it happened and who else was there to understand if harm has or may occur.
- **Never** ask suggestive, leading or 'Why' questions. Do not assume or introduce anything.
- Check your understanding by using their own words to reflect back what they have told you.
- **Thank them** for sharing.
- Ask if there is anything else they want to tell you.

Reassure them that they were right to speak up. Be honest - tell them what you are going to do next and why you need to do it. If harm or abuse has been disclosed tell them that you are going to have to contact someone who can help them. **NEVER PROMISE CONFIDENTIALITY**

Use open invitations to encourage the child to speak freely, giving them the freedom to choose what information they wish to share and in their own words.