

Procedures for what to do if you have a concern about a child for those in directorates/teams/services who do not work directly with children or adults at risk

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1. Introduction

1.1 The child's welfare is paramount and this means that the child's safety and protection must be the most important consideration and take priority over everything else. These procedures outline what action should be taken if you have concerns about a child's¹ safeguarding including child protection.

1.2 The procedures apply to the following individuals: all staff in directorates/teams/services who do not work directly with children or adults at risk and volunteers (including trustees and interns), secondees, agency staff, students, who in the course of their work or volunteering, have information or receive information that gives them cause for concern about a child's safeguarding/child protection. There are some staff who will need to follow both this procedure and the What to do if you are concerned about a child: For staff working directly with children or adults at risk e.g. Evidence Team.

The procedures also apply to sole traders and contractors, including training associates and fundraising agencies. Please refer to section 8 'What contractors and sole traders should do if they have a safeguarding concern'.

1.3 Throughout this procedure there are a range of terms used interchangeably across NSPCC directorates to describe concerns about protection and welfare of a child. For clarity of definition in application of this procedure:

- **Safeguarding children** is the action we take to **promote the welfare of children** and **protect** them from **harm**
- **Child protection** is part of the safeguarding continuum. It focuses on the activity that is undertaken to **protect** individual **children** identified as **suffering or likely to suffer significant harm**

1.4 Although there is no specific mandatory regulation in the UK² requiring professionals who work with children to report suspicions about child abuse to the authorities, in Northern Ireland it is an offence not to report an arrestable offence to the police, which by definition includes crimes against children. In the rest of the UK, professionals who work with children report their concerns and are expected to co-operate and exchange information following statutory guidance³ in their respective countries.

Principles

1.5 The key principles known as the 4 'Rs' for referring concerns:

- **Recognise** concerns that a child is being harmed or might be at risk of harm
- **Respond appropriately** to a child who is telling you what is happening to him or her

¹ Child: This procedure is in respect of all children. A child includes babies, children and young people from pre-birth up to 18 years. In Scotland, there is a variance to this where a child is someone up to the age of 16 years unless the child is subject to a supervision requirement by a Children's Hearing, in which case they are considered a child until the age of 18 years. See National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2014 (para 21-24) for more detailed guidance on this

² The Children Act 1989 (England and Wales) introduced the concept of significant harm/risk of significant harm as a threshold that justifies compulsory intervention in family life in the best interests of children. This concept is also used in equivalent legislation for other nations. The concept of significant harm is used in the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, and the Children (Scotland) Act 1995

³ HM Government (2018) Working Together to Safeguard Children; The Scottish Government (2014) National Guidance for Child Protection; Welsh Assembly Government (2006) Safeguarding Children: Working Together Under the Children Act 2004; DHSSPS (2010) Co-operating to Safeguard Children

- **Refer** the concerns, if appropriate, to the NSPCC helpline, police or children's social care⁴ or (in Scotland) the Children's Reporter⁵
- **Record** the concerns appropriately and any subsequent action taken; **do not delay** in passing on concerns. Timescales are in place to ensure that matters are resolved in a timely way but these are the *maximum allowed* and nothing should prevent a speedier response if this is required

Relevant policies and procedures

These procedures relate to other organisational policies and procedures:

1.6 Safeguarding and child protection policy

1.7 Safeguarding code of conduct and Policy on appropriate professional conduct

1.8 Non-recent historic abuse policy and procedure must be followed alongside this procedure in circumstances where there is:

An allegation of child abuse involving persons of public prominence and/or position of trust

- Child abuse offences which took place historically⁶ where there may have been a failure within an organisation to protect children, and
- Child abuse involving persons who are likely to be active and other children may be at risk.

This will ensure consideration of and co-ordination where necessary, with other external inquiries.

1.9 Female genital mutilation policy and procedure must be followed when there is concern that a child is at risk of or has suffered FGM. This will ensure that legislative requirements are followed as well as full consideration being given to action being taken to safeguard the child in these specific circumstances.

1.10 Radicalisation and extremism practice guidance should be followed when there are safeguarding including child protection in the context of radicalisation and extremism.

1.11 The Management of allegations against staff and volunteers procedure must be followed if the concern is about the behaviour of any of the following individuals: all staff and volunteers (including trustees and interns), secondees, agency staff, students, towards a child either currently or in the past.

1.12 If the concern is about a person who is aged 18 years and above then follow the Safeguarding adults at risk of abuse policy and procedure

1.13 Online Safety Guidance should be followed as necessary.

1.14 Safeguarding in specific circumstances – there is a range of guidance available in the resources section on VIP. Please ask your manager / supervisor / coordinator if you have any questions or require further information.

⁴ Equivalent in other nations are: Social Services (Wales); Health and Social Care Trusts (NI); Social Work Services (Scotland); Children's Services (Jersey)

⁵ Under the 2011 Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act

⁶ Definition: 'Non-recent historical' means – an allegation which occurred at least one year before it was reported

2. Reporting serious incidents to the CEO

2.1 Please note: this procedure is separate and in addition to the process for immediate (same day) reporting of serious incidents to the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive expects to receive on the same day information that relates to:

- In Children's Services - a death or serious abuse or neglect in an open or recently closed case
- In National Services - a death or serious abuse or neglect in a contemporaneous or recent telephone or online contact
and any
- Death or serious abuse or neglect likely to trigger a Child Safeguarding Case Review or equivalent, and/or likely to trigger media interest (imminently)
- Obvious or apparent NSPCC/Childline serious systems failure e.g. recording system, or serious performance or conduct breach
- Death or serious incident that is very distressing to the practitioner/manager and to whom the Chief Executive might offer a word of support

2.2 This information can be a brief rather than a comprehensive report, with further information to follow if and as necessary, making a judgement about what needs to be shared. Same day alerts are the priority. The Chief Executive will then make a timely alert to all trustees.

3. Recognition of abuse

3.1 *"Abuse: a form of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by others. Abuse can take place wholly online, or technology may be used to facilitate offline abuse. Children may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children"*⁷.

3.2 A concern about a child's safety and welfare might arise as a result of:

- A child saying that s/he is being abused or telling you about an experience or event that has happened to them that you think would be harmful
- You identifying signs or indicators of abuse or neglect
- The child's behaviour gives cause for concern
- You directly witness a child being harmed by an adult or another child
- Somebody tells you, either face to face or by any other means of communication, that a child is being harmed or is at risk of harm, for example a service user, another child, a supporter/donor or a member of the public
- The behaviour of an adult gives you cause for concern

⁷ HM Government (2018) *Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*; Scottish Government (2014) *National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland*. See *Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People 2017 Department of Health NI equivalent definitions*

- A situation where the child is a foreign national and it is not clear who the parents are, or that the child is with adults where the relationship to the child is unclear

3.3 There are four types of child abuse: physical, sexual, emotional, and neglect – although children can be subjected to more than one type of abuse. There are ten categories of adult abuse detailed in the Safeguarding adults at risk policy.

4. Responding to concerns expressed by a child

4.1 If you're in a situation where a child discloses abuse to you, there are a number of steps you can take:

- **Listen carefully to the child.** Avoid expressing your own views on the matter. A reaction of shock or disbelief could cause the child to 'shut down', retract or stop talking
- **Let them know they've done the right thing.** Reassurance can make a big impact to the child who may have been keeping the abuse secret
- **Tell them it's not their fault.** Abuse is never the child's fault and they need to know this
- **Say you will take them seriously.** A child could keep abuse secret in fear they won't be believed. They've told you because they want help and trust you'll be the person who will listen to and support them.
- **Don't talk to the alleged abuser.** Confronting the alleged abuser about what the child's told you could make the situation a lot worse for the child
- **Explain what you'll do next.** If age appropriate, explain to the child you'll need to report the abuse to someone who will be able to help
- **Don't delay reporting the abuse.** The sooner the abuse is reported after the child discloses the better. Report as soon as possible so details are fresh in your mind and action can be taken quickly

4.2 At an appropriate point in the conversation and depending on the age of the child, let the child know that s/he can also contact Childline for support and provide the Childline telephone number⁸.

5. What to do if you have concerns that child's life is threatened or is at risk of immediate harm

5.1 If it appears that a child is in need of urgent medical attention or in need of police protection due to imminent harm, then:

- Contact the emergency services on **999**
- Pass the child's details and the action that you have taken to the NSPCC helpline on **0808 800 5000**
- Record relevant information on the safeguarding incident report form and send to the NSPCC helpline **within one working day**. The helpline will make an appropriate referral to children's social care (or equivalent in other nations) and/or the police or Child Trafficking and Advice Centre (CTAC) in cases of child trafficking. Once the safeguarding incident report form has been shared with the helpline and a receipt of it confirmed then there is no need to keep that information at a local level
- Inform your line manager

⁸ The Childline number is: 0800 111. Childline offers a distinct confidentiality threshold to children who use it that is different from the rest of the NSPCC. When a child is harmed, or is at risk of being harmed, or is connected to illegal activity, then Childline will aim to get the child's permission to take protective action. However, the contract of confidentiality can be breached when the child is perceived to be in a life-threatening situation, and in some instances as outlined in the Childline Confidentiality Standards

5.2 What to do if you have safeguarding concerns that do not pose immediate risk to a child's life

- Inform your line manager or supervisor about the concern
- Complete the safeguarding incident report form outlining the nature and details of the concern(s) and email it to the NSPCC helpline help@nspcc.org.uk within one working day
- Follow this up by making a telephone call to the NSPCC helpline on **0808 800 5000**
- update your line manager or supervisor of the actions taken

6. What to do if you have concerns outside your employment or volunteering for the NSPCC

6.1 When NSPCC staff or volunteers are outside of their NSPCC employment or volunteering role or outside of work as a member of the public, they may identify child safeguarding /child protection concerns. For example in their own family or networks, community, neighbourhood or through other activities in which they participate.

The NSPCC expects all of its staff and volunteers, to act on any safeguarding/child protection concerns by taking advice and / or reporting them.

6.2 The process below should be followed where the concerns arise in the course of working, or volunteering for another organisation.

- If NSPCC staff or volunteers are working or volunteering in another organisation (e.g. church, sports club, girl guides) and a safeguarding/child protection concern arises, they should follow the safeguarding procedures of that organisation. Advice may always be sought from the NSPCC helpline
- If the organisation has no safeguarding procedures of its own, then the concerns should be shared with the NSPCC helpline **within one working day**, or with children's social care (or equivalent) or the appropriate emergency service(s) by calling **999** if a child is at immediate risk of harm or if s/he needs urgent medical attention
- If NSPCC staff or volunteers identify safeguarding/child protection concerns outside of work, if the child is at immediate risk of harm they call emergency services on 999 or if the child is not at risk of immediate they should contact the NSPCC helpline or the local children's services.

7. Confidentiality, information sharing, and records retention

7.1 The Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and human rights law are not barriers to justified information sharing, but provide a framework to ensure that personal information about living individuals is shared appropriately and must be adhered to when handling personal information.

7.2 **Fears about sharing information cannot stand in the way** of the need to safeguard and protect the safety of children and promote their welfare.

7.3 When the helpline receives information about concerns it will normally pass on referrer details to the recipient unless to do so would endanger a child or family or where it is an anonymous referral.

7.4 Staff should pass information on as necessary, and no individual should assume that someone else will pass on information which may be critical to keeping a child safe or that all professionals involved have the same information and knowledge of a family.

8. What contractors and sole traders do if they have a safeguarding concern

8.1 **Contractors who come onto NSPCC premises to do work** (e.g. plumbers and electricians) are supervised by an NSPCC employee, and as such if they have any concerns these should be raised with this person or another member of staff.

If you are a contractor working away from NSPCC premises but on behalf of the NSPCC you should follow the procedures below.

8.2 **For sole traders who are not expected to come into contact with children and vulnerable adults**

The following is required:

- If you are concerned that a child or adult is at risk of immediate harm call **999**, then call the NSPCC helpline
- If you are concerned that a child or adult is at risk that does not need a 999 call, then call the helpline on **0800 800 500**

8.3 **Sole traders who are expected to come into contact with children and vulnerable adults**

The procedure set out here is for use by sole traders and contractors who come into contact with members of the public, children or vulnerable adults (adults at risk), or who come into contact with education, health or social care professionals

We ask sole traders to call the police or helpline direct rather than via their manager or supervisor because they might have details or impressions that are helpful to the police or the helpline.

Contracting agencies should decide how and when their staff should inform their line managers of the concern. We recognise that some sole traders will not have a manager.

Sole traders should share any safeguarding concern they have with the NSPCC helpline if the details they have do not lead to the identification of the child or adult at risk. This will enable the helpline to consider what further action the helpline could take to seek the identity of a child as well as offer immediate emotional support to the contractor or sole trader who might be anxious or distressed.

8.4 **Safeguarding and child welfare concerns**

If you see or hear something that gives you reason to think that a child or adult is, has been, or may in the future be, at risk of harm:

- Call the NSPCC helpline on **0808 800 5000**
- Identify yourself as a fundraiser on behalf of the NSPCC and provide as much information as you can about why you are concerned, giving any details that might help to identify the child or adult where necessary
- Don't wait until the end of your shift to do this – call the helpline as soon as you can

If a child or adult gives you information that gives you reason to think that they or someone else is, has been, or may in the future be at risk of harm, or would benefit from advice on a child welfare matter:

- Explain to them that it sounds like it would be useful for them to get some advice about what they are telling you. If the person is an adult, briefly explain what the NSPCC helpline does, and give them the contact details. If you are talking to a child, give them the contact details for Childline instead
- After you have finished your conversation with the person, call the NSPCC helpline on **0808 800 5000** and identify yourself as a fundraiser on behalf of the the NSPCC. Provide the NSPCC helpline with details of the conversation, and with the advice that you passed to the person in question

There may be some situations in which it is reasonable to think that someone may be at serious risk or in danger, and that an immediate response is needed.

These situations could include (but are not limited to):

- Encountering a child who is alone without adult supervision and does not appear old enough to keep themselves safe
- Witnessing a physical assault of either a child or an adult
- Being approached by someone who is clearly in need of urgent medical attention

If you feel that somebody requires emergency assistance of any kind, you should call **999** to share your concerns in the first instance, and follow this with a call to the NSPCC helpline on **0808 800 5000** to provide details of the concern and the action that you have taken.

8.5 Things to remembers

- Stay calm and listen to the child or member of the public
- Do not become more involved than you need to and never offer any advice on how someone should act or feel
- Do not make any promises of anything that you will do or that will happen
- If you are concerned, trust your judgement. Calling the helpline whether for advice or action is better than doing nothing
- The police and/or the NSPCC helpline will record details of your call. Your agency will have its own policy about record-keeping with which you must comply