

Safeguarding for volunteers and support staff: promoting resilience working with children and young people in schools

Introduction

All those who come into contact with children, young people and their families in their everyday work and who do not have a specific role in relation to safeguarding children, have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in their care. These individuals include volunteers and other support staff in schools.

However, the very disclosure checks and organisational policies that keep children and young people safe can create barriers to volunteers and support staff getting involved in youth activities or organisations that promote **resilience** working.

'You can't do that nowadays - you would put yourself at risk of a child/organisation making an allegation against you'

School receptionist'

The intention of these systems is obviously to create a safe environment for our children and young people and yes we know they are not full proof but they do focus the mind on what children need to be safe.

Resilience research shows that children and young people develop resilience if they are able to build good

relationships with individuals with whom they trust.

So how do we encourage people to get involved to support children and young people but still remain safe?

This document provides information to help volunteers and support staff understand the issues around safeguarding children and young people and what is expected of them. It should help you manage to build positive relationships with children and young people whilst being clear about safeguarding practices.

Know your safeguarding

Consider the following scenarios:

Scenario 1

You see a young child alone and crying in a local park. What would your response be?

Answer. A child on their own is vulnerable and we have an instinctive human response to protect that child. We should use our knowledge of legislation to promote and support that human response and not hide behind it. The child may have become separated from their parent/carer so look around and see if there if they are around. The child may be lost and afraid and care should be taken if approaching a distressed child as they could find the arrival of a stranger intimidating. Consider

your body language and approach calmly and in a friendly manner, perhaps bend down to the height of the child or young person so as not to appear dominating. Ask the child for identifying information and involve another bystander, if possible a mum with a child/baby may seem safer to a distressed child. Use common sense to determine whether there is a real risk to the child or are there simple solutions that can be found. In the multi-agency context of child protection there may be an agency nearby, who can offer help e.g a nursery. If you judge there to be real concerns pass it on to the police and or a social worker.

Scenario 2

You are a parent on a school trip and a child is becoming sunburnt. School staff have forgotten to obtain permission for applying sun cream, medication etc. and are reluctant to intervene - sounds impossible but it has happened. How would you respond to this situation?

Answer. Give the child sun cream to put on if they are competent, however, most young children will need direction. Apply it yourself but ask the child if they mind you doing this and seek their permission and do this in the presence of another adult as witness and inform the parents/guardian after the event. It may be possible to obtain verbal consent by phone on the day if it is practical. Bear in mind that a small number of children experience allergies to sun protection cream.

Borrow/buy a sun hat for the child/make sure they cover their arms. Make a game of the situation and ask the children to plan for this unexpected event. It won't be only one child affected. Ensure that your actions have been recorded so that this situation can be avoided in the future.

Scenario 3

You are a volunteer in school providing one to one reading assistance to children. A child you assist with makes a disclosure to you. What do you do?

Answer. It is important to remain calm and neutral in your response. Do not show any emotional reaction, especially one which may cause anxiety to the child. The child's emotions are sensitive, the adult needs to make them feel safe and listened too. Remain calm and listen to the child or young person if appropriate to do so. It is very important for the child or young person to know that you believe what they are saying to you.

Write down your concerns and report it to the child protection or safeguarding lead in your organisation. Remember that the welfare of the child or young person is paramount' and you have a duty to report your concerns.

Scenario 4

You are a school caretaker who helps with running an after school cricket club. You know of two young people that show a keen interest in cricket but have no one to encourage them to take part or take them home afterwards. You want to help them

get involved but you are worried that your interest might be perceived as inappropriate. What would you do?

Answer. A good **resilient** move would be to encourage the young people to take part. You will need to approach senior staff in school for support to help you follow up your actions. For example you will need to ensure you have obtained a parent or carer's consent for the young people taking part in the activity in the first instance (you may need to be proactive about this and engage with the parents or carers) and possibly carry out a risk assessment. Perhaps explore whether other parents whose children attend the cricket club could help with home runs, again appropriate consents would need to be obtained. Remember your involvement and commitment to these young people could make all the difference to their lives.

After school clubs tend to be less formal settings but you should always ensure that your behaviour remains professional at all times. Make sure that a responsible adult is present with you during the after school activities.

Everyone working with children, young people and their families should:

Be familiar with and follow their organisation's procedures for promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children and young people in your area, and know who to contact in your organisation (there should be a designated member of staff or

health professional depending on your organisational setting) to express concerns about a child's or young person's welfare.

Remember that an allegation of child abuse or neglect may lead to a criminal investigation, so don't do anything that may jeopardise a police investigation, such as asking a child or young person leading questions or attempting to investigate the allegations of abuse.

If you are responsible for making referrals, know who to contact in police, health, education, school and children's social care to express concerns about a child's welfare.

When referring a child to children's social care you should consider what the cause of concern is, including the level of the concern. Is it safe for the child or young person to go home? Also any information from the child or young person which may be relevant i.e. how does the child or young person present both physically (bruising) or emotionally (tearful). Does the child or young person need medical attention? If appropriate (preferred if safe) inform or discuss the referral with the parent /guardian. However, if a prior discussion could place the child at risk of significant harm, then this should be recorded along with the reason why when a referral is made. Also include any information you have on the child's or young person's developmental needs and their parents'/carers capacity to respond to these needs within the context of their wider family and environment.

See the child or young person and find out his or her wishes and feelings as part of considering what action to take in relation to concerns about the child's or young person's welfare.

Communicate with the child or young person in a way that is appropriate to their age, understanding and preference. This is especially important for disabled children and young people and individuals whose preferred language is not English. How you communicate with the child or young person will depend on the seriousness of the concerns and you may require advice from Children's social care or the police so ensure that neither the safety of the child nor any subsequent investigation is jeopardised.

Where concerns arise as a result of information given by a child or young person it is important to reassure the child or young person but not to compromise confidentiality.

Record full information about the child at first the point of contact and record in writing all concerns, discussions about the child or young person decisions made, and the reasons for those decisions. The child's records should include an up to date chronology, and details of the lead worker in the relevant agency - for example, a social; worker, GP, health visitor or teacher.

What legislation exists in the United Kingdom?

In England Wales, and Northern Ireland the current child protection system is based on the Children Act 1989 and 2004. There is no single piece of legislation that covers child protection in the UK but a number of laws and guidance that are continually amended and updated. Every Child Matters (ECM) is one of the most important policy initiatives which led to the Children Act 2004. However the underlying principles of the UK legislation are similar to those of the new Scottish legislation and GIRFEC.

In Scotland, the new Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, which legislates for Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) will help to ensure children get the help they need, when they need it before matters become critical. As people become more familiar with this new policy it should reassure that the supports are in place to refer children for support and intervention.

Children at risk or risky children

There can be a real barrier to interacting with children and young people who may be in situations where they seem in control or to be making free choices to behave badly.

Consider these situations:

Children and young people being groomed into child sexual exploitation may initially misinterpret the attention and find they are unable to retreat from the situation.

Young people want to be included with their peer group can get involved with the "wrong crowd".

Use of recreational drugs, so freely available at parties may escalate and become a problem, resulting in deteriorating behaviour.

Children, who are **resilient** and content, do not generally carry out risky behaviours and we are aware of this from research. Children, who are needy, experiencing some distress in their lives, or struggling with some aspects of growing up may engage in very risky behaviours. It can be difficult for individuals who work with risky children or young people to report abuse as they fear for their own safety. However it is very important to always keep the child or young person at the centre of the decision making process.

Growing up is hard and for young people. To develop resilience and make the right choices they have to be supported when they make the wrong choices.

Contact with Social Workers too risky

Many referrals to child protection social work do not result in involvement in the child protection system but may be diverted to other parts of the system to receive help. The Child Protection System has not been very successful in promoting these various routes, which may be taken following a referral. Many referrers may fear the repercussions of involvement at a high level, when a family may be in need of support at a lower level.

And most importantly:

What stops children and young people seeking help?

Research has highlighted many issues:

Fear of not being believed.

Fear of losing control of the process

Fear of lack of confidentiality and the pace of child protection moving too fast

Reluctance to identify the issue as a problem

No one to trust or speak to

Bottling up problems and concerns and coping in isolation is not healthy and while a child may appear resilient and can and will accommodate the abuse and devise coping strategies, this is not a recipe for good mental health.

The child protection system must evolve to incorporate some of the views of young people and this is particularly true of adolescents, who may still need protection but in a more informal and adaptable way. Child Protection is challenged by many new issues e.g. internet safety, 'child sexual exploitation, child trafficking and providing support to adolescents, who may not have been helped and supported sufficiently at an early stage.

Conclusion

Research shows that children and young people develop **resilience** if they are able to build good relationships with practitioners and other individuals with whom they trust.

Barriers do exist for children and young people to disclosing abuse and also for the public reporting abuse but the system is evolving and becoming influenced by a children's rights agenda and by good partnerships and multi-agency working.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0039/00394308.pdf>

Safeguarding children and young people is '**everyone's business**' it should not be seen as a barrier for working with children or young people. It is yours and your organisation's duty to provide you with training and to know the necessary policies and procedures that protect the young people you work with but above all give you the confidence and support to carry out your role and make a difference to the children and young people you work with.

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Useful Contacts:

HM Government

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-to-do-if-youre-worried-a-child-is-being-abused>

NSPCC

www.nspcc.org.uk

Resilience research and practice

www.boingboing.org.uk/

The Scottish Government

A guide to getting it right for every child.
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