

The following guidance builds on the recommendations made in:

- *Keeping Children Safe in Education (September 2018)*
- *Working Together to Safeguard Children (July 2018)*
- *What to do if you are worried a child is being abused: Advice for practitioners (March 2015)*
- *Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Partnership Interagency Safeguarding Children Procedures (January 2019), particularly 4.9 'Responding to Abuse and Neglect - Hearing and observing the child/young person'*
https://nottinghamshirescb.proceduresonline.com/p_respond_abuse.html

...and follows from lessons learned from a recent Serious Case Review.

For the purposes of this guidance *disclosure* refers to any sensitive information which a child or young person chooses to share with an adult. Whilst this may include the disclosure of acts of abuse, *disclosure* is not limited to immediate child protection concerns; it may also include the sharing of sensitive, personal information, for example about sexual orientation. Where a child or young adult makes a Child Protection disclosure, the adult must follow the procedures set out in *Keeping Children Safe in Education (2018)*. Always follow your school's Safeguarding procedures and consult with your designated Lead for Safeguarding.

When establishing relationships with their pupils, adults should take care to sensitively make children and young people aware of their professional responsibility and professional boundaries, including their responsibility to report concerns about safety. It may be helpful to develop a script to use, for example,

'You can talk to me and I will respect your privacy and confidentiality unless I am concerned you or someone else is not safe. In that case, I will need to tell someone else to get help.'

The purpose of this is would be to reduce the risk of a breakdown in the trusted relationship following a disclosure in the future. Whilst his can be easier for school professionals in a more formal helping relationship (e.g. school counsellor, form tutor), schools should consider how such a script might be used by adults having more natural day to day conversations with children and young people.

When a child or young adult chooses to share or disclose sensitive information, this usually takes place within the context of an existing, trusted relationship with the adult. The very act of sharing this sensitive information will have an impact on the relationship itself, often depending on how the adult reacts.

If you are in a situation where a child or young person discloses abuse or other sensitive information to you, there are a number of steps you and your school can take:

- Listen carefully, and observe the child or young person's behaviour and circumstances.
- Demonstrate empathy, and provide reassurance. Reassurance can make a big impact to a child or young person who may have been keeping abuse or sensitive information secret.
- Be non-judgemental. 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.
- Acknowledge the courage which the child has demonstrated in sharing the sensitive information with you
- Do not press the child or young person for information, cross-examine them, or give them false assurances of confidentiality, but do say that you take them seriously.
- Explain to the child or young person the action that you will be taking, including what you may need to do in order to protect the child or young person, and the timeframe for your actions
- Subsequently, and as soon as possible after the conversation, make a written record of the disclosure conversation.

The duty of care which the adult has towards the child or young person who has shared with them sensitive information, extends beyond the immediate moment when the *disclosure* conversation has taken place.

In managing the *disclosure* conversation, you should reassure the child or young person that:

- You will continue to be available to listen to worries or concerns that they may have, and
- That should the child or young person not feel able, for any reason, to be able to come to you in the future, ask who else the child or young person might go to as an alternative or additional trusted adult.

When the *disclosure* conversation has ended, and the child or young person is alone, they may regret having shared the sensitive information, and if the adult was the only trusted person the child or young person had felt able to go to, their sense of aloneness could become heightened. This is why the adult should be proactive in reassuring the child or young person about the rightness of them sharing the sensitive information, as well as being proactive in agreeing with the child or young person future sources of trusted adult support.

Staff follow up support:

It is important that members of school staff feel supported through the process of a child or young person disclosing sensitive information. Hearing a child disclose distressing events can have a negative impact on a person's own wellbeing. It is important that staff follow the school's safeguarding procedure, and it is also important that the school considers the processes it has in place to support the emotional health and wellbeing of its staff. This includes recognising not only the importance of this aspect of work, but also that this work can be difficult and stressful; it is work which can have an emotional and physical impact on staff, and this impact is not a sign of weakness, but a recognition that the work is challenging.

Lander (2018) states:

“Attend to self-care, guard against your work becoming the only activity that defines who you are. Keep perspective by spending time with children and adolescents who are not experiencing traumatic stress. Take care of yourself by eating and exercising, engaging in fun activities, taking a break during the workday, finding time to self-reflect, allowing yourself to cry, and finding things to laugh about”

Strategies to support staff might include:

- teachers coming together once a month or once a week to check in with each other about how they are doing emotionally
- fostering a supportive and caring culture, where staff are trained to recognise and support students suffering trauma, and are also trained to recognise the impact this can have on them personally (J. Lander, 2018)

The ‘Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families’ has published more general advice on “Supporting staff wellbeing in schools” which includes a focus on staff’s physical, mental and emotional health. The advice recognises that school staff are often juggling many demands, whilst a focus on wellbeing is becoming more important.

It is important that the school’s ethos, practices and procedures value staff wellbeing, including the following:

- staff members having a space dedicated to them to go and take some time out
- there are clear policies around staff wellbeing
- open communication is encouraged
- good working practices and self-care are modelled to encourage a good work-life balance. People are encouraged to take regular breaks, to finish on time and to ask for help and support when needed
- staff are communicated with about any changes that might take place and, if possible, are consulted with. Positive feedback is given
- a sense of community is encouraged, there are opportunities for all staff to get together, and non-work-related activities are introduced
- staff wellbeing is kept on the agenda. Resilience based workshops are offered regularly and staff are offered opportunities to debrief each other regularly
- staff feedback is encouraged on thoughts regarding how to maintain and improve staff wellbeing

The Anna Freud guidance concludes that the following can be important in the promotion and maintenance of your mental wellbeing:

- ✓ know your personal limits, and have the strength to say “no” when necessary
- ✓ identify supportive people that you have in your life
- ✓ be flexible around change; accept that there will inevitably be changes, and develop strategies to adapt to help build your resilience
- ✓ talk: if you have had a challenging day, try and speak to someone before you leave school

There are recommendations from several bodies, including the Anna Freud Centre, that recognise the importance of staff supervision. Ensure that ongoing supervision is available, and utilise it to explore any ongoing issues and concerns on a regular basis.

Summary

How well a child or young person responds having disclosed sensitive information, will be affected by how well the adult has managed the conversation, both at the time, and afterwards. The likelihood of the child or young person disclosing sensitive information will be affected by the quality of the relationship which they have with the adult. The quality of this relationship, and how well the adult manages the disclosure will be affected by the adult's own emotional well-being. The adult's emotional well-being, and their ability to establish and maintain relationships with children, young people and their work colleagues, will be affected by the environment in which they work.

References:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/signs-symptoms-effects/what-to-do-child-speaks-out-about-abuse/>

Supporting staff wellbeing in schools - the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families.

<https://www.annafreud.org/what-we-do/schools-in-mind/resources-for-schools/supporting-mental-health-and-wellbeing-in-schools/>

Lander, J (2018), "*Helping teachers manage the weight of trauma understanding and mitigating the effect of secondary traumatic stress for educators*".

<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/18/09/helping-teachers-manage-weight-trauma>

Useful additional resources:

Grange Primary School Supervision policy

<http://www.grange.lancs.sch.uk/download/file/GPS%20Supervision%20Policy%20Feb%2020171.pdf>

<https://www.bravehearteducation.co.uk/secondary-trauma-in-schools/>