**Practice Guidance - Dealing with Allegations of Harm made by a Child**

What should you do if a child comes to you and tells you that they are being abused, harmed or at risk of violence?

What should you do if a child tells you they are carrying weapons, or are threatening harm to others?

1. **Acknowledge your feelings**

It is normal to feel emotional, overwhelmed and confused when a child discloses. Child abuse, including peer on peer abuse and violence is a sensitive subject that can be hard to accept and even harder to talk about. Children who are abused or groomed are often threatened by the perpetrators to keep the abuse a secret, therefore it takes a great amount of courage for them to make a disclosure. Children must manage a lot of issues, including the fear that no one will believe them.

Care must be taken to remain calm and to show support to the child throughout the disclosure phase. The following guidelines will help lessen the risk of causing more trauma to the child and/or compromising a criminal investigation during the disclosure phase.

1. **Receive the information**

* Remain calm
* Listen to what is being said without displaying shock or disbelief
* Accept what is being said without judgement. Take it seriously

1. **Reassure**

Reassure the child, but only so far as is honest and reliable.

* Do not make promises that you cannot keep, e.g. "Everything will be all right now"
* Reassure the child that they did nothing wrong and that you take what is said seriously
* Don’t promise confidentiality – never agree to keep secrets. You have a duty to report your concerns
* Tell the child that you will need to tell some people, but only those whose job it is to protect children
* Acknowledge how difficult it must have been to talk. It takes a lot for a child to come forward about abuse

1. **React**

* Listen quietly, carefully and patiently
* Do not assume anything – do not speculate or jump to conclusions
* Do not investigate, interrogate, or decide if the child is telling the truth

\***Remember that an allegation of child abuse may lead to a criminal investigation**\*, so don’t do anything that may jeopardise a police investigation. Let the child explain to you in their own words what happened, but don’t ask leading questions.

**Be mindful, you could be called to give a police statement and, in some cases, requested to present as a witness in Court. For support you can contact the Trust Legal team.**

* Ask open questions like "Is there anything else that you want to tell me?"
* Communicate with the child in a way that is appropriate to their age, understanding and preference. **This is especially important for children with disabilities and for children whose preferred language is not English**
* Do not ask the child to repeat what they have told you to another member of staff( this is re-traumatising ). Explain what you must do next and whom you must talk to
* Report your concerns directly to the named Child Protection Officer or designated person in your organisation (as set out in your organisation’s child protection policy). The organisation’s local safeguarding process should be followed.

**\*Do not discuss the child’s situation with anyone outside the child protection team.\***

1. **Record**

Make some very brief notes at the time and write them up in detail as soon as possible. **Do not destroy your original notes in case they are required by Court**.

* Record the date , time and who was present and record in the child’s words and how they presented (be specific). Record the actual words used, including any swear words or slang.
* Record statements and observable things, not your interpretations or assumptions – keep it fact.
* If they have disclosed information that could be intelligence, re locations names of perpetrators or events where harm is likely to occur, please submit a Force Intelligence Form.

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If you require support following a disclosure, please discuss with your line manager and access support from the Trust’s Employment Assistance Programme.