
CHILD PROTECTION – GENERAL GUIDANCE

1. The Law and Child Protection

We share responsibility for safeguarding and promoting each pupil's welfare with other adults and agencies. Failure to identify abuse, or potential abuse, may be deemed negligent. The term “identify” may require us to pick up hints, not just respond to a straight disclosure of abuse; in many cases there might not be one.

The child should be given credence in all circumstances. Even if we consider the harm to be trivial, the child may not. The law takes the child's perspective and interests before all others.

2. General Guidance for Staff

Staff should operate according to these guidelines:

- Members of staff should familiarise themselves with the School's Child Protection Policy.
- Child abuse to be reported includes abuse of a pupil by a staff member or other adult, abuse at home or a host family which a pupils reports to staff, abuse by a stranger outside school, and abuse of one pupil by another pupil. In the case of abuse by a pupil, or group of pupils, the key issues identifying the problem as abuse, rather than an isolated instance of bullying or “adolescent experimentation” which could be handled within the normal framework for discipline, are:
 - the frequency, nature and severity of the incident(s)
 - whether the victim was coerced by physical force, fear, or by a pupil or group of pupils significantly older the him/herself, or having power or authority over him
 - whether the incident involved a potentially criminal act
 - whether, if the same incident or injury had occurred to a member of staff or other adult, it would have been regarded as assault or otherwise actionable.
- Any member of staff who is told of any incident or strong suspicion of physical or sexual child abuse occurring at the School, or to a pupil of the School at home or outside the School or who knows of or suspects such abuse must report the information immediately to the CPO. Further guidelines on responding to a disclosure are given below.
- Staff are asked not to investigate in detail reports of physical or sexual abuse themselves. Questioning should always be limited to the minimum necessary to seek clarification only, strictly avoiding “leading” the pupil or making suggestions that introduce your own ideas about what may have happened. The reason for this requirement is that in the event of any subsequent legal action, the whole case may be prejudiced by such questioning. Further interviewing or questioning will be carried out by the CPO.

- Staff should never give absolute guarantees of confidentiality to anyone raising complaints about abuse but may point out that they will pass on information to only a minimum number of people who have to be told to ensure that proper action is taken to sort out the problem.
- Any member of staff who is informed about an allegation of abuse should make a written record of the incident as soon as possible and give a copy of the report to the CPO.
- The School may suspend from duty, pending investigation, any member of staff who is alleged to have abused a pupil or pupils.
- If you are not sure how to deal with an incident or situation consult the CPO, who will advise you.

3. Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse at the School

Pupils and staff at the School enjoy a fairly relaxed and informal atmosphere. Staff fulfil many roles in and out of the classroom. Pupils are away from their families and home countries and in an unfamiliar environment.

Given the risk of false alarms and even deliberate hoaxes on the part of pupils, staff are advised to think carefully about the setting and nature of their varied relationships with their pupils so as not to lay themselves open to undue suspicion or accusation.

It would be wrong to dictate hard and fast rules in the atmosphere of a school where the great importance of relaxed and informal pastoral interaction between staff and pupils is basic to our philosophy. However, the following points are worth bearing in mind:

- If engaging with pupils in a non-public setting, ensure that you meet with at least two pupils at any one time.
- Inappropriate physical contact should be avoided. Contrary to popular belief, the Children Act says very little about what may or may not be done in this area, beyond the requirement to look after children properly. There is such a thing as appropriate physical contact and “non-abusive” actions include:
 - applying restraint to prevent a pupil harming him/herself or another person
 - removing, with reasonable force, potentially dangerous items from a pupil's possession or a pupil from a dangerous location
 - shepherding pupils, for example with a hand on back or shoulder
 - comforting, for example with a hand on a shoulder, back or arm
 - securing attention by tapping a pupil's shoulder
- It is always unacceptable to harm a child.
- If you have to touch a child in order, for example, to demonstrate a sporting technique, always use the procedure: demonstrate - ask permission - touch.
- If physical contact is prolonged or sensitive - for example when comforting a crying child, or if someone has been injured - try to ensure that other pupils and, if possible, adults are present.

- If you find yourself questioning a pupil about any serious matter, or one of any possible delicacy, it is advisable to do so with another adult witness present and to make sure that a written record of the incident is kept. A male member of staff questioning a female should have a female colleague present if possible. A female member of staff questioning a male should have a male colleague present if possible.
- Staff should ensure that they bring any safety regulations and precautions to the attention of pupils, particularly on activities or trips on the School's programme of activities and on airport transfers. Any accidents or incidents should always be recorded, signed and dated.
- Under no circumstances should members of staff advise on the taking of medicines.
- Staff should ensure that pupils are properly supervised and care taken for their safety and security during activities, trips and airport transfers. The School's guidelines for each activity must be followed and staff must familiarise themselves with the School's risk assessment for the appropriate activity.
- If a child seeks to develop an inappropriate personal relationship with you, do nothing to encourage this. Inform the CPO as soon as possible.
- If you feel that a pupil is developing a “crush” on you, do nothing that might be seen as encouraging this. Inform the CPO.
- Never flirt with a student.
- Never make sexually suggestive or provocative comments, even in fun.
- Never initiate electronic contact with or give personal telephone numbers to a pupil unless this is for a clear purpose that has been sanctioned by the School.
- If a child contacts you by telephone or electronically, keep your tone friendly, professional and neutral.
- Avoid situations that involve the exchange of personal information, personal photographs, virtual gifts or the use of any application that suggests or encourages the sharing of personal feelings.
- Social forums such as Face book present particular risks. Staff should not initiate or accept “friendship” requests from children, however innocent these requests may seem, as this provides access to photos and other intimate details of personal lives.
- Children can be very demanding. If you find yourself reaching the limits of your patience, remove yourself safely from the situation, for example by asking a colleague to take over.

4. Examples of Abusive Actions

The key criteria in assessing whether to refer a situation to the CPO is whether the harm caused, or risk of harm, is significant and/or persistent. Any of the following between adult and pupil should automatically be referred:

Physical Abuse: any form of physical assault (including attempts), such as:

- punching

- kicking
- pushing
- smacking
- slapping
- shaking
- throwing a missile at a pupils, such as a board rubber or whiteboard pen.

Sexual Abuse:

- any form of sexual assault (including attempts)
- possession of indecent and pseudo indecent photographs of children, including digital images
- showing indecent or pornographic material to children
- inappropriate use of text messaging, email or other ICT towards any child or pupil for sexual purposes
- inappropriate touching, language or behaviour towards any child or pupil for sexual purposes

Emotional Abuse and Neglect

- racial comments or behaviour, or failing to address these in others
- homophobic comments or behaviour, or failing to address these in others
- bullying pupils, or failing to address this in others
- persistent sarcasm
- humiliating pupils, for example by persistently placing a child in a corridor
- creating a climate of fear in a classroom or during an activity
- inappropriate punishment, for example putting a child in a cupboard or dark room
- failing to protect a child from physical harm or danger
- failing to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment

5. Possible Signs of Abuse

Staff should be aware of the following signs that might indicate abuse:

Possible physical signs may include unexplained or repeated injuries, bruises in odd places, marks of slapping, biting, gripping etc., cuts in odd places, poor hygiene, marked weight fluctuations.

Possible behavioural signs may include a marked change in behaviour, eating disorders, excessively affectionate or sexual behaviour, emotional isolation, school refusal, an inability to sleep, theft, habits such as thumb-sucking, 'frozen watchfulness'.

Remember that these symptoms are 'possible' signs and do not automatically mean that abuse has or is taking place; there may be other explanations.

6. How To Respond To Signs or Suspicions of Abuse

1. Listen to the Child

Children who report to a teacher, activities leader or other adult working at the School that someone has abused them must be listened to and heard, whatever form the communication may take.

The following points give guidance on how to deal with a child who makes an allegation:

- Listen to the child, but do not conduct an interview or ask the child to repeat the account. Avoid asking questions and make sure that any questions asked are open-ended (i.e. not inviting yes or no as an answer).
- Do not interrupt when the child is recalling significant events.
- Make a careful note of all information, including details such as timing, setting, who was present and what was said, in the child's own words. The account should be obtained verbatim or as near as possible. Always record what was said as contemporaneously as possible. Notes written up afterwards will carry less weight than those made at the time.
- Take care not to make assumptions about what the child is saying or to make interpretations.
- On no account should you make suggestions to the child as to an alternative explanation for their worries.
- Staff should point out to the informant that action will be taken as a result of the allegation and you should ask the informant of any steps they would like taken to protect them now that they have made the allegation.
- The written record of the allegations should be signed and dated by the person who received them as soon as is practicable.
- All actions subsequently taken should be recorded.
- The disclosure should be reported to the CPO as soon as possible, and certainly within 24 hours.

Remember, no member of staff should promise confidentiality to a pupil who makes an allegation. In responding to a child who makes such disclosures, account should be taken of the age and understanding of the child and whether the child or others may be at risk of significant harm. While acknowledging the need to create an environment conducive to speaking freely, the member of staff should make it clear to any pupil asking for confidentiality that he or she will need to pass on what has been told, to ensure the protection of the child concerned. Within that context, the child should then be assured that the matter will be disclosed only to people who need to know, and the child will know who these people are.

2. Take Action

The member of staff who has listened to the allegations of abuse should report immediately to the CPO, who will make an urgent initial assessment. If the CPO is the person against whom the allegation is made, the member of staff should report to the Director of Studies. The support needs of a child who expresses concerns about significant harm should be considered and met, utilising resources within or beyond the school as necessary.

Immediately an allegation is made, the CPO will:

- obtain written details of the allegation, signed and dated, from the person who received the allegation.
- record any information about times, dates, locations and names of potential witnesses.
- where appropriate, talk to the child concerned.
- make recommendations about further action.

There are four possible outcomes of the initial assessment:

- where the pupil has suffered, is suffering, or is likely to suffer significant harm, the incident will be referred immediately to the police under local child protection procedures.
- where the child has alleged that a criminal offence has been committed, then again this will be referred under local child protection procedures and the police may carry out a criminal investigation.
- the allegation may represent inappropriate behaviour or poor practice by a member of staff (which does not fall within the above categories) that needs to be considered under school disciplinary procedures.
- the allegation is adjudged to be apparently without foundation.

Only if the allegation is trivial or demonstrably false, will further investigations not be warranted.

Where the initial assessment by the CPO (or, where the allegation is against the CPO, the Director of Studies) concludes that the allegation warrants investigation, there will be a referral within 24 hours to one or more of the agencies with statutory responsibilities to make enquiries.

If a referral needs to be made, parents will be consulted. In really extreme cases the law allows schools to by-pass parental consent.

7. Guarding Against Allegations

The law is weighted in favour of the child, applying a burden on staff to safeguard children's welfare and providing for the child's protection rather than protecting the adult. Because of the requirement for schools and agencies to share information about allegations, there is little anonymity once an allegation has been made, even if it turns out to be false in the end. The burden of evidence is to disprove rather than prove the allegation.

Staff should follow the advice given in this document, follow the School's policies and guidelines and, if a situation arises, record everything scrupulously, giving one copy to the CPO and keeping a further copy for themselves.