



# **Safeguarding in Education**

## **Managing Disclosures**

**Working for every child**

**Safeguarding and Child Protection - Managing disclosures in schools and settings**



## Managing Disclosures

Children experiencing distress or abuse may seek to tell someone in their school or education setting. This is formally known as a **disclosure**. School is often a place where children feel most safe, secure and listened to. It is not unusual for them to choose to confide in members of staff with whom they have the best relationship and this can include midday supervisors, caretakers or class-room support staff because they may be perceived as having less authority and less intimidating. It is important to make sure therefore that all staff know how to respond to a disclosure from a child.

If a child discloses **harm** to any staff member it must be remembered that **the role of the school or education setting is to recognise and refer the abuse**, not to investigate. However, 'not investigating' does not mean that the staff member receiving the concern cannot ask any questions. It is reasonable to ask open, non-leading questions in order to establish the child's story. The basic rule of thumb is that staff should only ask the child enough questions to clarify whether they are being harmed or are at risk of harm. For example, if a child presents with an injury accompanied by a clear disclosure that they have been harmed, it should not be necessary to question the child, other than to clarify (where needed) who was involved and when an incident took place. *We have included some more practice examples below, to help put this advice into context.*

Sometimes children choose to disclose concerns through a third party such as a friend 'telling' on their behalf, or indirectly e.g. sounding out information and reaction by asking '*what if my friend.....?*' If such concerns arise they should be taken equally seriously and be followed up with the Designated Safeguarding Lead in the same manner as a direct disclosure. It is important for all staff to remember that the DSL may already have information about the child they are unaware of. Children may also seek to disclose and share their experiences through drawings, writing and play. If concerns arise, it is appropriate to talk further with the child to allow wider discussion and clarification. This might involve inviting the child to '*tell me more about what is happening in your picture / story / game*".

**Criminal Investigations:** Often education staff are worried about the prospect of asking 'too much' and then jeopardising any future potential criminal investigation. It is of course important to be mindful to avoid any questions that could be interpreted as 'leading', for example, '*Did Daddy do this to you?*' However, for all safeguarding partners, the most important consideration should always be the immediate safety of the child and with this in mind, accessing the right information, to make the right decision about the next steps, as quickly as possible, is key. It is also important to be aware that the reality is that very few safeguarding inquiries result in prosecutions. This is for a variety of reasons, which can include a child not wanting to make a formal statement against a loved one and the police deciding (in consultation with the professional network) that it is not in the child's best interests to pursue a charge, particularly where parents/carers are open to accessing support.

**If and when a child discloses abuse:**

### 1. Stay calm

- An abused or neglected child or young person needs to know that you are able to help them;
- Do not show shock at what you are hearing. This may discourage the child from continuing their disclosure, as they will feel you are unable to cope with what you are hearing and may be thinking badly of them;
- A calm response reassures a child that what has happened can be worked through.

### 2. Be supportive - Let the child or young person know:

- They are not in trouble and they have not done anything wrong;
- You are glad that they have chosen to speak to you and they have done the right thing telling someone about this;
- You are sorry that they have been hurt or that this has happened to them;
- You will do everything you can to make sure they are not hurt again;
- You know others who can be trusted to help solve this problem.

### 3. Clarify where needed, but do not investigate

- If you need to clarify what is being said and whether the child is at risk, gentle and open-ended questions such as: *"Can you tell me more about what happened?"* are helpful. You may wish to use the acronym 'TED' as a reminder that the child can be encouraged to 'Tell', 'Explain' and 'Describe' the concern. If it is necessary to seek further clarification, keep to open questions such as 'What? When? Who? How? Where?'
- Avoid the question 'why?' as this can imply guilt / responsibility on the child;
- When you have sufficient information and reason to believe that abuse and/or neglect has occurred, gently stop gathering facts and be supportive.

### 4. Be clear about what will happen next

- Never promise to keep a secret or maintain confidentiality. If a child requests confidentiality, use a 'prepared' response, such as *"I'm really concerned about what you have told me and I have a responsibility to help ensure that you are safe. To help make sure you are safe, I have to tell someone (name person) who will know how to help us to do this"*;
- Don't make promises to the child about what may or may not happen next, instead provide reassurances only about what you know is realistic and achievable;
- Discuss with the child what you think will happen next and who will be involved.

### 5. Take the appropriate next steps

- Record factually what the child has told you or what you have observed as soon as possible. Ensure records include the date, time, place of disclosure, behaviour and words used by the child;
- Tell your DSL about what you have heard as soon as possible, but unless this is really necessary, do not ask the child to repeat what they have told you to another staff member, as this can be stressful for the child;
- Do not tell other staff about what you have heard. The information should remain confidential to those who 'need to know';
- Maintain contact with the child. They have trusted you enough to disclose and will need to know that they have your continued support;
- Ensure that you have support for yourself in managing the information you have received.

### Potential Allegations involving Members of Staff or volunteers (including governors)

Disclosures relating to colleagues, members of staff or volunteers (including governors) should be responded to in the same way as described above. This information must also be passed immediately to the **Named personnel with designated responsibility regarding allegations against staff**, as set out in your setting's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy (this is usually the headteacher, or a designated deputy if they are not available). If the disclosure is regarding the headteacher, the Chair of Governors (or equivalent) should be contacted. The named personnel will ensure the appropriate procedures are followed. Further information about Managing Allegations can be found here: <http://www.chscb.org.uk/allegations-against-professionals/>.

### Consent

Every parent/carer has the right:

- To be told when a professional is worried about the safety or well-being of their child by that professional;
- To have their consent obtained when someone makes a request for support for their child on their behalf;
- To be front and centre of any plan to keep their child safe and well.

The only circumstances in which a referral to MASH should be made without informing a child's parent/carer is where there are immediate concerns about the safety of a child **and** it is believed that telling a parent/carer about the concerns will **increase the risk of harm to the child**.

MASH understands that it may be difficult for schools and education settings to determine **both** whether a child's disclosure represents a clear indication of harm **and** whether the risk of harm is significant and immediate, such that parental consent to share information with MASH is not required. Following consultation with the Designated Safeguarding Lead, if education settings remain unclear about the most appropriate course of action, prior to making a formal referral to MASH, educational professionals can call MASH on **020 8356 5500** to ask for a consultation about the next steps. The outcome of this consultation may include:

- Advice from MASH about further conversations the school or education setting should hold with the child, to gather further information or clarity around their disclosure, in line with this guidance; and/or
- Advice from MASH about a conversation the school or education setting should hold with the child's parents/carers about the disclosures, to gather their response and/or seek consent to make a referral to MASH; or
- Advice from MASH to make a formal written referral straight away.

or young person makes a **disclosure** to a member of staff or another child or young person in an education setting



Is there a clear disclosure that a child is being harmed, or is at risk of being harmed?



**Yes**

- Follow the setting’s safeguarding procedures and consult with the Designated Safeguarding Lead, or alternative senior contact point in the DSL’s absence;
- Where there are concerns that the child is in immediate danger which requires an urgent safeguarding response and there are grounds to override parental consent, consider whether the police need to be contacted on **999** and call MASH **020 8356 5500, or 020 8356 2710 outside of office hours**, followed up by a formal written referral via <https://hackney.gov.uk/child-protection>;
- Where there are not grounds to override parental consent, discuss the concerns with the child’s parents/carers, prior to referring to MASH.

**No**

- Ask the child to ‘Tell’, ‘Explain’ and ‘Describe’ the concern;
- Ask open questions such as **What? When? Who? How? Where?**;
- **Consult with the school’s Designated Safeguarding Lead**, or alternative senior contact point in the DSL’s absence, to think together about the most appropriate next steps, which may include either the same member of staff or the DSL having a further conversation with the child, and/or the setting having a conversation with the parents/carers about the disclosure, to gather their response.
- If the school or educational setting remains unclear about the most appropriate next steps, call MASH on **020 8356 5500** to request a consultation for further advice and guidance.

**Not sure**

- Follow the setting’s safeguarding procedures and consult with the Designated Safeguarding Lead, or alternative senior contact point in the DSL’s absence;
- If the school or educational setting remains unclear about the most appropriate next steps, call MASH on **020 8356 5500** to request a consultation for further advice and guidance.

Practice Examples

Example disclosures	Potential follow up questions
I'm scared to go home because my mum might beat me.	<i>Can you tell me a bit more about that? What makes you think that might happen? Can you describe what getting 'a beat' might look like? Has that ever happened to you before? If yes, when was the last time it happened?</i>
Last night, my dad hit me with a belt because I got a detention for not doing my homework.	<i>No further questions to the child by education staff are required: the child has made clear disclosure that they have been harmed and has said when and by whom.</i>
I don't like it when my grandad kisses me.	<i>Where does he kiss you? When does this happen: how often and when was the last time? Who is around when this happens: have your parents seen it? Who else knows you feel this way?</i>
My friend, Ikmat, (age 14) posted something on social media saying she wanted to die.	<i>When did this happen? Where did you see this e.g. on Facebook or Snapchat? Have you or any of your other friends said anything to Ikmat about this and if so, what did she say? Have you been worried about Ikmat before?</i>
My sister's boyfriend came into my room the other night and touched me in my private place. He told me I wasn't allowed to tell anyone.	<i>No further questions to the child by education staff are required: the child has made clear disclosure that they are at risk of harm.</i>
Mikhail (age 9) came to school this morning with a large bruise around his right eye. He presented as very quiet and subdued in class.	<i>That's a nasty bruise, can you describe to be how that happened? I am a bit worried about you, can you tell me if anything is troubling you?</i>
I look after myself after school and my mum only comes home in the middle of the night.	<i>Who is at home when you get home from school? Who makes your dinner? Can you tell me a bit about what you mean when you say your mum comes home in the middle of the night: do you know what time this is? How do you know? When did this last happen? When your mum is out, is there anyone else at home?</i>
My mum and dad fight a lot. Sometimes I get scared.	<i>Can you describe to me what a fight looks and sounds like? How often does this happen? When was the last time it happened? Who else is around when they fight? Where are you when this happens?</i>

## Managing Disclosures

I am going on holiday to Somalia for the summer and my mum says we're going to have a special family celebration when we are there.

*Can you tell me a bit more about your holiday: do you know what you are going to do whilst you are there? Who are you staying with? Have you been before? Can you tell me some more about the celebration? Do you know when you are coming back?*