

Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board - At a Glance Guide



Guidance on Handling a Disclosure from a Child

What should you do if a child comes to you and tells you that they are being abused? It's normal to feel overwhelmed and confused in this situation. Child abuse is a difficult subject that can be hard to accept and even harder to talk about. Children who are abused are often threatened by the perpetrators to keep the abuse a secret. Thus, telling an adult takes a great amount of courage. Children have to grapple with a lot of issues, including the fear that no one will believe them. So, 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.

There are a number of basic 'rules' that should be followed to ensure the safe handling of any disclosures of abuse from a child.

- Don't panic
- Remember that the safety and well-being of the child come before the interests of any other person
- Tell your manager or supervisor as soon as possible

Receive:

- Listen to the child and accept what the child says.
 - Look at the child directly, but do not appear shocked. A common reaction to news as unpleasant and shocking as child abuse is denial. However, if you display denial to a child, or show shock or disgust at what they are saying, the child may be afraid to continue and will shut down.
 - Don't seek help while the child is talking to you.
 - Reassure them that they did the right thing by telling someone.
 - Accept what is being said without judgement
 - Assure them that it is not their fault and you will do your best to help.
 - Let them know that you need to tell someone else.
 - Let them know what you are going to do next and that you will let them know what happens.
 - Be aware that the child may have been threatened.

Things TO SAY when a child discloses	Things NOT TO SAY when a child discloses
'I believe you'	'I can't believe it! I am shocked!'
'I am going to try and help you'	'Oh, that explains a lot'
'I am glad that you told me'	'No not....he/she's a friend of mine'
'You are not to blame'	'I won't tell anyone else'

Reassure:

- Reassure the child, but only so far as is honest and reliable. Don't make promises that you can't be sure to 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.
- Immediately seek help, in the first place from your designated safeguarding lead/manager

React:

- Listen quietly, carefully and patiently. Do not assume anything – don't 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 his or her own words what happened, but don't ask leading questions.
- Do 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 and understanding. This is especially important for children with disabilities and those where English is not their preferred language.

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, place, words used by the child and how the child appeared to you – 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 factual
- Make certain you distinguish between what the child has actually said and the inferences you may have made. Accuracy is paramount in this stage of the procedure

Important Notes:

- The same action should be taken if the allegation is about abuse that has taken place in the past, as it will be important to find out if the person is still working with or has access to the children.
- Dealing with an [allegation](#) that a professional, staff member, foster carer or volunteer has abused a child is difficult but must be taken seriously and dealt with carefully and fairly. Always contact the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for advice prior to investigating the allegation.