

# CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Harwell Parish Council (The Council) recognises that the protection and safety of children and young people is everyone's responsibility. The council's staff may come into contact with children through the normal course of their duties. This policy sets out the expectations of the council in relation to the protection of children with whom staff members and councillors come into contact in the course of their duties.
- 1.2 This policy is divided into two sections. The first section deals with what staff or councillors must do if you suspect a child is being, or has been, abused or if a child tells them that he/she is being, or has been, abused. Staff and councillors are not expected to be child protection officers but, if in their dealings with children through their work it is suspected that abuse is, has been, or there is a likelihood of abuse taking place, they must take some action and therefore the procedures to be followed are provided below.
- 1.3 **The definition of a child is any person under the age of eighteen.**
- 1.4 The second part of the policy will help staff and councillors not only protect children with whom you come into contact through their work, but will also help to identify practices which could be mistakenly interpreted and lead to false allegations of abuse. Best practice guidelines on how to interact with children are also given.
- 1.5 There is also an Appendix giving a suggested reporting sheet.

## 2. POLICY STATEMENT

- 2.1 The policy of the council is to safeguard the welfare of all children. These children might be children participating in activities organised under the auspices of the council, or other children with whom staff or councillors may come into contact during the course of their work.
- 2.2 The two key principles in achieving this are:-
- ◆ The welfare of the child is the paramount consideration.
  - ◆ All children, regardless of age, disability, gender, racial or ethnic origin, religious belief or sexual identity, have a right to protection from harm or abuse.
- 2.3 The council will require all operational staff who will come into contact with children in the course of their work and all other staff who undertake work with children and young people to provide an 'enhanced disclosure' from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). CRB disclosures will have a validity of three years and you will be required to apply for a new disclosure after that time. The council must keep a register of training events and CRB status of staff and those who come into contact with children on council property.
- 2.4 In all cases where there is an allegation or suspicion of child abuse, immediate steps must be taken to ensure that the matter is reported to Social services immediately and then inform the Chairman of the Council or if it concerns this person to the Clerk as an alternate. Second hand reporting of abuse is not acceptable practice. Social services will not divulge names of informants.
- 2.5 In all its operations, the council is committed to:-

- ◆ Taking all reasonable, practicable steps to protect children from physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect.
- ◆ Respecting the rights, wishes and feelings of children.
- ◆ Ensuring that staff and councillors are carefully selected, trained and supervised, as appropriate
- ◆ Ensuring that contractors and partners are aware of our policy and procedures.
- ◆ Training is provided to all appropriate staff.
- ◆ Training and certification is recorded on the training records system.

2.6 It is staff and councillors responsibility when they come into contact with children to ensure that :

- ◆ Their behaviour is appropriate at all times.
- ◆ They observe the rules set out to ensure the safety and security of children and young people.
- ◆ They follow the procedure following suspicion, disclosure or allegation of child abuse.

2.7 If required the council will provide awareness training of child protection procedures for all operational staff who come into direct contact with children.

### **3. WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?**

3.1 Child abuse occurs when children or young people are harmed by adults or their peers. The child will often know and trust the person who is abusing them. It can happen within or outside of their family, at school or in activities that they undertake away from the home or school. Child abuse refers to the damage done to a child or young person's physical, mental or emotional health and is a misuse of the power that adults and peers may have over them.

3.2 There are four main forms of abuse. They are:-

- ◆ Physical abuse

Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. It can occur in training situations when the nature and intensity of the training exceeds the capability and capacity of the child or young person. Physical harm can also be caused when a parent or carer feigns the symptoms of, or deliberately causes, ill-health to a child whom they are looking after (commonly called fabricated or induced illness or Munchausen Syndrome by proxy).

- ◆ Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child that causes severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It can include a persistent lack of love, affection or attention and the conveying to a child that he/she is worthless or unloved, inadequate or valued only insofar as he/she meets the needs of another person. It may include situations where parents/carers subject children or young persons to constant criticism, bullying, unrealistic pressure to perform to high expectations or reach standards they are unable to reach, or exposure to domestic violence. It may involve a child in frequently feeling frightened or in danger, or the

exploitation or corruption of a child. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill-treatment of a child, although it may occur alone.

- ◆ Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. This may take the form of full sexual intercourse, masturbation, oral sex, fondling or anal intercourse, or even inappropriate contact. It may also involve showing a child pornographic books, photographs or videos or involving them in the production of pornographic material. It can also occur by encouraging them to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

- ◆ Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. It may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food, shelter or clothing, failing to protect a child from physical harm or danger, or the failure to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

### 3.3 **Recognition of Child Abuse**

3.3.1 It is not easy to recognise when child abuse may be taking place or has taken place and you are not expected to be experts in recognising the signs. However, any concerns that you may have about the welfare of a child or young person should be reported in line with the procedures in this policy. Indications that a child or young person may be being abused include:-

- ◆ Unexplained or suspicious injuries, such as bruising, cuts or burns, particularly if on a part of the body one would not expect to see such injuries.
- ◆ An injury that is not consistent with the explanation given for it.
- ◆ The child describing what appears to be an abusive act involving him/her.
- ◆ Another person tells you of concerns about the welfare of a child.
- ◆ There is an unexplained change in behaviour of a child, eg becomes withdrawn or displays sudden outbursts of anger.
- ◆ Sexual awareness appears to be inappropriate for the child or young person's age.
- ◆ The child or young person engages in sexually explicit behaviour in games.
- ◆ Distrust of adults, especially where one would expect there to be a close relationship.
- ◆ The child or young person has difficulty in making friends.
- ◆ Being prevented from socialising with other children or young people.
- ◆ A loss of appetite or overeating.
- ◆ Loss of weight for no apparent reason.
- ◆ Becoming increasingly dirty or unkempt.

3.3.2 The list above is not exhaustive and the presence of one or more of these things is not proof that abuse is taking, or has taken, place. All children have bumps and bruises during their childhood and these are likely to be in places where there are bony part of their bodies like elbows, knees and shins.

3.4 Child abuse is:-

- ◆ A deliberate act.
- ◆ Failure to provide care.
- ◆ Risk of 'significant harm' because children need to be kept safe from harm as well as meeting their other needs, eg locked in bedroom at night or handles taken off inside of door.

3.5 Many children have behaviour that gives cause for concern from time to time. If, however, you are concerned about the welfare of a child, it is up to you to take some action. You cannot assume that some other person will do so.

3.6 REMEMBER:-

- ◆ It is **not** up to us to make the decision as to what does and does not constitute abuse - we are not social workers.
- ◆ It **is** up to us to record and report anything that we see in the course of our duties and with colleagues that makes us uneasy.

## 4. CHILD PROTECTION

4.1 The following sections give details of the actions to be taken where there are any concerns that a child may be suffering harm or abuse.

4.2 You may have cause to think that a child may be at risk of, is being, or has been, abused either by:-

- ◆ Another member of council staff or councillor
- ◆ A member of their family
- ◆ Any other person, including another child or a neighbour

4.3 A child may also tell a member of staff or a councillor that they are being, or have been, abused by any of the above.

4.4 If the member of staff or councillor see, hear or are told anything in the course of their duties that makes them concerned that a child may be at risk of, is being, or has been abused, you must report that concern to the Chairman or Clerk as appropriate.

4.5 The reporting person should not think that it is their responsibility to decide whether a child is being, or has been, abused or whether someone poses a 'real' risk to the welfare of a child. However, it is essential that they immediately bring any concerns they have to the attention of the Chairman or Clerk. They must not wait to see whether there really is a problem, nor should they investigate the matter themselves. The protection of children is a complex area which requires specialist skills and knowledge.

4.6 The council recognises that reporting your concerns about possible child abuse can be difficult, but saying or doing nothing is not an option. The reporting person will be supported by the council if, in good faith, they report concerns that a child is being or is at risk of being abused, even if these concerns prove to be unfounded.

4.7 If someone has concerns about the behaviour of another member of staff which, through their position as an employee of the council, may put children at risk, they must report this as indicated above

**5. WHAT DO THE CHAIRMAN/CLERK DO IF THEY RECEIVE A REPORT ABOUT POTENTIAL OR REAL CHILD ABUSE?**

5.1 The Chairman or Clerk should immediately telephone Oxfordshire County Council Social Services Department, (Social Care & Health) to check that the informant has reported the incident if there is any doubt. Social services may be contacted for advice.

**6. WHAT DOES A MEMBER OF STAFF OR COUNCILLOR DO IF A CHILD TELLS THEM THEY ARE BEING, OR HAVE BEEN, ABUSED?**

6.1 Children will occasionally disclose abuse to an adult they have come to feel they can trust. This may happen for many reasons but, if they do tell you, they are doing so in the hope that you will act to stop it happening, even if they ask you not to do anything with the information. You must tell them that when we hear about children being hurt we have a responsibility to take it further and will be telling other people who need to know.

6.2 You should be aware that they may feel that they are betraying someone they are close to and whom they love. It is not unusual for a child to love the abuser, but want the abuse to stop, especially when the abuser is a parent or carer. Equally, it may be someone they fear. In any case, it takes a great deal of courage for a child to talk to an adult about abuse and your response can be crucial.

6.3 If a child disclosed abuse to you in the course of your work, it is important to react appropriately.

- ◆ Remain calm and receptive.
- ◆ Listen without interrupting. Only ask questions for clarification if you are unclear what the child is saying.
- ◆ Make it clear you take them seriously.
- ◆ Acknowledge their courage in telling you.
- ◆ Tell them they are not responsible for the abuse.
- ◆ Let them know you will do what you can to help them (by reporting the matter).
- ◆ Ask open, non-leading questions. (Ask TED questions - “tell me”, “explain to me”, “describe to me”).

**DO NOT:-**

- ◆ Allow your shock or distaste to show.
- ◆ Probe for more information/ask other questions.
- ◆ Make assumptions or speculate.
- ◆ Make negative comments about the abuser.
- ◆ Make promises you cannot keep.
- ◆ Agree to keep the information secret.

6.4 It is important to remember that it can be more difficult for some children to tell than for others. Children who have experienced prejudice and discrimination through racism may well believe that people from other ethnic backgrounds do not really care about them. Children with disabilities will have to overcome barriers before disclosing abuse. They may have to rely on their abuser for their daily care and have no knowledge of alternative

sources. It is therefore essential that everything possible is done to protect children who put their trust in us.

6.5 If a child tells you that they are being, or have been, abused, you must:-

- ◆ Make an immediate record of what the child has said, if possible using their own words. Write down what you said to the child, note down any questions you asked the child and accurately describe any behaviours you have witnessed, eg scared of a parent.
- ◆ If necessary follow the instructions for reporting to the Dorset Social Care and Health Services as set out above.
- ◆ Respect the confidentiality of the matter and only tell those who need to know about your concerns.
- ◆ Do not inform the parent/carer of your concerns or action. The Social Care and Health Services will decide on the action to be taken on this.

6.6 If the child requires immediate medical treatment, call an ambulance to take the child to hospital. Inform the medical staff of your concerns but also report the matter to Social Care and Health in accordance with the procedure contained in this policy

6.7 If a child tells you that they are being abused and you know another agency is involved with that child, you should still make a referral. You may have been given information that the child has not told the other agency. Social Care and Health will make the decision as to whether any further action needs to be taken.

## **7. CODE OF PRACTICE - TO AVOID FALSE ALLEGATIONS**

7.1 This code is intended to provide you with advice which will not only help to protect children, but will also help you and your colleagues to identify any practices which could be mistakenly interpreted and perhaps lead to false allegations of abuse. Good practice will also protect the council through reducing the possibility of anyone using their role with the council to gain access to children in order to abuse them. This applies to all who work with children on council premises.

7.2 Good practice will begin with the recruitment and selection of staff. Requests for references will refer to the candidate's suitability to work/have contact with children and all operational staff and other staff who are likely to work or come into contact with children will be asked to apply for a disclosure with the council. Any gaps in employment history will need to be explained satisfactorily.

7.3 When working with children, there is much that can be done to avoid situations that may give rise to misinterpretation, which will also work to protect children. If at any time a member of staff or councillor needs to carry out practices that are contrary to the following guidelines, you should only do so after discussion with the Chairman.

7.4 The general guidelines are normally to be used at all times.

7.5 Treat everyone with respect and provide an example you wish others to follow.

- ◆ Don't offer to or transport children alone in your car.
- ◆ If it is necessary to do things of a 'personal' nature for a child, eg if they are very young or have a disability, ensure these are carried out with the full knowledge of the parents/carers and that the child concerned knows what you are going to do and why.

- ◆ It is unacceptable to use repeated touching as a style of working or as a way of relating to individuals.
- ◆ Develop a culture in which staff feel comfortable enough to point out inappropriate attitudes and behaviours to each other.
- ◆ Don't engage in or allow any sexually provocative games involving or observed by children, whether based on talking or touching.
- ◆ Never make suggestive remarks or discriminatory comments to a child.
- ◆ Don't engage in or tolerate any bullying of a child, either by adults or other children.
- ◆ Don't engage in or tolerate rough, physical games, including 'horse play', involving children.
- ◆ Never enter a room where a child may be changing their clothes or not be fully dressed.
- ◆ Respect children at all times, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, disability or sexual identity.
- ◆ Avoid 'favouritism' and singling-out 'troublemakers'.
- ◆ Never trivialise child abuse.
- ◆ Never let allegations by a child go unreported, including any made against you.
- ◆ Do not rely on your good name to protect you or believe that "it could never happen to me"

7.6 As a general rule, you should be mindful of not putting yourself at risk by putting yourself into situations which would increase the chances of having allegations made against you. Work in pairs, change practices, eg arrange meeting a young person somewhere as opposed to transporting them. If in doubt, consider how an action or activity may be perceived as opposed to how it is intended. You should remember that someone else might misinterpret your actions, no matter how well-intentioned.

## **8. HOW TO MAKE A CHILD PROTECTION REFERRAL**

8.1 When you make the referral, you should give the following information:-

- ◆ Your own personal details - as per the referral form.
- ◆ The nature of the concerns.
- ◆ How and why the concerns have arisen.
- ◆ What appears to be the needs of the child and family.
- ◆ Whether the child may need urgent action to make him/her safe.
- ◆ Full details of the child and, as far as known, the parents, carers or other significant adults.
- ◆ Information on the parents' awareness/position taken on the referral.

**CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**

**Suggested Form to complete**

**CHILD'S DETAILS**

Surname .....

Forename .....

Address .....

**PERSON RAISING CONCERN**

Name .....

Council .....

Date .....

**REASONS FOR CONCERN**

Access Team  
Oxfordshire County Council  
PO Box 221  
Kidlington Delivery Office,  
Oxford,  
OX5 1YD

Tel: 0845 050 7666  
Fax: 01865 854443  
Email the Access Team  
Online contact form

Out of hours emergency number:  
0800 833408 (freephone)

<http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk>