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Child Protection Policy

St Oswald's Catholic Primary School

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Date of Ratification:	30 April 2014	Signed: Ms H T Lennon (HEAD TEACHER) Mrs E Higham (CHAIR OF GOVERNORS)
Review date:	Dec 2019	Signed: Ms H T Lennon (HEAD TEACHER) Mrs S Boardman (CHAIR OF GOVERNORS)
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Safeguarding Statement

At St Oswald's Catholic Primary School we respect and value all children and are committed to providing a caring, friendly and safe environment for all our pupils so they can learn, in a relaxed and secure atmosphere. We believe every pupil should be able to participate in all school activities in an enjoyable and safe environment and be protected from harm. This is the responsibility of every adult employed by, or invited to deliver services at St Oswald's Catholic Primary School. We recognise our responsibility to safeguard all who access school and promote the welfare of all our pupils by protecting them from physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect and bullying.

Principles of best practice

Best practice dictates that schools:

- Have an ethos in which children feel secure, their viewpoints are valued, they are encouraged to talk, and are listened to;
- Provide suitable support and guidance so that pupils have a range of appropriate adults to whom they can turn if they are worried or in difficulties;
- Work with parents/guardians to build an understanding of the school's responsibility to ensure the welfare of all children and a recognition that this may occasionally require children to be referred to investigative agencies as a constructive and helpful measure;
- Are vigilant in cases of suspected child abuse, recognising the signs and symptoms, have clear procedures whereby teachers report such cases to senior staff and are aware of local procedures so the information is effectively passed on to the relevant professionals;
- Monitor children who have been identified as at risk, keeping in a secure place clear records of pupils' progress, maintaining sound policies on confidentiality, providing information to other professionals, submitting reports to case conferences and attending case conferences;
- Provide and support Child Protection training regularly to school staff and in particular to designated teachers to ensure their skills and expertise are up-to-date, and ensure that targeted funding for this work is solely used for this purpose;
- Contribute to an inter-agency approach to Child Protection by developing effective and supportive liaison with other agencies;
- Use the curriculum to raise pupils' awareness and build confidence so that pupils develop a range of contacts and strategies to ensure their own protection and understand the importance of protecting others;
- Provide clear policy statements for parents/guardians, staff and pupils on this and on positive behaviour policies and the school's approach to bullying;
- Have a clear understanding of the various types of bullying - physical, verbal and indirect, and act promptly and firmly to combat it, making sure that pupils are aware of the school's position on this issue and who they can contact for support;
- Take particular care that pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN), who may be especially vulnerable to abuse, are supported effectively with particular attention paid to ensuring that those with communication difficulties are enabled to express themselves to a member of staff with appropriate communication skills;
- Have a clear policy about handling allegations of abuse by members of staff, ensuring that all staff are fully aware of the procedures;
- Have a written whole school policy regularly reviewed which clearly outlines the school's position and positive action in respect of the aforementioned standards.

The aim of this policy is to safeguard and promote our pupils' welfare, safety and health by fostering an honest, open, caring and supportive climate. We wish our pupils to remain safe and free from harm. We are committed to playing a full and active part in the multi-agency response to Child Protection.

Our pupils' welfare is of paramount importance. We believe in open and honest communication with parents and guardians and will always share with them any information or concern about their children at the earliest opportunity. The only exception to this would be where it is felt that such a communication might compromise a pupil's safety. If a pupil is felt to be in need of protection and becomes the subject of a Child Protection Plan, parents/guardians should regard the school as a source of help and support.

All children have an absolute right to a childhood free from abuse, neglect or exploitation. All members of staff (teaching and non-teaching) have a responsibility to be mindful of these issues related to children's safety and welfare and a duty to report and refer concerns, however minor they may appear to be. NB: it is not the role of school staff to undertake an investigation.

If school receives information about a child which suggests he/she has been abused, neglected or that it is likely, we have a duty to refer these concerns to Social Care/Family Services or the Police. The school has no discretion in this matter. The Child Protection Procedures for St Oswald's Catholic Primary School are in accordance with the Warrington Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) multi-agency procedures.

Situations may not always be clear cut, in which case staff may consult with colleagues from an appropriate agency which will usually, but not always, be Social Care/Family Services. Advice and guidance will be sought in this case, meaning that those working with children have ready access to consistent information and advice from suitably qualified and experienced staff, in order to explore a situation and to decide together on an appropriate course of action. This should not be seen as a way of transferring ownership of a "problem", but as an agreed outcome of a discussion, when a referral will be made.

Children are best protected when professionals work effectively together and share responsibility for protective action. It is important to remember that a referral or consultation with Social Care/Family Services is an expression of concern about a child's welfare. It is not an accusation or a presumption of responsibility about a parent or guardian.

In the course of an investigation, social workers or the Police may wish to speak with a child, without parental knowledge or consent. Ms H T Lennon (Head Teacher), acting in "loco parentis", has the discretion to agree to allow this to enable the authorities to explore concerns and determine whether there are grounds for further action. In these cases the Head Teacher will ensure that the child's welfare is secured and he/she has access to a trusted adult.

Ms H T Lennon (Head Teacher) will not allow a child to be removed from the school premises without either:

- Parental consent

or

- An Order of the Court or a Police Protection Order

St Oswald's Catholic Primary School has a statutory duty to work to the guidelines stated in the Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education (DCSF, 2007) including the recruitment of anyone who will work in school. This policy has been developed following the latest DFE guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children', (2015) the Warrington Safeguarding children Boards (WSCB) guidance and the Pac Cheshire Safeguarding Procedures. DBS (formerly CRB) vetting checks are carried out for all employed staff and regular volunteers prior to commencement of working in school. (Please also refer to the section titled Recruitment within this policy).

In addition, school has a duty to safeguard and protect the well-being of children and is committed to act in accordance with the locally agreed Child Protection procedures in cases where there is concern of significant harm. Significant harm can be defined as the ill-treatment or impairment of health and development of a child or young person. Development includes physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development. Health includes physical and mental health. This is viewed from the perspective of expected behaviour for a child of a similar age and understanding.

St Oswald's Catholic Primary School is constantly vigilant to deter possible abusers and will manage effectively any allegations or concerns about abuse when they arise.

When a child makes an allegation about abuse or neglect they will be listened to, have their comments taken seriously and, where appropriate, the allegations will be investigated thoroughly. It is not the role of school staff to undertake any such investigation.

St Oswald's Catholic Primary School fully recognises the contribution it can make to protect children and support the pupils in our school. The following categories of abuse are recognised:

1. Neglect: persistent or severe neglect, or the failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger including cold, starvation or extreme failure to carry out important aspects of child care. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic physical and emotional needs resulting in a failure to thrive.
2. Physical injury: actual or likely physical injury to a child, or failure to prevent physical injury (or suffering) to a child.
3. Sexual abuse: actual or likely sexual exploitation of a child and/or their involvement in inappropriate sexual activities which includes all forms of media exposure e.g. internet, photography.
4. Emotional abuse: actual severe adverse effect on emotional behaviour of a child caused by persistent or severe emotional ill-treatment or rejection. It may involve conveying to a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person.

Appendix A details indicators to help staff recognise signs of child abuse.

There are three main elements to our Child Protection Policy:

PREVENTION:

- Through the creation of an open culture which respects all individual's rights and discourages discrimination and bullying of any kind;
- Through a positive school atmosphere, teaching and pastoral support to pupils. Pastoral support is the responsibility of all staff working in school;
- Through a team approach the Head Teacher, Ms H T Lennon, as the Designated Senior Person (DSP) has overall responsibility for Child Protection and is supported by Mrs S Orwin (Assistant Head Teacher) as the named Deputy Designated Senior Person (DDSP);
- Through our pastoral team leader offering all pupils an opportunity to talk and discuss any worries or concerns;
- Through PSHCE, SEAL and an ongoing programme of support, at an age-appropriate level to promote self-esteem and social inclusion and address the issue of Child Protection in the wider context of child safety in general.

PROTECTION:

- By following agreed procedures ensuring staff are trained and supported to respond appropriately and sensitively to Child Protection concerns;
- Through fostering an ethos of "collective responsibility" within school where staff communicate concerns timely and through appropriate school systems.

SUPPORT:

- By working to support any pupil or member of staff who may have been abused and by working to support parents or guardians.

This policy applies to teaching and non-teaching staff, and to all others working within school.

School Commitment

We recognise that high self-esteem, confidence, supportive friends and clear lines of communication with a trusted adult helps all children, and especially those at risk of, or suffering, abuse.

We will therefore:

- Work hard to establish and maintain an ethos where our pupils feel safe, secure and are encouraged to talk and be listened to;
- Ensure that pupils know that there are adults in the school who they can approach if they are worried or are in difficulty;
- Include in the core and enhanced curriculum activities opportunities for PSHE and SEAL which equip pupils with the skills they need to stay safe and develop realistic attitudes to the responsibilities of adult life;

- Ensure that wherever possible every effort will be made to establish effective working relationships with parents/guardians and colleagues from other agencies.

Framework

We do not operate in isolation. The welfare of pupils is a corporate responsibility of the entire local authority, working in partnership with other public agencies and the voluntary sector. All local authority services have an impact on the lives of children and families and local authorities have a particular responsibility towards children and families most at risk of social exclusion. Child Protection is the responsibility of everyone.

Roles and Responsibilities

All adults working with or on behalf of children have a responsibility to safeguard children, however there are key people within schools and Warrington that have specific responsibilities under Child Protection procedures. As stated earlier there are designated named staff responsible for Child Protection during school time. The named governor for Safeguarding and Child Protection is Mrs E Shaw whose role is to liaise with named persons and school staff on all matters relating to Safeguarding and Child Protection, participate in the annual review of policy and procedures and make an annual report to the full Governing Body. All named staff and governors have had access to Safeguarding and Child Protection training and are aware of our safer recruitment procedures.

In the event of any concern by any member of staff, or if any member of staff is approached by a pupil regarding any matter concerning abuse, they must tell the pupil that they are bound to share the information. All staff should be alert to signs of abuse and know to whom they should report any concerns or suspicions. In the first instance this should be the Head Teacher or, in their absence, one of the other named persons above.

Because of the day-to-day contact with children, schools are particularly well placed to observe outward signs of abuse, changes in behaviour or failure to develop. Parents/guardians will be made aware that, where it appears to a member of staff a pupil may have been abused, the school is required to report their concern to Social Care/Family Services.

Procedures

Where it is believed a child is suffering from or is at risk of significant harm, we will follow the procedures below which are guided by our Local Authority Safeguarding Board directives.

Teacher's responsibilities:

- To be vigilant in order to identify potential incidences of abuse;
- To report immediately to the designated named person/s;
- To complete documentation for external agencies as appropriate;

It is not the teacher's role to investigate suspected abuse but rather to recognise it and refer it as appropriate to the designated named person/s.

Designated named person's responsibilities:

- To co-ordinate actions in the school and liaise with agencies over suspected or actual cases of child abuse;
- Identify the signs and symptoms of suspected or actual abuse and when to make a referral;
- To ensure that staff observe and implement school's agreed procedures;
- To facilitate training for all staff and governors;
- To authorise and support referral to the relevant and appropriate authority;
- To keep full and accurate records of concerns, reports and referrals made which are stored securely to maintain confidentiality.

Professional Confidentiality

St Oswald's Catholic Primary School's training and induction processes ensure the context of confidentiality is fully understood by all those working with our pupils, particularly in the context of Child Protection. All information should be treated as confidential and particular care taken with sensitive information. Sharing information will be treated on a "need to know" basis. Relevant factors include:

- The purpose of the disclosure;
- The nature and extent of the information to be disclosed;
- The appropriateness of the professional to whom is the disclosure to be made;
- If disclosure is a proportionate response to the need to protect the welfare of a pupil.

School will not undertake an investigation but may seek clarification from the pupil. Care will be taken not to ask leading questions. Regular Child Protection training ensures our school staff understand they should not promise confidentiality to a pupil.

In the unlikely event that an incident happens outside core school hours, e.g. on an educational visit or during an after-school activity, and none of school's named person/s are available the teacher/staff member will contact the relevant agency as soon as possible if they feel the safety of the pupil may be compromised. The designated named person/s should be informed as soon as possible afterwards. Relevant information will be recorded at the time with full details of the concern.

Protecting Staff

All staff are required to attend Child Protection/Safeguarding training with regular practice updates. This is to ensure best practice is maintained and that staff are aware of measures designed to support their safety and protection together with those pupils in their care. Staff should:

- Always avoid inappropriate physical contact with pupils;
- Avoid being left alone in a room with a closed door with just one pupil;
- When a pupil needs intimate care staff will ensure that another member of staff knows they are about to undertake the task. Wherever possible an additional member of staff will be present e.g. assisting a pupil to wash/change clothing or to be changed due to them wetting or soiling. Where a pupil has complex health needs, such tasks should be carried out in line with the pupil's individual care plan. Staff will inform parents/guardians that such tasks have been carried out.
- Avoid discussing, counselling and/or giving advice to pupils about sexual matters except in the agreed context of planned SRE lessons where parental permission will have been obtained. All staff should be aware of school's SRE policy ratified by the Governing Body and the statutory requirements of delivering such education. (Guidance is available on the DFE website).

Allegations made against staff

Sometimes allegations of abuse may involve a member of the school staff. In these circumstances the allegations must be reported to Ms H T Lennon (Head Teacher) immediately. On receipt of such an allegation the Head Teacher will contact the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). If the allegation concerns the Head Teacher, the member of staff receiving the allegation must contact one of the other named persons, Mrs S Boardman (Chair of Governors) and LADO as a matter of urgency. (Contact details are held in the office.)

Training and Support

We will ensure that the Head Teacher, Named Persons, Chair of Governors and Safeguarding Governor attend Child Protection training relevant to their role. School staff will also receive basic Child Protection awareness training and be kept informed through dissemination and our INSET programme.

Recruitment

As stated earlier, St Oswald's Catholic Primary School operates safe recruitment procedures in line with Central Government policy and Warrington guidelines to ensure that vetting checks are carried out on all new staff and, where appropriate, volunteers who work regularly with our pupils. This includes Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks (formerly known as CRB). Anyone who is not prepared to cooperate with these procedures will not be considered for employment or work in a voluntary capacity within the school.

All childcare organisations, which includes schools, have statutory duties under the Protection of Children Act 1999. As such school will:

- Refer names to the DBS if there are concerns that a person has caused harm, or poses a future risk of harm to our pupils;
- Complete DBS vetting checks as previously stated;
- Not employ or allow a person to volunteer if they are registered on a DBS barred list.
- Cease to employ a person if it is later discovered that the individual is registered on a DBS barred list.

From January 2010 it became mandatory that at least one person on any appointments committee should have completed the Safer Recruitment training. Details of all staff and governors who have completed this training is held in the office.

The Data Protection Act

The Data Protection Act (2010, 1998) regulates the handling of personal data. Essentially, this is information kept about an individual on a computer or in a manual filing system. The Act lays down requirements for the processing of this information which includes obtaining, recording, storing and disclosing it.

If making a decision to disclose personal data, the Data Protection Act must be complied with. This includes eight data protection principles. There should not be an obstacle if:

- There are particular concerns about the welfare of the pupil.
- If information is disclosed to social services or to another professional organisation e.g. Police
- The disclosure is justified under the common law duty of confidence.

As previously stated, professionals can only work together to safeguard children if there is an exchange of relevant information between them. This has been recognised in principle by the courts. Any disclosure of personal information by school to others (including social services departments), will always, however, have regard to both common and statute law.

Normally, personal information should only be disclosed to third parties (including other agencies) with the consent of the subject of that information. Wherever possible, consent will be obtained before sharing personal information with third parties. In some circumstances consent may not be

possible or desirable but the safety and welfare of a pupil dictate that the information should be shared. The law permits the disclosure of confidential information necessary to safeguard a pupil. Disclosure should be justifiable in each case according to the particular facts of the case and legal advice will be sought if school is in doubt.

Records and Monitoring

Well kept records are essential to good Child Protection practice. Staff have been informed about the need to record any concerns held about a pupil or pupils within our school, the status of such records and when these records should be passed over to other agencies.

As stated earlier, records concerning Child Protection are kept in a separate and securely locked cabinet. The Head Teacher will ensure that staff are informed of the contents of reports and other confidential issues on a need-to-know basis, although the overriding principle is the safety of pupils. All records are confidential. Anyone requesting access to records must first consult with the Head Teacher who will allow access only if it is deemed appropriate. A record of all access will be maintained to provide an audit trail.

Any incident in school which may or may not result in bruising will be recorded in the school accident log. This would provide clarification/cover for the child, staff and parents.

Attendance at Child Protection Conferences

A Child Protection conference may be convened by social services to which all involved agencies would be invited. Where a case involves a pupil in our school a representative is usually invited to attend the meeting. The Head Teacher or one of the other named persons may attend – the choice of this representative will depend on the circumstances of each individual case.

Staff may be requested to provide a report for a Child Protection meeting. Any report should be relevant, concise and professional. All reports will be submitted in the first instance to the Head Teacher or, if not available, one of the other named persons with designated responsibility for Child Protection in school.

All staff that are required to attend such meetings, prepare reports and maintain relationships with parents during and after a referral has been made will be fully supported by our staff who have completed specialist Child Protection training.

This policy should be read in conjunction with our other related school policies such as:

Behaviour management policy
Inclusion policy
Anti-bullying policy
Health & Safety policy
Care & Control policy
Recruitment and Vetting Policy

SRE Policy
PSCHE Policy
SEND Policy

APPENDIX A

Recognising signs of child abuse

It must be remembered that perpetrators of abuse can be male, female or other children.

Categories of Abuse:

- Physical Abuse
- Emotional Abuse (including Domestic Abuse, cyberbullying, bullying)
- Sexual Abuse including child sexual exploitation
- Neglect
- Enforced marriage
- Female genital mutilation
- Radicalisation – seek LA and police support through CHANNEL
- Honour based violence
- Peer on peer

Signs of Abuse in Children:

The following non-specific signs may indicate something is wrong:

- Significant change in behaviour
- Extreme anger or sadness
- Aggressive and attention-seeking behaviour
- Suspicious bruises with unsatisfactory explanations
- Lack of self-esteem
- Self-injury
- Depression
- Age inappropriate sexual behaviour

Risk Indicators

The factors described in this section are frequently found in cases of child abuse. Their presence is not proof that abuse has occurred, but:

- Must be regarded as indicators of the possibility of significant harm
- Justifies the need for careful assessment and discussion with designated / named / lead person, manager, (or in the absence of all those individuals, an experienced colleague)
- May require consultation with and / or referral to Children's Services

The absence of such indicators does not mean that abuse or neglect has not occurred.

In an abusive relationship:

The child may:

- Appear frightened of the parent/s
- Act in a way that is inappropriate to her/his age and development (though full account needs to be taken of different patterns of development and different ethnic groups)

The parent or carer may:

- Persistently avoid child health promotion services and treatment of the child's episodic illnesses

- Have unrealistic expectations of the child
- Frequently complain about/to the child and may fail to provide attention or praise (high criticism/low warmth environment)
- Be absent or misusing substances
- Persistently refuse to allow access on home visits
- Be involved in domestic abuse

Staff should be aware of the potential risk to children when individuals, previously known or suspected to have abused children, move into the household.

Recognising Physical Abuse

The following are often regarded as indicators of concern:

- An explanation which is inconsistent with an injury
- Several different explanations provided for an injury
- Unexplained delay in seeking treatment
- The parents/carers are uninterested or undisturbed by an accident or injury
- Parents are absent without good reason when their child is presented for treatment
- Repeated presentation of minor injuries (which may represent a “cry for help” and if ignored could lead to a more serious injury)
- Family use of different doctors and A&E departments
- Reluctance to give information or mention previous injuries

Bruising

Children can have accidental bruising, but the following must be considered as non-accidental unless there is evidence, or an adequate explanation provided:

- Any bruising to a pre-crawling or pre-walking baby
- Bruising in or around the mouth, particularly in small babies which may indicate force feeding
- Two simultaneous bruised eyes, without bruising to the forehead, (rarely accidental, though a single bruised eye can be accidental or abusive)
- Repeated or multiple bruising on the head or on sites unlikely to be injured accidentally
- Variation in colour possibly indicating injuries caused at different times
- The outline of an object used e.g. belt marks, hand prints or a hair brush
- Bruising or tears around, or behind, the earlobe/s indicating injury by pulling or twisting
- Bruising around the face
- Grasp marks on small children
- Bruising on the arms, buttocks and thighs may be an indicator of sexual abuse

See records and monitoring page 11.

Bite Marks

Bite marks can leave clear impressions of the teeth. Human bite marks are oval or crescent shaped. Those over 3 cm in diameter are more likely to have been caused by an adult or older child. A medical opinion should be sought where there is any doubt over the origin of the bite.

Burns and Scalds

It can be difficult to distinguish between accidental and non-accidental burns and scalds, and will always require experienced medical opinion. Any burn with a clear outline may be suspicious e.g.:

- Circular burns from cigarettes (but may be friction burns if along the bony protuberance of the spine)
- Linear burns from hot metal rods or electrical fire elements
- Burns of uniform depth over a large area
- Scalds that have a line indicating immersion or poured liquid (a child getting into hot water is his/her own accord will struggle to get out and cause splash marks)
- Old scars indicating previous burns/scalds which did not have appropriate treatment or adequate explanation
- Scalds to the buttocks of a small child, particularly in the absence of burns to the feet, are indicative of dipping into a hot liquid or bath.

Fractures

Fractures may cause pain, swelling and discolouration over a bone or joint.

Non-mobile children rarely sustain fractures.

There are grounds for concern if:

- The history provided is vague, non-existent or inconsistent with the fracture type
- There are associated old fractures
- Medical attention is sought after a period of delay when the fracture has caused symptoms such as swelling, pain or loss of movement
- There is an unexplained fracture in the first year of life

Scars

A large number of scars or scars of different sizes or ages, or on different parts of the body, may suggest abuse.

Recognising Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse may be difficult to recognise, as the signs are usually behavioural rather than physical. The manifestations of emotional abuse might also indicate the presence of other kinds of abuse.

The indicators of emotional abuse are often also associated with other forms of abuse.

The following may be indicators of emotional abuse:

- Developmental delay
- Abnormal attachment between a child and parent/carer e.g. anxious, indiscriminate or not attachment
- Indiscriminate attachment or failure to attach
- Aggressive behaviour towards others
- Scape-goated within the family
- Frozen watchfulness, particularly in pre-school children
- Low self-esteem and lack of confidence
- Withdrawn or seen as a “loner” – difficulty relating to others

Recognising Neglect

Evidence of neglect is built up over a period of time and can cover different aspects of parenting. Indicators include:

- Failure by parents or carers to meet the basic essential needs e.g. adequate food, clothes, warmth, hygiene and medical care
- A child seen to be listless, apathetic and unresponsive with no apparent medical cause
- Failure of child to grow within normal expected pattern, with accompanying weight loss
- Child thrives away from home environment
- Child frequently absent from school
- Child left with adults who are intoxicated or violent
- Child abandoned or left alone for excessive periods

Recognising Signs of Sexual Abuse

Boys and girls of all ages may be sexually abused and are frequently scared to say anything due to guilt and/or fear. This is particularly difficult for a child to talk about and full account should be taken of the cultural sensitivities of any individual child/family. Some children may not be aware that they are experiencing sexual abuse and may see the actions of the adult as “normal”. This may involve forcing or enticing a child to take part and it may or may not involve penetration. It can include involvement in looking at, or the production of sexual images.

Recognition can be difficult, unless the child discloses and is believed. There may be no physical signs and indications are likely to be emotional/behavioural.

Some behavioural indicators associated with this form of abuse are:

- Inappropriate sexualised conduct
- Sexually explicit behaviour, play or conversation, inappropriate to the child’s age
- Continual and inappropriate or excessive masturbation
- Self-harm (including eating disorder), self mutilation and suicide attempts
- Involvement in prostitution or indiscriminate choice of sexual partners
- An anxious unwillingness to remove clothes e.g. for sports events (but this may be related to cultural norms or physical difficulties)

Some physical indicators associated with this form of abuse are:

- Pain or itching of genital area
- Blood on underclothes
- Pregnancy in a younger girl where the identity of the father is not disclosed
- Physical symptoms such as injuries to the genital or anal area, bruising to buttocks, abdomen and thighs, sexually transmitted disease, persistent urine infection, presence of semen on vagina, anus, external genitalia or clothing

Sexual Abuse by Young People

The boundary between what is abusive and what is part of normal childhood or youthful experimentation can be blurred. The determination of whether behaviour is developmental, inappropriate or abusive will hinge around the related concepts of true consent, power imbalance and exploitation. This may include children and young people who exhibit a range of sexually problematic behaviour such as indecent exposure, obscene telephone calls, fetishism, bestiality and sexual abuse against adults, peers or children.

Developmental Sexual Activity encompasses those actions that are to be expected from children and young people as they move from infancy through to an adult understanding of their physical, emotional and behavioural relationships with each other. Such sexual activity is essentially information gathering and experience testing. It is characterised by mutuality and of the seeking of consent.

Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour can be inappropriate socially, inappropriate to development, or both. In considering whether behaviour fits into this category, it is important to consider what negative effects it has on any of the parties involved and what concerns it raises about a child or young person. It should be recognised that some actions may be motivated by information seeking, but still cause significant upset, confusion, worry, physical damage, etc. It may also be that the behaviour is “acting out” which may derive from other sexual situations to which the child or young person has been exposed.

If an act appears to have been inappropriate, there may still be a need for some form of behaviour management or intervention. For some children, educative inputs may be enough to address the behaviour.

Abusive sexual activity includes any behaviour involving coercion, threats, aggression together with secrecy, or where one participant relies on an unequal power base.

Assessment

In order to more fully determine the nature of the incident the following factors should be given consideration. The presence of exploitation in terms of:

- Equality – consider differentials of physical, cognitive and emotional development, power and control and authority, passive and assertive tendencies
- Consent – agreement including all the following:
- Understanding that is proposed based on age, maturity, development level, functioning and experience
- Knowledge of society’s standards for what is being proposed
- Awareness of potential consequences and alternatives
- Assumption that agreements or disagreements will be respected equally
- Voluntary decision
- Mental competence
- Coercion – the young perpetrator who abuses may use techniques like bribing, manipulation and emotional threats of secondary gains and losses that is loss of love, friendship, etc. Some may use physical force, brutality or the threat of these regardless of victim resistance.

In evaluating sexual behaviour of children and young people, the above information should be used only as a guide. Advice should always be sought as we are not trained to make judgements.

Child Sexual Exploitation

The following list of indicators is not exhaustive or definitive, but it does highlight common signs which can assist professionals in identifying children or young people who may be victims of sexual exploitation.

Signs include:

- underage sexual activity
- inappropriate sexual or sexualised behaviour
- sexually risky behaviour, 'swapping' sex
- repeat sexually transmitted infections

- in girls, repeat pregnancy, abortions, miscarriage
- receiving unexplained gifts or gifts from unknown sources
- having multiple mobile phones and worrying about losing contact via mobile
- having unaffordable new things (clothes, mobile) or expensive habits (alcohol, drugs)
- changes in the way they dress
- going to hotels or other unusual locations to meet friends
- seen at known places of concern
- moving around the country, appearing in new towns or cities, not knowing where they are
- getting in/out of different cars driven by unknown adults
- having older boyfriends or girlfriends
- contact with known perpetrators
- involved in abusive relationships, intimidated and fearful of certain people or situations
- hanging out with groups of older people, or anti-social groups, or with other vulnerable peers
- associating with other young people involved in sexual exploitation
- recruiting other young people to exploitative situations
- truancy, exclusion, disengagement with school, opting out of education altogether
- unexplained changes in behaviour or personality (chaotic, aggressive, sexual)
- mood swings, volatile behaviour, emotional distress
- self-harming, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, overdosing, eating disorders
- drug or alcohol misuse
- getting involved in crime
- police involvement, police records
- involved in gangs, gang fights, gang membership
- injuries from physical assault, physical restraint, sexual assault.

Forced Marriage

This is an entirely separate issue from arranged marriage. It is a human rights abuse and falls within the Crown Prosecution Service definition of domestic violence. Young men and women can be at risk in affected ethnic groups. Whistle-blowing may come from younger siblings. Other indicators may be detected by changes in adolescent behaviours. Never attempt to intervene directly as a school or through a third party – contact the LADO and police.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

It is essential that staff are aware of FGM practices and the need to look for signs, symptoms and other indicators of FGM.

What is FGM?

It involves procedures that intentionally alter/injure the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

4 types of procedure:

- Type 1 Clitoridectomy – partial/total removal of clitoris
- Type 2 Excision – partial/total removal of clitoris and labia minora
- Type 3 Infibulation entrance to vagina is narrowed by repositioning the inner/outer labia

- Type 4 all other procedures that may include: pricking, piercing, incising, cauterising and scraping the genital area.

Why is it carried out?

Belief that:

- FGM brings status/respect to the girl – social acceptance for marriage
- Preserves a girl's virginity
- Part of being a woman / rite of passage
- Upholds family honour
- Cleanses and purifies the girl
- Gives a sense of belonging to the community
- Fulfils a religious requirement
- Perpetuates a custom/tradition
- Helps girls be clean / hygienic
- Is cosmetically desirable
- Mistakenly believed to make childbirth easier

FGM is internationally recognised as a violation of human rights of girls and women. It is illegal in most countries including the UK.

Circumstances and occurrences that may point to FGM happening

- Child talking about getting ready for a special ceremony
- Family taking a long trip abroad
- Child's family being from one of the 'at risk' communities for FGM (Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Egypt, Nigeria, Eritrea as well as non-African communities including Yemeni, Afghani, Kurdistan, Indonesia and Pakistan)
- Knowledge that the child's sibling has undergone FGM
- Child talks about going abroad to be 'cut' or to prepare for marriage

Signs that may indicate a child has undergone FGM:

- Prolonged absence from school and other activities
- Behaviour change on return from a holiday abroad, such as being withdrawn and appearing subdued
- Bladder or menstrual problems
- Finding it difficult to sit still and looking uncomfortable
- Complaining about pain between the legs
- Mentioning something somebody did to them that they are not allowed to talk about
- Secretive behaviour, including isolating themselves from the group
- Reluctance to take part in physical activity
- Repeated urinal tract infection
- Disclosure

The 'One Chance' rule

With Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation there is the 'One Chance' rule. It is essential that settings /schools/colleges take action without delay.

Further advice is available from the GOV.UK website and agencies such as the NSPCC.