

Safeguarding Children Policy

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Purpose

To create awareness amongst staff and volunteers (including Branch committee members) of children's safeguarding issues and to outline procedures when responding to an incident, allegation or concern of abuse involving children in our care.

NOTE: This policy replaces the Child Protection Policy (SO-0189) and also incorporates Staff Responsibilities Policy (previously covered in SO-0191), Child Prostitution Policy (SO-0192) and Child Protection in NAS Branches Policy (SO-0343).

Scope

This policy applies throughout the NAS and in addition to children in our Schools it also includes children involved in other Services such as Befriending, Out of School Clubs, Youth Clubs, Resource Centres and Branches.

Safeguarding Children (Concise Statement)

There is a considerable body of legislation, government guidance and standards which are designed to ensure that children are protected from harm. The Children Act 1989 is the primary legislation for children in England and Wales (complemented by the All Wales Child Protection Procedures 2008); The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 legislate for children in those respective countries.

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is the process of “protecting children from abuse or neglect, preventing impairment of their health and development and ensuring they are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care.” (Working Together to Safeguard Children, DfES 2006).

Children with autism share the right of all children to protection from abuse. We know that children with autism are potentially more vulnerable, because of their communication and interaction difficulties and it is the duty of each staff member and volunteer to ensure that the children they come into contact with are safe at all times and that their welfare is promoted.

Abuse

Working Together to Safeguard Children defines child abuse as harm to children by a parent, sibling or other relative, a carer, an acquaintance or a stranger. The harm may be the result of a direct act or by a failure to act to provide proper care or both.

There are four main forms of abuse. These are described in Working Together to Safeguard Children as:

- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse (includes child prostitution)
- Neglect

Recognising child abuse

Recognising child abuse is not easy and it is not the responsibility of NAS staff and volunteers to decide whether or not child abuse has taken place or if a child is at risk of “significant harm”. However, staff and volunteers do have a responsibility to act if they have a concern about a child’s welfare or safety. Those responsibilities are summarised at Appendix 1.

Response to concerns about child abuse

It is very important that there are procedures in place to ensure a speedy and effective response for dealing with concerns about the physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect of children.

Under no circumstances should anyone within the NAS undertake an investigation into concerns that a child has been abused, or is at risk of being abused. This is the role of the statutory services (Social Care/Police) and any concerns or worries that staff or volunteers may have should be passed to the NAS Regional/School Designated officer (for child protection) as detailed under ‘procedures’ later in this document .

Designated Safeguarding Children Officer

All NAS Schools and regions have a Designated Safeguarding Children Officer to whom any concerns must be reported immediately. The role of the Designated Safeguarding Children Officer is to provide advice and reassurance to the member of staff or volunteer and make decisions about what to do next. The Designated Safeguarding Children Officer will ensure that appropriate contact is made with the Local Authority (Social Care/Police) to promote partnership working and good practice.

All relevant staff and volunteers will be informed who the Designated Safeguarding Children Officer is and how to contact him/her as part of their induction.

Disclosure

Concerns of abuse

Staff and volunteer concerns about a child being abused may arise through various factors. These include:

- a child may tell them
- someone else might report that a child has told them or that they strongly believe that a child has been or is being abused
- a child might show signs of physical injury or neglect for which there appears to be no satisfactory explanation
- a child's behaviour may indicate to them that it is likely that he/she is being/has been abused
- observing one child abusing another
- a child having contact with a person who may pose a risk to them

Victim needs

The victim of abuse needs:

- to be believed
- to talk or communicate at their own pace
- to be heard
- to be supported

Recording events

It is important that an accurate record of all events surrounding the disclosure or suspected abuse is kept, stating the facts, times, explanations and action taken. It is vital that when a disclosure is made to a member of staff or volunteer the person:

- is non-judgemental.
- does not coach or ask leading questions.
- makes notes of the conversation as soon as possible after the event.

Support provided to the individual disclosing

In the event of disclosure of alleged abuse the individual disclosing will be protected from any retaliation or unnecessary stress and will be supported through the process.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality cannot be assured, as depending on the disclosure and individual concerned, information may need to be shared internally, with the Designated Safeguarding Children Officer and with other agencies. This could include the Police and Local Authority. However, information will only be shared on a need to know basis, and the person making the disclosure should be reassured that the information they have given will be treated within best practice codes of conduct for confidentiality.

Referral

When a referral is made to the local authority, the Designated Safeguarding Children Officer must confirm in writing with the Principal/Regional Director and the Responsible Individual the actions that have been taken.

In the case of Schools, OFSTED and the funding Child Placement Team should also be notified. The Designated Safeguarding Children Officer will hold a confidential file in which a record will be kept of child protection suspicions and referrals.

Training

All staff and volunteers will be trained in Safeguarding Children in line with the training procedure (see Appendix 2).

The training will cover child protection procedures including:

- prevention and recognition of abuse
- dealing with disclosures and suspicions of abuse

All staff and volunteers must read, understand and become knowledgeable about child protection procedures during induction and must undertake refresher training on an annual basis. Failure by a member of staff to report actual or reasonably suspected physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect of a child will be treated as a disciplinary offence.

Equal Opportunities

NAS employees and volunteers shall not discriminate against any person on the grounds of race, nationality, age, religious or similar philosophical beliefs, sexual orientation, or social standing and shall work in such a way as to give equal opportunity for each Service user to achieve the maximum benefit and potential consistent with respecting the dignity and value of fellow human beings.

Safeguarding Children (Concise Statement)

General guidance is contained in the publication "What to do if You're Worried A Child is being Abused" (DCSF 2006)

The prime concern is the best interests and safety of children. Always ensure that the child is safe while you take appropriate action.

Safeguarding Children - Procedure for Staff and Volunteers in NAS Schools

Step 1

On every occasion that any member of staff or volunteer has reason to suspect that a child has suffered abuse, or is at risk of suffering abuse, he/she should at the earliest opportunity contact the School Designated Officer and Principal.

If the allegation or suspicion is about the Designated Safeguarding Children Officer then the report should be made to the Principal only.

If the allegation or suspicion is about the Principal then the report should be made to the Designated Safeguarding Children Officer only.

Step 2

If possible write a brief note at the time, but always make a written note as soon as you can and whilst the facts are still clear in your mind. If two staff members witness something, they should write their accounts independently.

Step 3

On no account should staff or volunteers make physical examinations that require the removal of clothes or pursue enquiries beyond the initial statement. However, staff and volunteers should check and record the child's physical appearance and apparent state of mind

Step 4

The Designated Officer will contact the appropriate Social Care office and OFSTED. Social Care will advise on the next step(s) to be taken. The Designated Officer will also hold contact names and address for all Purchasers, Ofsted and copies of the Safeguarding Children procedures of the Local Authority.

Step 5

On accepting the referral the Local Authority becomes responsible for determining what action is to be taken including advising parents. It is not the responsibility of staff or volunteers to make enquiries of or to notify parents when abuse is suspected.

Step 6

Verbal reports should be made immediately and followed as soon as possible by a written report using the Local Authority Child Protection Report form.

These procedures do not take away the right of the informant to report the matter directly to Social Care Departments or, if they believe an offence has been committed, the Police.

Safeguarding Children - Procedure for Staff and Volunteers involved in other NAS Child Services

Step 1

On every occasion that any member of staff or volunteer has reason to suspect that a child has suffered abuse, or is at risk of suffering abuse, he/she should at the earliest opportunity contact the NAS Line Manager who will, in turn, seek advice from the Designated Safeguarding Children Officer.

If the allegation or suspicion is about the Designated Safeguarding Children Officer then the report should be made to the Director of Education or Director of Adult Services if that post is vacant.

Each region has an Out-of-Hours contact for emergency advice for Safeguarding issues. All staff and volunteers will be given this number.

Step 2

If possible write a brief note at the time, but always make a written note as soon as you can and whilst the facts are still clear in your mind. If two staff members witness something, they should always write their accounts independently.

Step 3

On no account should staff or volunteers make physical examinations that require the removal of clothes or pursue enquiries beyond the initial statement. However, staff and volunteers should check and record the child's physical appearance, behaviour and apparent emotional state of mind.

Step 4

The Designated Safeguarding Children Officer will, if s/he is of the opinion that the particular situation demands a referral, contact the appropriate Local Authority, who will advise on the next step(s) to be taken.

Step 5

On accepting the referral the Local Authority becomes responsible for determining what action is to be taken including advising parents. It is not the responsibility of staff or volunteers to make enquiries of or to notify parents when abuse is suspected.

Step 6

Verbal reports should be made immediately and followed as soon as possible by a written report using the Local Authority Child Protection Report Form.

These procedures do not take away the right of the informant to report the matter directly to Social Care Departments or, if they believe an offence has been committed, the Police.

Safeguarding Children - Additional Procedures for dealing with Abuse through Child Prostitution

Staff and volunteers should be alert to any evidence of children becoming involved in prostitution, or of unauthorised persons picking children up, contacting children or observed trying to make contact with children outside the home. All such concerns should be reported directly to the police as well as following the procedural steps set out above.

Allegations made against Staff or Volunteers

Staff members and volunteers against whom an allegation is made are owed a duty of care and should be treated fairly, honestly and without discrimination. They should be provided with support throughout the process. The police and other relevant agencies should always agree jointly when to inform the subject of allegations which may be subject to criminal procedures.

Measure

Refer to Local Social Care Guidance
Training in Protection Procedures
Review of Investigations

Safeguarding Children – References

Children Act 1989
All Wales Child Protection Procedures 2008
The Children (Scotland) Act 1995
The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995
Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) (Northern Ireland)
The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety 2006 (DHSSP)
Standards for Child Protection Service 2008 (Standards 1-8)
DfES Guidelines – Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education (2006)
OFSTED
Every Child Matters
Protection of Children Act 1999
Purchasers' Contracts

Other relevant policies and guidance

Child Protection - Treatment of the Abused Child Policy SO-0196
Department of Health – Working together to Safeguard Children
Department of Health - Supplementary Guidance - Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution
www.childline.co.uk Telephone 0800 1111
BUPA Wellbeing Telephone 0800 371536 Quote 33705
Child Protection Liaison Officer
Responsible Individual
DfES Guidance – Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education (2006)
DfES - What to do if You're Worried a Child is being Abused

Appendix 1

Staff and Volunteers' Responsibilities

1. To act in loco parentis whilst any child is at the School/Service and have the responsibility to protect the child and promote his/her general welfare.
2. To be aware that abuse does happen; to always remain alert to the possibility of abuse and ready to act upon information that you receive or signs of abuse you see or hear about.
3. To be aware of the early warning signs of potential abuse situations and the possible signs of abuse.
4. To notify the School/Regional Designated Safeguarding Officer if there is any reason to suspect that a child has been or may be the subject of abuse.
5. To maintain a professional confidential approach in line with NAS Equal Opportunities Policy when dealing with the child and any other person who may be involved.
6. To ensure good communication of observations are made in writing to the Designated Safeguarding Officer.