Supporting Children and Young People Who Have Experienced Abuse in Residential Childcare

Learner Study Guide
Introduction

This information guide is designed to support the knowledge and understanding of child abuse and to development the skills required to support the provision of a safe and secure environment for children and young people who have been subject to harm or abuse.

You will explore roles and responsibilities and the support needed by children and young people in residential childcare.

This information will provide you with the knowledge and understanding of the importance of working to identified and agreed roles and responsibilities when supporting children and young people who have been harmed or abused.

The information examines approaches to working and how they are underpinned by collaboration with support networks, which can provide guidance and information in relation to the harm or abuse experienced by children and young people.

Ongoing implementation of agreed ways of working and policies and procedures is key to ensuring the safety and security of children and young people.
The role and responsibilities of the residential childcare practitioner

Harm or abuse may be:

➢ Physical
➢ Emotional
➢ Sexual
➢ Financial
➢ Bullying
➢ Self-harm
➢ Neglect
➢ Exploitation by gangs, groups or solo perpetrators

For the purpose of this guide, ‘others’ may include:

➢ Team members
➢ Families or carers
➢ Advocates
➢ Social workers
➢ Others in the local network for safeguarding and protection

The role and responsibilities of the practitioner with regard to children or young people who have experienced harm or abuse is paramount. Your role as a childcare practitioner is to ensure overall safety of children within your care. This entails firstly, establishing a professional and trusting relationship with individual children or young people.

Your role incorporates understanding what abuse is. Your role is to be able to recognise the signs of abuse and to act on these in an appropriate and positive manner using the correct policies and procedures adopted by your setting.

Your role is to understand the need for monitoring children suspected of suffering abuse. Through careful and meticulous observations, you must be able to effectively collect information relating to the suspected abuse and demonstrate this information to your line manager, or a company director.

If you are told of abuse by any child, you must offer clear support and guidance, always informing the child that you cannot keep the disclosure a secret and that you MUST inform others in higher positions. It is extremely important to remember that if any child discloses abuse, you must support them immediately and assure them that they have done no wrong and that you believe them.
Simple Guidelines to follow are:

**Respond with care and urgency**
If you think a child is trying to tell you about a sexually abusive situation, respond promptly and with care. The police and children’s social services have joint working arrangements for responding to suspected child sexual abuse. They are experienced in this work and will deal sensitively with the child and family.

**Believe the child**
If a child trusts you enough to tell you about abuse, you must remember that they rarely lie about such things. Although it may be hard to believe that someone we trust or care about is capable of sexually abusing a child, it’s highly unlikely that a child would deliberately make false accusations about adult-like sexual behaviours.

The pressures on the child to keep silent are enormous. It takes tremendous courage to talk about abuse. A child’s claim that sexual abuse did not happen (when it actually did), or taking back a disclosure of abuse are common. Sometimes the child’s account of what happened changes or evolves over time. This is a common pattern for disclosure and should not invalidate their story.

**Be supportive**
It is important that they feel supported – don’t dismiss their claims or put them off talking about it.

**Stay calm**
If they are talking to you about it, don’t get angry. Stay calm and steady. If you get angry the child may think you are going to punish them – this will play into the hands of the abuser who warned the child not to tell.

**Be caring**
Make sure the child knows you love them and that they have done nothing wrong – and keep telling them. The child will need to see that adults believe them and they are doing all they can to protect them. Make sure the child knows they were right to talk about it and that you are glad they came to you.

**Face the problem**
When the abuse is known, adults must face the problem honestly, protect the child at all costs and place responsibility appropriately with the abuser.

**Re-establish safety**
Do what is necessary to protect the child from further harm. Put into place a family safety plan.

**Get help**
Get help from professionals who can help guide you towards safety and healing. Information on sources of help can be found on our get help / further support.
Do not despair

Children can and do recover from child sexual abuse. It is incredibly difficult to hear that someone you love has been hurt in such a way but help to recover is available.

Remember what a Child may be feeling

They may be afraid that the person who abused them will reject or harm them or those they love. They may feel scared that no one will believe them and extremely anxious about what will happen next. They will feel confused and conflicted, they may be feeling unsure about whom they can trust. Some children who suffer abuse feel protective and/or loving toward the person who abused them. They may be feeling regret about having told, they may even take back the disclosure.

Guilt and shame

Many children actually believe they are responsible for the abuse. They feel guilty about upsetting the family by telling. They even feel ashamed if they experienced positive physical sensations.

Hope and relief

A child may feel relieved that the burden of secrecy has been lifted and hopeful that the abuse will now stop.

Sexual abuse or incest within the family

When a child is abused by another family member, each family member is affected. Typically, the help of outside specialists is needed to address the emotional toll on the family and to assist the healing process of each individual.

Contradictory feelings

When sexual abuse takes place within families, the pain we experience can include conflicting and confusing emotions. We may feel extreme anguish over what was done to the child, while still feeling love and concern for the family member who committed the abuse.

What protective parents and caregivers may be feeling

Anger

You as a residential carer may feel rage toward the person who abused for harming the child, betraying your trust, deceiving and manipulating you. You may even feel anger at the child for not telling sooner.

Guilt

Self-blame for not having seen what was happening in time to protect the child (even when the person responsible for the abuse did all that they could to keep it hidden). Guilt over loving or caring about the person who abused the child.

Fear

Afraid about how the abuse will impact the child. Fearful about the family's future and the consequences for the person who abused the child.
Loneliness and loss

➢ Grieving for the loss of the life we had, or thought we had, before we knew about the abuse.
➢ Feeling extreme sense of isolation.
➢ Feelings of inadequacy

Finding Support

As a protective caregiver, you will also need support. Connecting with whom you can to share feelings will help all care-workers come to terms with the trauma and challenges faced

Intervention

The person who has sexually abused a child needs to be held accountable and get specialized professional help. The local police or children's services are often best placed to take the next steps. Should you choose not to contact them, and if it is safe, consider speaking directly to the person who has allegedly offended?

Some points to keep in mind when speaking with someone who has or may have abused:

➢ Explore the situation in a non-accusatory, non-confrontational way. This may help to reduce the person's defensiveness.
➢ Be specific about the behaviours that concern you and state your reactions to them.
➢ Ask simple and direct questions.
➢ If you feel it, let the person know that you care about them. Support can be an important factor in getting someone to take responsibility, face consequences and get treatment.
➢ Conversations generally need to happen more than once.
➢ Find a professional ally for yourself whom you can turn to for support.
➢ Always follow set policies and procedures
Definitions of Abuse:

Abuse is a violation of an individual’s human and civil rights by any other person or persons. The Legal Definition Children’s Act 1989 - The child is suffering or likely to suffer, significant harm and the harm is attributable to lack of adequate parental care or control. Article 19 UN Convention on the rights of the child. Every Child and Young Person has a right to life free from abuse.

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 and development.

Neglect can occur:

- During pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse.
- Through an inability to provide adequate food, clothing and shelter.
- Through an inability to protect a child from physical and emotional harm and danger.
- Neglect can be lack of adequate supervision, or failing to access appropriate medical care.

Recognition of Neglect

When professionals work in areas of high poverty and deprivation they can become desensitised to some of the indicators of neglect.

- Children can fail to grow within normal limits or lose weight.
- Child thrives away from home environment.
- Child frequently absent from school.
- Child left with inappropriate carers.
- Child left with adults who are drunk or violent.
- Child left alone for excessive periods.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, including prostitution, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (e.g. rape, buggery or oral) or non-penetrative acts.

They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in production of, sexual online images, watching sexual activities or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.
Physical Abuse

Physical abuse can take many forms, including:

➢ Hitting
➢ Shaking
➢ Throwing
➢ Poisoning
➢ Burning
➢ Drowning
➢ Suffocating
➢ Strangling
➢ Biting
➢ Hair Pulling
➢ Licking
➢ Slapping

Or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm can also be caused when a parent fabricates the symptoms or deliberately induces illness in a child. This symptom is known as ‘Munchhausen’s Syndrome by Proxy’

Emotional Abuse

Emotional Abuse can be difficult to recognise, as the signs are usually behavioural rather than physical. The indicators are often associated with other forms of abuse.

➢ Developmental Delay.
➢ Abnormal attachment between a child and parent.
➢ Aggressive behaviour towards others.
➢ Scapegoat within the family.
➢ Low self-esteem and lack of confidence.
➢ Withdrawn or seen as a loner.
➢ Playing on community and cultural fears.
➢ Overcritical.
➢ Shouting / Swearing.
➢ Humiliation.

Bullying

This is defined as repeated behaviour intending to hurt someone either physically or emotionally. Typical signs of bullying include:

➢ Withdrawn or seen as a loner or becoming overcritical
➢ Playing on community and cultural fears.
➢ Shouting / Swearing.
➢ Humiliation.
➢ Taking or breaking personal possessions
➢ Threats or ganging up on an individual
➢ Spreading nasty lies about someone, particularly using social media
Harassment

Defined as attacking, or tormenting someone in a persistent way. Typical signs of harassment may include:

➢ Repeated physical or verbal attack
➢ Sending unwelcome text messages or phone calls
➢ Tracing someone’s movements
➢ Racial harassment
➢ Sexual harassment

Useful Links:

Stop it Now! UK and Ireland www.stopitnow.org.uk
Helpline - 0808 1000 900 Email help@stopitnow.org.uk

Stop it Now! UK and Ireland is a useful website for anyone with concerns about child sexual abuse. The Stop it Now! campaign operates a confidential Freephone helpline for any adult with concerns including those worried about the sexual behaviour or another adult towards children, those worried about their own thoughts or behaviour towards children and those concerned about the worrying sexual behaviour of a child or young person.

Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre

www.ceop.police.uk

The CEOP Centre is the UK’s national police agency set up to tackle child sexual abuse. If you are worried about someone’s behaviour towards a child, online or offline, you can report this at the website above, you can also get help, advice and support on all issues related to internet safety for young people by visiting www.clickceop.net.

The Home Office Disclosure Scheme

Keeping children safe: your right to ask for a police check. If you are worried about someone in your child’s life, you can get them checked by the police to see if they have a record of child sexual offences. Find out what you need to do to get someone checked.