

Recognising and Reporting Suspected or Actual Child Abuse or Bullying



The ability to recognise child abuse depends as much on a person's willingness to accept the possibility of its existence as it does on knowledge and information. It is important to note that child abuse is not always readily visible, and may not be as clearly observable as the "text book" scenarios might suggest. Indeed "text book" scenarios tend to be unusual rather than the norm. All cases are different.

A. Grounds for Concern

Consider the possibility of child abuse if there are reasonable grounds for concern. Examples of reasonable grounds are:

- A specific indication or statement from a child that s/he has been abused
- A statement from a person who witnessed abuse
- An illness, injury or behaviour consistent with abuse
- A symptom which may not itself be totally consistent with abuse, but which is supported by corroborative evidence of deliberate harm or negligence
- Consistent signs of neglect over a period of time

In some cases of child abuse the alleged perpetrator will also be a child and it is important that behaviour of this nature is not ignored. Grounds for concern will exist in cases where there is an age difference and/or difference in power, status or intellect between the children involved. However, it is also important to distinguish between normal sexual behaviour and abusive behaviour. Persons unsure about whether or not certain behaviours are abusive and therefore reportable, should contact the local social services department or the NSPCC 24 hour free phone helpline on 0808 800 5000. They will advise whether or not the matter requires a formal report; contact the duty social worker in the local health board or social services department where they will receive advice.

B. Bullying

Bullying is deliberate hurtful behaviour by an adult or other child. It may result in pain and distress to the victim.

Bullying can be:

- Emotional e.g. Being unfriendly, tormenting, excluding
- Physical e.g. Pushing, kicking, hitting
- Racist e.g. Racial taunts or gestures
- Verbal e.g. Teasing, sarcasm, spreading rumours
- Cyber e.g. Taunts via email, social network sites, text message

Recognising Bullying

Adults should be aware of these possible signs and should consider investigating if a child:

- Doesn't want to go to school/sports club
- Changes in their usual routine
- Begins to truant
- Becomes withdrawn, anxious or lacking in confidence
- Runs away, threatens to self harm or suicide
- School work is negatively affected
- Has possessions damaged or 'go missing'
- Asks for money or starts stealing money

- Has unexplained cuts or bruises
- Becomes aggressive, disruptive or unreasonable
- Is frightened to say what is wrong
- Is afraid to use the internet or mobile phone

One of these signs alone may not indicate bullying but a mixture of these signs could indicate problems, one of which could be bullying and should be investigated.

Procedure to counter bullying

- Incidents should be reported to the DC / Centre Proprietor or Child Protection Officer (CPO)
- Victim will be encouraged to speak in an honest, open environment away from bully (bullies) where they are safe
- Discuss with victim the need to record information and involve others such as coach and/or parents / guardian
- Investigate the incident including giving bully (bullies) opportunity to explain their behaviour
- Mediation between victim and bully (bullies) may help to change behavior

Resolving issues

- Reconciliation – getting parties together to apologise may solve the problem
- Representatives meet with the victim and parents to get details of allegation
- Same representatives to meet with the alleged bully. If the allegation is found to be true, bully (bullies) should be warned in accordance with the disciplinary procedures, be told how they can improve their behaviour and progress should be monitored.
- A written account of all meetings should be kept
- Bullies to be supported and encouraged to stop bullying behaviour

C. Reporting Child Abuse

If you suspect that a child is being abused:

- Observe and note dates, times, locations and contexts in which the incident occurred or suspicion was aroused, together with any other relevant information. If injuries are noted, it may be useful to include an annotated sketch of any marks and of the area on the body in which they are to be found. It would be useful to include size, shape and appearance of the marks in the notes to accompany such a sketch
 - Report the matter as soon as possible to the Branch DC / Centre Proprietor or the Area Representative
 - In cases of emergency, where a child appears to be at immediate and serious risk and it is not possible to contact a duty social worker, the police should be contacted. Under no circumstances should a child be left in a dangerous situation pending intervention by the Statutory agencies, i.e. Police, Social Services in England and Wales, the Social Work Department in Scotland, Child Care Northern Ireland and / or NSPCC, but, if the child is felt to be at risk and is in a potentially dangerous situation, the child's circumstances should form part of the early discussions with the Police or Social Services.
- If the Branch DC / Centre Proprietor or the Area Representative is unsure whether reasonable grounds for concern exist or not, they should informally consult with the local social services department or the NSPCC 24 hour free phone helpline on 0808 800 5000. They will advise whether or not the matter requires a formal report;
 - A Branch DC / Centre Proprietor or the Area Representative reporting suspected or actual child abuse to the Statutory Agencies should first inform the family of their intention to make

such a report, unless doing so would endanger the child or undermine an investigation or would be likely to result in violence to anyone.

- A report should be given by the Branch DC / Centre Proprietor or the Area Representative to the Statutory Agencies in person or by phone, and in writing;
- It is best to report child abuse concerns by making personal contact with the relevant personnel in the Statutory Agencies.

D. Response to a Child Reporting any Form of Abuse

The following points should be taken into consideration:

- It is important to deal with any allegation of abuse in a sensitive and competent way through listening to and facilitating the child to tell about the problem, rather than interviewing the child about details of what happened
- It is important to stay calm and not to show any extreme reaction to what the child is saying. Listen compassionately, and take what the child is saying seriously; Belief in what the child is saying may be difficult and is not necessary. It is not for anyone other than the statutory agencies to investigate whether or not the child is truthful, our role is to take the child seriously and refer as necessary and appropriate.
- It should be understood that the child has decided to tell about something that is important to them and has taken a risk to do so. If possible, the experience of telling should be a positive one so that the child will not mind talking to those involved in the investigation;
- The child should understand that it IS NOT possible that any information will be kept a secret; but the person speaking to the child should inform them of the people who will need to be told.
- No judgmental statement should be made against the person against whom the allegation is made; neither should any judgement be made nor be made apparent as to whether or not the hearer believes what is being said to them.
- The child should not be questioned unless the nature of what they are saying is unclear. Leading questions should be avoided. Open, non-specific questions should be used such as "Explain to me what you mean when you say that"..Questions beginning "What", "Where" and "How" are most likely to elicit an open response, coupled with phrases, such as "I'm sorry, I don't think I quite understood you." Avoid using "Why" questions if possible, as they can be seen as condemnatory e.g. "Why haven't you told anyone before?" Could leave the child feeling that they are to blame because they haven't told anyone before this. Only such questions should be asked which would clarify the child's statement. There is no need to investigate the matter or to carry on questioning the child to find out all the details of whatever it was that has happened.
- The child should be given some indication of what would happen next, such as informing parents/guardians, statutory agencies. It should be kept in mind that the child may have been threatened and may feel vulnerable at this stage.
- Report the matter as soon as possible to the Branch DC / Centre Proprietor or the Area Representative
- In cases of emergency, where a child appears to be at immediate and serious risk, it may be preferable to contact the police. The majority of Police Authorities have a special unit that deals with crimes of child abuse and this unit can be contacted by ringing the Police telephone number and asking to be put through to the sexual offences unit. Under no circumstances should a child be left in a dangerous situation if it is in your control to protect that individual.
- If the Branch DC / Centre Proprietor or the Area Representative is unsure whether reasonable grounds for concern exist or not, they should informally consult with the local social services department or the NSPCC 24 hour free phone helpline on 0808 800 5000. They will advise whether or not the matter requires a formal report;

- A Branch DC / Centre Proprietor or the Area Representative reporting suspected or actual child abuse to the Statutory Agencies should first inform the family of their intention to make such a report, unless doing so would endanger the child or undermine an investigation or result in violence to anyone.
- A report should be given by the Branch DC / Centre Proprietor or the Area Representative to the Statutory Agencies in person or by phone, and in writing;
- It is best to report child abuse concerns by making personal contact with the relevant personnel in the Statutory Agencies.

If the Branch DC / Centre Proprietor or the Area Representative is unsure of what action should be taken and is unable to contact the relevant agencies, then advice, guidance and support can be obtained from the Pony Club's Lead Safeguarding Officer, who may be contacted through the Stoneleigh office.

E. Allegations of Abuse Against a Branch Official or Coach

If an allegation is made against a Pony Club Official, coach or other Volunteer, two procedures should be followed:

- The reporting procedure in respect of the child
- The procedure for dealing with the Pony Club Official, coach or other Volunteer (See below)

F. Special Considerations

The following points should be considered:

- The safety of the child making the allegation and any others who are/may be at risk should be ensured and this should take precedence over any other consideration. In this regard, the District Commissioner, Centre Proprietor, Area Representative, Branch Official, Team Manager or coach should take any necessary steps which may be immediately necessary to protect children.
- If a Pony Club Official, coach or other Volunteer is the subject of the concern she/he should be treated with respect and fairness

G. Procedure to follow

Where reasonable grounds for concern exist the following steps should be taken:

- Advice should be sought from the local social services department or the police with regard to any action by the branch deemed necessary to protect the child/children who may be at risk. The matter should be reported to the local social services department or the police following the standard reporting procedure outlined above.
- Once the Police are involved the needs of their investigation are the primary concern. The Police will give advice and instruction on how to proceed without impeding their investigations. In these circumstances steps must be taken to ensure that all children are safe and that the named individual is kept apart from any unsupervised contact with any child without warning them that an investigation has been instigated.
- If the Police agree the Pony Club Official, coach or other Volunteer involved in the concern may be informed and asked to stand aside pending the outcome of investigations by the Statutory agencies.