

PATCHWAY TOWN COUNCIL

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

1 Policy Statement

The Town Council considers it the duty of Councillors, staff and volunteers to protect children and young people who they come into contact with from abuse.

What is Abuse?

The 1989 Children Act recognises four categories of abuse:

Physical Abuse
Sexual Abuse
Emotional Abuse
Neglect

Physical Abuse: Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may 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.

Emotional Abuse: Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional ill treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may involve causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children.

Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (e.g. rape and buggery) or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

Neglect: Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs. It may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food, shelter and 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.

As a member, paid staff or a volunteer, you have a responsibility to be aware and alert to signs that all is not well with a child or young person. Not all concerns about children or young people relate to abuse, there may well be other explanations. It is important to keep an open mind and consider what you know about the child and its circumstances. If you are worried, is not your responsibility to decide if it is abuse. It is your responsibility to act on your concerns and do something about it.

2 Historical Abuse

There may be occasions when a child will disclose abuse (either sexual or physical) which occurred in the past. This information needs to be treated in exactly the same way as a disclosure of current child abuse. The reason for this is that the abuser may still represent a risk to children now.

3 What To Do

3.1 If abuse is disclosed

When a child discloses abuse, the member of staff should take the following action:

- 3.1.1 Inform the child that this cannot be kept confidential and will have to be passed on to the appropriate agencies. Offer reassurance to the child or young person that they were right to tell you. Do not promise the child that this can be kept secret, as subsequent disclosure could then lead to the child feeling betrayed.
- 3.1.2 Make a note of any conversations with the child, trying to make these as detailed as possible including when and where the conversations took place. Draw a diagram to show the position of any bruises or marks the child or young person shows you, trying to indicate the size, shape and colour.

In the event of a complaint projects must take a record that includes:

- Name of the child:
- Parent's/carer's details:
- The child's address:
- Date of birth:
- School attended
- Family details, e.g. siblings
- Relevant phone numbers:
- What is said to have happened or what was seen;
- What your concerns are:
- When it occurred;
- Who else was there?
- What was said by those involved.

Additional information that would be helpful includes:

- Gender issues
- Race, culture and language
- Consideration to venue
- Any other information – e.g. pending court case, family bereavement

All records should be kept in a secure place and should be confidential. Parents have the right to see any records kept on their child. It is really important that only those who need to know do, to avoid rumours and gossip that could affect the child, parents and the group.

3.2 If abuse is suspected

3.2.1 Recognising abuse is one of the first steps in protecting children and young people. There could be signs or behaviour that make you feel concerned. Staff should be alert to the following type of behaviour in the children:

Becoming excessively withdrawn or exclusively clinging
 Seeming to be keeping a secret
 Personality changes – becoming insecure
 Unreasonable fear of certain people or places
 Acting out in an inappropriate way perhaps with toys or objects
 Unexplained bruising, injuries or burns
 Sexually explicit language or actions

3.2.2 Where these types of behaviour have been noticed, the worker should keep monitoring the child's behaviour, making a note of any particular concerns (when, where and what happened)

3.2.3 Discuss your concerns with a senior worker. The senior worker should then discuss any signs or behavioural changes (e.g. bullying, accidents) they have seen with the child's parents or guardians at the earliest opportunity to see if there is a known reason for this (e.g. a change in family make-up, death of family member, pet)

You should remember that if abuse is taking place, it may not be the parents but other family members or friends who are causing the abuse.

3.2.4 Any member of staff or volunteer can contact a relevant agency to discuss any concerns that they may have before reporting, they can give you guidance and support in how to deal with situations and confirm appropriate action to take.

3.2.5 If you are still concerned about the welfare of the child or young person this information must be passed on to the appropriate agency. It is important to remember that if you do report concerns, you are not reporting the parents or carers – you are reporting to protect the welfare of the child

3.2.6 If appropriate, inform parents/carers that you are going to report your

suspicions /concerns. This might not always be possible and should not put the child or yourself at risk

If the disclosure or suspicion involves another member of staff, you should try to ensure that during the remainder of the working day that member of staff is not left in sole charge of the children. Contact one of the committee members responsible for child protection at the earliest opportunity. The member of staff should be suspended whilst the allegations or suspicions are investigated further.

4 Support to staff and volunteers

As a result of dealing with disclosure or reporting your concerns, you may feel angry or upset. It is important that you are able to work this through. The management committee fully supports all members of staff in following this procedure and if you wish you should talk to the child abuse representative from the management committee. Also, any of the appropriate agencies listed in the appendix will be able to provide support.

Staff may also be subject to allegations of abusing children. While support will be offered, the staff and committee will ensure that the Agency concerned is given all assistance in pursuing any investigation and the disciplinary procedure may be implemented.

5 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is crucial to all our relationships but the welfare of the child is paramount. The law does not allow anyone to keep concerns relating to child abuse to themselves.

Confidentiality may not be maintained if the withholding of the information will prejudice the welfare of the child.

It is also worth noting that due to the confidential nature of such investigations, where information has been reported to any agency, there may not be feedback from them.

6 Recruitment of Staff and Volunteers

Paedophiles are attracted to organisations which provide services for children.

As part of this policy we will ensure that people working with children are safe to do so. Two references will be taken up for new staff and volunteers and a medical reference may also be required. In addition, through Social Services Children's Playlink and other applicable organisations, police and other records will be checked.