What to do if you’re worried a child is being abused – Summary

Every Child Matters
Change For Children
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Introduction – Safeguarding children

All those who come into contact with children and families in their everyday work, including practitioners who do not have a specific role in relation to safeguarding children, have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. You are likely to be involved in three main ways:

- you may have concerns about a child, and refer those concerns to children’s social care or the police. School staff (both teaching and non-teaching) should be aware of the local procedures to be followed for reporting concerns about a particular child. This will normally be via the school’s designated senior member of staff or their nominated deputy or if neither are available, another senior member of the school’s staff. In emergencies however, contact the police direct;

- you may be approached by children’s social care and asked to provide information about a child or family or to be involved in an assessment. This may happen regardless of who made the referral to children’s social care;

- you may be asked to provide help or a specific service to the child or a member of their family as part of an agreed plan and contribute to the reviewing of the child’s progress.

The flow charts starting on page 12 illustrate the processes for safeguarding children:
from the point that concerns are raised about a child and are referred to a statutory agency that can take action to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child (flow chart 1);

- through an initial assessment of the child’s situation and what happens after that (flow chart 2);

- taking urgent action, if necessary (flow chart 3);

- to the strategy discussion, where there are concerns about the child’s safety, and beyond that to the child protection conference (flow chart 4); and

- what happens after the child protection conference, and the review process (flow chart 5).

Everyone working with children and families should...

- Be familiar with and follow your organisation’s procedures and protocols for promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children in your area, and know who to contact in your organisation to express concerns about a child’s welfare.

- Remember that an allegation of child abuse or neglect may lead to a criminal investigation, so don’t do anything that may jeopardise a police investigation, such as asking a child leading questions or attempting to investigate the allegations of abuse.

- If you are responsible for making referrals, know who to contact in police, health, education, school and children’s social care to express concerns about a child’s welfare.
• When referring a child to children's social care you should consider and include any information you have on the child's developmental needs and their parents'/carers' capacity to respond to these needs within the context of their wider family and environment. This information may have been obtained during the completion of a Common Assessment (2006). Similarly, when contributing to an assessment or providing services you should consider what contribution you are able to make in respect of each of these three domains. Specialist assessments, in particular, are likely to provide information relevant to a specific dimension, such as health, education or family functioning.

• See the child and ascertain his or her wishes and feelings as part of considering what action to take in relation to concerns about the child's welfare.

• Communicate with the child in a way that is appropriate to their age, understanding and preference. This is especially important for disabled children and for children whose preferred language is not English. The nature of this communication will also depend on the substance and seriousness of the concerns and you may require advice from children's social care or the police to ensure that neither the safety of the child nor any subsequent investigation is jeopardised. Where concerns arise as a result of information given by a child it is important to reassure the child but not to promise confidentiality.
• Record full information about the child at first point of contact, including name(s), address(es), gender, date of birth, name(s) of person(s) with parental responsibility (for consent purposes) and primary carer(s), if different, and keep this information up to date. In schools, this information will be part of the pupil’s record.

• Record in writing all concerns, discussions about the child, decisions made, and the reasons for those decisions. The child’s records should include an up-to-date chronology, and details of the lead worker in the relevant agency – for example, a social worker, GP, health visitor or teacher.

If you have concerns about a child’s welfare...

Everyone should...

• Discuss your concerns with your manager, named or designated health professional or designated member of staff, depending on your organisational setting. If you still have concerns, you or your manager could also, without necessarily identifying the child in question, discuss your concerns with senior colleagues in another agency in order to develop an understanding of the child’s needs and circumstances.

• If, after this discussion, you still have concerns, and consider the child and their parents would benefit from further services, consider which agency, including another part of your own, you should make a referral to. If you consider the child is or may be
a child in need, you should refer the child and family to children's social care. This may include a child whom you believe is, or may be at risk of, suffering significant harm. If your concerns are about a child who is already known to children's social care, the allocated social worker should be informed of your concerns. In addition to children's social care, the police and the NSPCC have powers to intervene in these circumstances.

- In general, seek to discuss your concerns with the child, as appropriate to their age and understanding, and with their parents and seek their agreement to making a referral to children's social care unless you consider such a discussion would place the child at an increased risk of significant harm. (Appendix 1 sets out six key points on information sharing reproduced from Information sharing: Practitioners' guide (HM Government 2005) – Section 4 of this information sharing guidance provides more in-depth guidance on consent, confidentiality and information sharing. See www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/informationsharing)

- When you make your referral, agree with the recipient of the referral what the child and parents will be told, by whom and when.

- If you make your referral by telephone, confirm it in writing within 48 hours. Children’s social care should acknowledge your written referral within one working day of receiving it, so if you have not heard back within 3 working days, contact children's social care again.