An Overview on Safeguarding and Child Protection

If you SEE something, DO something.
If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, report it.
If you are wrong, nothing will happen; if you are right, you can save a child!

An Introduction to Safeguarding

Safeguarding is the action that is taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm. Safeguarding measures protect children from abuse and maltreatment, preventing harm to children's health or development and ensuring they grow up with the provision of safe and effective care.

The four most recognised forms of abuse are defined in the following categories: physical, emotional, neglect and sexual. Bullying is also an important child protection concern.

The 5 Rs of Safeguarding are:

- *Recognising* the signs of abuse and/or neglect
- *Responding* appropriately to these concerns
- *Reporting* concerns to the appropriate people
- *Recording* information accurately and in a timely manner
- *Reviewing* safeguarding practices regularly to ensure they are effective

Effective Record Keeping & Safeguarding Practices

An up to date recording of child protection or welfare concerns is essential as:

- it can help educational settings identify child protection or welfare concerns at an early stage
- it can enable settings to record seemingly minor issues to build a more complete picture of what life may be like for their learners
- it helps to monitor and manage safeguarding practices, including decision making, actions taken and agreed joint strategies
- it can demonstrate action taken to reduce impact of harm to a child
- it can provide evidence to support professional challenge, both within school and when working with external agencies

Promoting the welfare of and safeguarding children is a whole school task, therefore all members of staff have an essential role to play in helping to identify possible indicators of abuse or neglect at an early stage; to re-assess concerns when situations do not improve, and to share information in a timely manner.

Clear child protection record keeping is an important practice for educational settings. All concerns, discussions and decisions made, and the reasons for those decisions, should be recorded in writing. If in doubt about recording requirements, staff should discuss with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).

Well-kept records support the DSL in meeting their key responsibilities to respond appropriately to welfare concerns and to keep their communities safer. Effective record keeping will also support monitoring, risk-assessment and will enable informed and timely referrals to be made when necessary.

For some students a 'one off' welfare or child protection incident may occur and there will be no doubt that this must be immediately recorded and reported. Most often however, it is the accumulation of several small incidents, events or observations that provide evidence of harm being caused. It is vital that any concerns staff have for a student's welfare, however small, are formally recorded and passed to the DSL.

Best practices include the use of a consistent welfare concern form. Staff should be aware that all welfare concerns must be recorded and kept centrally by the DSL.

If staff have doubts as to whether an incident or information constitutes a concern, or should be formally recorded, they should consult with the DSL. Safeguarding information is shared on a need to know basis, so it may be the DSL already has concerns regarding the student, and the information could provide vital evidence.

All staff should be mindful that, in serious cases, schools may be required to disclose their records, either through the police or social services, for example when there is a need to involve other agencies, or when there is a need to be used as evidence in court proceedings.

It is important that staff always use clear and precise language (including recording any specific words used by a child) and they record facts, not opinion.

The DSL should ensure that all staff are clear about how they as the DSL will respond to reported concerns; this could include providing appropriate feedback to the member of staff who completed the form. Staff should feel open to ask for feedback and updates on the actions taken by the DSL.

Some Examples of Welfare Concerns

Staff need to maintain an attitude of 'it could happen here' where safeguarding is concerned. All staff need to be alert and professionally curious; questioning behaviours and checking this out with the DSL to enable information shared to be evaluated.

A welfare concern could include a child protection issue; however, may also include concerns that may arise through:

- physical marks or injuries
- eating disorders
- behaviour or attitudinal changes
- self-harm
- observation of behaviour of a parent/carer
- information from a third party
- information shared by another professional

Information to be Recorded in a Welfare Concern Form

The welfare concern form should ensure that essential information is recorded. This should include:

- WHO: full name and role of the person who is making the report
- WHEN: date, location and time of the incident/event/observation
- WHAT the concern is
    - describing the incident/event/observation clearly and concisely
    - recording the names of those involved, including any witnesses
    - stating how the information came to light
    - recording any physical marks or injuries with sufficient detail
- WHY the member of staff is concerned

All information recorded should be legible, factually accurate, using a child's own words as much as possible, and signed and dated by the person making the report. The level of detail recorded will depend on the nature and seriousness of the concern highlighted.

It is important to note that, in the case of physical marks and injuries, photographs should NOT be taken by staff. If photos of injuries are required for evidence purposes, this can be done only by the Police.

Many schools are now opting to use electronic record keeping systems to log and manage child protection and welfare concerns. Schools can use the recording system approach that works best for them, whilst still maintaining appropriate child protection records in line with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

Welfare concern forms can be made accessible to the student's form tutor, the school's Management and to any other staff member that may need to see these forms. Confidential information and records about children must be held securely and only accessible and available to those who have a right or professional need to see them.

If the DSL takes any further action to investigate the concern after receiving a form, they must record the date and details of the actions taken. These actions can include:

- recommendation for staff to monitor specific aspects of the student's physical appearance, behaviour, attendance etc. and for how long
- discussions and telephone calls, including professional consultations
- the decision to (or not to) refer concern to an external agency
- any rationale for decision making

Safeguarding Files Kept by the DSL

Once a welfare concern has been passed to the DSL and a record has been made of the action taken and/or decision making, these documents will be stored in a separate child protection/safeguarding filing system. This is regardless of whether formal child protection procedures have been initiated. For some children, this single record will be the only concern held for them over their time in the setting. For others, further information will be brought from a variety of sources over time.

When concerns for the child, records of these and actions are increasing, in these cases, information about child protection concerns and referrals should be kept by the DSL in a separate individual child protection file for each student.

A chronology will serve as an important record of actions and when attached to a referral, can provide an overview, evidence and justification for a referral being made. A chronology should list specific and significant incidents, events and actions taken in relation to the child and where appropriate their family, with a brief explanation, or cross-reference to the relevant record within the file.

It is good practice to keep child protection files separate from a child's general records. Child protection records should be stored in a locked cabinet within the DSL's office with access only to those with direct child protection responsibility for children.

It is essential to ensure that the school's Leadership Team can access these records in the absence of the DSL.

On occasions where safeguarding concerns exist for a child, it may be appropriate for the DSL to consult on a confidential basis with the DSL from another school to share and jointly consider concerns.