



FACT SHEET 27

RESPONDING TO A CHILD REPORTING AN INCIDENT

1. **Always stop and listen** straight away to someone who wants to tell you about incidents or suspicions of abuse
2. **Write brief notes** of what they are telling you as soon as you can or while they are speaking but it is important to remember how the child may be feeling and it may actually be insensitive to be writing while they are talking unless you explain why you are doing it. (these may help later if you have to remember exactly what was said) Keep your original notes, however rough and even if you wrote on the back of something else (it's what you wrote at the time that may be important later – not a tidier and improved version you wrote up afterwards!). If you don't have the means to write at the time, make notes of what was said or observed as soon as possible afterwards.
3. **Never make a promise** that you will keep what is said confidential or secret – if you are told about abuse you have a responsibility to tell the right people to get something done about it (see below). If asked explain that if you are going to be told something very important that needs to be sorted out, you will need to tell the people who can sort it out, but you will only tell the people who absolutely need to know.
4. **Do not ask leading questions** that might give your own ideas of what might have happened (e.g. “did he do x to you?”) – just ask “what do you want to tell me?” or “is there anything else you want to say?”
5. Immediately tell the person in charge of the group i.e. the designated person (unless they are themselves accused or suspected of abusing) – and don't tell other adults or young people what you have been told

(If someone has made an accusation to you about an adult in charge of the group, YOU should contact the local HSE/Social Services yourself, and ask them what to do next – the telephone number will be in the directory.)

6. Discuss with the person in charge whether any steps need to be taken to protect the person who has told you about the abuse (this may need to be discussed with the person who you told).
7. Never attempt to carry out an investigation of suspected or alleged abuse by interviewing people etc. – HSE/Social Services and police staff are the people trained to do this – you could cause more damage and effect possible criminal proceedings. It is your duty to refer concerns on, not investigate.
8. As soon as possible (and certainly the same day) the person in charge should refer the matter to the local HSE/Social Services (helped by your notes). Follow their requests about what to do next. They will set up any necessary investigations, and advise you – that is their statutory job.
9. Never think abuse is impossible in your organisation or group, or that an accusation against someone you know well and trust is bound to be wrong.
10. Children and young people often tell other young people, rather than staff or other adults, about abuse – make sure that your senior young people know the points on this sheet as well as the responsible adults.

Important:

These points are no substitute for the proper selection and training of adults trusted to look after children and young people, or for the organisations/groups having their own clear child protection procedures for their particular setting

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