

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN POLICY

Statement of Principles

- 1 All children have the right to be protected from all forms of abuse, whether this is physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect.
- 2 West Cornwall Womens Aid (WCWA) holds a feminist perspective on abuse which places responsibility for the abuse solely with the abuser. Our approach is child-centred, and we believe that the child is never to blame for any abuse that s/he may suffer. We also believe that everyone has a duty to protect children.
- 3 WCWA recognises that one of the best ways to support a child is to provide support for the mother, and this we will strive to do. However we also recognise that sometimes there may be a conflict between the interests of the mother and those of the child. This can raise difficulties, but as professionals we have a duty to ensure that the welfare of the child is paramount.
- 4 Concerns about the safety or well-being of a child will not be ignored. In practical terms this means that when child protection is an issue, the need for appropriate action will override the usual guarantee of confidentiality.
- 5 WCWA is committed to anti-discriminatory practice. Such practice will take into account the diverse needs of our client group. Any action taken within these guidelines will reflect the equality and diversity principles.
- 6 WCWA recognises the negative impact of discrimination on a child's development. Every effort will be made to challenge discrimination including discrimination on the grounds of disability, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, both externally and within Womens Aid itself. The process of challenging discrimination will involve challenging assumptions and stereotypes, recognising differing needs and attempting to meet these needs as far as is practicable.
- 7 WCWA recognises the WAFE national policy on Safeguarding Children and Confidentiality and includes these issues in training for staff and volunteers.

Responsibility for Safeguarding Children at WCWA

If any staff member or volunteer has reason to believe that a child is being abused, or is at risk of being abused, she must discuss this immediately with The Chief Executive Officer, who is the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), and a decision will be taken on action to prevent further abuse in line with this policy. In the event that The Chief Executive Officer is not available the member of staff should speak to one of the Deputy Safeguarding Leads who are The Refuge Manager and The Community Services Manager.

The Chief Executive Officer, The Refuge Manager, The Community Services Manager and Children's Workers will take the lead for safeguarding children. All staff and volunteers will receive training in safeguarding and confidentiality.

Informing service users

When a woman moves into the refuge, she is told about the house rules and should at the same time be informed verbally that WCWA has policies on safeguarding children and confidentiality. This is also referred to in the Service User Handbook.

It is important that women with children should understand that there are limits to confidentiality when safeguarding issues are involved. If there are clear indications that a child is at risk of abuse, WCWA will refer the case to Social Care or the Police, as appropriate.

Procedure for dealing with specific incidents of abuse

If a child is in immediate danger the police and social services should be contacted immediately.

In all other cases the worker should discuss the concerns with the DSL or Deputy Safeguarding Lead. The worker must complete WCWA internal Cause for Concern form and submit this to the DSL. A decision will be made about how to proceed. The decision will be recorded along with further actions.

WCWA recognises that there are different levels of harm. It will not always be appropriate to ask Social Care to investigate, if WCWA can deal with the problem effectively by arranging the provision of practical support and monitoring the situation to ensure that there is no further abuse.

Social Care may be able to offer access to services such as children's centres without an investigation of safeguarding matters.

Before making an actual referral, it may sometimes be helpful to discuss a possible referral with Social Care and to ask what action they would be likely to take in these circumstances. Health visitors and education providers can also offer helpful advice.

Advice is available about a child or young person's safety can be accessed by telephone to the Multi Agency Referral Unit (MARU) on **0300 123 111**

If a child discloses abuse

WCWA will:

- stay calm and listen carefully to what is being disclosed
- offer support without making false promises
- reassure the child that s/he was right to disclose what happened and that the abuse is not his or her fault
- discuss this with a designated worker, to decide on the appropriate course of action
- keep a factual record of the disclosure and subsequent action
- record the date and time of the disclosure

If the abuse occurred previously and the child is no longer in danger, intervention by Social Care may not be necessary and some other form of help may be more appropriate, *eg* counselling

However, if the abuse involved a serious physical injury or sexual abuse, the abuser is likely to be a danger to other children a referral to Social Care will be necessary to ensure there is a record of the alleged offence. WCWA will check the procedure with MARU.

If a child discloses recent or continuing abuse

WCWA will:

- explain to the child that in these circumstances confidentiality cannot be maintained
- assure the child that the issue will be taken seriously
- tell the child what action is likely to be taken, who will be informed and what the consequences may be
- if the child has sufficient understanding, discuss the options realistically, including talking with the mother with a staff member present (if the mother is not the abuser)
- keep the child informed throughout the entire process
- fill out an incident form immediately, stating what was said by both the child and the member of staff, and recording facts rather than opinions.

The staff member will then discuss the allegations with the Refuge Manager. She will decide on a course of action depending on the nature and seriousness of the abuse and seeking advice from Social Care if appropriate.

Normally any concerns should be discussed with the mother/carer and, if necessary, she should be encouraged to make her own referral to Social Care. However, this should only be done if such discussion and agreement-seeking will not place a child at increased risk of significant harm. The situation will be brought to the attention of relevant members of staff and monitored if necessary.

If there is a need to ensure the immediate protection of the child, a referral will be made to Social Care/Police without delay.

If there is reason to believe that a child is at risk of sexual abuse, it is essential to seek specialist advice from Social Care. It is inappropriate for WCWA to investigate such circumstances. It is important to reassure the child that the abuse is not his or her fault, as children who have been sexually abused frequently feel very guilty and confused.

Contamination of evidence

WCWA is aware of the danger of contaminating evidence, especially when dealing with young children and particularly in cases involving allegations of sexual abuse or gross physical abuse. For this reason we will:

- give the child time and reassurance so s/he can say what has happened in his or her own words
- avoid asking repeated questions
- avoid asking intrusive or leading questions
- avoid making judgmental comments
- avoid jumping to conclusions by asking who the child is talking about and checking the meaning of any words that are unclear
- avoid further discussion of the abuse with the child and without delay talk to a designated worker and possibly also social services if a decision to refer is made.

If the mother/carer resumes a relationship with an abuser

If it is known that a child has been abused by the partner of the mother/carer or has been seriously affected by witnessing violence, WCWA will discuss the situation with the woman and explain that in these circumstances, Social Care will have to be informed if she returns to the abuser.

As the safety of a child is involved, Social Care will be notified even if there has been insufficient time or opportunity to explain WCWA policies on confidentiality and safeguarding to the woman or to discuss the implications of her returning to the abuser.

Allegations of abuse during contact

WCWA will offer practical support and provide written or verbal evidence in court if appropriate.

Any disclosure or evidence of abuse which may be relevant to contact proceedings will be carefully recorded. We will also record information about the child's behaviour if s/he appears to be disturbed or traumatised by contact arrangements, as this evidence may be needed to show that contact is not in the best interests of the child.

We will also offer to provide evidence for Social Care, the police or the court about the ability of the mother to care for her child(ren).

We will seek to ensure that the court is made aware of any factors indicating a risk of harm to either the child or the mother.

Disclosure of abuse by the mother

If a child discloses abuse by the mother, the person in whom the child confided should arrange a meeting with the mother and the Refuge Manager. This meeting should focus on the safety of the child.

If a referral is to be made to Social Care, the mother should be informed. It may be possible to encourage her to speak to Social Care herself. However, this should only be done where such discussion and agreement-seeking will not place the child at increased risk of significant harm.

The mother should be shown the written report, unless it is felt that this might place the child or a staff member or volunteer in danger. WCWA will aim to support the mother, and if necessary will outline her support needs to Social Care.

If the mother leaves the refuge to prevent further action from being taken, a referral should still be made to the local area office of Social Care.

If there is a conflict of interest between the welfare of the child and the wishes of the mother, the welfare of the child must take priority.

Serious injury

If a child has been seriously injured, WCWA will ensure that the child is immediately taken to hospital or to a doctor. Ideally this should be done by the mother with a staff member accompanying her to provide support, but anyone who has care of the child may do what is reasonable to safeguard the child's welfare. If there is any indication that the injury is non-accidental or due to neglect, the doctor is likely to order an investigation.

Suspicious of abuse or neglect

If a member of staff or a volunteer suspects that abuse or neglect is happening, she should discuss this as soon as possible with the Refuge Manager

WCWA will:

- assess whether action is needed urgently
- monitor the situation carefully
- keep a factual record of all incidents or causes for concern
- work with the mother to ensure that the child's needs are met.

If the abuse or neglect continues, the situation will be discussed with the mother and she will be made aware of the Safeguarding Children Policy. Every effort will be made to work with mother, including offering support and practical help. After consultation with the mother it may be considered necessary to involve an outside agency.

If there is an **injury or bruising**, it is essential to discuss how this happened with the mother. This should be recorded. If the injury does not appear to be consistent with the explanation given, this should be discussed with the Refuge Manager and if necessary a referral should be made to Social Care.

In cases of **emotional abuse or neglect** the concern may not be confined to an isolated incident, so it is very important to record observations over a period of time. If the abuse continues, a meeting should

be set up with the mother to discuss the situation and any support needs. A decision may be reached to work with the mother at Refuge over a stated period of time. It may be agreed to involve other professionals (*eg* health visitor) or a referral may be made to Social Care.

If a member of staff witnesses abuse by the mother, she should intervene and challenge the behaviour if it is safe to do so. The situation should be calmed down and the child offered comfort and reassurance. As soon as possible a meeting should be set up with the mother at which point it will be made clear that this behaviour is unacceptable. This will be recorded. If concerns continue appropriate action will be taken.

Reports of abuse by the mother from another resident service user

WCWA will:

- reassure the resident that this will be taken seriously and dealt with
- tell her that the allegation will have to be discussed with other staff members but the mother will not necessarily be told who made the complaint
- explain the procedure for dealing with complaints of this kind
- offer her support and encourage her not to discuss this with other service users
- monitor the situation
- discuss the issue with the mother and the Refuge Manager, adhering to the Freedom from Abuse Policy
- make a referral to Social Care if necessary

A child abusing other children or adults

Many children feel intense anger and helplessness about the violence that they have witnessed or been subjected to, and frequently this is expressed in aggressive and destructive behaviour. Managing challenging behaviour positively is an intrinsic part of working with children in refuges.

In these cases WCWA will:

- inform the child and the mother that this behaviour is abusive and unacceptable
- in partnership with the mother, work with the child to enable him or her to cope with emotions and to relate to other more positively
- monitor the situation and keep factual records.

In extreme cases (*eg* sexual assault) it will be necessary to make a referral to an outside agency, explaining the situation clearly. If there is a clear danger to other children, a team decision should be made on whether the family should be required to move to alternative accommodation and supported in doing so.

In the case of sibling abuse, preventive work will start as soon as possible to resolve the problem.

Child abuse by another resident service user

WCWA will ensure that:

- this is discussed with the Refuge Manager
- the situation will then be discussed separately with the resident and the child's mother
- a record will be kept of any comments made
- if the allegation is of a serious nature and staff have reason to believe it is correct, then Social Care will be informed

It may be necessary to move the accused resident to temporary accommodation pending full investigation, which should take place without delay. If the allegations are not substantiated, WCWA will try to ensure that the accused woman and her family are offered accommodation with a different refuge group. In these circumstances the other refuge project must be told what has happened.

Child abuse by a staff member or volunteer

WCWA will:

- ensure that any such allegation is reported immediately to the Refuge Manager who will report to the General Manager who will decide what action is necessary under the Disciplinary Procedure
- keep a record of any allegations of child abuse made against any staff member or volunteer
- fully investigate any allegation of inappropriate behaviour by a staff member or volunteer.

It may be necessary to suspend the staff member or volunteer while the investigation is carried out.

Child Protection Plan

When a woman is first admitted to the refuge, she should be asked whether she has any involvement with Social Care. If the answer is yes and the child is subject to a Child Protection Plan, this should be recorded.

In this situation the mother has a legal obligation to keep Social Care informed of her whereabouts. She should be encouraged to contact Social Care herself to inform them that she and her children are living in refuge. If she is unwilling to do this then WCWA will inform them on her behalf.

Liaison with the Social Care team which previously dealt with the family will be necessary when undertaking a risk assessment prior to admission to refuge.

Protection of staff and volunteers

There are practical steps that may be taken to reduce the risk of unfounded allegations of abuse against staff. These include:

- keeping a written record of any injury that occurs to a child, ensuring that the record is witnessed by another staff member
- encouraging children to take responsibility for their own personal care
- keeping a record of any sexually inappropriate touching by a child, again ensuring that the record is witnessed by another staff member
- informing another member of staff when one-to-one work is being done and always seeking the mother's permission
- making criminal record checks on all staff and volunteers
- ensuring that health and safety procedures are followed, drawing any potential hazards to the attention of the Housekeeper
- reminding residents that they are responsible for the safety of their children
- recognising WCWA's legal duty of care
- keeping adequate accident/injury records

Record keeping

Immediately after an incident of abuse or neglect has been reported or witnessed, a staff member should complete an incident report. This should contain only factual information, not opinions, about the alleged incident, including details of conversations with the mother, child, staff members or other residents. The dates and times of these conversations must be recorded. Discussions between staff about their concerns should also be recorded. All reports should be legible and initialed so it is clear who has written the report. The report must be submitted to the Refuge Manager

The mother has a right to see all written reports unless this might endanger the safety of the child or a staff member or volunteer. Young people aged 14 and over should be shown any reports, if they request this. If the situation is being monitored in the refuge, regular updated reports must be filed. These can be useful if there are any further allegations or concerns about abuse.

Individuals have a right of access to information recorded about them. Such access should only be refused if the information could cause harm to a person or might prejudice the prevention or detection of crime. The right of access also applies to children so long as the child is able to understand the issues concerned.

Confidentiality and disclosure of information

Personal information about women and children is subject to a legal duty of confidence and should not normally be disclosed without their consent. However the law permits the disclosure of confidential information if this is necessary to safeguard a child. Disclosure should be justifiable in each case, and if there is any uncertainty, legal advice should be sought.

Under the General Data Protection Regulations 2018, personal information may be disclosed without the consent of the subject in order to prevent or detect a crime, to apprehend or prosecute an offender or where failure to disclose could prejudice such action.

Parental responsibility

Women are responsible for their children's care in the refuge at all times. This includes health, safety and behaviour. Women are expected to supervise their children in the communal areas of the house and ensure that younger children are never left alone. In special circumstances (*eg* going to hospital) it may be possible for WCWA to arrange child care but children should never be left in the refuge without proper supervision.

Discipline

The responsibility for disciplining children lies with mothers. However we recognise that we are well placed to provide information and advice to women on positive management of children's behaviour. WCWA will work directly with families to promote non-violent methods of resolving conflict and to encourage mothers to consider other forms of discipline.

Working with Social Care Services

In order to establish good working relationships, WCWA will meet with social care workers who have responsibility for safeguarding children:

- to explain the services which the refuge provides for children and our involvement in safeguarding
- to discuss our policies on safeguarding and confidentiality
- to agree referral procedures, particularly for emergency cases
- for training
- to discuss any other concerns

All trustees, staff and volunteers are reminded of the duty to share significant information where there is evidence of risk to self or others. Client consent should be requested however action must be taken with or without consent in these circumstances, through the appropriate line management structures. This is especially relevant to community services volunteers working on a one to one basis with women.

In the case of a child being at risk of abuse confidentiality cannot be kept. Clients will be offered support whilst appropriate action is taken.

Central point of contact for safeguarding concerns: Multi Agency Referral Unit (MARU) 0300 1231 116

Inter-agency referral form (required to refer to the MARU)

The inter-agency referral form can be found on the SWCPP website

http://www.proceduresonline.com/swcpp/cornwall_scilly/p_report_concerns.html

On the CIOS LSCB website <http://www.safeguarding-cios.co.uk/health-and-social-care/children-and-family-care/cornwall-and-isles-of-scilly-safeguarding-children-board/policies-procedures-and-referrals/> there are 2 forms 1) the inter-agency referral form PLUS 2) the new 'Concern regarding a person or location' form developed in response to CSE to facilitate the development of intelligence profile.

Early Help Hub

Single point of contact for Cornwall Council and community based children's early help support and services

Professional triage for all service requests for Children's Early Help services led by Cornwall Council and the Cornwall Partnership Foundation (CFT)
A source of information and advice to help make the best decision for children and young people in your care
earlyhelphub@cornwall.gov.uk
01872 322277

If there is an immediate threat to a child (*eg* abduction), it may be appropriate to ask the police to remove the child from a potentially dangerous situation.

Emergency Police 999
Non-emergency Police 101

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