

Community Action Hampshire – trading as Action Hampshire and Action Portsmouth

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN POLICY

All references to Action Hampshire in this document should be deemed to cover and include Action Portsmouth.

Introduction

Action Hampshire believes that everyone has a duty to protect children. This policy sets out the procedure that will be followed to ensure that action is taken quickly when abuse is suspected and that good practice is in place to prevent abuse.

Abuse of a child may consist of a single act or repeated acts over time. It may be physical, emotional, sexual or an act of neglect.

All local authorities are required by legislation which protects vulnerable adults and children to have in place a procedure for reviewing allegations and reports of abuse. There must be a published process for investigating such reports. It is important that all staff are aware of this local procedure. Activity carried out under the vulnerable adults procedure is usually led by Social Services and will involve other agencies like the police and health service representatives.

Definitions of abuse

The following definitions are based on those from Working Together to Safeguard Children (DfE)

- Physical abuse: including hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing 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.

Physical abuse, as well as being the result of a deliberate act, can also be caused through omission or the failure to act to protect.

- Emotional abuse: 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 making a child feel or believe they are worthless or unloved, inadequate or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of the other person. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. It may also involve causing children to feel frequently frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of a child.

Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill treatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

- 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, or consents to, what is happening. The activities may involve

physical contact, including penetrative acts such as rape, buggery or oral sex, or non-penetrative acts such as fondling.

Sexual abuse may also 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.

Boys and girls can be sexually abused by males and or females, by adults and by other young people. This includes people from all different walks of life.

- Neglect: is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. It may involve a parent or a carer failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing, leaving a young child home alone or the failure to ensure that a child gets appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

It is accepted that in all forms of abuse there are elements of emotional abuse, and that some children are subjected to more than one form of abuse at any time. These four definitions do not minimise other forms of maltreatment.

The overarching principle of abuse prevention is that the first priority should always be to ensure the safety and protection of vulnerable people and that it is the responsibility of all staff to act on any suspicion or evidence of abuse or neglect.

Responding to an allegation of abuse

It is important that when a person makes an allegation of abuse they are taken seriously, listened to and appropriate action taken. Action Hampshire will ensure that anyone making a complaint, allegation or expressing concern, can be reassured that:

- They will be taken seriously and their comments will receive a positive response from management;
- Their comments will be treated with confidence;
- They will be given support if necessary;
- They will be dealt with in a fair and equitable manner;
- They will be informed of action that has been taken and its outcome.

Investigation of abuse allegations

In all cases of suspected abuse consideration will be given to instituting an internal investigation into the allegations or suspicions, unless joint working arrangements with other agencies dictate that an external investigation or an externally led investigation should take priority. The local child safeguarding procedure should also be consulted and the actions set out in the procedure followed.

The objectives of an investigation, subject to any criminal investigation, will be to:

- establish the facts;
- decide what actions are necessary with regard to the vulnerable person;
- decide what actions are necessary with regard to the alleged perpetrator;

- decide what actions are necessary with regard to the management of Action Hampshire's services.

The investigation should not delay the intervention required for the protection of the vulnerable person.

As a matter of course allegations of criminal behaviour will be reported to the police and other agencies as required.

Allegations in respect of employees or volunteers will be fully investigated. Employees may be suspended pending the outcome of the investigation which if proven could result in dismissal.

Volunteers may be asked not to continue with the voluntary activity pending the outcome of the investigation which if proven could result in the withdrawal from volunteering.

Action Hampshire may make referrals to the Disclosure and Barring Service in accordance with relevant legislation.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Action Hampshire recognises female genital mutilation (FGM) as a safeguarding issue. It is also sometimes referred to as female circumcision.

FGM is a collective term for procedures that remove part or all of the external female genitalia for cultural or other non-medical reasons.

The FGM Act (2003) makes it an offence for UK nationals or permanent UK residents to carry out FGM abroad, or to aid, abet or procure the carrying out of FGM abroad – even in countries where FGM is legal.

If FGM is suspected, disclosed or identified, Action Hampshire will:

- follow local child protection procedures
- contact local Children's Services (if under 18)
- encourage it to be reported to the police (if over 18)