



Child Protection Refresher for International Schools 2022

Module 2 – Dealing with Disclosures

In this module we will cover:

- dealing with a disclosure
- the effects of abuse
- a case review.

Introduction

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

‘Governments must do all they can to ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and bad treatment by their parents or anyone else who looks after them.’

Article 19UNCRC

The law and statutory guidance vary internationally. International schools are subject to the laws of the country where they are based.

Many countries have mandatory reporting procedures and so it is important that you understand what these are and know how to act if required to do so. If you work in a location in which an adult or child might suffer human rights abuses as a result of reporting an allegation, you should speak to your safeguarding lead.

A list of international, regional, and local guidance can be found on The International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children website or Child Helpline International. Links can be found in the Resources section when you leave this course.

Dealing with a disclosure

One individual alone cannot have a full picture of a child’s needs and circumstances and, if children and families are to receive the right help at the right time, everyone who encounters them has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information, and taking prompt action.

To fulfil this responsibility effectively anybody working or volunteering with children or young people should make sure their approach is child centred.

This means that they should consider, at all times, what is in the best interests of the child.

It is important you always follow your school's policy and procedures for child protection.

Do

- Remain calm and composed.
- Believe the child.
- Give positive messages and praise them for their courage.
- Answer honestly.
- Respect the child's privacy.
- Keep a stable environment.
- Be fully present with them, give them time, space, and your full attention.
- Assure them they have done the right and brave thing by telling you.
- Keep them informed of who you will speak to about this and why.
- Remain constant. Do not treat the child any differently to how you interacted with them when they disclosed.
- Realise that sharing this information with you can be uncomfortable and embarrassing for them.
- Realise that receiving this information can be traumatic for you too. Give yourself time and space to process.
- Ensure their immediate safety and any medical needs.
- Make, sign and date careful notes of what you were told.
- Report following your school's child protection procedures. If it is not related to the school setting, report to the appropriate child protection service in your country.
- Seek mental health support or supervision if you are triggered by what the child disclosed.

Do not

- Overreact or panic.
- Pressure for details.
- Confront the offender.
- Blame or rush the child.
- Make them feel they have burdened you with this information.
- Promise them their offender will be prosecuted.
- Share this information online.
- Gossip about what has been shared with you in confidence.
- Let this situation overwhelm you (ask for help if you need it).
- Avoid them.
- Tell the child to "forget about it" or "keep quiet and move on".
- Promise to keep the disclosure secret.

Reflection

Ask yourself the following:

- Do you feel confident in recognising the warning signs that could help identify that a child is at risk?
- Would you feel confident to deal with a disclosure?
- Are you certain you know the school policies and procedures and can follow them?

If the answer is 'no' to any of these, you should speak to your school's designated safeguarding designated senior person for child protection.



Most children will carefully plan a disclosure, they will choose someone they trust, it is important that you do not breach this trust however challenging you might find a disclosure.

The importance of listening

Being able to listen will help you to understand a child's perspective and offer them appropriate support.

Why is listening to children and young people important?

- It helps in mutual understanding
- It helps to protect children
- It leads to better decision-making and outcomes
- It promotes respect
- It helps build resilience

How to develop your listening skills

- Create a safe space
- Listen patiently
- Be comfortable with silence
- Do not interrupt
- Be empathetic
- Always remain calm
- Facial expressions and open body language, such as nodding or sitting forwards, will show that you are listening
- Respond calmly with open questions or reflections to check you have understood
- Avoid judgment

Active listening is a skill and may take time to learn, but it will help to create a connection and mutual understanding between yourself and the person you are supporting.

Open questions

Sometimes it may not be clear that a child is making a disclosure; it is therefore okay to ask open questions. Using open questions with the words, 'what', 'when', 'who', 'how', and 'where' may clarify your understanding, and should inform you about the appropriate next action. Closed questions on the other hand can typically be answered with a 'yes' or 'no' and are less fruitful.

Which of these are examples of open questions?

Did it happen in your bedroom?

That's a nasty bruise, when did you do that?

Were you made to do anything?

Did they hit you?

What happened?

What did the person say?

You seem to be upset and that's not like you. Is there anything worrying you? How are you feeling?

Did they touch your private parts?

Where were you when you did it? Who were you with? What did the person do?

Open questions

That's a nasty bruise, when did you do that?

What happened?

Where were you when you did it? Who were you with? What did the person do?

What did the person say?

You seem to be upset and that's not like you. Is there anything worrying you? How are you feeling?

Closed questions

Did they hit you?

Did they touch your private parts?

Did it happen in your bedroom?

Were you made to do anything?

Remember, questions should not be used to investigate, only to clarify information. Some questions may invalidate evidence if used in legal proceedings later.

Making notes

The more specific your notes, the more useful they will be in forming a well-rounded picture for child protection professionals to act upon.

When they receive a report containing ambiguous, vague information, it makes their role extremely difficult.

For example

Instead of "Jasmine was wearing inappropriate clothes for the weather".

Say exactly what you see, hear, or know:

"It was minus five degrees outside with a hard frost and Jasmine was wearing a summer dress".

For example

Instead of "Omar is looking quite thin, and he sometimes steals from other children's lunchboxes".

Say exactly what you see, hear, or know:

"Omar looks very underweight for his age and stage of development. In the last two weeks, he has repeatedly taken food from other children's lunchboxes".

For example

Instead of "The mother gave an implausible account of how Bindi had come to have so many bruises".

Say exactly what you see, hear, or know:

"Bindi's mother said she wasn't aware of the multi-coloured bruises on Bindi's arms and legs and that she thought she must have fallen over".

'Say exactly what you see, hear, or know'

Record keeping

The designated safeguarding person for child protection should take the lead in ensuring all concerns, discussions and decisions made, and the reasons for those decisions, are recorded in writing. They must also ensure they are kept confidential and stored securely in separate child protection files.



Records should include:

- a clear and comprehensive summary of the concern
- details of how the concern was followed up and resolved
- a note of any decisions reached, action taken and the outcome.

Reporting safeguarding incidents

In some countries there are clear reporting pathways for allegations of abuse and exploitation in the form of legislation or published guidance from government, and there is an infrastructure of support. But in many countries, this does not exist and in some locations, there can be significant risks to reporting safeguarding concerns. These risks can be to those who have experienced abuse because of their gender, sexual orientation, local legislation and customs regarding sexual activity outside of marriage.

In many cases children and young people feel pressure to keep family 'secrets' to avoid reputational damage, which prevents them from disclosing abuse and seeking help.

The perception of vulnerability can also vary between countries. For example, a report from ECPAT found:

- Boys in South Korea are seen as being strong and not vulnerable to sexual exploitation and able to protect themselves.
- Boys in Hungary should be able to take care of themselves.

Schools should understand the guidance and law relating to safeguarding in which they operate, this should include information regarding risk and threats to vulnerable populations.

'The principle that protecting those at risk of harm and acting in their best interest is always the highest priority is essential to embed clearly in policies and practice; this principle should always be placed above any organisational considerations such as reputation or maintaining relationships with other agencies.'

Global Safeguarding expert Gary Trundell

Resources to support the school can be found at the ECPAT, ICMEC and Child Helpline websites. Links to these can be found in the Resources of this course.

The effects of abuse

Children who have experienced abuse and adults who have been abused in childhood may suffer from problems relating to:

- **Behaviour**
Catalina is shouted at and smacked at home on a regular basis. She does the same to children at school.
- **Attainment**
Catalina does not like school and does very little work; she does not see the point.
- **Mental health**
Catalina suffers from anxiety.
- **Relationships**

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Catalina does not have many friends at school; they all think she is a bully.

- **Substance misuse and self-harm**

Catalina cuts her arms every morning because she feels less stressed when she does it.

- **Brain development**

Catalina finds reading and writing difficult at school. She gets angry when she is offered support.

Adults must:

- Know what to look out for as potential signposts for abuse such as changes in wellbeing, peer interaction, mood, mental health, friendship groups, and academic work.
Catalina's teacher is concerned about how she interacts with the other children. She has noticed marks on Catalina's arm.
- Take all allegations seriously, including rumours and concerning comments.
Catalina has told a boy at school that her dad is always angry.
- Know the procedures on how to report concerns about children and young people.
Catalina's teacher has reported her concerns to the safeguarding lead.

Schools must:

- Teach children how to keep safe.
Catalina's school teaches the children how to keep safe and how looking after their mental and physical health is important.
- Ensure children and their families know the role of school staff and understand professional boundaries.
Policies and procedures are in place and available on the school website.
- Teach children how to report concerns or worries to trusted adults at school or elsewhere in their lives.
All the children in the school know who to report concerns to.

Scenario

When answering this scenario, you should think of the actions that fit the policies for your school.

Part 1 - Background: Shanela talks to Tinah

- Tinah is 11 years old. She recently had a lesson on how to keep safe online, which included guidance on telling a trusted adult if she was worried about something she had seen or heard online.
- Her friend Shanela, who is 13 years old, told her she has been involved in a group on the dark web and that Tinah should join. Her new friends are giving her advice on dieting and other personal things.
- Tinah has heard about the dark web but does not really understand it. She also does not understand why Shanela needs any dieting advice. She decides to speak to her form teacher.

Tinah – ‘Miss, please can I speak to you about something I am worried about?’

1. As Tinah’s teacher how should you respond?

Response 1	Response 2
‘Yes Tinah, come and speak to me in form time when I am taking the class register’.	‘Yes Tinah. Would you like to meet me at breaktime and go to the quiet room?’
Comment – It is important to remember form time is normally busy and you would not be able to give Tinah the space and privacy she needs to speak to you.	Comment – Tinah agrees. She likes the quiet room because she feels comfortable in there and knows that her teacher will not be distracted.

2. Tinah explains to you that a friend of hers has been on the dark web and has been talking to a group of people about dieting. How should you respond?

Response 1	Response 2
‘Thank you Tinah for telling me, you have done the correct thing’. From your online safety training you are able to tell Tinah what the dark web is in a calm way. You also tell her that if her friend is worried about her weight, then getting the correct advice is important and that cannot be guaranteed on the dark web.	You looked shocked and concerned. You have heard a lot of bad things about the dark web and insist that Tinah tells you the name of her friend as she is at risk, and she should not be accessing the dark web as it is illegal.
Comment – You have handled this situation well so far and because you have kept your training up to date you feel confident.	Comment – By reacting in this way Tinah is likely to feel scared and feel that her friend will be in trouble.

3. Tinah now understands the dark web better and does not feel as scared. She knows she has done the right thing in telling you. Tinah decides to tell you her friend’s name. What should you do next?

Response 1	Response 2
You thank Tinah and tell her that you will speak to Shanella’s tutor and the designated safeguarding person for the school to see what help she needs. You reassure her again that she has done the right thing.	You thank Tinah and then tell her it is time for the next class.
Comment – You have followed the school’s child protection policies and procedures and are up to date with your training. As a result, you have handled the conversation calmly and explained to Tinah what will happen next.	Comment – By not telling Tinah what happens next, she will worry. She may feel uncomfortable for any future concerns.



Answers

1. Response 2
2. Response 1
3. Response 1

By working through this scenario, we hope you understand the importance of creating an environment where a child will talk to you openly, and also, the importance of understanding the school's policies and procedures.

Summary

This module has covered a refresher on receiving and responding to a disclosure or allegation, including the importance of open questioning and listening skills. In module three we will learn more about the importance of creating a safe space.

Anyone working with children or young people has a responsibility to provide a safe environment in which they can learn and thrive.

- Do you know what key laws and regulations are important to you?
- Do you know what to do if you are concerned about someone?

If the answer is 'no' to any of these, please speak to the designated safeguarding person for child protection in your school.

You are now ready to complete the corresponding questionnaire. Click **Questionnaire 2** to begin the questions.