

Recognising and Responding to Abuse¹

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Purpose and Scope

The East Africa Children's Project (EACP) supports schools and organisations in East Africa that come into contact with children and families as part of their activities in education and community support. This document focusses on the safeguarding needs of children/young people in our organisation and in particular the organisations in East Africa we support. This policy aligns with your other key safeguarding and organisational policies, procedures and standards.

Background

It can be very hard for children and young people to speak out about abuse. Often they fear there may be negative consequences if they tell anyone what's happening to them. Some may delay telling someone about abuse for a long time, while others never tell anyone, even if they want to.

It's vital that children and young people are able to speak out and that whoever they tell takes them seriously and acts on what they've been told. Even if a child doesn't tell someone verbally about what's happened to them, there may be other indicators that something is wrong. People who work with children need to be able to recognise the signs and know how to respond appropriately.

This document outlines best practice for recognising and responding to abuse and some of the issues which may arise when working with children who have been abused.

Identifying concerns

Disclosure

Disclosure is the process by which children and young people start to share their experiences of abuse with others. This can take place over a long period of time – it is a journey, not one act or action.

¹ This guidance draws on guidance provided by the Charity Commission (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strategy-for-dealing-with-safeguarding-issues-in-charities>), National Council for Voluntary Organisations (<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/information/safeguarding>), National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/>), and learning from best practice from both larger organisations (<https://www.build-africa.org/>) and smaller organisations (<https://www.livingstonetanzaniatrust.com/governance>) in the Africa Charity Sector.

Children may disclose directly or indirectly and sometimes they may start sharing details of abuse before they are ready to put their thoughts and feelings in order. Not all disclosures will lead to a formal report of abuse or a case being made or a case being taken to court, but all disclosures should be taken seriously. It takes extraordinary courage for a child to go through the journey of disclosing abuse. It's vital that anyone who works with children and young people undertaking this journey is able to provide them with the support they need.

How disclosure happens

Children and young people may disclose abuse in a variety of ways, including:

- directly– making specific verbal statements about what's happened to them
- indirectly – making ambiguous verbal statements which suggest something is wrong
- behaviourally – displaying behaviour that signals something is wrong (this may or may not be deliberate)
- non-verbally – writing letters, drawing pictures or trying to communicate in other ways.

Children and young people may not always be aware that they are disclosing abuse through their actions and behaviour. Sometimes children and young people make partial disclosures of abuse. This means they give some details about what they've experienced, but not the whole picture. They may withhold some information because they:

- are afraid they will get in trouble with or upset their family
- want to deflect blame in case of family difficulties as a result of the disclosure
- feel ashamed and/or guilty
- need to protect themselves from having to relive traumatic events.

When children do speak out it can be many years after the abuse has taken place.

Barriers to disclosure

Some children and young people are reluctant to seek help because they feel they don't have anyone to turn to for support. They may have sought help in the past and had a negative experience, which makes them unlikely to do so again.

They may also:

- feel that they will not be taken seriously
- feel too embarrassed to talk to an adult about a private or personal problem
- worry about confidentiality
- lack trust in the people around them (including parents) and in the services provided to help them
- fear the consequences of asking for help
- worry they will be causing trouble and making the situation worse
- find formal procedures overwhelming

Not all children and young people realise they have experienced abuse, for example if they have been groomed.

Spotting the signs of abuse

Children and young people who have been abused may want to tell someone, but not have the exact words to do so. They may attempt to disclose abuse by giving adults clues, through their actions and by using indirect words. Adults need to be able to notice the signs that a child or young person might be distressed and ask them appropriate questions about what might have caused this.

You should never wait until a child or young person tells you directly that they are being abused before taking action. Instead, ask the child if everything is OK or discuss your concerns with your organisation's designated safeguarding lead, or the NSPCC helpline. Waiting for a child to be ready to speak about their experiences could mean that the abuse carries on and they, or another child, are put at further risk of significant harm. Not taking appropriate action quickly can also affect the child's mental health. They may feel despairing and hopeless and wonder why no-one is helping them. This may discourage them from seeking help in the future and make them distrust adults.

Helping children disclose abuse

It's important to create an environment where children and young people are comfortable about speaking out if anything is worrying them. They need to:

- be able to recognise abuse and know it is wrong
- know who they can talk to about it.

The people they choose to disclose to need to listen, understand and respond appropriately so the child gets the help, support and protection they need.

Encouraging children and young people to seek help and support

Many children and young people will seek help because they know where to go and believe that it will make a difference. Others may not have the confidence to seek support or be too scared to ask for help. They may not get the help they need until they reach crisis point.

Make it as easy as you can for young people to find and take up the offer of help.

- Reinforce positive messages about those who seek help – seeking help is a sign of strength.
- Encourage parents to support their children in seeking help.
- Be positive about young people, their capacity for change and their resilience.
- Listen to the people you help – improve your services using feedback from service users.
- Shout about your work – lack of awareness is a significant barrier to young people seeking help.
- See the whole person – engage with young people both in terms of their strengths and their weaknesses.
- Build trust – treat young people with respect.
- Help young people to help each other – equip young people with the skills and tools to support their friends/peers and family members.
- Consider the role of new technologies – these should be complementary to other ways of supporting young people.

Responding to disclosures

Three key interpersonal skills may help a child feel they are being listened to and taken seriously:

- **show you care, help them open up:** Give your full attention to the child or young person and keep your body language open and encouraging. Be compassionate, be understanding and reassure them their feelings are important. Phrases such as 'you've shown such courage today' help.

- **take your time, slow down:** Respect pauses and don't interrupt the child – let them go at their own pace. Recognise and respond to their body language. And remember that it may take several conversations for them to share what's happened to them.
- **show you understand, reflect back:** Make it clear you're interested in what the child is telling you. Reflect back what they've said to check your understanding – and use their language to show it's their experience.

If a child tells you they are experiencing abuse, it's important to reassure them that they've done the right thing in telling you. Make sure they know that abuse is never their fault. Never talk to the alleged perpetrator about the child's disclosure. This could make things a lot worse for the child.

Non-biased approach

It's vital that any child who is trying to disclose abuse feels that they are being listened to and taken seriously. But there can be a risk that if professionals just believe the child's account without thoroughly investigating the situation, this can lead to unfair bias against the alleged abuser as formal investigations progress. This means it's important to maintain an unbiased approach when responding to disclosures and the organisation's procedures to ensure each case is treated in a fair and transparent manner and that the child gets the protection and support that they need.

Making notes

It's important to keep accurate and detailed notes on any concerns you have about a child. You will need to share these with your nominated child protection lead.

Include:

- the child's details (name, age, address)
- what the child said or did that gave you cause for concern (if the child made a verbal disclosure, write down their exact words)
- any information the child has given you about the alleged abuser.

Information sharing

Why information sharing is important

Sharing information about a child's wellbeing helps professionals build a clearer picture of the child's life and gain a better understanding of any risks the child is facing. Information sharing helps to ensure that an individual receives the right services at the right time and prevents a need from becoming more acute and difficult to meet.

General principles of best practice for information sharing are outlined below.

When to share information

Timely information sharing is key to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. People who work with children, whether in a paid or voluntary role, may need to share information about the children and families they are involved with for a number of reasons. These include:

- you are concerned that a child or a member of their family may be at risk of significant harm
- you think a serious crime may have been committed or is about to be committed

- someone from another agency has asked for information about a child or family
- a statutory duty or court order requires information to be shared.

You must always have a clear and legitimate purpose for sharing a child's personal information. Keep a record of the reasons why you are sharing or requesting information about a child or their family. You should also make sure you are not putting a child's safety and wellbeing at risk by sharing information about them. Some professionals have a legal duty to share information relating to safeguarding concerns, for example concerns around female genital mutilation (FGM). Always seek consent to share information about a child and their family. However if consent isn't given, you can still share information with relevant professionals under certain circumstances, for example if you are protecting a child from significant harm.

What information to share

You need to decide what specific information is appropriate to share and who to share it with.

- Prioritise the safety and wellbeing of the child and anyone else who may be affected by the situation.
- Make sure you share the information quickly and securely. The sooner you report your concerns the better. This means the details will be fresh in your mind and action can be taken quickly.
- Identify how much information should be shared. This will depend on the reasons for sharing it.
- Use language that is clear and precise. Different agencies may use and understand terminology differently.
- Make sure the information you are sharing is accurate. Make it clear what information is factual and what is based on opinion (yours or other people's).

Facts and opinions

When recording information you should be as factual as possible. If you need to give your own or somebody else's opinion make sure it is clearly differentiated from fact. You should identify whose opinion is being given and record their exact words.

Seeking consent to share information

Children should be given the opportunity to decide whether they agree to their personal information being shared. If a child doesn't have the capacity to make their own decisions ask their parent or carer (unless doing so would put the child at risk of harm).

You should always seek consent to share information about an adult.

Tips for getting consent:

- be open and honest
- make sure the person you're asking for consent understands what information will be shared and why
- explain who will see the information and what it will be used for
- make sure the person you're asking for consent understands the consequences of their information not being shared
- get the consent in writing, in case there are any disputes in the future. If it's only given verbally, make a written record of this

- make sure the person knows they can withdraw consent at any time.

Sharing information without consent

If consent is refused or if you're unable to seek consent, you can still share information with relevant professionals if this is in the public interest.

This includes protecting children from significant harm and promoting the welfare of children.

When deciding whether to share information without consent, you should consider each case individually.

- Decide if the need to share information is in the public interest and whether it outweighs the need to maintain confidentiality.
- Consider all the implications of sharing the information, for example if you are sharing sensitive details about a person's life.

If you're not sure what to do, contact the organisation Designated Safeguarding Lead, the NSPCC helpline for advice on (+44 (0)808 800 5000) or the relevant local authority responsible for child safeguarding. Make sure you are following the relevant legislation and guidance.

If you're sharing information without consent keep a written record explaining:

- what steps you took to get consent
- the person's reasons for not giving consent (if known)
- why you felt it was necessary to share information without consent.

Confidentiality

Never promise a child that you will keep the things they're telling you a secret. Explain that you need to share what they've told you with someone who will be able to help.

Reporting concerns

If a child is suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm, you can share information with appropriate agencies or professionals without the child's or their parent's consent

If a child is in immediate danger, call the police.

If a child is not in immediate danger:

- **Follow the organisation's safeguarding policies and procedures** on Recording and Sharing Concerns as soon as possible. These provide clear guidelines on the steps you need to take if a child discloses abuse. They will state who in your organisation has responsibility for safeguarding or child protection and who you should report your concerns to.

Other relevant agencies are:

- **Contact your local child protection services.**
- **Contact the police.**
- **Contact the NSPCC Helpline** on [0808 800 5000](tel:08088005000) or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk.

Mandatory reporting: Female genital mutilation (FGM)

It is illegal to carry out FGM in the UK. It is also a criminal offence for UK nationals or permanent UK residents to perform FGM overseas or take their child abroad to have FGM carried out.

In England and Wales, regulated health and social care professionals and teachers must make a report to the police, if, in the course of their duties:

- they are informed by a child under the age of 18 that they have undergone an act of FGM
- they observe physical signs that an act of FGM may have been carried out on a child under the age of 18.

Peter Lagaay (Chair of EACP) has overall responsibility for safeguarding and can be contact through the details below.

| Organisation | Chair of Trustees | Assistant to the Chair |
|--------------------------------|--|---|
| East Africa Children's Project | Peter Lagaay EACP Chair of Trustees pieter.lagaay@googlemail.com | Barry Harper Assistant to Peter Lagaay barry.eacp@gmail.com |

Date: 06 February 2020

Peter Lagaay EACP Chair of Trustees

Appendix A

Definitions and signs of child abuse

Child abuse happens when a person – adult or child – harms a child. It can be physical, sexual or emotional, but can also involve a lack of love, care and attention. Children who suffer abuse may struggle to find the words to speak out, so it's vital that anyone working with children or young people is vigilant for the signs of abuse.

The NSPCC factsheet below sets out the different types of abuse and describes potential signs that a child is being abused.

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1188/definitions-signs-child-abuse.pdf>

In Summary:

Abuse is a term used to describe ways in which people are harmed, usually by adults and often by people they know and trust. It refers to the damage done to a person's physical or mental health. People can be abused within or outside their family, at school, in the sports environment and elsewhere. Abuse can take many forms:

Physical Abuse - where people:

- Physically hurt or injure an individual (such as hitting, shaking, squeezing, biting, scolding or otherwise causing physical harm to a child).
- Give children, vulnerable adults alcohol, inappropriate drugs or poison.
- Attempt to suffocate or drown an individual.

Sexual Abuse – sexual abuse means the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions. This could include:

- Full sexual intercourse, masturbation, oral sex, fondling.
- Showing pornographic books, photographs or videos, and sexual exploitation including taking pictures of individuals for pornographic purposes.
- Grooming people for sexual purposes and/or making inappropriate sexual comments.

Sexual exploitation – sexual exploitation means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially, professionally or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. This includes human trafficking and modern slavery.

Emotional Abuse and Psychological Harm – persistent emotional or psychological harm to a person that causes a severe long-lasting impact on their emotional development this can occur in a number of ways. For example, where:

- There is constant overprotection that prevents an individual from socialising.
- People being frequently shouted at or taunted, including name calling
- There is neglect, physical or sexual abuse.
- Witnessing or hearing domestic violence.
- Humiliating or degrading treatment

- Constant criticism
- Persistent shaming
- Isolation

Neglect – where parents or guardians persistently fail to meet a person’s basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter.

People with Disabilities

People with disabilities may be more vulnerable because:

- They may have greater difficulty in communicating.
- They may have less mobility than individuals without disabilities.
- They often receive as part of their daily life, intimate physical care, which may provide greater opportunity for potential abusers.
- They may have a greater number of providers of care than individuals without disabilities.
- Their behaviour may be more challenging, which may put them at greater risk.

Signs that a child may be experiencing abuse include:

- Left in unsafe situations or without medical attention, constantly "put down", insulted, sworn at or humiliated
- Seems afraid of parents or carers
- Severely bruised or injured
- Aggression towards others
- Displays sexual behaviour which doesn't seem appropriate for their age
- Neurotic behaviour (e.g. rocking, self-mutilation)
- Constant tiredness
- Lack of social relationships

This list is not exhaustive but as an NGO working extensively with children, EACP requires all staff and Partners to be constantly vigilant for signs that a child may be being abused.