

Managing Allegations Made Against a Child¹

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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.

Every organisation that works with children must have procedures about how to respond to allegations of abuse made against a child and concerns that a child or young person may pose a risk of abuse to others.

The aim of information and guidance in this policy is to seek to:

- ensure children who may have been abused by another child or young person are protected and supported
- provide the child or young person who may have carried out the abuse with the appropriate help
- make sure the organisation's response to any allegations is fair and consistent and any risks posed to children are managed appropriately.

Types of allegations

There are many ways that a child may be abusive towards others. A child who is displaying abusive behaviour may not realise they are doing so.

Allegations may involve:

- bullying or cyberbullying
- emotional abuse
- online abuse
- physical abuse
- sexting
- harmful sexual behaviour
- sexual abuse.

Identifying concerns

There are a range of ways concerns might be raised.

- A child or adult might make a direct allegation of abuse by a child or young person.
- A child or adult might tell you they're uncomfortable with a child or young person's behaviour. They may not realise the behaviour is abusive.

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/>).

- A member of staff or volunteer might observe behaviour that gives cause for concern and make a report following your organisation's safeguarding procedures.
- The organisation may be informed that a child or young person is the subject of an investigation.
- A child or young person might tell you they have harmed someone else or are at risk of doing so.

Responding to concerns

When responding to an allegation of abuse made against a child, it's important to consider the needs of everyone involved.

Talking to a child who tells you they have behaved abusively

Sometimes a child may tell you directly that they have behaved abusively towards someone else. If this happens:

- reassure the child that they've done the right thing by telling you about it
- listen carefully to the child and let them tell their whole story. Don't try to investigate or quiz the child, but make sure you understand what they're saying
- use non-judgmental language
- remember that a child who is telling you they've abused someone else is a child in need of support
- tell them that you now have to do what you can to keep them and the other children involved safe
- explain what you are going to do next and that you will need to speak to other people who can help
- reassure the child that they can get help to change their behaviour and move forward with their life
- you may want to suggest the child contacts [Childline](#) or a similar organisation for support.

Never promise to keep what a child tells you a secret. Explain that you need to talk to other people who can help keep them and the other children involved safe.

Talking to a child who may be behaving abusively

If allegations have been made against a child you should speak to your nominated child protection lead, who can advise you on the best way to proceed. If you confront the child about the allegations before taking advice, it may make the situation worse.

For more advice about speaking to a child who may be behaving abusively, you can contact the NSPCC Helpline on [0808 800 5000](tel:0808 800 5000) or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk.

Sometimes you may have noticed a child behaving inappropriately and you may need to talk to them about this immediately, in order to manage the behaviour. Remember that they may not realise their behaviour is unacceptable. Talk to them calmly and explain why their behaviour is unsuitable and what they can do to improve it.

The EACP has Codes of Conduct as it's helpful to have a code of conduct which everyone in the organisation agrees to, and which can be referred to when managing behaviour. Be aware that a child who displays challenging behaviour may be doing so because they have

experienced abuse or neglect. If you think this may be the case, follow EACP's child protection procedures.

Making notes

It's important to keep accurate and detailed notes on any concerns you have about a child. You will need to share this record 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)
- the details of any other children involved or impacted.

For more information about child protection and how to record concerns see EACP Policy on Recognising and Responding to Abuse

Deciding if a concern is a child protection issue

When a child or young person behaves inappropriately towards another child, a decision needs to be made about whether there may be a child protection concern.

The organisation's nominated child protection lead should make this decision in consultation with:

- the volunteer or staff member who is responsible for the supervision/pastoral care of the children involved
- the senior manager or trustee responsible for safeguarding
- any other agencies you know are working with the child
- the local child protection services if necessary.

When an allegation is a child protection concern

An allegation becomes a child protection concern when:

- the behaviour involves sexual assault or physical assault
- the child who has experienced the abusive behaviour has suffered significant harm
- the behaviour forms part of a pattern of concerning behaviour by the child or young person who is being abusive
- the child carrying out the abuse is displaying harmful sexual behaviour
- you are concerned that the child carrying out the abuse may be doing so because they have experienced abuse or other upsetting experiences themselves.

It is also a child protection concern when there's a significant difference of power between the child who is displaying abusive behaviour and the person being abused, for example when:

- there's an age difference of more than two years
- there's a significant difference in terms of size or level of ability
- the child displaying abusive behaviour holds a position of power (such as being a helper, volunteer or informal leader)
- the child being abused is significantly more vulnerable than the other child or young person.

When you're not sure

If you aren't sure whether a child or young person's behaviour is abusive, you could contact the NSPCC Helpline on [0808 800 5000](tel:08088005000) or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk. Their trained professionals will talk through your concerns with you, give you expert advice and take

action to protect the child as appropriate. This may include making a referral to the local authority. You should also discuss the matter with your local authority child protection services, or appropriate authority.

Telling parents that their child may have abused someone else

The child's parents or carers should be told what has happened, as long as it doesn't increase the risk to the child.

Ask the child how they would like their parents/carers to be told. You could suggest:

- talking to parents first without the child there, then summarising everything with the child present
- helping the child tell their parents in their own words, with you present for support.

It's important for parents and children to talk about what's happened and begin to come to terms with it as a family.

When talking to parents or carers, remember that the news their child has behaved abusively may be a shock. Reassure them that support is available to help their child change their behaviour and move forward.

Support for parents

You should also seek to ensure that the parents/carers are offered appropriate support. Some local or national organisations that may be helpful for parents/carers.

Reporting concerns

If you think a child is in immediate danger, contact the police (UK: **999**). If you're worried about a child but they are not in immediate danger, you should share your concerns.

- **Follow the organisations child protection procedures.**
- **Contact the NSPCC Helpline** on [0808 800 5000](tel:08088005000) or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk. Trained professionals will talk through your concerns with you and give you expert advice.
- **Contact the local child protection services.**
- **Contact the police**

Services will risk assess the situation and take action to protect the child as appropriate either through statutory involvement or other support.

Taking action to keep all children and young people safe

Depending on the nature of the allegation or concern, you may need to take action to protect and support children who have experienced peer abuse. You should also consider how best to support the child against whom the allegation was made.

Sanctions

The EACP has a behaviour code which explains how it is expected people to behave. It sets out sanctions that will apply to anybody who chooses not to behave appropriately. You should follow these sanctions for any child who does not behave in the right way.

Emotional support

If peer abuse has taken place in the organisation, this may have an emotional impact on everyone in the group.

Make sure children, young people and adult supervisors have access to the emotional support they need and know who they can talk to if they are worried about anything.

In the UK Childline provides confidential help and advice for children and young people. Calls to [0800 1111](tel:08001111) are free and children can also contact [Childline online](https://www.childline.org.uk).

Risk assessment

Conduct a risk assessment and develop a risk management plan to make sure you are doing everything you can to keep all your children and young people safe.

Things to consider include:

- any relevant information from other agencies, such as care plans or multi-agency assessments
- making sure the child who is alleged to have carried out the abuse is separated from the children who experienced the abuse
- separating the child who is alleged to have carried out the abuse from other children where there is a risk of further abuse
- whether the children who experienced the abuse are at risk of bullying or victimisation from others and what prevention measures are needed
- whether the child who is alleged to have carried out the abuse is at risk of any retaliation and what action can be taken to keep them safe.

Multi-agency working

If statutory agencies are investigating and assessing the situation you should stay in contact with them and share all relevant information with multi-agency partners.