

Document A: Background Notes for Leaders

14.The Four R's: • Recognise • Respond • Record • Report

14.3 Recognise: Being alert to common signs of abuse and harassment is an important aspect of risk assessment and child protection. The presence of indicators might suggest child abuse, however the absence of indicators does not always discount the disclosure of maltreatment. Generally, a single indicator might not provide conclusive evidence of abuse; but the presence of any indicators should be treated select seriously.

(a) Indicators of abuse must be considered within the student's context i.e.

(i) what is known about the student's family, medical, psychological, educational and social history; and

(ii) what developmental behaviours and competencies you would expect the student to be demonstrating.

(b) Possible adolescent indicators of child abuse and neglect:

(i) acting out behaviour e.g. school truancy, early sexual activity, substance use and delinquency

(ii) school performance problems

(iii) poor interpersonal skills, lack of respect for others, intolerance of difference and lack of empathy

(iv) responding aggressively or being withdrawn

(v) depression

(vi) anxiety

(vii) somatic/ physical symptoms

(viii) quick temper and explosiveness

(ix) inability to accept responsibility or tendency to blame others

(x) disconnection from others, tendency to be mistrustful or defensive

(xi) lack of confidence but masking this with bravado

(xii) low self esteem.

14.4 Response to Disclosures: You might think you are making things worse by reporting the disclosures. Few things are worse than allowing abuse to continue. Many children and adolescents are devastated by the experience of abuse and, in the most serious cases, may be seriously harmed or have their life threatened.

What you should do, if abuse is disclosed to you: (a) Do not promise confidentiality. (b) Use active and passive listening skills and protective interrupting. Most important, you should listen attentively and let him or her know that it was right that they told someone about their worries. Try to make sure that the student isn't disclosing where everybody can hear. (c) Stay calm and competent. Stay calm and make sure that the young person feels safe and knows that he or she is not to blame for what has happened. Answer the student's queries as honestly as you can. Note the correct procedures to follow (see the flowchart in clause 15). (d) Help the conversation to move along. Finally ask the student questions that establish what was done and who did it. Reassure the student that they did the right thing in coming to you and talking about the problem. (e) Be non judgmental. Do not be critical of anything that has happened or anyone who might be involved. However, you can respond to the student's feelings and try to help the student identify their fears. What the student does not need:

(a) To be blamed;

(b) To have their own family or situation criticised or blamed;

(c) To have adults get angry or excited;

(d) To have adults moralising about right or wrong;

- (e) To be interrogated;
- (f) To be told to forget it or get over it;
- (g) To not have their disclosure acknowledged – this is an enormous step for a student to take;
- (h) To be shown excessive pity or sympathy.

14.5 Record: Keep a written record of the conversation with the student as soon after the disclosure as you can, including the date and time of the conversation.

This is important. Use the student's words and record only what has been told to you without making any judgments.

14.6 Report: Report the disclosure to the appropriate authority (Child Protection Helpline or Police) and then the DYPO/DG (they will select the appropriate people to be informed, as well as the appropriate action to follow in order to keep the student safe if YEP student)

N.B. Seek advice from senior Rotary personnel before informing anyone else about the disclosure or letting any person suspected of abuse know what's happened – you could be putting the student in greater jeopardy by doing so.

14.7 Factors why children and young people don't always report abuse:

(a) Helplessness:

- (i) there is nothing I can do to make it stop;
- (ii) no one will believe me;
- (iii) they made me promise that I wouldn't talk about it.

(b) Fear:

- (i) he/she said they wouldn't believe me;
- (ii) what will happen to my family (host family) if I tell – she/he said that they would send me away;
- (iii) I can't trust anyone.

(c) Guilt:

- (i) this must be my fault;
- (ii) if I – then he/she wouldn't have;
- (iii) I am bad/stupid/naughty – that's why this has happened.

(j) lack of experience or information or support – well what am I supposed to do?

(k) maintaining distance – that is a horrible story, but it isn't really any of my business;

(l) workload stress – what else do I take on? If I report this, it'll open up Pandora's box;

(m) system against individual needs – this student is already the focus of so many people's energy and resources – now he or she is creating more problems;

(n) defeatism – the damage is already done and reporting it will never achieve anything useful anyway, it'll just make it worse.