



Child Protection - A Few Reminders

January 2003

Kate Cox is the Designated Teacher for Child Protection.

All colleagues, teaching and non-teaching, share a responsibility to be alert for signs of Child Abuse. Any concerns, however vague, must be passed on either to Kate, or to the Form Tutor or Head of House, who will then pass them on.

The law defines four types of Child Abuse: physical Abuse, Emotional Abuse, Neglect and Sexual Abuse. Apart from noticing bruising or other signs of physical abuse, the main symptoms of abuse are the kinds of behaviours which we would normally pick up as part of our pastoral care of pupils, for example inappropriate sexual awareness or talk; extreme tiredness or lethargy, self destructive behaviour, unusual or unexplained gifts of money, depressions, etc. However, these symptoms may of course have other causes. Be alert also for changes in a child's normal pattern of behaviour or attitude.

Child Protection concerns should be recorded in writing, dated and signed, either by the colleague voicing the concern, or by the Form Tutor/Head of House. These should be passed on to Kate, who will keep all the documentation on file and, after consultation, decide whether a referral is necessary. Child Protection records must be kept separately from academic records and do not have to be disclosed to parents. They are kept in the top drawer of the filing cabinet in the Senior Teachers' room. Child Protection documentation should be forwarded if a child changes school.

If a child discloses to you that s/he is being abused, you **must** act as though that allegation is true. You must

- Receive – listen to the child. Try not to appear shocked. Take what they say seriously. Don't ask why they haven't told you before.
- Reassure – stay calm, don't panic. Try to make the child feel that they are not to blame, and that they have done the right thing in telling you. Don't promise confidentiality.
- React – react only as far as is necessary for you to know whether or not you need to pass on the information – don't 'interrogate' for full details. Don't ask leading questions, just listen to what the child has to say. Explain who you will have to pass the information on to, and why.
- Record – make brief notes at the time and write in additional details afterwards. Make drawings showing the position of any bruising, etc. Record the date and time and any noticeable non-verbal behaviour. Try to use the words of the child (including slang or a child's own sexual expressions). Try to be objective and distinguish between fact and opinion. Keep your original notes.
- Support – make sure that the child continues to receive support. Keep the child informed, if appropriate, of what is happening. Make sure that you also receive some support, without revealing confidential details to other staff.

Once a referral is made, a Child Protection Conference may be called at which the school is normally represented, usually by the Designated Teacher, but occasionally by another colleague who knows the child well (usually Head of House). A decision will be made at the meeting as to whether or not the child is to be placed on the Child Protection Register. Any further action or involvement by Police, Social Services, etc., will be decided. The School may be asked to monitor a child. The deciding factor is often whether a child is in a '*high criticism/low warmth*' situation.

The School no longer has to inform parents if they are making a Child Protection referral. In fact, we are now discouraged, in case this interferes with an investigation by Social Services or the Police.

Another change is in the way that allegations against staff are now handled. These are, unfortunately, still running at a high level (approx one per week in Norfolk) but it is now recognised that most of these are malicious and it is now no longer compulsory to suspend the member of staff while any investigation is taking place. Heads and governors now have far greater discretion in this matter. What you should do if you are accused (advice from the LEA):

- Write down what happened as soon as possible, including the names of any witnesses.
- Keep your own counsel. Talking to colleagues and pupils about an incident could give the impression that you are trying to cover up what really happened.
- Headteachers will usually be sympathetic and can be a useful source of information and support.
- Co-operate fully with any investigation. Remember that you are allowed a third party presence at meetings with the Head or Governors.
- Contact your union (or lawyer if you are not a member) for advice and support at an early stage.

The LEA and the School must now actively try to minimise harm, limit the damaging effects and support the member of staff, in the case of false allegations.

However, we all have the responsibility to consider whether we put ourselves into vulnerable situations by our actions, for example one-to-one situations with pupils in closed rooms. The Form Tutor, Head of House or Head of Department is usually available (and of course SMT) and it is often very helpful to have a witness to what is said, or a second perspective, or a second person to write down what is being said or agreed.