

Disclosures and responses – the basics

 Right people, right role, right knowledge

Standard 7

Ongoing education and training

Criteria 7.4

Personnel have the information and skills to respond effectively to safeguarding risks, concerns, disclosures, and allegations of abuse.

Indicators

7.4.1 Education and training programs equip relevant personnel to appropriately respond to and support anyone bringing forward concerns, disclosures, and allegations of abuse.

What does a disclosure look like?

You have reasonable grounds to suspect harm if:

- a child or young person tells you directly that they have been harmed;
- a child or young person tells you indirectly (e.g. writing about abuse in journal writing, drawing pictures of inappropriate touching or play-acting abuse scenarios);
- someone else tells you (e.g. another child, parent or colleague) that harm has occurred or is likely to occur;
- a child or young person tells you they know someone who has been harmed;
- you are concerned at significant changes in behaviours of a child or young person, or the presence of new, unexplained and suspicious injuries; or
- you see harm happening.

What to do if a child or young person discloses to you abuse by someone else?

- listen to the child – REALLY LISTEN;
- keep calm, don't be shocked, act normally;
- find a private place to talk out of hearing of others;
- accept what the child or young person says;
- let the child or young person speak freely. Do not push for information;
- offer immediate support, understanding and reassurance;
- do not ask questions other than to clarify your understanding. If you must ask a question, make sure it is open-ended (what, when, who, where);
- explain the seriousness and that you can not keep it a secret – do not make false promises;
- let them know that you need to speak with someone else;
- let them know what you are going to do next, including who you will need to share the information with, and let them know you will tell them what happens after that;
- reassure the child or young person that they have done the right thing by telling you;
- do not convey value judgements about an abuser. The child will want the hurt to stop, but the person causing the harm may be someone very close to the child; and
- always finish on a positive note.

Helpful responses

- You were right to tell.
- Thank you for telling me.
- You were brave to tell.
- Do you want to tell me anything else?
- It is not your fault.
- I believe you.
- I will talk to who will know what to do next.

Avoid these responses

- That is shocking.
- That can't be true.
- Are you sure?
- Why did you let that happen?
- I won't tell anyone, your secret is safe with me.

In all cases

- as soon as you can, record everything that was said, including date and time of the conversation and details of any incidents disclosed. Avoid doing this in front of the child or young person;
- you must follow your entity's reporting procedures, including reporting to police, child protection authorities (either directly or through your Safeguarding Coordinator); and
- do not investigate.

Adapted from material sourced from *National Committee for Professional Standards*