

Appendix 4:When a Child Makes a Disclosure

When a child does disclose abuse, this needs to be taken very seriously. It is important that any disclosure is dealt with appropriately, both for the wellbeing of the child and also to ensure that your actions do not jeopardise legal action against the abuser.

If as a mandated person, you receive a disclosure of harm from a child, which is above the thresholds, you must consult with the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and make a mandated report of the concern to Tusla. You are not required to judge the truth of the claims or the credibility of the child. If the concern does not meet the threshold to be reported as a mandated concern, you should report it to Tusla as a reasonable concern.

There are a number of basic 'rules' that should be followed to ensure the safe handling of any disclosures of abuse from a child:

- Don't panic
- Remember that the safety and well-being of the child come before the interests of any other person
- Listen to the child and accept what the child says
- Look at the child directly, but do not appear shocked
- Don't seek help while the child is talking to you
- Reassure them that they did the right thing by telling someone
- Assure them that it is not their fault and you will do your best to help
- Let them know that you need to tell someone else
- Let them know what you are going to do next and that you will let them know what happens
- Be aware that the child may have been threatened
- Write down what the child says in their own words – record what you have seen and heard also
- Make certain you distinguish between what the child has actually said and the inferences you may have made. Accuracy is paramount in this stage of the procedure
- Tell your DLP or DDLP as possible
- As a mandated person, you must make a report to Tusla, or the Gardaí immediately. This can be done in conjunction with the DLP/DDLP
- After making the referral look after yourself. Discuss the matter with your DLP/DDLP or relevant person

Important Notes

- The same action should be taken if the allegation is about abuse that has taken place in the past, as it will be important to find out if the person is still working with or has access to children
- Dealing with an allegation that a colleague on the school staff has abused a child is difficult but must be taken seriously and dealt with carefully and fairly

Things to say when a child discloses

Repeat the last few words in a questioning manner

- 'I believe you'
- 'I am going to try to help you'
- 'I will help you'
- 'I am glad that you told me'

- 'You are not to blame'

Things not to say when a child discloses

- 'You should have told someone before'
- 'I can't believe it! I am shocked!'
- 'Oh that explains a lot'
- 'No not...he's a friend of mine'
- 'I won't tell anyone else'
- 'Why? How? When? Where? Who?'

Things to do

- Reassure the child that s/he was right to tell you
- Let them know what you are going to do next
- Immediately seek help, in the first place from the DLP/DDLP
- Write down accurately what the child has told you. Sign and date your notes. Keep all notes in a secure place for an indefinite period
- Seek help for yourself if you feel you need support

Things not to do

- Do not attempt to deal with the situation yourself
- Do not formally interview the child:
 - Never ask leading questions
 - Never push for information or make assumptions
 - Only necessary relevant facts should be obtained, when clarification is needed
 - Do not make assumptions, offer alternative explanations or diminish the seriousness of the behaviour or alleged incidents
 - Do not keep the information to yourself or promise confidentiality
 - Do not take any action that might undermine any future investigation or disciplinary procedure, such as interviewing the alleged victim or potential witnesses, or informing the alleged perpetrator or parents or carers
 - Do not permit personal doubt to prevent you from reporting the allegation to the designated child protection officer