



CHILD PROTECTION – A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Everyone has a duty to protect children from abuse and/or neglect.

The Department of Education (NI) has clearly set out the roles and responsibilities of staff, and requires every school to develop, to review and to follow their own Child Protection Policy.

This leaflet sets out to explain what staff at your child's school need to do if they are concerned about possible neglect or abuse (abuse may be physical, emotional or sexual in nature).

SCHOOL PROCEDURE AND THE ROLE OF STAFF

Schools like to keep in close contact with parents about their children's progress. If there are any day-to-day concerns, these can be discussed between the parents, the teacher and sometimes the Principal.

If there is a range of concerns or a single, more serious issue, school staff will need to pass their concerns on to Social Services as outlined in the School's Child Protection Policy.

If a teacher or anyone working in a school: -

- Is told by a child that they are being harmed or abused
- Notices any unusual, unexplained marks or bruises on a child
- Is aware of inappropriate sexual language or behaviour from a child
- Observes signs of serious neglect

the adult will listen and write down what they are told, or what they have observed.

They have a legal duty to tell the school's designated teacher (Miss Burns) or the deputy designated teacher and Principal (Mrs Corry) who will consult with the Education Authority Child Protection Team, and if considered necessary, notify Social Services. Social Services will then have a duty to investigate.

The designated teacher will usually let parents know this is happening, but if there is concern that in telling parents the child is put at greater risk, then parents will *not* be notified until the matter is investigated by Social Services. When a Child Protection referral is made, Social Services must contact the police to decide whether Social Services or the Police will investigate.

A Social Worker will talk to the parents and the child involved and will consult with the school and other agencies so that they can get a full picture of what has happened.

Possible Signs of Neglect

Constant hunger, poor general hygiene, constant tiredness, frequent lateness or non-attendance at school, untreated medical problems, destructive tendencies, low self-esteem, neurotic behaviour e.g. rocking, hair twisting, thumb-sucking, no social relationships, chronic running away, compulsive stealing, scavenging for food or clothes.

Possible Signs of Physical Injury

Unexplained injuries or burns, improbable excuses given to explain injuries, refusal to discuss injuries, untreated injuries, excessive punishment, fear of parents being contacted, chronic running away, withdrawal from physical contact, flinching at sudden movements, arms and legs kept covered in hot weather, fear of returning home, fear of medical help, self-destructive tendencies and aggression towards others.

Possible Signs of Emotional Abuse

Physical, mental and emotional development delay or disturbance, excessive punishment, over-reaction to mistakes, sudden speech disorders, fear of new situations, inappropriate emotional responses to stressful situations, neurotic behaviour e.g. rocking, thumb sucking, hair twisting, self-mutilation, fear of parents being contacted, extremes of passivity or aggression, drug/solvent abuse, chronic running away, compulsive stealing and scavenging for food or clothes.

Possible Signs of Sexual Abuse

Disclosure, compulsive masturbation, sexual drawings, sexualised play with explicit acts, explicit sexual stories, vivid details of sexual activities, exposing of private parts, running away, gender identity difficulties.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS

It is extremely important for parents to keep the school fully informed of family developments that may eventually give rise to questions regarding pupil welfare and child protection. For example, the reason for:

- Unexplained injury or bruising
- Repeated absence from school
- Untreated medical problems
- Constant hunger/no breakfast
- Upset at witnessing family dispute
- Sudden mood swings

Parents may speak to the class teacher about any of the above, or any other issue relating to child protection. However, parents are advised to provide written explanations. These will be stored securely and will be available for referral at a later date should the need arise.

Useful contacts:

Child Protection Support Service
Education Authority NE Region
Antrim Centre, 17 Lough Road, Antrim, BT414DH
Tel: 028 9448 2223

Department of Education (NI)
Rathgael House, Balloo Road, Bangor, Co Down.
Tel: 028 9127 9000

SOCIAL SERVICES GATEWAY TEAM: 0300 1234333

Helplines:

NSPCC 808 800500 (free)
Childline UK 800 111 (free)

A copy of the school's full Child Protection Policy is available on the school website.

If you have any queries about the information in this leaflet, or want more information or advice, please speak to the Principal and Deputy Designated Teacher for child protection, Mrs Corry