

Guidance notes for staff and volunteers when dealing with people who are disclosing allegations of abuse – Sevenoaks District Council Policy for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults **Appendix A2**

Staff and volunteers must, at all times:

- Acknowledge the characteristics of the group you are working with and respond accordingly.
- Remember that it is rare for children, and particularly young children, to lie about abuse.
- Even if there are ambiguities or uncertainties around an allegation, it may nevertheless indicate children or vulnerable adults need for help in other ways.
- Never trivialise or exaggerate abuse issues.
- Allow the person time to speak and not do interrupt.
- Do not make suggestions to them which could imply you are intending to make an investigation at that time as the person may then refuse to give any information at all.
- Reassure the person that you are glad he or she has told you what has happened and that it is right to tell.
- Never push for information. If the person decides not to tell after all, then accept that and let them know you are always ready to listen.
- Do not interrogate or question other than to clarify your understanding. If the matter is to be investigated further, it will be done by trained professionals. No matter how well you know the person, spare them having to repeat themselves over and over. Apart from anything else, the person may begin to think you do not believe them.
- Be aware that the child or vulnerable adult may have been seriously threatened not to tell.
- Remain calm, no matter how difficult it is to listen to the person – think of how hard it must be to say it. You have been chosen because that person feels they can talk to you. If you show anger, disgust or disbelief then they may stop talking for fear of upsetting you further or feel that your negative feelings are being directed towards them.
- Listen to the person – **Really Listen** – take what they say seriously. Tell them they have done the right thing by telling you.
- Be honest - tell the person that you cannot keep it a secret and that you have to talk to someone else who can help.
- Let them know what you are going to do next and why it is necessary.
- As soon as practical, write down everything you have been told including all the elements that should be in the report as stated in the **Procedures** section of this Policy (See Appendix 1, Procedures – pages 10-16)
 - Note what was said, using the exact words and phrases spoken if possible
 - Describe the circumstances in which the disclosure came about
 - Note the setting and anyone else who was there at the time
 - Separate out factual information from your own opinion
 - Use a pen or biro with black ink, so that the report can be photocopied
 - Be aware that your report may be required later as part of a legal action or disciplinary procedure
 - Make every effort to preserve any evidence which may be relevant to a police investigation, however taking into account that the wellbeing of the person is your first priority.

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- Consider your own feelings and seek support if it is needed by contacting the Human Resources Team to arrange for confidential counselling
- Respect the confidentiality of the situation and do not share or discuss information with anyone except on a “need-to-know” basis, as outlined in this document