

## **HOME-START CHILD PROTECTION GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES**

HOME-START is a voluntary organisation that works with families who are experiencing difficulties or suffering stress and who have at least one child under 5 years of age. These families are offered support in their own homes by volunteers for as long as is necessary.

HOME-START values the dignity and identity of each individual and encourages the strengths and emotional well-being of the parents to the ultimate benefit of the children.

All information about parents and families is treated as confidential by the Volunteer, to be discussed only with the Co-ordinator and at Support Groups to assist the family and in support of the volunteer. Any disclosure of the confidential information to any other person may only be undertaken with the expressed permission of the parents for the purpose of assisting the family, except where it is considered necessary for the protection of a child when information will be shared with the appropriate authority.

HOME-START believes that the safety and welfare of the child is paramount and it is the responsibility of each HOME-START scheme to ensure that the staff and volunteers are properly prepared to enable them to protect every child. The following guidelines are recommended by the HOME-START Central Office.

Home-Start Dacorum believes in an open and honest policy between ourselves and families. On any initial visit, Co-ordinators will tell families that all information between a family and Home-Start Dacorum is confidential UNLESS we feel that disclosing concerns is in the best interests of the child.

This message is reflected in our literature given to the family and is repeated when a Volunteer is first introduced to a family. This ensures that in the event a report is made on a child protection issue, the family and the Volunteer's relationship can be maintained and support can be continued.

### **Home-Start Dacorum's Role**

As a voluntary organisation, Home-Start Dacorum's responsibility lies in passing on to the appropriate agency any concerns it may have in relation to the safety of a child so that these concerns can be assessed. If a family being supported by Home-Start Dacorum is involved in the child protection process, Home-Start may be asked to provide information about their involvement with the family to assist in assessment. Home-Start Dacorum will continue to support the family.

### **Home-Start Dacorum's Responsibility in Safeguarding and Protecting Children**

Home-Start Dacorum exists to offer support, friendship and practical help to families under stress helping prevent crisis and breakdown. The scheme has no statutory remit or role to investigate child abuse. However, the welfare of the child is paramount; therefore the scheme does have a responsibility to pass on to the appropriate agency concerns in relation to the safety of a child so that these can be assessed.

**It is not the responsibility of any Home-Start Dacorum volunteer or co-ordinator to make judgements about the concerns or to investigate further.**

The Management Committee is responsible for ensuring that the scheme develops effective child protection procedures which retain the ethos of Home-Start and fit in with the local statutory procedures.

**The welfare of the child must be paramount at all times.**

### **ACTION FOR PROTECTION**

#### In an Emergency

**If a child is potentially seriously injured:** ensure the child receives medical attention as soon as possible.

**If a child is alone or someone is threatening to harm the child:** ring 999 or the local police station. The police are empowered to act **immediately** to protect a child without having to obtain a Child Protection Order. Children, Schools and Families are not empowered to act in the same way.

### **IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER**

- In any conflict of interest between the parent and the child - those of the child **MUST** come first.
- Where possible the parent's co-operation should be obtained before HOME-START contacts the appropriate authority.
- Recognising and coping with cases of child abuse is very stressful. However, it is the duty in law of HOME-START staff and volunteers - as it is for all members of society - to alert the appropriate authority if there is knowledge of or suspicion of abuse and neglect, or anxiety about the welfare and safety of a child.
- Ultimately, Children, Schools and Families have a statutory responsibility for the protection of children.

### **DISCOVERY OR DISCLOSURE OF ABUSE OR SUBSTANTIAL NEGLECT WHICH DOES NOT NEED EMERGENCY MEASURES:**

#### *Where the parent is co-operative:*

The Volunteer will usually be able to discuss the most immediate cause of concern with the parent(s), and remind them that she/he must contact the Co-ordinator and get help.

The Volunteer should then contact the Co-ordinator for full discussion.

The Co-ordinator, and sometimes the Volunteer, will then visit the family as soon as possible to discuss their need for immediate help.

They will reassure the family that HOME-START DACORUM will continue to offer support.

The Co-ordinator will consult with appropriate colleagues, such as a Health Visitor, Social Worker etc., in order to inform her decision about possible referral to the Child Protection Team, in accordance with Local Authority Guidelines.

***Where the parent is uncooperative or where discussion with the parent(s) may***

***endanger the child:***

If the parent is uncooperative, the Volunteer may be unable to discuss the abuse or neglect with the family.

***In cases of suspected sexual abuse concerns should be passed immediately to the Co-ordinator without discussion with the family.***

The Volunteer must contact a Co-ordinator for a full discussion.

The Co-ordinator will then visit the family, at the earliest opportunity, for discussion and if it is not possible to enlist their co-operation at this stage, or undesirable to do so in the interests of the child's immediate protection/safety, the Co-ordinator will let them know that she/he must seek help for the child and for them from the appropriate authority.

The Co-ordinator will then contact the appropriate authority.

**WHERE THE VOLUNTEER IS ANXIOUS BUT THERE IS NO SUBSTANTIAL EVIDENCE OF ABUSE OR NEGLECT:**

The Volunteer will probably already have had some discussions with the parent(s). The volunteer should have full discussion with the Co-ordinator. Together you may be able to put anxieties into perspective.

Volunteers must keep written records of any relevant concerns, observations, conversations etc. These records should be made contemporaneously and be dated and signed by the volunteer.

It may be helpful to use the checklist relating to the child's basic needs and the definition of children in need (see Appendices I and II).

The Co-ordinator should make sure that all information from the Volunteer is logged and that the communication between them both is clear and made without delay.

Co-ordinators may wait for further information from the Volunteer or make an immediate visit to the family. The Co-ordinator will try to open up the areas of concern with the family. The Co-ordinator may need to contact the statutory worker for discussion if there is one involved. The Co-ordinator can use the "What If?" service at Children, Schools and Families if they are unsure whether the situation is serious enough for a referral to Children, Schools and Families.

**IF YOU HAVE ANY DOUBTS, CONTACT A HOME-START DACORUM CO-ORDINATOR.**

**RECOGNISING ABUSE**

Child abuse occurs throughout all sectors of society. Child abuse is the term used to describe how children are harmed, often by adults who are responsible for their care.

All children, whatever their circumstances, have the right to expect protection from harm. All parents have a right to receive help and support to prevent them from further harming their child.

There are different kinds of abuse. Some occur because of the way adults or other children and young people behave towards a child; some happen because adults are failing or unable to provide proper care for the children they look after. One child may suffer several different kinds of abuse at the same time. It is important that action is taken straight away to help a child who is being abused.

Children are dependent upon others for their survival and well-being and have a right to someone who will act on their behalf. Any adult with whom a child has contact can start the protection process.

The abuse or neglect of children – physically, emotionally or sexually can have long term effects on all aspects of a child's health and development. Sustained abuse is likely to have a deep impact on the child's self image and self esteem and on their future life. Difficulties may extend into adult life and can affect personal, social and work relationships.

It is not only the stressful events of abuse that have an impact on children, but also the context in which they take place. Any potentially abusive incident has to be seen in context to assess the extent of harm to a child and appropriate intervention. Often it is the interaction between a number of factors, which serve to increase the likelihood or level of significant harm. Understanding child abuse in the wider context of child welfare means that the impact of abuse on an individual child will be dependent on other factors such as:

- the individual child's means of coping and adapting
- support from family and social networks
- the impact of supportive and therapeutic interventions and subsequent life events

The concept of significant harm was introduced by the Children's Act in 1989 as the threshold that justified compulsory intervention in family life in the best interests of children. The Local Authority is under a duty to make enquiries where it has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm.

## **Definitions**

The Department of Health defines child abuse as:

- physical injury
- neglect
- sexual abuse
- emotional abuse

A child is defined as anyone under the age of 18.

## **Triggers of Concern**

There are several triggers:

- something you see on a child
- something you observe about a child's behaviour
- something a child or someone else tells you
- general concerns regarding parenting not allayed by supportive interventions.

Recognising abuse is not always easy, even for those with specialised training. Only a paediatric doctor is in a position to confirm or discount abuse as a cause of an injury. However, it is possible to indicate, through careful monitoring and evaluation what should cause concern and lead to consultation and / or further enquiries being made.

Children with a disability are often a greater risk and their additional vulnerability should always be born in mind.

Where uncertainty / doubt exists it is always good practice to seek further advice / consultation either within Home-Start or with other designated professionals. This helps to ensure that a child is not left in a situation where a delay in responding exposes them to additional risk of harm.

The following signs may indicate the possibility of abuse or neglect. This is not an exhaustive list – Home-Start Dacorum staff should refer to Child Protection Information Pack for more information.

### Signs of Physical Abuse

Hitting, squeezing, biting or twisting a child's arms or legs can cause injuries like bruises, grazes, cuts or broken bones. Sometimes, someone burns a child, perhaps by holding a part of the body against something very hot or by scalding. Shaking a baby is particularly dangerous and can cause brain injuries which can lead to permanent disability, or even death. Many parents do not realise the danger involved in doing this. Poisoning a child, perhaps by giving them alcohol or drugs, is also physical abuse.

Be especially concerned about:

- any injuries at all – even small bruises – to young babies who are not yet able to move independently
- bruises in places where you would not normally expect to find them, in soft tissue, for example, rather than on the bony prominence
- bruises which have a distinctive shape or pattern, like hand prints, grasp or finger marks or belt marks
- burns or scalds with clear outlines
- injuries which do not match the explanations given for them
- bite marks – bruises like 'love' bites
- bruising in or around the mouth, especially in babies

### Signs of Neglect

Neglect can result when adults are unable to, or fail to, meet the physical or emotional needs of the children they are responsible for. All children need adequate food, clothing, warmth, love and attention to grow and develop properly. If they do not receive enough of any of these, their growth and development may suffer and they may become disabled. Children may also be neglected when carers do not ensure that they receive proper medical care.

Be especially concerned about:

- a child who looks thin and ill
- a child with lingering illnesses which have not been treated
- a child who is often dressed in inadequate or unsuitable clothing for the weather conditions
- a child who suffers repeated accidents, suggesting a lack of proper supervision
- a child who does not respond when given attention or, on the other hand, one who craves attention and affection from any adult
- a child who is constantly hungry, greedy or stealing food
- a child who is continually smelly, scruffy or dirty
- a child who is constantly tired

Severe neglect of young children is associated with impairment of growth and intellectual abilities. Persistent neglect can lead to serious impairment of health and development and long term difficulties with social functioning, relationships and educational progress.

### **Signs of Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse is when someone forces or entices a child to take part in a sexual activity, to fulfil their own sexual desires, which the child does not really understand and to which the child is not able to give informed consent.

The abuser may use different methods to persuade the child to co-operate such as bribery, threats or physical force. Sexual abuse can take different forms from touching to intercourse and often it does not cause any physical injury. It can happen to boys as well as girls and to children of any age.

Sexual abuse can have long-lasting effects: some children who have been abused in this way go on to abuse other children, some find as they grow up that they are unable to have close relationships with other people; others cannot help but deliberately injure themselves because they feel so awful about themselves.

Be especially concerned about:

- a child who exhibits sexually explicit behaviour
- a child who has inappropriate sexual knowledge for his / her age
- suicide attempts or self-inflicted injuries
- repeated running away from home
- children's vulnerability to pornography and the internet

### **Signs of Emotional Abuse**

This form of abuse may result in a child becoming withdrawn, nervous, unhappy or lacking in confidence. It may result in a child being unable to make friends, perhaps because s/he behaves aggressively or inappropriately towards other children.

Emotional abuse may happen when a carer behaves in a persistently indifferent or hostile way towards a child, perhaps through bullying, rejecting, frightening, criticising or scapegoating the child. It may happen when a carer behaves in an inconsistent way all the time so that the child never knows what reaction to expect. It may happen when carers are severely possessive or over-protective. In severe cases, children may be subjected to cruel treatment and punishment, like being locked in cold, dark surroundings or being made to do endless, inappropriate household tasks.

Emotional abuse may result in a child becoming withdrawn, nervous, unhappy or lacking in confidence. It may result in a child being unable to make friends. Underlying emotional abuse may be more important than visible forms of abuse on the child. In families where the child experiences a low level of warmth and a high level of criticism negative incidents may have a more damaging impact on the child. Domestic abuse, adult mental health, substance misuse or racism from a carer may be features in families where children are exposed to emotional abuse.

Be especially concerned about:

- a child who is persistently blamed for things that go wrong
- a child who is made to carry out tasks inappropriate to his / her age
- a child who is not allowed to do normal childhood activities
- a child who is continually withdrawn and depressed

- a child who displays excessive fear of parent or carers

The local Area Child Protection Committee procedures will contain more detailed guidance about recognising abuse.

#### LIST OF CONTACTS

Lara Parker	Senior Co-ordinator	07803 105375
Bobbie Cameron	Co-ordinator	07790 351206
Cath Lewis	Co-ordinator	07791 201145
Dr Kirsty Saunders	CP Advisor	
Jane Woodbridge		
Lesley Moore		
Police		
Children, Schools & Families		