



Circles Network Policy

Child Protection & Safeguarding

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Introduction

Circles Network provides a range of services to children and their families in various locations throughout the UK.

The Board of Trustees takes its' responsibility to protect and safeguard the welfare of children and young people entrusted in to the care of / or in the venues of Circles Network, very seriously and is committed to the safeguarding of children.

This policy is in line with current legislation and good practice.

Principles

We are committed to "Getting it right for every child" (quoted from the A guide to Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) Scotland). We must therefore ensure that each child and or young person are:

- Safe
- Healthy
- Active
- Achieving
- Respected
- Responsible
- Included

and as per "Every Child Matters (England & Wales) guidance, the main aims for every child , whatever their background or circumstances, is to have the support they need, in order to:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe

- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well being

Safeguarding guidance and legislation

Safeguarding legislation and government guidance says that safeguarding means:

- protecting children from maltreatment
- preventing impairment of children's health or development
- ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care,

As well as "understanding that role so as to enable those children to have optimum life chances and to enter adulthood successfully" (working together to Safeguard children 1.18 HM Government 2010).

Circles Network will ensure that;

- a child / young person's welfare is paramount
- all children / young people, whatever their age, culture, gender, racial origin, religion or belief or sexual identity have the right to protection from abuse
- all suspicions or allegations of abuse and poor practice will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately
- all employees/ volunteers have a responsibility to report concerns to the appropriate individual.

Scope of this policy

This policy applies to all employees, agency workers and volunteers of Circles Network.

Policy Statement

Circles Network has a duty of care to protect / safeguard all children in their care or at a Circles Network venue from harm. All children have a right to protection and safeguarding and the needs of disabled children and others who may be particularly vulnerable must be taken into account.

Circles Network will ensure the safety and protection of all children involved in the organisation through adherence to Child Protection and safeguarding guidance as adopted by Circles Network.

A child is defined as a person under the age of 18 years (The children (Scotland) Act 1995).

Policy Aim

The aim of Circles Network's Child Protection policy is to clarify our policy and promote good practice by;

- providing children and young people with appropriate safety and protection whilst in the care of Circles Network
- allow all employees / volunteers to make informed and confident responses to child protection issues
- listening to, relating effectively and valuing children and young people whilst ensuring their safety
- encouraging and supporting parents / carers
- ensuring that employees and volunteers are given support and training and that they understand their responsibility in child protection and safeguarding
- maintaining good links with the statutory child care authorities
- having a system for dealing with concerns about possible abuse

Guidelines

Promoting good practice

Child abuse, particularly sexual abuse, can arouse strong emotions in those encountering such a situation. It is important to understand those feelings and not allow them to interfere with judgement when regarding the appropriate action to take.

Abuse can occur in many situations which include the home, school and in the organisations environment. Some individuals will actively seek employment or voluntary work with children / young people in order to harm them.

All employees and volunteers who have regular contact with children and young people will be an important link in identifying situations where they need protection.

All suspicious concerns of poor practice should be reported using the guidance in this policy.

Good practice guidelines

All employees and volunteers must demonstrate exemplary behaviour in order to promote children's welfare and reduce the possibility of allegations being made. The following are examples of how we expect employees and volunteers to act when working with children and young people:

- Always working in an open environment, avoiding private or unobserved situations, with open communication and no secrets.
- Treating all children and young people with respect and dignity
- Always putting the welfare of each child and young person first (before administration or achieving goals)
- Maintaining a safe and appropriate distance with children and young people (it is inappropriate for employees or volunteers to have intimate relationship with a child / young person or to share a bedroom with them)

When taking children to the toilet employees and volunteers should;

- inform a colleague, parent or carer where and with whom they are going

- provide assistance appropriate to a child's age and abilities (for example, full nappy change for babies, assisting toddlers with buttons or belts or providing materials for a school child to clean themselves after an accident)
 - be sensitive to older children's embarrassment, for example standing guard outside the toilet whilst a child is cleaning or changing.
- Building balanced relationships based on mutual trust which empower children and young people to share in the decision making process
 - Use reasonable contact to separate children who are physically fighting or to stop a child from assaulting another child or member of staff / volunteer.
 - Making activities fun, enjoyable and promoting fairness
 - Being an excellent role model, this include not smoking or drinking alcohol in the presence of children /young people, or discussing inappropriate material with them
 - Giving enthusiastic and constructive feedback rather than negative criticism.
 - Recognising the development needs and capacity of children / young people
 - Securing parental consent in writing to act in loco parentis, if the need arises to administer emergency first aid and or any other medical treatment.
 - Keeping written records of any injuries that occur and the details of any treatment given and reporting this back to the parents.

Practices to be avoided

The following should be avoided except in emergencies. In situations where these situations are unavoidable it should only be done with the full knowledge and consent of the line manager. For example this could be if a child needs to go to hospital, or a parent unexpectedly fails to arrive to pick up a child at the end of a session.

- avoid spending time alone with a child away from others
- avoid taking or dropping a child off at an event or activity

Practices that are not allowed;

- engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games
- share a bedroom with a child
- initiate physical contact with a child e.g. cuddling
- allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching with a child, e.g. ensure that when contact is made for first aid, that the child has prior knowledge or consented and that this is not carried out in an open environment and avoiding private and unobserved situation.
- use physical punishment or chastisement as a means of discipline.
- discuss confidential information in the presence of children
- discuss personal employee or volunteer issues in the presence of children
- allow children or young people to use inappropriate language unchallenged
- make sexually suggestive comments to a child or young person even in fun
- reduce a child or young person to tears as a form of control
- fail to act upon and record any allegations made by a child or young person
- do things of a personal nature for a child or young person that they can do for themselves
- allow a child or young person to stay with you at your home unsupervised

It may sometimes be necessary for employees or volunteers to do things of a personal nature for children or young person. These tasks should only be carried out with the full understanding and consent of parents and the children involved.

There is a need to be responsive to a persons' reactions. If a person is fully dependant on you, talk to him or her about what you are doing and give choices where possible. Particularly so if you are involved in any dressing or undressing of outer clothing, or where there is physical contact, lifting or assisting a child / young person to carry out activities.

You must not participate in tasks for which you are not properly trained.

Photography or filming equipment at activities or events

Circles Network recognises the value of recording activities and events for publicity and parents own records. Employees or volunteers must seek parents or carers permission to take and use photographs for these purposes. The wishes of parents and carers will be considered at all times.

All photography and film must remain under the control of Circles Network. It is unacceptable for an employee or volunteer to retain images of children and which should only be taken and stored on Circles Network equipment.

Failure to adhere to this instruction may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

There is evidence that some people have used organised events as an opportunity to take inappropriate photographs or film footage of young people in vulnerable positions. All employees and volunteers should be vigilant and any concerns should be swiftly reported to their line manager.

Recruitment and training of employees or volunteers

Circles Network recognises that anyone may have the potential to abuse children / young person in some way. We will ensure that we will take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure that individuals who are unsuitable to work with children / young people are prevented from this type of work. We will ensure that;

- all applicants / volunteer s must complete an application form, which will ask for self-disclosure on any criminal record, the selection panel must check this has been fully completed

- two confidential references including one regarding previous work with children will be taken prior to any offer of employment / volunteering opportunity
- evidence of identity will be taken e.g. passport photo
- their qualifications should be substantiated
- the job requirements and responsibilities should be clarified
- child protection procedures are explained and training needs identified
- PVG or Safeguarding checks carried out (dependent on the country)
- We will conduct criminal records checks for all applicants / volunteers

Training

All new employees and volunteers will be required to receive in- house training on a variety of topics related to the philosophy of inclusion. Individuals involved in the family's project will be required to undertake additional training courses listed below;

- Introduction to Child Protection legislation
- Introduction to family dynamics
- Introduction to the processes involved where children are at risk of being subjects of care proceedings
- Overview of the latest research or learning re- disabled parents or parents with mental health difficulties
- Strategies employed in the recognition and prevention of child abuse.

Included in the staff development programme is the provision of employee / volunteer supervision, which will be provided by line managers within the organisation, sometimes being supplemented by the support of Trustees. We also achieve non managerial supervision from external consultants for our work with families.

A peer evaluation system for team members operating on a regular basis, where team members share information and support is an added dimension to a package of training and support designed to protect children with whom we have contact or involvement.

Confidentiality

Circles Network will respect individual's rights to privacy. This means in general terms that no information given in confidence can be given to a third party without the individuals express consent. However there are limits of confidentiality and any child disclosing abuse cannot be treated in confidence, this must be reported to a regional coordinator who will make the report to the relevant social services department.

In addition to legal requirements, confidentiality will only be breached if an adult or child is perceived to be in danger / life threatening situation or likely to be a danger to others. The following circumstances would constitute an authorised breach of confidentiality;

- A child or adult is at that moment physically or emotionally so damaged that immediate medical treatment is necessary.
- There are indications of a real danger or physical or emotional damage or death if a child or adult returns to an abusive situation.
- An adult or young person is threatening suicide or appears to have attempted suicide. All suicide threats should be taken seriously and not assumed to be attention seeking.
- An individual is threatening to kill or severely damage another individual

Action when suspecting a child or young person is being abused

Immediate action upon suspicion of abuse; any person associated with Circles Network, employee, volunteer or other worker, who becomes aware that a child / young person may be being abused should immediately, without any delay, contact either the regional coordinator or CEO. It will then be the Regional Coordinator or CEO responsibility to contact the relevant child protection for the child.

If the Regional Coordinator or CEO cannot be contacted then ensure the relevant Social Services Department are immediately contacted.

If the named Child Protection Contact is known to you, contact this person immediately. If not known or unavailable, make contact with Social Service (child care) duty referral point appropriate to area in which the child is living.

The duty office that you speak with will require the following information:

- who you are and the reason for telephoning
- the child's name and home address
- the child's date of birth
- when the child's parent(s) or carer(s) can be contacted
- details of the injuries or circumstances which cause you concern and any explanation or comment the child, parent(s) carer(s)

Remember to take note of the Social Worker's name that you spoke to, the date and time and record the conversation to be retained with our records.

Where a child / young person has suffered serious physical harm

In circumstances when emergency medical attention is required. If the child / young -person is in need of urgent medical attention, it is policy to take the most appropriate actions - for example, by encouraging the parents to seek this help immediately if this is appropriate in the circumstance. Where this is not immediately forthcoming or inappropriate, contact the relevant emergency services yourself. Depending on the circumstances you may need to;

- telephone for an ambulance
- ask a doctor to call
- ask the parent / carer to take the child /young person to a doctor or hospital at once
- offer to take the parent / carer and the child to the hospital,/ surgery, clinic, for immediate medical attention
- take the child yourself to the hospital,/ surgery/clinic

The subsequent protection of the child/ children /young person is of paramount importance. Assess the situation and ensure that all relevant emergency personnel are requested to attend should any further risk exist.

Should you have concerns regarding the immediate safety of any person involved in the situation (including yourself) do not hesitate to summon appropriate assistance.

Where a child or young person discloses past abuse

It is vital to remember that should someone disclose abuse in their past, the abuser may still pose a threat to the safety and welfare of children / young people today. The procedure for the prevention and detection of physical / sexual abuse must still be followed in these circumstances. This should be carefully explained to the person who has made the disclosure. You may wish to enlist the support of the Regional Co-ordinator or CEO to do this. Never mislead the person or assure confidentiality regarding the disclosure of past abuse, it is not possible to guarantee confidentiality in such circumstances.

Employee or volunteer subject to allegations of abuse

In circumstances where it is alleged that an employee or volunteer is abusing children / young people the organisation will provide support to that individual during the investigations.

The Regional Co-ordinator / CEO will ensure that Social Service Departments are given every assistance possible in pursuing any investigations or disciplinary procedures that may be subsequently implemented.

It is important that employees and volunteers recognise that there are practical considerations that will minimise the vulnerability to allegations of abuse whilst working directly with children / young people. Please refer to the good practice guidance in this policy to help minimise the risk of allegations.

Employees and volunteers should be aware that in the context of being subject to an allegation of abuse, any subsequent investigation may extend to their own family.

Follow up investigations and child protection conference

Involvement in any follow up investigations or child protection conferences will be assumed by the representative of the organisation with lead responsibility for the situation in question. In their absence responsibility will be assumed by the Regional Coordinator or CEO.

As an employee in any work organised by Circles Network which involves regular contact with children, you may on occasion, be requested to attend a particular meeting or child protection or safeguarding conference. Support to enable you to do this will be made available.

Abuse

Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and or emotional ill treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligent treatment or exploitation resulting in actual or potential harm in the child's health or development.

Children may be in need of protection where their basic needs are not being met in a manner appropriate to their development and they will be at risk from avoidable acts of commission or omission on the part of their parent(s), sibling(s) or other relative(s) or a carer (i.e. the person(s) while not a parent who has actual custody of a child) other individuals or complete strangers. There are varied settings in which abuse can occur. Whilst the setting in which abuse occurs may require special consideration and professionals should demonstrate and record that they have made such considerations, it is crucial that all suspected abuse must be addressed primarily as a child protection matter. Likewise children who themselves abuse other children present particular challenges for professionals and the relevant protocol should be consulted in conjunction with these procedures.

Categories of Abuse

To define an act (of commission or omission) as abusive and/or presenting future risk a number of elements must be taken into account.

These include demonstrable or predictable harm to the child, which must have been avoidable because of action or inaction by the parent or other carer. The following are the standard categories of abuse, which, although presented as separate definitions, in practise may overlap.

Physical injury

Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Whilst the law recognises some physical chastisement of children as reasonable, any blow to the head, shaking or use of an implement is against the law. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child (known as Fabricated (sometimes factitious) or induced illness).

Physical Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development.

Before a child is born, neglect may occur as a result of maternal substance abuse.

Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- Provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)
- Protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger
- Ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care givers)
- Ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Non-organic Failure to Thrive:

This is recognised as failure to meet expected weight and growth norms or developmental milestones, which does not have a basis in a hereditary or medical condition, as medically diagnosed. In its extreme form children can be at serious risk from the effects of malnutrition, lack of nurturing and stimulation. This can lead to serious long term effects such as greater susceptibility to serious childhood illnesses, reduction in potential stature and, with young children in particular, the results may be life threatening over a relatively short period.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another (including being exposed to domestic abuse). It may involve serious bullying, causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, including prostitution, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of sexual online images, watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.