



Responding to Allegations Procedure:

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**Responding to a child or vulnerable adult making an allegation of abuse**

Any worker for the BDFFA should understand that common barriers exist that prevent children from disclosing abuse and as such children very seldom make false accusations that they have been abused and in fact frequently deny the abuse or take back an accusation after they have made it for fear of the consequences of making a bad situation worse if they are “found out” for telling someone else. It should be understood that children often do not tell because they:

- Are scared and may have been threatened
- Believe they will be taken away from home
- Believe they are to blame
- Think it is what happens to all children
- Feel embarrassed
- Feel guilty
- Don't want the abuser to get into trouble
- Have communication or learning difficulties
- May not have the vocabulary for what happened
- Are afraid they won't be believed
- Believe they have “told” (maybe by dropping hints) – haven't been believed so what's the point in trying again

It is therefore extremely important when a child or vulnerable adult does begin to disclose abuse to:

- Stay calm
- Listen carefully to what is said
- Find an appropriate early opportunity to explain that it is likely that the information will need to be shared with others – do not promise to keep secrets
- Allow the child to continue at his/her own pace
- Ask questions for clarification only, and at all times avoid asking questions that suggest a particular answer
- Reassure the child that they have done the right thing in telling you
- Tell them what you will do next and with whom the information will be shared
- Record in writing what was said using the child's or vulnerable adult's own words as soon as possible – note date, time, any names mentioned, to whom the information was given and ensure that the record is signed and dated
- Seek the support of the earliest opportunity of the BDFA's Named Person

Helpful things you may say:

- I believe you
- Thank you for telling me
- It's not your fault
- I will help you

Do Not Say:

- Why didn't you tell anyone before?
- I can't believe it
- Are you sure this happened?
- Why? How? When? Where? Who?
- Never make false promises – you HAVE to share the information
- Never make statements such as "I am shocked, don't tell anyone else"

Make notes as soon as possible after talking to the child. Write down exactly what was said using their words and what you said in reply. You will also need to write down the situation in which the child shared the information with you. Record dates and times. Do not shred the hand written notes even if you have typed these up. They may be used if the case ever goes to court.

### **Responding to signs or suspicions of abuse**

- **Anyone** in the BDFA (either an employee or volunteer) who becomes aware of or is concerned about actual or suspected occurrence of abuse of a child or vulnerable adult or about the behaviour of someone in the BDFA must **report it immediately** to that BDFA's Designated Safeguarding Officer identified in our organisation to be responsible for dealing with allegations or suspicions of abuse. Everyone in the BDFA should ensure that they know who this is and how to contact them.
- Our Named Person is called the BDFA Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO). It should be understood that it is **not** the role of the BDFA's DSO to decide whether a child has been abused or not. This is the task of the children's service authorities who have the legal responsibility, or of the NSPCC which also has powers to investigate child protection concerns. To conform to best practice guidance the BDFA Child & Vulnerable Adult Protection Officer in conjunction with the Chair of the Trustees will make a

decision within one working day about whether to refer a concern to the statutory authorities or take no further action. All decisions must be recorded and signed and dated.

### **Responding to allegations of abuse against a member of BDFA staff, other worker or volunteer**

- If something in the behaviour of another member of staff, volunteer or other person carrying out work for the Charity in the way they relate to a child has led to an allegation or suspicion of abuse then this confidential information must be reported to the BDFA's DSO as part of our 'whistle-blowing' policy to promote such disclosure.
- A report must be written under the BDFA's disciplinary procedure which includes all the information contained in the "Reporting Suspected Abuse" form and immediate consideration given to whether the member of staff concerned should be suspended on full pay whilst an investigation takes place.
- In the event the suspicions/concern is about the behaviour of a Trustee or other volunteer this must be reported immediately to the DSO. Immediate consideration must be given as to whether the Trustee or volunteer should be removed from their duties whilst an investigation takes place.
- The Local Authority Designated Office can be contacted for guidance. Details are available from each relevant LA. LADO's are involved in the management and oversight of individual cases where it is alleged that a person working with children (including a volunteer) has: behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child; or possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates s/he is unsuitable to work with children. These officers provide advice and guidance to employers and voluntary organisations, in addition to liaising with the police and other agencies, and monitoring the progress of cases to ensure that they are dealt with as quickly as possible consistent with a thorough and fair process.

### **Responding to a child disclosing abuse or unacceptable behaviour**

- When a child themselves is telling someone in the BDFA or someone who carries out work for the Charity something which constitutes a disclosure of actual or suspected abuse by anyone – BDFA worker or otherwise – it is really important that that person stays calm, listens carefully to what is said and responds in a manner to avoid preventing disclosure and records in writing what was said – using the child's own words – as soon as possible.
- The person then should seek the support of the BDFA's DSO at the earliest opportunity in order that their concerns can be recorded using the BDFA Reporting Suspected Abuse and actioned as appropriate.
- It is important to be aware that the person who first encounters a case of alleged or suspected abuse is not responsible for deciding whether or not abuse has occurred. That is a task for the professional child protection agencies following a referral to them of concern about a child.

### **Responding to suspicions of abuse against someone not working in the organisation**

- If, during a home visit or a phone call to the BDFA or during a BDFA event something in the behaviour of a parent or carer in the way they relate to a child, or the behaviour of the child or vulnerable adult themselves, has led to a suspicion of abuse then the person, either employee or volunteer, with the concern should seek the support of the BDFA's DSO at the earliest opportunity in order that their concerns can be recorded using the BDFA Reporting Suspected Abuse form and actioned as appropriate.
- It is important to be aware that the person who raises a concern about a case of suspected abuse is not responsible for deciding whether or not abuse has occurred. That is a task for the professional child protection agencies following a referral to them of concern about a child.

## **Recording information**

If a fellow employee or volunteer has concerns, however vague, themselves or has been told by another employee or volunteer or enquirer about concerns they have about a child or vulnerable adult or about the behaviour of someone in the BDFA or not working for the BDFA, either in person or by email or by telephone conversation or helpline enquiry (including anonymous calls) then it is important that:

- the person listens and takes them seriously
- makes a written record of the observations or the information received. This should be an exact account of what you have been told – using the BDFA Reporting Suspected Abuse Form completed with the BDFA's DSO within 24 hours who, after discussion, will countersign and date the record.
- If once all the factors and information have been considered and:
  - The concerns are allayed – a record should be kept and filed securely on the relevant service user/BDFA worker's file in a sealed envelope marked (only to be opened in the event of a child protection investigation" and no further action taken.
  - The concerns are ongoing – the appropriate social services department and/or police must be contacted who will undertake an initial assessment (see Working Together 2013 5.35). This should happen no later than 24 hours after the suspicion or concern of abuse was first reported. The BDFA Form RSA will be further completed in order to maintain a full record of statements and actions taken.

## **Recruitment and training methods**

- The BDFA recognises that the safe culture of our organisation in providing activities or services for children and vulnerable adults depends entirely on the quality and integrity of our staff and volunteers. The ways in which all BDFA personnel both paid and volunteer are recruited and selected, as per the BDFA Recruitment Policy, ensures their suitability for working with children through rigorous recruitment and selection processes that involve checks into the eligibility and the suitability of all trustees, staff and volunteers who work or come into contact with children.
- As the BDFA recognises that if we expect our staff and volunteers to be able to respond appropriately to child protection concerns encountered in the course of their work, the BDFA staff and volunteer (including Trustees) induction programme includes child protection awareness via the NSPCC online training. All staff and volunteers are asked to read the BDFA Child & Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy. Opportunities for further

training and support in best practice for working with children and vulnerable adults are available through local authority Social Services and the NSPCC. For the BDFA DSO additional responsibilities additional child protection training will be identified and arranged. BDFA staff will receive training every 2 years and the DSO will attend a DSO refresher every 2 years.

- The BDFA recognises that workers for the BDFA who have become involved with a family in which a child or vulnerable adult has suffered harm, or appears to be likely to suffer harm may find the situation stressful and upsetting. We therefore support such workers by providing an opportunity to talk through their anxieties with the BDFA DSO and to seek further support as appropriate.

### **Concerns raised in response to a telephone or helpline enquiry**

A member of staff or volunteer may become concerned about the welfare of a child following a telephone conversation. Should concerns arise on the phone when the caller is **anonymous**, the following guidance should apply.

- In the first instance the caller should be encouraged to seek appropriate help and support, and be given details of relevant agencies in their area – including the local social services department. As soon as it appears to the member of staff that it may be necessary to breach our usual confidentiality policy in order to protect the welfare of a child then the caller must be informed about this possibility immediately.
- It may be the case that the caller refuses to disclose their identity. If they have not done so already, prior to the concern arising, the member of staff must note all details given and attempt to solicit any others which might more accurately identify them and enable further contact to be made. Where identity and contact details have been withheld, the member of staff should listen and note any accent, background noise, family circumstances, and any other information which might help identify the family concerned. The member of staff should also note anything said which gave rise to the concerns for a child's welfare. Before the call ends, the staff member must again encourage the caller to make direct contact with the relevant agencies.
- After the call ends the member of staff must refer the matter to the BDFA DSO, and follow the procedures for referring their concern as laid out in this policy.

Dated: 10<sup>th</sup> July 2017