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Module Code: ECEY5011

Word Count: 2177

Portfolio based on case study 2 – Ben

Recognising and Recording

It appears from the case study that this is the first instance of concern for Ben, whilst in Year 1. As concerns have been present for a month, a record should be made via the reporting system used in the setting, for example CPOMS. This is in line with Article 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), acting in the best interest of the child. According to Regional Child Protection Procedures for West Midlands (2024, Section 1.4), practitioners should be alert to any indicators of abuse or neglect and be able to collect information relating to those concerns, to assess whether further intervention is needed. As detailed in the Early Years Statutory Framework (2023, Section 3.6, p.22), the setting's safeguarding policy will ensure that all staff are aware of the procedure for reporting concerns. If matters escalate, this record will show how long the situation has been ongoing. Keeping Children Safe in Education (2023, p. 6) mentions the importance of school practitioners in identifying concerns at an early stage, to prevent escalation of the situation. If matters continue, Ben could be found to be a victim of neglect, not having had his basic needs of food and cleanliness met, as per Maslow (1943). In addition, it would be pertinent to ask Ben's previous teachers if they had ever had similar concerns. It is noted from the case study, that Ben has an older brother in Year 4, and their teacher should also be approached, to ascertain if there are any concerns around that child. Early Intervention: Policy and Provision (2021, Section 3.2, p.37), states that information sharing supports the early identification of potential safeguarding issues. In the short term, no issue should be made about Ben eating extra fruit, if supplies allow, and a practitioner should ensure that Ben gets access to toast, or other breakfast options available. Ben states that his mother has not

been shopping this week. The practitioner should monitor this, checking after a day or two, as part of a casual conversation, asking open questions. This will give Ben the freedom to answer with as much or little detail as he feels comfortable with, and any answer could provide further insight into how serious the situation is (Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF, 1989, Articles 12 and 13). It could be that she was just short of time, or unemployed and waiting for payment to come through. In this instance, the family may be unaware of extra funds available through the Healthy Start Scheme, as cited in Early Intervention: Policy and Provision (2021, Section 2.1, p.18). Discreet observation of Ben could be carried out by staff in the setting, to see if either his appearance or eating habits change, alongside looking for other indicators that he may be suffering from further or different abuse. According to the Early Years Statutory Framework (2023, Section 2.5, p.19), interaction with children should be by way of observation and practitioners should act on what they observe.

With relation to Ben's unwashed, unkempt appearance, this should be monitored. The reasons for this could be numerous, for example, a broken washing machine, disorganised morning routine, or a change in adult supervising Ben, who may not be familiar with the amount of supervision he needs, to get ready. The situation could be rectified within a brief period, depending on the cause, or could continue for longer, leading to more investigation being needed. A report compiled by In Kind Direct (2024), claims that many parents can no longer afford basic toiletries, due to the inflated cost of housing, low wages, or benefit cuts.

When recording concerns on the setting's concern log system, the practitioner should ensure the child's words are used, without adding any opinion on the situation. Information should be accurate, concise, and written in ink, if recorded by hand, to prevent it being altered later. As per Keeping Children Safe in Education (2023, Part 1, p. 22), a practitioner should firstly follow their setting's child protection policy, speaking to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), who will decide whether a referral needs to be made. If this does happen, the DSL will contact Children's Social Care.

Reporting and Referral

The procedures for reporting safeguarding concerns should be made clear to all employees regularly, as indicated in the Early Years Statutory Framework (2023, Section 3.24) Indeed, in most settings there is an annual safeguarding refresher course, usually provided at the start of each academic year, with any specific updates communicated as and when notified. However, communication levels can vary, depending on an individual's role in the setting. For example, whilst initial training is delivered in person to the whole school staff, updates may be communicated via email, or handouts, as mentioned in Keeping Children Safe in Education (2023, p. 136). These are not always accessed with the same frequency by all staff. For example, staff who receive very few work-related emails may only check their inbox once a week. In practice, this could affect how individuals deal with reporting and referral, due to them not yet having seen the latest guidelines stated in policies. Cambridge Education (2024) states that when training is cascaded in this way, the biggest risk is dilution in quality, as details can be missed out, the more the information is disseminated. It is the role of the DSL to ensure all employees are aware of how and when to report a concern. Individuals are more likely to participate well if they can practice what they have learned through training or mentoring.

Many schools now use IT based systems to record safeguarding concerns. This makes reporting quicker than writing it by hand and keeps all concern logs centrally. According to Rose (2023), IT also proves useful as you can easily access data, to reveal trends and patterns in behaviour. However, IT training in schools is often rolled out in stages, with support staff, lunchtime and site staff trained later than teaching staff, putting pressure on the latter to find other ways of reporting, or struggling to use a system on which they have not yet been trained. A similar issue is that the method of reporting can differ dependent on role. Teaching staff may record electronically, having access to laptops, and i-pads in their rooms, whilst Lunchtime Supervisors may record on paper forms, later passing these to a teacher or Designated Safeguarding Lead. If a teacher or

DSL then transfers the information onto an electronic document, this gives margin for error in copying information accurately, potentially causing the situation to be misconstrued. Therefore, all concerns should be recorded by the person who took the disclosure.

Another criticism of the reporting system is that safeguarding documents are often provided in paper form, with stakeholders asked to read them in their own time. Whilst this is a useful resource to look back on, it could also pose problems. Firstly, a lot of people may put the papers aside to read later, then never get round to it. Secondly, reading is not the preferred method of learning for some people, which could put them off looking at the paperwork. Also, if there is no robust system for checking engagement with literature, it may never get followed up. There is potential for some people not to have accessed the documents at all, meaning they cannot fully understand the reporting procedure. In the case of Ben, from this case study, if an individual has not read the required paperwork, they may not know the signs of neglect, and may pass Ben's behaviour off as being greedy, or just being extra hungry on a particular day. If an employee sees the child part way through the day, they may put their dirty clothes down to a messy morning's play and not consider that it could be safeguarding related, if they do not know what to look for.

During safeguarding training, individuals are told if they are unhappy with the action taken by their setting, they can refer to Children's Services themselves. Contact details are disseminated, and we are reminded that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, as per Keeping Children Safe in Education (2023, Part One, Section 2, p.6). However, unless an individual works regularly in a child protection role, such as DSL, reporting a concern can be daunting. According to Brigden (2014), this especially affects registered childminders, who do not have a DSL to report to. Also, local authorities in different areas have variations in the way they deal with referrals, making the reporting process inconsistent. Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE, no date) highlights how failure to share specialist language used by child protection agencies can affect how referrals

are handled. Failure to share or show continuity in the language used can cause delays in child protection cases. Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023, page 7) states that individuals and organisations should understand each other's roles and how they work alongside each other. Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE, no date) mentions the introduction of updated terms by Children's Social Care. The terms 'referral' and 'contact' were introduced because of a high volume of calls to their service, to help them distinguish whether information provided was simply a statement, or something that needed immediate action. Problems arose due to terms not having been circulated to service users. Callers therefore presumed their call to Children's Social Care was a referral, whereas the service categorised calls as either referral or contact, without indicating to the user which it was. Clients questioned by SCIE (no date) suggested better communication is needed, to make it clear what category had been decided.

Setting Responsibilities

Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989, Article 19), all children have the right to be protected from bad treatment by anyone who takes care of them. As practitioners, it is our responsibility to do everything possible to uphold this right. This begins with the implementation of clear and thoroughly thought through safeguarding policies. Keeping Children Safe in Education (2023, Part One, Section 2, p.6) emphasises that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, and as such steps should be taken to deliver safeguarding training, to all staff, at least once annually, along with notifying changes made, when they happen. This will ensure staff are aware of how to recognise, record, report and refer cases if necessary, and to whom they should report. In terms of individual school policies, it may be advantageous to tailor these to the specific needs of the catchment area. For example, in places where there is a high rate of drug crime, additional safeguarding interventions could be put in place, to educate children on the dangers of such activities, hopefully persuading them not to get involved. According to NSPCC (2023), it can also be helpful to use wording and phrases familiar to the children and families in the area, when writing a safeguarding policy. Often people are put off reading documents because of the jargon used by

professionals. Ravitch (2007) states that this is important as parents and citizens may be involved in making decisions on school policies, but cannot do so effectively, if they do not understand them fully. In line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989, Articles 12 and 13), NSPCC (2023) also suggests that children's views and opinions could be obtained, when compiling safeguarding policies. This gives a child centred approach, as per Keeping Children Safe in Education (2023, Part One, Section 2, p.6). Policies should be revisited regularly, and a reflective approach taken, making improvements in line with lessons learned from previous incidents. Recruitment of suitable staff, and the process of carrying out the necessary security checks on their background, together with Code of Conduct handbooks are also essential in relation to safeguarding. Handbooks outlining expectations of children, parents, and staff, ensure that all parties are protected from allegations of misconduct (NSPCC, 2022). Autonomy should be encouraged, empowering people to feel confident in their actions, however this should run alongside an awareness of professional boundaries, ensuring that all staff know where their level of responsibility ends and whose help they should enlist to progress matters further. Failure to exercise close collaboration and deliver consistency in multi-agency working was recognised as a weakness by Laming (2003, Section 17.46), when delivering his report on the Victoria Climbié case.

Building good relationships with children and their families is key in Early Years settings and everyone should feel safe, welcome, and cared for. Children are more likely to disclose information when they have a good relationship with staff. Allnock et al (2019) state that good relationships give children the opportunity to disclose, and that disclosure is usually made through open dialogue. Therefore, regularly talking to children and more importantly, listening to their views, shows them that you care and can be trusted with what they want to tell you.

As stated by Personnel Checks (no date), accountability and transparency are of utmost importance in safeguarding practice.

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