

This portfolio will discuss safeguarding in relation to the physical abuse of Joanna in Case study 1, the importance of recognising signs and symptoms of child abuse and how to effectively record the information to safeguard and protect children from significant harm. It will also consider issues such as making observations, how to question children appropriately and reporting information accurately.

Recognising and Reporting Abuse

According to Social Care Wales (2022) safeguarding is defined as protection from abuse and neglect and education to recognise signs of abuse and danger. Wales safeguarding Procedure (2024) also state many definitions that practitioners need to be aware of to communicate concerns effectively referring to the *Social Services and Well-being Wales Act 2014*. This act states that children are at risk if they experience abuse or in turn do not have their needs met.

Physical abuse is defined by HM Government (2015) as deliberately causing injuries to hurt a child. This can include physical violence such as being hit, burned or slapped. Recognising signs and symptoms of child abuse is important in safeguarding to protect children from significant harm. According to NSPCC Learning (2023) it is important to be aware of the signs of abuse, particularly if they are part of a pattern and an explanation does not justify the injuries. Physical symptoms can include bruises to areas not confined to legs, broken bones, burns and bite marks (Brighton and Hove Safeguarding Children Partnership, 2023).

Joanna's Teaching Assistant spotted a bruise on her ribs whilst she was nearby. This is an unusual place for a bruise to occur (Chappel, 2015). The Teaching Assistant will now question Joanna as to how she got the bruise. Another worrying sign of physical abuse in babies can be noted by head injuries, being sleepy and suffering breathing problems. There are also behavioural indicators of physical abuse. Child matters (2024) state examples such as a child being wary of adults or individuals, being aggressive towards others and not being able to recall how the injuries occurred. Joanna, in the case study is exhibiting behavioural indicators of physical abuse as she is reluctant to take off her

jumper, being afraid to show the bruises. Joanna has also been quiet and clingy, which is unusual behaviour for her.

Physical abuse can have long lasting effects on the health and development of children (Barnardo's, 2024; Welsh Government, 2015) such as anxiety, depression, social problems with peer relationships and post-traumatic stress disorder. Davies and Ward (2012) state that the impact of abuse causes implications for the development of children particularly in the first three `years of life suggesting that early intervention is important when safeguarding.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, and any concerns of abuse or neglect should be reported promptly to ensure the safety and welfare of the child, Section 11 of the (*Children Act 2004*). Practitioners need to be alert to signs of abuse and question behaviours of children if they act unusual or out of character (Welsh Government, no date). In addition, if a disclosure is made by the child, allegations must be taken seriously by recording the conversation and reassuring the child (HM Government, 2015). Joanna is displaying changes in her behaviour that are concerning. Her Teaching Assistant, who knows her well, recognises that Joanna being clingy and quiet is unusual (NSPCC, 2024b; Welsh Government 2021). The Teaching Assistant should now note these concerns and report to the class teacher and Designated Safeguarding Officer [DSO] where she will be advised to speak to the parents for an explanation and continue to monitor Joanna's behaviour (Ann Craft Trust, 2024). This can be a difficult conversation, but it is important to look out for the welfare of the child (Safeguarding Lewisham, no date) and reporting the concern can ensure children are protected from harm.

Records need to be clear and concise as they may be used in investigations and shared by multi agencies to track patterns of abuse whilst facilitating communication to ensure all parties are informed and can collaborate effectively. Leslie and Pritchard (2011) state that recording is a form of communication which allows sharing of information.

Practitioners should remain impartial so writing what is seen and heard is important, not

what is interpreted (NSPCC, 2024a). Information should be recorded as soon as possible to ensure accuracy and signed in pen and dated (Social Care Wales, no date). If what has been observed does not need immediate action, then information or observations can be completed regularly to identify changes in behaviour or physical condition (HM Government, 2023).

There are several ways to record information that have been observed or disclosed. Open-ended questioning can encourage the child to speak in their own words and allows practitioners to record what has been said (NSPCC, 2023). When questioning children, it is important to use age-appropriate language suitable to ensure they fully understand and can respond and avoid asking leading questions. This enables practitioners not to influence children's answers (Swansea University, 2023). After discovering a bruise to Joanna's rib, the Teaching Assistant questioned Joanna using an open question asking how she got the bruise. Joanna became upset immediately and became quiet and was reluctant to answer the question. This raised suspicion to the Teaching Assistant who added this concern to the report raised previously along with observations on Joanna's behaviour. Under Wales Safeguarding Procedures (2019) a report has been sent to Social Services to decide whether section 47 enquiries are needed.

When questioning children on a disclosure a non-judgmental approach is best to achieve evidence when making a report (British Council, no date). Practitioners must not jump to conclusions based on what they have been told. More information is needed to consider all possible explanations and consider a holistic understanding of the child's situation. This can be achieved by collaborating with other professionals (Department for Education, 2023).

Reporting and Referring Abuse

When reporting a concern, settings have safeguarding procedures that all staff must adhere to, to ensure that children's safety, well-being and rights are being considered in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC] (1991) to include safeguarding responsibilities. Articles 3, 12, 19, 24 and 34 state the best interests and rights of the child, which is important when listening to disclosures (Save the Children, no date). It also ensures children are protected from abuse and sexual exploitation accessing health services to preserve physical and mental health needs. This is supported by UNICEF (no date) embedding these principles into all the work they do supporting children. Reporting procedures should be a clear system where practitioners have responsibility to ensure that reports are acted upon at once.

Reporting a concern has many benefits for the child including immediate and long-term safety, support from health services, involvement from Social Services to support families and breaking the cycle with prevention and interventions. According to *Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014*, Individuals are given more control over the care and support received. Breaking the cycle of abuse can benefit children in many ways with Barnardo's (2020) suggesting early intervention can prevent mental health problems, academic achievement and be cost effective than treatment later in life.

However, reporting concerns comes with barriers such as lack of knowledge, cultural factors and emotional barriers which can make practitioners hesitant to report concerns. According to Safeguarding Wales (2024a) these factors can influence decisions to report. YouGov (2013) states that 59% of people were concerned about reporting over fears they were incorrect about an incident. NSPCC (2024) maintains that practitioners should seek advice from the whistleblowing helpline if worried and be assured that they are doing the right thing by raising their concerns (Safeguarding Matters, no date). Children may also be concerned about disclosing abuse to an adult. They may worry if the abuser is a family member and fear the consequences (Dewis Cymru, 2023).

Settings are responsible for ensuring policies and procedures are implemented and regularly updated, which must be communicated with all staff members (Estyn, 2023). Alongside this regular training is mandatory to keep up to date with improving legislation and reporting obligations (Social Care Wales, 2023). This ensures compliance with current legislation and identifies areas that require improvement. It is also good practice to refresh knowledge on signs and symptoms of abuse to ensure awareness while working with children (Public Health Wales, n.d.-a). If warning signs have been missed this leads to serious consequences for the vulnerable children who may suffer from abuse.

New staff to settings must undertake a Disclosure and Barring System check (Disclosure and Barring Service, 2019; Mind, 2022) to ensure they are suitable to work with children. Practitioners are also required to sign a code of conduct when working in a setting with children. National Council of Voluntary Organisations [NCVO] (2021) states that this can set out clear expectations telling people what they should and should not do in the setting. This is an important part of safeguarding where there is a clear understanding of how to behave. A code of conduct will contain standards and expectations of roles with practitioners signing to show they understand and agree to follow. Additionally, the *Social Services and Well-being Wales Act 2014* is made up of regulations and codes of practice to guide people to work within the law. This focuses on safeguarding to keep children safe from harm (Welsh Government, 2019).

Furthermore, Practitioners have a duty of care towards the children which includes taking action if concerned of their well-being (Public Health Wales, n.d.-b). This code ensures that the right steps are followed to demonstrate meeting this duty. As a result, failure to report a concern can lead to legal penalties or dismissal (Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse, 2022; Safeguarding Wales, 2024b).

Setting Responsibilities

Settings have a responsibility to ensure a holistic, open and effective approach to safeguarding. By creating and maintaining a safe environment and identifying well-being concerns with prompt action children will feel safe and have their well-being prioritised. This could lead to disclosures if trust is built between a child and practitioner (British Council, no date). This is supported by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs which considers safety as an important need such as security and minimising exposure to threats and harm (Interaction Design Foundation, 2021). Similarly, with the implementation of the new curriculum (Welsh Government 2019) children's well-being is incorporated into lessons as one of the main areas of learning. This allows children to learn about healthy relationships, how to keep safe and gain a sense of worth.

A child-centred approach to safeguarding is important to promote the welfare of children (Hampshire Safeguarding Partnership, 2024). This ensures there is focus on the child when making decisions that affect them when working in partnerships with them and their family. There are several legislations to support this such as the *Children Act 1989* and UNCRC (1991) taking their rights and views into account.

The UNCRC is a framework of rights and protections for children ensuring all children have access to education, healthcare and a safe environment including protection from abuse, exploitation and neglect. The principles including the child's best interests, non-discrimination and the right to be heard have been integrated in national laws and policies strengthening child protection systems. Section 19 of the UNCRC (Save the Children, no date) state children must be protected from abuse, neglect and violence.

Additionally, the primary goal of determining and evaluating the best interests of the child is to ensure they fully and effectively enjoy all rights recognised by the UNCRC and to support their overall development. According to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2024) the concept of the best interests is varied stating a substantive right where the best interests are assessed when making decisions affecting children and a rule of procedure where these decisions are evaluated to determine the impact on the child

(Information Commissioner's Office, no date). That is, every practitioner has a duty of care to keep children safe by reporting concerns based on their best interests.

When a child makes a disclosure, children should feel they are being listened to and allowed time to speak whilst being assured that the practitioner will take the information seriously and explain what is happening next (British Council, no date).

Furthermore, practitioners can maintain confidentiality (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2015; Data Protection Act, 2018) however, when only in the child's best interest. Information must be shared with people who can help keep the children safe (National Assembly for Wales, 2018). Social Services decide upon circumstances whether information regarding a disclosure is shared with parents. However, engagement with families to support children's safety is needed in a setting and at home emphasising preventative support (*Social Services and Well-being Wales Act 2014*).

In conclusion, this portfolio emphasises the importance of recognising and recording abuse, reporting and referring incidents, and supporting children's holistic well-being in settings. Identifying and documenting signs of abuse is essential for protecting children, involving a thorough understanding of various forms of abuse and accurate recording. Reporting and referring abuse require clear procedures for immediate action and legal compliance. Settings must create a safe and nurturing environment and implement policies. This comprehensive approach ensures children's protection and promotes their long-term welfare.

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