

Case Study 1

Recognising & Recording

Child abuse can involve any action or behaviour made by another person that can cause significant damage to a child (Fayaz, 2019). According to NICE (2017) child abuse can be emotional, physical or sexual, however Fayaz (2019) furthers this point by stating that abuse in children could be a lack of affection or attention. Recognizing the various forms of abuse within a school setting is crucial for all children within the practitioner's care. There are four types of child abuse stated by NSPCC (2010) as physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect, this coincides with the UK Government guidance of Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010 (HM Government, 2023) and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, section 3.

According to Appleton & Sidebotham (2017) physical abuse involves the causing of physical harm to the child, this could be through hitting, shaking or burning. Physical abuse can also be if a parent or caregiver deliberately induces or fabricates symptoms of illness in a child (HM Government, 2023). Appleton & Sidebotham (2017) further explain that the result of physical abuse can cause serious life-long problems which include the aspects of social, emotional and physical development, and in worse cases can be the result of serious injury or death. As stated by Maguire and Mann (2013) the most common sign of physical abuse is bruising, it is important for practitioners to understand the difference between the pattern of the bruising and its location on the child, these differences can help distinguish the difference between accidental and non-accidental bruising (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, National Collaborating Centre for Women's and Children's Health, 2009, p.26). However, Matthews et al (2017, p.425) claims that observing and assessing a bruise based on its appearance cannot be proof of mistreatment, therefore the Child Protection Social Workers study focused more on the history and explanations of the child and parents/ caregivers. Practitioners have the responsibility of protecting children when unexplained bruising appears on a child in their care (Department of Education, 2024). The identification of bruising can be the first indicator of potential abuse or neglect (Harris, 2009). Given their regular interaction with children, practitioners have a unique position to observe and ask relevant questions. Observing these children accurately can be the step towards early intervention and potentially prevent any further harm being made (NICE, 2017). The practitioner must help the child feel safe and in a supportive environment and the use of open- ended questions are vital. Open – ended questions allow the child to not feel pressured and have the ability to express their views (Ponizovsky-Bergelson et al., 2019). Research made by Clark & Statham (2005); Dayan & Ziv (2012) show that children between the ages of 3-6 are able to hold their own views, opinions and are able to show valuable perspectives. Faller (2020) states the practitioner should maintain a calm and non-judgemental demeanour and that in turn will allow the children to open up and volunteer an answer in a supportive environment without feeling intimidated. While observing the child, it is important for practitioners to document the observations and interactions meticulously (PACEY, 2016). If there are subsequent investigations or any interventions by child protection services, detailed records made by the practitioner play a crucial role. While recording information, it is important that all information is accurate and up to date while dealing with safeguarding concerns (The Education Safeguarding Service, 2018). This process is essential as any concerns noted may be of help when identifying patterns of abuse and help to identify concerns at an early stage (NICE, 2017). Whether it be minor issues in the school setting, these small concerns noted may help build a complete picture of what maybe the situation for the child. Note taking will help to monitor and manage safeguarding practises (Hojnoski et al, 2009) which can then help in the decision-making process. It is important that a practitioner follows their institution's protocol and guidelines while observing and documenting information for suspected abuse, while maintaining confidentiality the appropriate authorities should be contacted (GDPR, 2018).

In summary, observing a child in a school setting with bruising is critical for the child's welfare through safeguarding. Through observation, open-ended, empathetic questioning and diligent documentation, practitioners play a pivotal role in helping to identify potential abuse or neglect. This course of action ultimately contributes to a safer and supportive environment for all children and families.

Reporting and Referral

Preston (2023) explains that the practise of safeguarding in school settings is crucial and continues to explain that safeguarding procedures will not only protect the children but can help safeguard the staff. There are two key statutory guidance documents that all educational settings must adhere to; Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) which has a main focus on the practical elements of the setting (Department for Education, 2023) and Working Together to Safeguard Children which helps direct multi-agency arrangements (GOV.UK, 2023). NSPCC (2024) states that any organisations that has contact with children should have these key safeguarding procedures in place to help ensure the children's safety from other that may become a risk. NCFE (2021) defines the role of safeguarding as protecting the health and wellbeing of children and adults along with their human rights as per The UN Conventions on Rights of a Child (UNCRC, 2022) which will help enable all to live safely, while being free from abuse and/or neglect. The Social Services & Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 provides the legislative framework that helps with the safeguarding of children and young people in Wales (Social Care Wales, 2014). Whether safeguarding an adult or a child from abuse or neglect this legislation is in place alongside Working Together to Safeguard People and The Children Act 2004. The Children Act 2004 aims to be a integrate children's service with aims to not only promote early intervention when signs of abuse appear in children and young adults, but to encourage multiple professionals in multi-disciplinary teams, in order to achieve successful and positive outcomes for children and young adults along with their families. This legislation coincides with the launch of Every Child Matters: Change for Children (GOV, 2003). The launch of this major strategy is broken down into 25 specific aims in which local authorities can use to help build their own programme for change.

When suspected abuse arises in a school setting, the child's welfare is paramount (The Children's Society, 2020). The reporting and referral process and procedures are critical when ensuring the well-being and safety of the children (Wekerle, 2012). The processes of protecting the child from harm are governed by ethical frameworks, statutory requirements and guidelines on policies (GOV,UK, 2022) these help ensure the appropriate steps are taken. Within education statutory requirements are the backbone of safeguarding procedures in many countries. In the UK, the Children Act 1989 and 2004 have a mandate for schools to promote the welfare and safeguarding of children, alongside the Education Act 2022 (GOV.UK, 2022) School settings have the responsibility to adhere to the guidance that is provided and it helps outline the responsibilities that all school staff have when working with children and when there is suspected signs of abuse. Practitioners are legally obligated to report any information or potential suspicions of neglect or abuse to designated safeguarding officers within the setting. The safeguarding officer will then have the responsibility to determine whether a referral to external agencies is necessary (Hughes & Owen, 2009) with the main focus of the welfare of the child at hand. If information is not passed onto relevant authorities or to comply with the statutory obligations provided, this can result in serious consequences not only for the school but for the individuals involved (SCIE, 2019).

Reporting and referring suspected abuse is vital, however Forsner, Elvhage, Ewalds-Kvist & Lutzen (2021) explains that there are many barriers to this process. For practitioners to understand these limitations, it will positively help to improve the process for safeguarding, this will ensure the outcomes to be better for children that are in a vulnerable situation at home. School staff that may not be adequately trained may have difficulty in recognising signs of abuse (Chambers, Cantrell & Booth, 2021). This could then lead to

concerns not being reported. Goldman (2007) agrees by explaining that insufficient training in school settings may result in a lack of confidence by the practitioner through the process of identifying and reporting abuse. Teachers and staff in the school setting form relationships with families throughout the academic year, Tufford et al., (2020) asserts that practitioners may avoid reporting these signs due to personal or professional repercussions. Kenny (2001) underpins this by stating that staff may not volunteer information with the chance of damaging relationships with parents, experiencing retaliation from families or with facing legal consequences. Conversely, Appleton (2021) assert that early reporting can help lead to early intervention and can help mitigate long-term harm. Which can in turn present a better outcome for both the child and their family. Fontes & Plummer (2010) further explain that within many cultural and societal norms, discussing the topic may be taboo with the stigma around abuse and may impact the willingness of the practitioner to report. Erooga (2012) contend this by explaining that by addressing abuse can help contribute to a culture of safety within the school and will reassure the parents and all staff involved that the school is committed to safeguarding. Horwath & Morrison (2011) mitigate that the multi-agency collaboration can sometimes hinder the timely intervention due to a referral being complex. While multi-agencies are vital through the process, this element can sometimes result in the breakdown of communication. However, Baginsky & Manthorpe (2021) argue that once an issue has been reported, children gain support that help address their physical, emotional and psychological needs through the access of social services and counselling. While many findings show that there are significant barriers to reporting and referring suspected abuse for children within the school setting, the benefits of reporting these issues underscore the importance of overcoming these obstacles. Fostering a culture of honesty and confidentiality are fundamental steps to enhance safeguarding practices and the effect they have on families.

3. Setting Responsibilities

A holistic approach in a school setting in regards to safeguarding involves addressing the comprehensive needs of all children. This is important as it ensures their safety, well-being, and development (Kellock, 2020). This approach in a school setting helps recognise that safeguarding is about promoting their overall welfare as well as protecting them from harm. Baginsky & Manthorpe (2021) state that school have a duty to ensure students physical safety, this can be maintained by ensuring secure premises, implementing health and safety policies and procedures while conducting risk assessments regularly. Another factor to consider while in a child-based environment is emotional safety. Durlak et al (2011) states that emotional wellbeing is critical. Within the school setting, a supportive environment where children feel heard and valued is important. A few examples on how this can be achieved are by creating a counselling service for children to voice their problems and opinions, putting anti-bullying policies and programs in place that help promote mental health. Alongside these policies and guidance, school setting should have clear safeguarding policies in place as stated by the Department for Education, (2021). These policies should show guidance to students on how to report concerns and help manage them correctly, while stating who the designated safeguarding officer is and what their role consists of. Safeguarding training for all staff members in the school setting should run coherently (Tate, 2016). Tate (2016) explains that development for staff is vital and training should cover the recognition of abuse signs and responses. Goldman (2007) furthers this by stating that all staff members should understand the ethical and legal frameworks that surrounds safeguarding and subsequent updates should always be reported to the staff to ensure well rounded knowledge. Schools should establish links with multi-agencies such as social services and healthcare providers, this approach will help ensure a coordinated response when it comes to safeguarding concerns (Sidebotham et al., 2016). While sharing information regarding children to relevant agencies, schools must have protocols in place, this will help ensure data protection and confidentiality, this aligns with the GDPR policy (GDPR, 2018). It is of upmost importance to teach all children about their rights of life, in line with the United Nations Convention Rights of the Child (UNCRC, n.d). This includes educating them on their rights, how to seek help if they are in a

vulnerable position and how to recognise signs of abuse. Children in the school setting should also be taught the risks of online content, with the increase use of technology digital safety is paramount. Livingstone et al., (2011) explains that there should be policies clearly stated that show what acceptable use of technology is while being educated about the risks that can occur from being online. Mathews et al (2009) is in agreement that awareness of safeguarding issues is important, Mathews explains that parents are an integral part to a child's safeguarding. Providing resources and keeping regular contact with families helps build awareness to these issues while creating a supporting network around the child. While Erooga (2012) explains that building ties with the community effectively creates a protective environment for all children both in and out of school.

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