

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

1. STATEMENT OF INTENT

1.1 Streetlight has a responsibility to protect and safeguard the welfare of children. The need for written guidelines is important in ensuring that this is done with understanding and clarity.

1.2 In its work with children Streetlight is committed to:

- a) Listening, relating effectively to and valuing children whilst ensuring their protection within its activities.
- b) Encouraging and supporting parents/carers.

1.3 It is recognised that many children today are the victims of neglect and physical, sexual and emotional abuse. The policy sets out agreed guidelines relating to the following areas:

- Recognising and responding to abuse.
- What to do if suspected abuse occurs.

2. PRACTICAL ISSUES

2.1 Streetlight recognises the need to build constructive links with child care agencies. Accordingly, we liaise with Social Services and they are familiar with our work.

3. RECOGNISING ABUSE

The following may be indications of child abuse, but they should not be taken in isolation.

3.1 PHYSICAL SIGNS

- Any injuries not consistent with the explanation given for them.
- Injuries which occur to the body in places which are not normally exposed to falls, rough games, etc.
- Injuries which have not received medical attention.
- Bruises, bites, burns, fractures, etc., which do not have an accidental explanation.
- Cutting, slashing, drug abuse.

3.2 INDICATORS OF POSSIBLE SEXUAL ABUSE

- Any allegation made by a child concerning sexual abuse.
- Child with excessive pre-occupation with sexual matters and detailed knowledge of adult sexual behaviour.
- Sexual activity through words, play or drawings.
- Child who is sexually provocative or seductive with adults.
- Inappropriate bed-sharing arrangements at home.

- Severe sleep disturbances with fears, phobias, vivid dreams or nightmares, sometimes with overt or veiled sexual connotations.

3.3 EMOTIONAL SIGNS

- Changes or regression in mood and behaviour, particularly where a child withdraws or becomes clingy. Also depression/aggression.
- Nervousness/frozen watchfulness.
- Sudden under-achievement or lack of concentration.
- Inappropriate relationships with peers and/or adults.
- Attention seeking behaviour.
- Persistent tiredness.
- Running away, stealing, and lying.
- It is important that the above are not taken as indicating that abuse has taken place, but the possibility should be considered far more than in the past.

4. WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT ABUSE MAY HAVE OCCURRED

4.1 Any concerns must be reported as soon as possible to the Co-ordinator. Child Protection Co-ordinator (hereafter the Co-ordinator)

- Helena Croft mobile number 07886115953.
- In the absence of the Co-ordinator the matter should be brought to the attention of the Executive Assistant mobile number 07423835273.
- In the event of both persons being absent the matter should be brought to the attention of Trustee, Simon Coles, telephone number 01293 851543 mobile number 07860338057.

4.2 CONFIDENTIALITY

You should not discuss your suspicions with anyone other than those noted above, including anyone related to the child. You should not speak to the parent, as there is always the possibility that they could be involved. For example, a child may say that he/she has been abused by an older young person. In reality the perpetrator could be a parent or close relative, but naming another young person may be the only way this child could seek help. Only in the case of suspected neglect may you discuss the matter with the parents with the knowledge and support of the Co-ordinator.

4.3 ROLE OF THE CO-ORDINATOR

Once you have referred to the Co-ordinator, the Project Manager or in the absence of the Project Manager a Trustee, you will refer suspicions or allegations of neglect or abuse to a Social Services Child Protection Officer or the Police Child Protection Team.

The Co-ordinator does not have to refer every suspicion reported to them, but will document all incidents and communicate action taken by them to the Trustees. Care must be taken by the Co-ordinator to ensure that they neither under-react nor over-react. If they are in any doubt they may seek advice from Social Services.

The Co-ordinator may share limited information and concerns on a need-to-know basis with Trustees, carefully respecting the need for confidentiality.

Under no circumstances will the Co-ordinator attempt to carry out any investigation into the allegations or suspicions of neglect or abuse, neither will they discuss the concerns with anyone else. The role of the Co-ordinator is to collect and clarify precise details of the

allegation or suspicion and to provide this information to the statutory authorities, whose task it is to investigate the matter under Section 47 of the Children's Act 1989.

4.4 MAKING A REFERRAL

Volunteers and Employees. If possible, after a disclosure has been made write down the following details and give to the Co-ordinator:

- a) Child's Name
- b) Address
- c) Date of Birth
- d) Where parents/carers can be contacted
- e) Information about the circumstances or injuries which cause concern
- f) Any explanation or comment the child or their parents/carers may have made

4.5 CO-ORDINATOR

Phone Social Services and ask for the duty social worker (key worker where known).

State your own name clearly and reason for making contact (using details given by volunteer)

Make a record of the name of the person spoken to at the Social Services Department, plus the date and time.

4.6 PHYSICAL INJURY OR NEGLECT

If a child has a physical injury or symptom of neglect:

- The Project Manager (or Team Leader who may be known to the primary carer) will speak with the primary carer and suggest medical help/attention is sought for the child. The doctor will then initiate further action, if necessary. If appropriate the primary carer will be encouraged to seek help from the Social Services Department.
- If the primary carer is unwilling to seek help, then it may be appropriate for a Team Leader or volunteer to offer to go with them. If they still fail to act the Co-ordinator should in cases of real concern contact Social Services for advice.
- Where emergency medical attention is necessary then this should, of course, be sought immediately by telephoning for an ambulance. The hospital will automatically make a referral to Social Services if they feel there is a case of neglect or abuse.

4.7 SEXUAL ABUSE

Whilst allegations or suspicions of sexual abuse will normally be reported to the Co-ordinator or Project Manager, the absence of either party should not delay referral to the Social Services Department. Exceptionally, should there be any disagreement between the person in receipt of the allegation, or suspicion, and the Co-ordinator or Project Manager as to the appropriateness of a referral to the Social Services Department, that person retains the responsibility as a member of the public to report serious matters to Social Services and should do so without hesitation.

4.8 SEEKING ADVICE

Where the Co-ordinator and/or Project Manager is unsure whether or not to refer a case to the Social Services, then advice from the Agency will be sought and followed. The Agency will confirm its advice in writing in case this is needed for reference purposes in the future.

5. HOW TO REACT WHEN A CHILD WANTS TO TALK ABOUT ABUSE

It is not easy to give precise guidance but the following may be of help.

5.1 GENERAL POINTS

- Accept what the child says (however unlikely the story might sound).
- Keep calm.
- Look at the child directly.
- Be honest.
- Let them know you will need to tell someone else – don't promise confidentiality.
- Even when a child has broken a rule they are not to blame for any ensuing abuse.
- Be aware that the child may have been threatened.
- Never push for information.
- Do not suggest what might have happened.

5.2 WHO ABUSES CHILDREN

- Very rarely a stranger.
- Often someone who knows the child, e.g. parent, carer, babysitter, sibling, relative or friend of the family.
- Sometimes someone in authority such as a teacher, youth leader, children's worker or a church worker/leader.
- Sometimes paedophiles and others set out to join organisations (including churches) to obtain access to children.

5.3 HELPFUL THINGS TO SAY OR SHOW

- I believe you (or showing acceptance of what the child says).
- It is important that you have told.
- It's not your fault.
- I will help you.

5.4 AVOID SAYING

- Why didn't you tell anyone before?
- I can't believe it.
- Are you sure this is true?
- Why? How? When? Who? Where?
- Never make false promises.
- Never make statements such as 'I am shocked, don't tell anyone else'.

5.5 CONCLUDING THE DISCUSSION

Again, reassure the child that they were right to tell you and that you believe them.

Let the child know what you are going to do next and let them know what happens.

The person to whom the child has made a disclosure may be involved in any further case conferences with Social Services so that the project is able to continue supporting the child.

5.6 WHAT TO DO ONCE A CHILD HAS TALKED TO YOU ABOUT ABUSE

- Immediately refer to the Co-ordinator who must inform the Social Services of all disclosures. See Section 4.
- Make notes as soon as possible (preferably within one hour of conversation), writing down exactly what the child said and when he/she said it and what was happening immediately beforehand (e.g. description of activity). Record dates and times of these events and when you have made the record, keep all hand written notes even if subsequently typed up.

6. VOLUNTEERS' SELF-PROTECTION

Because of the concerns of child abuse and in particular child sexual abuse, it is important that all adults involved in working with children have guidelines for self-protection to avoid instances of false allegations against them. Although it is rare that someone is falsely accused, IT CAN HAPPEN. The following steps help to minimise this possibility: Be proactive – unless it is unavoidable no worker has to be on their own with individual children.

In the event of an injury to a child, accidental or otherwise, ensure that it is recorded and witnessed by another adult on the Incident Report Log.

Keep written records of any false allegations a child makes against yourself. Inform another team member if it becomes clear that a child appears to have a dislike for you.

Get another adult to witness the allegation if possible.

If a child touches a worker in an inappropriate place or manner, record what happened immediately and ensure that another worker is informed immediately.

7. PRACTICAL ISSUES CONCERNING THE STREETLIGHT PROJECT

7.1 INVOLVEMENT WITH CHILDREN

Streetlight works with women involved in prostitution through offering regular practical and emotional support, whilst visiting Brothels and places of work for women in the sex industry. The importance of this Child Protection Policy is to support and protect young women working in prostitution, to support and protect volunteers and also to deal with issues that might arise from the children of older women working in prostitution.

7.2 YOUNG PEOPLE UNDER THE AGE OF 18 WORKING IN PROSTITUTION

Child prostitution is any form of sexual exploitation of a child which involves payment or reward of some kind (i.e. money, drugs and alcohol, accommodation, food, etc.). The Children's Act 1989 defines any person under the age of 18 as a child.

Some young people may not recognise that they are in an exploitative relationship, although this may be clear to those around them. Young people engaging in sexual activity in return for clothes, money, somewhere to stay or favours will not always see themselves as being involved in prostitution. They may have been groomed over a period of time and formed an emotional attachment to either an abuser or someone who is coercing them. They may be compliant and/or subject to manipulation by a coercer, or subject to threats of harm to themselves or others. All children involved in prostitution are being sexually exploited, even if they appear to be engaging in the activity voluntarily. Most children who are drawn into prostitution are vulnerable, and, due to their age, circumstances and past experiences, are unable to give truly 'informed' consent to the activity.

Sexually exploited children face immense risks to their physical, emotional and psychological health, and are viewed by the project as victims of abuse. Action will be taken on the basis of both supporting the young person and protection, and safeguarding and promoting their welfare.

If a volunteer meets a child who is working in prostitution and is under the age of 18 this must be reported immediately to the Co-ordinator.

While we recognise that issues relating to prostitution require an inter-agency approach and prostitution of children may involve children who are not known to the police or to social services, confidentiality will be protected as far as possible and information shared on a need to know and need to protect basis.

If there are enough details about the child, then the Co-ordinator will contact social services. Sometimes it will not be possible to take the matter further because the child may refuse to disclose their name or age. If this is the case then the Co-ordinator will make a note of the information available and keep a record of any further dealings with this individual. If at any time the child makes further disclosures this will be reported to the Co-ordinator and subsequently to social services.

8. CHILDREN OF OLDER WOMEN WORKING IN PROSTITUTION

Sometimes disclosures are made about the children of women working in prostitution. Where there is the suspicion or allegation of neglect and abuse towards the children of the working women, this must be reported immediately to the Co-ordinator.

EXAMPLE

DBS policy own guidelines

As recipients of disclosure information, Streetlight will observe the guidance issued by the DBS.

When informing personnel and applicants about DBS disclosures

- The subject of a disclosure will be informed of the existence of this process and a copy will be made available to them on request.
- Application forms for volunteer positions at Streetlight will contain a statement that a disclosure will be requested in the event of a successful application.
- Application forms will state that a criminal record will not necessarily be a bar to obtaining volunteer position in order to reassure applicants that disclosure information will not be used unfairly.

When initiating a DBS check

- If fears are expressed by the person asked to complete a DBS disclosure form, feelings will be explored sensitively, explaining why DBS checks are undertaken.
- If concerns remain in spite of an explanation and reassurance, it may indicate that there is information the person does not wish to disclose. This will be gently explored.

The Child Protection Co-ordinator will follow the guidelines laid out in Item 3 above.

9. TEAM DYNAMICS

9.1 WORKING TOGETHER

It is essential that workers encourage and support each other.

Team Meetings will be held as often as is felt necessary. A written record will be kept concerning issues discussed/decisions made.

9.2 DISCIPLINING VOLUNTEERS

Concern about the behaviour of anyone working with children should be referred to the Project Manager who should speak sensitively to the person concerned at the appropriate time. If the person is responsive it need be taken no further but the Project Manager should monitor the person sensitively in future events. In the same way, concern about the Project Manager should be brought in a sensitive way. If the Project Manager is not responsive then the issues should be brought to the attention of the Chairman of Trustees.

9.3 WHEN HANDLING DISCLOSURE INFORMATION

- Streetlight will not pass disclosure information to persons not authorised to receive it. It is a criminal offence to pass this information to anyone not entitled to receive it.
- Streetlight will ensure that disclosures are available only to those who need access in the course of their duties. A record will be kept of all those to whom disclosures or disclosure information is revealed.
- Streetlight will securely store disclosures separate from the applicant's personal file in a lockable, non-portable cabinet.
- Disclosure information must only be used for the purpose for which it was requested and for which the applicant's full permission has been given.
- Streetlight will not retain the disclosures, or a record of them, for more than is required. In general, this will be no longer than 6 months.
- Once the retention period has lapsed, disclosure information must be suitably destroyed by secure means i.e. shredding, pulping or burning. No copies may be made.