Responding to observations of harm involving an adult

By following these key steps, education and care staff can effectively address safeguarding concerns, ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children while maintaining professional standards and personal wellbeing.

PAUSE AND TAKE A BREATH



- Observing harm involving an adult can be confronting.
- Staff may feel shocked, angry, uncertain, or worried about what to do next.
- Taking a moment to steady yourself can help you remain calm and focus on what matters most - the child's safety and wellbeing.

ACT ON CONCERNS, NOT CERTAINTY



- Staff do not need proof that harm has occurred before taking action. If a safeguarding concern has been directly observed, the priority is to support children's safety and prevent further harm.
- Avoid dismissing concerns because they seem minor, isolated, or difficult to interpret.
- It is better to raise a concern and seek guidance than to overlook behaviour that may place a child at risk.

ACKNOWLEDGE FEAR AND BARRIERS TO ACTION



- When harm involving an adult is observed, it can be difficult to act.
- Staff may worry about challenging another adult, getting it wrong, damaging relationships, or the consequences of speaking up.
- These concerns are understandable, but they should never prevent action being taken to protect a child.
- Child safety must always be the priority.

PRIORITISE IMMEDIATE CHILD SAFETY



- If a child is at risk of harm, act immediately to support their safety and wellbeing.
- Consider the safety of all children involved and take steps to prevent further harm from occurring.

STEP IN AND SET CLEAR BOUNDARIES

- Where it is safe to do so, intervene and clearly communicate that the behaviour must stop. Focus on stopping the behaviour and creating safety for the child rather than debating, investigating, or assigning blame in the moment.

CREATE SAFETY AND SEPARATION

- Where appropriate, separate the child and any other affected children from the adult involved.
- Ensure children are supervised, supported, and physically and emotionally safe while further action is taken.

SUPPORT THE CHILD



- Children who experience harm may feel frightened, confused, embarrassed, or distressed.
- Respond calmly and respectfully. Listen if the child wishes to talk, reassure them that their safety is important, and avoid asking leading or investigative questions.

ESCALATE, DOCUMENT, AND REPORT



- Concerns involving adults require prompt action.
- Record what was observed using factual and objective language.
- Follow organisational policies and legal reporting requirements and share information only with those who need to know.

MAINTAIN PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES AND CONFIDENTIALITY



- Do not investigate the concern yourself if this is not within your role or discuss it with people who do not need to be involved.
- Follow organisational processes and allow the appropriate people or authorities to manage the response.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF



- Directly observing harm involving an adult can be distressing.
- Seek support from a supervisor or manager if needed and use available wellbeing supports.
- Looking after yourself can help you continue to support children and participate effectively in safeguarding responses.

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A national Child Safety Reform initiative