

VIBRANT NATION

Reporting and Sharing a Safeguarding Concern



Introduction

Hearing that a child or adult may be at risk from harm is difficult. Hearing it from the child or adult themselves, when they have summoned up the courage to tell someone is even more difficult. Emotions are likely to run high and our ability to think coherently and judge a situation objectively is clouded. Very often we might want to deny that abuse or neglect could be happening, we find it hard to believe that this could happen in our communities and clubs.

We might tell ourselves that someone else must know about this and that something is being done. We assume that steps are in place to deal with it. We are naturally wary of repeating what we've heard as we have usually been taught from a young age not to tell tales, not to gossip.

It is a sad fact that poor information and late reporting of safeguarding issues directly relates to poor outcomes for the child or adult concerned. We all have an equal duty to promptly report a concern to a manager or safeguarding lead within our club or organisation.

This short document will deal with sharing a concern about a child or adult at risk, how this can be done without breaking any laws and how to keep information secure.

What about GDPR?

There has been a lot of confusion and misinformation about data protection law and the ability to report a safeguarding concern about a child or adult at risk. Many people wrongly assume that you cannot report a concern to anyone without the consent of the people involved. This is simply not true. We always remember our key consideration: **The safety and wellbeing of the child or adult at risk is paramount.**

Do not be persuaded that putting a child's welfare at risk is a consequence of the data protection act or GDPR, both these data protection laws allow the recording and sharing of concerns about the welfare and safeguarding of children and adults at risk.

How to report a concern

Hopefully your organisation has a process that outlines what you need to do in the event of becoming aware of a safeguarding concern. This process is there to help guide you in deciding what information you should share and who you should share it with.

As a general rule, you must always notify your manager or supervisor about any concern you may have. It is also important that you act in a timely manner. If you feel that the circumstances are an emergency and the child or adult at risk may come to direct and immediate harm, you should notify the police and social services.

Do I need consent?

In the simplest terms – no, you don't need consent to share a safeguarding concern. But we need to consider a few things first! It is better to get consent from people before you share a concern, but you are allowed to share without consent if not sharing the concern would risk the wellbeing of the child or adult at risk concerned.

The trickiest part of the whole consent issue is when a child has made a disclosure and asked you not to tell anyone. You must never tell a child that you will keep their disclosure a secret, you must report the concern and if you have promised to keep it secret you will lose the trust of the child. Tell them that you need to tell someone so that they can get the help they need and deserve.

If you have been informed about a concern by someone other than the child, ask the informer if it is OK to pass on their name when you report the matter to your manager or safeguarding lead, but be clear that you will pass on the information they have given you in any event but without their name unless it is vital to the welfare of the child.

Recording information properly

You will usually have a template to fill in to report a concern. This template will aid you in recording the right information in enough detail for it to be the most useful. It is worth familiarising yourself with the documentation before you need to use any of it for real. If you are uncertain about any information the form requests, seek the advice of your safeguarding lead.

Make sure that the recorded information is about the **FACTS** rather than opinions, but the opinions of the child or adult at risk should be recorded as the impact that the circumstances have had on them is important. Also ensure that the timeline of information is included so that current and historical facts are clearly identified. Make sure that dates are completed correctly, and the report signed as indicated on the document.

Keep your written report secure

You need to be very careful to keep the information you are recording secure and confidential. This is equally important for both a paper-based reporting form and one filled out on a computer. Imagine the damage that would be caused if the information were to be stolen and placed all over the internet. Imagine the damage to your organisation, personal reputations and above all else the catastrophic harm it may cause to a child or adult at risk. You need to be able to ensure as far as possible that this cannot happen.

Your club or organisation should provide you with guidance on keeping information secure. If you have not received any guidance, ask your manager to arrange for the information and/or training as appropriate.

Report the concern quickly

Avoid any delays in sharing information with your manager or safeguarding lead. If the matter is urgent or the situation serious, share the information quickly. ideally all concerns should be reported **within 24 hours**.

Follow the process provided in your club or organisation's safeguarding guide. Don't be put off by the time of day or day of the week. Pick up the phone and ring the relevant people to make sure that they are aware of the concern. Always ask to be kept informed and don't be afraid to chase up for feedback or to make sure that something is being done. Remember our key concern: **The safety and wellbeing of the child or adult at risk is paramount**.

Blowing the whistle

If you see something happen at your club or organisation that causes concern, never be afraid to report it. Whistleblowers are afforded protection under the Public Interest Disclosure Act which alters employment laws concerning any reprisals or other detriments in the workplace as a consequence of reporting concerns. Organisations have a duty to protect those that blow the whistle on bad practices.

This can be difficult if you are raising a concern about someone you may be friends with or otherwise have a high regard for. Very often, the simple act of raising the concern and the consequential handling of the issue will make the person you were concerned about better at their job and more aware of their own behaviour toward children. It is easy to become overbearing or to inadvertently bully a participant in an endeavour to help them

perform better. Often, coaches and trainers are pleased if it is pointed out that they are not acting in the best interests of the child as it is not their intention to cause upset or harm.

Always use the correct reporting mechanism though. Don't be tempted to 'have a quiet word' or tell someone 'off the record'. Don't be tempted to try and sort it out yourself, this is inappropriate and could cause harm.

Keeping mum

If you are made aware of an issue or have observed something and reported it, don't discuss it with anyone other than your manager or safeguarding lead. Other people might ask questions to find out what is happening or otherwise try and get some gossip. Don't be drawn into any conversation about a safeguarding issue. Don't confirm or deny speculation and if people are persistent, report this to your manager or safeguarding lead as rumours can be very harmful, even if they are true.

Also, don't be tempted to discuss it with anyone outside the organisation (unless it is the police or social services in an emergency). If you are struggling to deal with the situation on a personal level, ask for guidance from your manager, never feel that you have to deal with what might be a very upsetting issue on your own.

Summary

We must always remember our key consideration: **The safety and wellbeing of the child or adult at risk is paramount.**

Familiarise yourself with the safeguarding processes in your club or organisation. Ask for training if it is available. Also check out the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit website for lots of advice and information (<https://thecpsu.org.uk/>).

Timely reports result in better outcomes. GDPR is not a barrier to reporting.

Never agree to keep a disclosure by a child or adult at risk a secret. Always be honest about the next steps and the need to report the concern to enable the individual to get the help they need and deserve.

Keep the information secure and confidential – don't gossip or fuel any rumours.

If you need help, ask for it. Don't struggle on your own.