

## **FordHaven Allegation & Concern Policy**

Any allegation or concern that a Trustee, Team Member or Volunteer has behaved in a way that has harmed, or may have harmed, a child must be taken seriously and dealt with sensitively and promptly, regardless of where the alleged incident took place.

Depending on the situation, an appropriate response may involve:

- the police investigating a possible criminal offence
- your local child protection services making enquiries and/or assessing whether a child is in need of support
- FordHaven following the relevant disciplinary procedures with individuals concerned.

You should also make sure any children involved are given appropriate support.

Likewise, allegations against parents/carers, other children and/or other adults, also need to be reported and investigated.

This policy includes details of:

- What happens if FordHaven has a safeguarding concern about a child?
- What happens if a child discloses that they or another child are being abused?
- What happens if an allegation is made against a parent/carer?
- What happens if an allegation is made against a Trustee, Team Member or Volunteer at FordHaven?
- What happens if an allegation is made against a child?
- How can parents/carers report a safeguarding concern?
- What safeguarding information is FordHaven required to record and/or report?
- What information should parents/carers and professionals inform FordHaven about?

## **What happens if FordHaven has a safeguarding concern about a child?**

A FordHaven Team Member will discuss any concerns they have with a child's parent/carer if they have it brought to their attention or notice:

- significant changes in a child's behaviour;
- deterioration in a child's general wellbeing and/or appearance;
- unexplained bruising, marks or signs of possible abuse or neglect;
- children's comments which give cause for concern;
- any reasons to suspect neglect or abuse outside the setting, e.g. family member/friend.

However, if FordHaven believes that it would put the child at risk of further harm or if the concerns relate to potential sexual abuse, they would report these concerns immediately without questioning the parents/carers.

If it was felt that a child was in immediate danger, the police would be contacted immediately.

## **What happens if a child discloses that they or another child are being abused?**

Children and young people may not always be aware that they are disclosing abuse through their actions and behaviour. Sometimes children and young people make partial disclosures of abuse. This means they give some details about what they've experienced, but not the whole picture. They may withhold some information because they:

- » are afraid they will get in trouble with or upset their family;
- » want to deflect blame in case of family difficulties as a result of the disclosure;
- » feel ashamed and/or guilty;
- » need to protect themselves from having to relive traumatic events.'

Children and young people may disclose abuse in a variety of ways, including:

- » directly – making specific verbal statements about what's happened to them;
- » indirectly – making ambiguous verbal statements which suggest something is wrong;
- » behaviourally – displaying behaviour that signals something is wrong (this may or may not be deliberate);
- » non-verbally – writing letters, drawing pictures or trying to communicate in other ways.'

If a child makes a disclosure, FordHaven will:

- show that they have heard what the child is saying and that they take their allegations seriously;
- find a quiet place for them to talk without being overheard (if this does not disrupt the flow of their disclosure);
- listen carefully, without rushing them and show that we are interested in what they have to say;
- reassure the child that they can tell us anything that is worrying them but that we cannot promise to keep it a secret because some things have to be passed on in order to keep children safe;
- encourage the child to talk, without prompting them or asking them leading questions. We will not interrupt while a child is recalling significant events and will not make a child repeat their account. We may however ask them for specific details to clarify something, if necessary, using open phrases such as 'Tell us about...', 'Explain to us...' and/or 'Describe to us...';
- reassure the child that we are here to help them stay safe and that we will do our best to do so.
- explain what actions we must take, in a way that is appropriate to the age and understanding of the child;
- record what we have been told, as soon as we can, using exact words where possible;
- make a note of the date, time, place and people who were present during the disclosure.

If we have a concern about the child's welfare, we will call the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership for advice and an assessment of the situation.

We will follow up this phone call at a later date if we obtain any further information on the matter, either from the child or a family member.

We will record the concern and all contact with the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership along with conversations with children, parents/carers and witnesses in a safeguarding log, which will be kept locked away securely for the legally required length of time.

We will ensure that confidential phone calls are not overheard by anyone else and will not discuss safeguarding matters with anyone other than those necessary in order to report our concerns.

## **What happens if an allegation is made against a parent/carers?**

An allegation or concern does not necessarily mean that parents/carers will be reported to the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership for abuse.

Any comments that a child makes or potential signs of abuse that have been noticed will be written down in a child's safeguarding record.

Depending on the individual situation, these may or may not be passed on to the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership at that time.

We may discuss our concerns with the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership to obtain advice.

It may also be the case that a minor concern does not meet the local threshold for intervention and will be noted but no further action taken at that time.

It is a DSL's legal duty to record any potential safeguarding concerns, judging the severity of the individual situation to decide on a course of action.

Actions may involve some or all of the following:

- further discussion with the child, asking them to clarify their account (without any leading questions or putting words into their mouth);
- a discussion with parents/carers to ask for their version of events (if safe and appropriate to do so);
- a discussion with the Local Safeguarding Partners team asking for advice;
- passing on the child's details and safeguarding records to Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership for them to investigate the matter.

If a child's immediate safety is potentially at risk, the police could also be contacted.

This would be in the form of an emergency call to 999, if the situation warranted urgent action to protect a child from serious harm.

## **What would happen if an allegation was made against an employee or volunteer at FordHaven?**

An allegation might be made if it is believed that somebody within the setting has:

- harmed a child;
- put a child at risk of harm;
- neglected to keep a child safe from harm;
- acted in an unprofessional manner that suggests they might pose a risk to children;
- committed a criminal offence that relates to a child.

In order to reduce the likelihood of such as accusations occurring, we have a thorough Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy in place, detailing how we will keep children safe. All Trustees, Team Members and Volunteers will have had suitability checks. In addition, we will follow our Safer Recruitment policy.

Despite best efforts to protect the children in the setting, allegations might still be made. If any allegations of abuse are made against a Trustee, Team Member, a Volunteer, a visitor, or another child in the setting, we would:

- write a detailed record of all related incidents, including what was said and by whom, with times and dates;
- ask any witnesses (if applicable) to write a statement detailing the incident they observed and to provide their contact details in case it needs to be followed up by the authorities;
- contact our Local Authority's LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) for guidance;
- check our Local Authority's website for details of where we could access advice and support;
- notify NACCC, as well as our public liability insurance provider;
- suspend our services until a full investigation into the matter has been completed, if advised to do so.

### **What happens if an allegation is made against a child?**

Sometimes there may be an accusation of 'child-on-child abuse', where a child has been accused of abusing another child. This is also sometimes called 'peer-on-peer abuse'.

Incidents of child-on-child abuse may become a safeguarding concern, if:

- significant harm is caused;
- it involves sexualised behaviour;
- the abuse is repetitive rather than a one-off occurrence;
- it is expected that the abuser is mimicking abuse they themselves have suffered or witnessed;
- there is a significant difference in age/size/ability/power between the abuser and their victim;
- the child who is being abused is particularly vulnerable.

In any such cases, Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership should be contacted for advice on how to appropriately support the abuser and the victim(s).

For other less serious incidents involving children behaving inappropriately, FordHaven's Behaviour Code should be used to help children to adapt their behaviour.

Where appropriate, families may also need to be signposted to external agencies who are able to offer support and guidance

### **How can parents/carers report a safeguarding concern?**

If a parent/carer is concerned about the welfare of a child and has seen or heard something that they feel needs to be reported, they can discuss it with us, if appropriate, or report it directly themselves. Allegations against FordHaven should be made to the Local Authority Designated Officer and allegations of other abuse (for example, within the household/family/friends) should be made to the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership.

### **What safeguarding information is FordHaven required to record and/or report?**

If a report is made about a child, in all instances the following will be recorded:

- the child's full name, age and address;
- the date and time of the record;
- factual details of the concern (without personal opinions or judgements), for example injuries, what a child has said, who was present;
  - details of any previous concerns;
- any action taken, such as speaking to parents/carers (if it is deemed safe to discuss the matter with them) and details of any explanations given.

Written accounts from any witnesses present during a disclosure or events that have caused a safeguarding concern. These records should also be signed and dated.

All notes will be made in black ink/print, in case they later need to be photocopied for any reason.

It is not our responsibility at FordHaven to attempt to investigate the situation, take photographs of injuries or make any judgements. We must simply record the facts and pass them on to the relevant professionals.

## **What information should parents/ carers inform staff about?**

Parents/carers and professionals must notify us of any concerns they have about their child, as well as details of any changes in circumstances at home which may affect the child's emotional or physical wellbeing. Any relevant details will be recorded and a parent/carers or professional may be asked to sign that they have seen these notes. Such information may include (but is not limited to):

- accidents, illnesses and injuries;
- incidents that have upset the child;
- anything that a child is anxious about;
- changes in their family situation;
  - new or unusual behaviours;
- changes in sleeping patterns and/ or excessive tiredness;
- changes in appetite and/or food refusal.

It is important that we know these details so that children can be cared for with sensitivity while any issues are monitored and where necessary, addressed.

If you have any concerns about a child, family or childcare professional, it should always be reported.

Inaction could potentially allow further abuse and could have serious consequences.

Safeguarding is everybody's responsibility.

Never assume that someone else will report a concern.

**Approved by: Roxana Ford - Director**  
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