

### **Handling concerns, reports or allegations**

This section is primarily for the Club Safeguarding Officer, but everyone should be aware of the procedures to follow if there are concerns.

A complaint, concern or allegation may come from many sources: the child, their parents, someone else within the organisation. It may involve the behaviour of one of the club members or volunteers, or something that has happened to the child outside the club, perhaps at home or at school. Children may confide in adults they trust, in a place where they feel at ease.

An allegation may range from mild verbal bullying to physical or sexual abuse. If you are concerned that a child may be being abused, it is NOT your responsibility to investigate further BUT it is your responsibility to act on your concerns and report them to the appropriate statutory authorities. For guidance on recognising abuse, (see "What is child abuse").

#### **1. Handling an allegation from a child**

Always:

- stay calm – ensure that the child is safe and feels safe
- show and tell the child that you are taking what he/she says seriously
- reassure the child and stress that he/she is not to blame
- be careful about physical contact, it may not be what the child wants
- be honest, explain that you will have to tell someone else to help stop the alleged abuse
- make a record of what the child has said as soon as possible after the event, using the child's own words
- Pass the information onto the club Safeguarding officer immediately.

Never:

- rush into actions that may be inappropriate
- make promises you cannot keep (e.g. you won't tell anyone)
- ask leading questions (see 'Recording and handling information' below)
- take sole responsibility – consult someone else (ideally the designated Club Safeguarding Officer or the person in charge) so that you can begin to protect the child and gain support for yourself.

You may be upset about what the child has said or you may worry about the consequences of your actions. Sometimes people worry about children being removed from their families as a result of abuse, but in reality, this rarely happens. However, one thing is certain – you cannot ignore it.

#### **2. Recording and handling information**

If you suspect that a child may have been the subject of any form of physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect, the allegation must be referred as soon as possible to Children's Social Care or the Police who have trained experts to handle such cases. Do not start asking leading questions which may jeopardise any formal investigation.

A leading question is where you suggest an answer or provide options that only need a 'yes' or 'no' answer, instead of allowing the child to explain things in their own words. An example would be asking 'did X hit you?' instead of 'how did you get that bruise?'. Use open questions such as 'what happened next?'. Only ask questions to confirm that you need to

refer the matter to someone else. Listen to and keep a record of anything the child tells you or that you have observed and pass the information on to the statutory authorities.

All information must be treated as confidential and only shared with those who need to know.

### **3. Reporting Procedures**

If the allegation or suspicion concerns someone within the club, only the child's parents/carers, the club commodore (unless they are the subject of the allegation), the relevant authorities and the RYA Safeguarding and Equality Manager should be informed.

If the alleged abuse took place outside the club, the Police or Children's Social Care will decide who else needs to be informed, including the child's parents/carers. It should not be discussed by anyone within the organisation other than the person who received or initiated the allegation and, if different, the person in charge.

If you are uncertain what to do at any stage, contact the RYA's Safeguarding and Equality Manager on 023 8060 4104 or the NSPCC free 24-hour helpline 0808 800 5000.

Details of Children's Social Care departments and emergency duty teams are listed on local authority websites and in local phone books. If you are unable to find the appropriate contact number, call the RYA's Safeguarding and Equality Manager or, if a child is at immediate risk, the Police.