



CHILD PROTECTION POLICY AND PROCEDURES

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PURPOSE

Staffordshire Women's Aid's (SWA) Child Protection Policy and Procedures outline the organisation's responsibilities in relation to Safeguarding Children (up to 18 years). The Policy should be read and understood alongside SWA's Values, Social Objectives and Practice Principles, and has its foundations in the ethos of listening to and believing women and children's experiences of abuse.

The contents of the document draw from Staffordshire Safeguarding Board's Inter Agency Policies and Procedures for Safeguarding Children, the government's Working Together for Safeguarding Children (2023) and also to The Children Act 1989 (2004). It adheres to the legislation set out in the Human Rights Act 1999 and Data Protection Act 2018.

The Aims of the Child Protection Policy and Procedures are:

- To provide adequate information on child abuse, the legal aspects of child protection and the absolute necessity of interagency co-operation to safeguard the welfare of children using the services of SWA.
- To provide clear and specific guidelines to enable SWA to deal with child protection issues sensitively, efficiently, and effectively.
- To set out the role of SWA in child protection and to highlight their work for children in need, and
- To provide a safe and secure environment for the children who directly or indirectly use the services of Staffordshire Women's Aid.

The Scope of this Policy and Procedures extends to all premises operated by Staffordshire Women's Aid, as well as to locations where work is being carried out on behalf of Staffordshire Women's Aid.

RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES:

- Data Protection, Confidentiality and Access to Information Policy.
- Protection from Abuse
- Whistleblowing
- Equal Opportunities, Diversity and Anti-discriminatory practice policy
- Whistleblowing
- Health and Safety
- Safety and Security
- Recruitment and Selection Policy
- All procedures and guidelines related to children and young people.

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY AND PROCEDURES

This document contains a Policy Statement and Procedural Guidance (Section Two). The functions of each are set out below

Section One - Policy Statement. The statement sets out the broad framework of principles within which this particular area of work is carried out and sets out the organisation's broad approach to the issue. It covers a number of definitions and related legislation to help build an overview of the issues SWA is dealing with in relation the Safeguarding Children and Young People.

Section Two - Procedural Guidance. The guidance sets out the specific tasks and duties which staff will be required to undertake and identifies who is responsible for their implementation.

SECTION ONE

POLICY STATEMENT AND BACKGROUND FOR SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN

PRINCIPLES

1. The child's welfare is paramount. Each child has a right to be protected from harm and exploitation and to have their welfare safeguarded.
2. Each child is unique. Action taken should be child centred, taking account of the child's culture, ethnic and religious background, their gender, their sexual orientation, their individual ability and any special needs.
3. Children's mothers/carers should be made aware of their responsibilities and their rights, together with advice about the power of the statutory authorities to intervene in their family circumstances.
4. Each child has a right to be consulted about actions taken by others on his/her behalf. The concerns of older children and their families should be listened to, and due consideration given to their understanding, wishes and feelings.
5. Individual family members must be involved in decisions affecting them. They must be treated with courtesy and respect and with due regard given to working with them in the spirit of partnership in safeguarding the children's welfare.
6. Being open-minded and honest must guide each stage of assessment and of operational practice. The strengths of individual family members, as well as their needs, should be given due consideration.
7. Personal information is usually confidential. It should only be shared with permission of the individual concerned, or unless the disclosure of confidential information is necessary in order to protect the child. In all circumstances, information must be confined to those people directly involved in the professional network of each individual child and on a strict 'need to know' basis, and compliant with GDPR.
8. Practitioners should be aware of the effects of outside intervention upon children, upon family life and the impact and implications of what they say and do.
9. Explanations by practitioners to children, their families and other carers should be plainly stated and jargon free. Unavoidable technical and professional terminology should be explained in simple terms.
10. Sound professional practice is based on positive inter-agency collaboration, evidence-based research and effective supervision and evaluation.
11. Early intervention in providing support services under Section 17 of the Children Act (1989), (updated 2004), for 'children in need', is an important principle of practice in inter-agency arrangements for safeguarding the welfare of children.
12. Staffordshire Women's Aid will work according to the ethos of Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023).

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Board

The Board of Trustees has a legal responsibility and moral duty to ensure that children and young people are safeguarded from all forms of abuse whilst in receipt of SWA services and support.

They will ensure that:

- a) There is a designated Safeguarding Champion on the Board.
- b) Safeguarding incidents or failures are regularly reported to the Board.
- c) Safeguarding arrangements within SWA are regularly monitored, reviewed and reported to the Board.
- d) Risk is identified and managed and changes are reported to the Board.
- e) All trustees and all those involved in the delivery of services are subject to vetting through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) or police checks appropriate to their role as outlined in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975.
- f) All trustees, staff and volunteers are provided with appropriate, effective and regular training enabling them to recognise, respond to and report safeguarding concerns.
- g) Ensure that records and reports are stored securely and in accordance with relevant legislation.
- h) Will report to the Charity Commission if:
 - A beneficiary has been, or is alleged to have been, abused or mistreated by someone employed by or closely connected with SWA.
 - There has been an incident where someone was abused or mistreated, and this was related to the activities of SWA.
 - There has been a breach of procedures which put a beneficiary at risk, including the failure to carry out criminal record checks which would have identified an individual who was prohibited from working with children or vulnerable adults.

The current designated Safeguarding Champion on the Board is: Sue Howard

Child Protection Officer (Steph Alexander)

Staffordshire Women's Aid has a designated Child Protection Officer. The Child Protection Officer is responsible for ensuring that all safeguarding concerns are reported appropriately across the organisation and will ensure that the safeguarding of children and young people is recognised as everybody's business. They will provide advice to members of the organisation on child protection issues and take a lead on the development of our work with children. If you have queries about this policy, or any issues related to child protection, you can contact the Child Protection Officer, or alternatively, consult with your Line Manager.

The Child Protection Officer will ensure:

- a) That all employees and volunteers are provided with necessary and appropriate information, instruction, training and supervision to ensure that they are able to effectively safeguard the children and young people that they support.

- b) That all employees and volunteers follow child protection arrangements and procedures.
- c) Effective reporting and appropriate level of investigation into any safeguarding incidents and allegations, ensuring appropriate action and follow up.
- d) That all employees and volunteers are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and duties as individuals and employees.
- e) That any breach of procedure or allegation against a staff member is reported to the CEO.

The Child Protection Officer is: Steph Alexander

Tel: 07516 029122

Email: steph.alexander@staffordshirewomensaid.org

STAFFORDSHIRE WOMEN'S AID RISK MANAGEMENT PROCESSES IN RELATION TO CHILD PROTECTION

1. Recruitment and Selection of Staff and Volunteers

The organisation will ensure that all new staff, student placements and volunteers whose roles include working with children are carefully selected, screened, trained and supervised in line with our Recruitment and Selection Policy.

Those who are to have direct access to the children using our services will be subject to an enhanced DBS check and will need to produce two independent references from previous employers or other recognised institutions. It is not appropriate that character references only be accepted.

Staff and volunteers are employed on a temporary 6-month probationary period prior to a permanent post being agreed.

2. Supervision of Staff

All staff and volunteers have a named person who will give support on an ongoing basis with formal supervision at scheduled intervals.

3. Training of Staff and Volunteers in Child Protection

All new staff, volunteers and trustees will be conversant with the Staffordshire Women's Aid Child Protection policy within one month of commencing duties and will be given a copy of the Child Protection Policy as part of their induction package.

All staff and volunteers must complete level 1 of Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board training and refresh this training in a timely manner. Staff who work directly with children or families must attend the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Level 2 *Working Together to Safeguard Children* and any other up to date relevant training.

Staff members and volunteers are expected to update their knowledge on a yearly basis in partnership with their Line Manager.

4. Data Protection, Confidentiality and Access to Information

Staffordshire Women's Aid Data Protection, Confidentiality and Access to Information Policy notes the strict code of conduct with regard to confidentiality throughout our work with families. The policy does however emphasize that when a child's safety and welfare are at risk, information must be passed to those who need to know, and this may have to be done without the knowledge of the child or family members.

5. Direct Work with Children, Protecting Staff and Volunteers

The children using the services of Staffordshire Women's Aid will be met in safe areas, such as within the refuge, schools, resource centers. Minimal physical contact will take place. However, there may be occasions when staff have to provide personal care to a child, particularly in refuge in the absence of the child's mother. This care will be done as openly as possible, and with the knowledge of a manager. Should there be any complaints or adverse comments from the child the situation must be investigated and recorded, this will set up a monitoring process. Any suspicion of abusive behaviour should be reported as per the Child Protection Policy and Procedures.

6. Record Keeping

Staffordshire Women's Aid have documentation designed to record factual information about a family or any incident which may have an adverse effect on anyone using the services of the refuge or on staff members. Records are compiled and shared with users and signed by them and the member of staff involved. Records pertaining to the safety and welfare of a child, which cannot be shared with family members, are signed by the compiler and another member of staff and kept in a secure place.

All records must be made contemporaneously, dated and signed, and any alterations also signed. All considerations of a child protection/safeguarding referral should be recorded in the Safeguarding Log on Oasis, even where the decision has been made not to make a referral (see appendix 1).

Staff are advised to use the correct terminology in relation to a child who is the subject of a Court Order. The correct status of meetings and conferences must also be known and recorded.

7. Security, Storage and Access to Records, both manual and computerised

All records are stored in a secure place, with access restricted to only those staff with authorised access who need to know.

Case management IT system notes and information should be kept up to date. Case notes regarding children and or their parents must not be downloaded or shared unless authorised by your line manager.

If additional confidentiality is needed your line manager can further lockdown notes restricting which members of staff have access to the information. This may be required in the case of highly confidential meetings, processes or if the Service User is known personally by a staff member.

8. Information available to Women and Children on Child Protection Procedures

Child Protection procedures and responsibilities will be explained as part of the Information Sharing and Confidentiality agreement. Bespoke information will be explained to parents whose children are on Child in Need or Child Protection and or PLO plans, to accommodate the expectations of the plans in place. Staff will liaise with Child Protection and support agencies as part of information gathering and support for families.

Families who come to reside in refuge as part of Child Protection measures and referred by Children's Services or specialist agencies will be supported, and a copy of the Child Protection agency's plan and expectations will be sought on behalf of Mothers.

Additional information can be given to families and older children, including local resources, as is needed.

Mothers or legal guardians are entitled to request to see non exclusion time reports that will be submitted to Child Protection Conferences and core groups, this will be explained by a Support Practitioner.

Children will be informed of their rights and given a voice within Child Protection and Child in Need processes wherever appropriate, dependent on the requirements, likely outcomes and content of the plans.

9. Parental Responsibility and Child-minding

Women with children who are accommodated in Staffordshire Women's Aid's refuge will be expected to abide by the Babysitting Procedures and Refuge Rules, which have been developed to ensure the care and welfare of all children in the refuge.

KEY LEGISLATION IN SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN

Children Act 1989 (updated 2004): Legal Definitions concerning the Welfare of Children

1. A child is a child until he/she is 18 years

The Children Act 1989 introduced two concepts concerning the welfare of children, the concept of **need** and the concept of **suffering or likely to suffer significant harm**. These are set out in sections of the Act as follows:

2. Children in Need

Children Act 1989 (updated 2004): Section 17 (10) states that a child shall be taken to be in need if -

(a) He is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him of services by the Local Authority under this part; or

(b) His health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for him of such services; or

(c) He is disabled.

3. Children Act 1989 (updated 2004): Section 17 (1) sets out the provision of services for children in need, their families and others.

It shall be the general duty of every Local Authority (in addition to the other duties imposed on them by this part of the Act):

- (a) To safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need; and
- (b) So far as is consistent with that duty, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families, by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's needs.

4. Children who are suffering harm or who are likely to suffer significant harm

The Children Act 1989 (updated 2004): Section 31(9) states that the meaning of harm; development; health and ill treatment is as follows:

- **'Harm'** means ill treatment or the impairment of health or development.
- **'Development'** means physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development.
- **'Health'** means physical or mental health; and
- **'Ill-treatment'** includes sexual abuse and forms of ill-treatment, which are not physical.

Children Act: Section 31 (2) clarifies that the suffering of harm or the likelihood of suffering harm, within the context of the Act, has to be attributable to the lack of parental care and/or parental control, weighed against what it would be reasonable to expect of a parent in any given circumstances.

When it is believed that the above situation exists the child's circumstances must be investigated by invoking Section 47 of the Children Act, which is

5. Local Authority's Duty to Investigate

Children Act 1989 (updated 2004): Section 47 (1) states that -

(1) Where a Local Authority:

- (a) Are informed that a child who lives, or is found, in their area is:
 - (i) The subject of an emergency protection order; or
 - (ii) In police protection; or
- (b) Have reasonable cause to suspect that a child who lives, or is found, in their area **is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm**, the authority shall make, or cause to be made, such enquiries as they consider necessary to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare.

The 'Local Authority' in the context of this Policy and the Procedures is Staffordshire Social Services.

The Role of the Social Services and the Police Service in Child Protection

- **Social Services:**

Their key objective is to ensure that children are protected from significant harm.

- **The Police:**

Their primary task is to protect life and prevent crime. Children have the right to the protection offered by the criminal law and the Police have a duty and responsibility to investigate criminal offences committed against children, these will include neglect, physical harm and sexual abuse. The Police will respond immediately should a serious assault or crime take place.

DEFINITIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

The significant harm that the Children Act refers to will be caused by various acts of abuse or by neglect of the child's fundamental needs and can be defined as follows:

“Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institution or community setting, by those known to them or more rarely, by a stranger”.

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This is a broad-based definition and child abuse can be more readily recognised when it can be broken down into a number of component parts. This helps to identify the concern that is being described, or perhaps the context within which it takes place. None is mutually exclusive of any other and these different elements of abuse are known to co-exist within a harmful environment.

1. Physical Abuse

Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating. Other harmful actions involve kicking, smacking, pushing, biting, hair pulling and poking. Cigarette burns need to be considered with great suspicion.

Over chastisement or excessive discipline is not acceptable and must not be tolerated.

Physical harm may be caused when the parent or carer feigns the symptoms of, or deliberately causes ill-health to a child whom they are looking after. This situation is commonly described using terms such as FDIA - Factitious Disorder Imposed on Another (previously described as Munchausen Syndrome by proxy).

Female genital mutilation/female circumcision should be regarded as a child protection concern.

2. Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether the child is aware of what is happening or not. Sexual abuse may be perpetrated by an adult, child or young person of either sex from within or outside the family.

Sexual abuse involves misuse of power that may be based on difference in age, intellect, physical strength or understanding and may involve bribes and threats. It encompasses all those activities in which children are used for sexual gratification and

exploitation and can involve both sexual contact and non-sexual contact activity. Children may also be abused and exploited for the monetary gain of their abuser

Examples of non-sexual contacts, which are abusive, are:

- Involving children/young people in looking at pornographic material, including computer images
- Watching sexual activities
- Encouraging children/young people to behave in sexually inappropriate ways
- The taking of exploitative or abusive images of children for sexual gratification
- Activities which are designed to prepare (groom) a child for abuse.

Attention should be given to the fact that the majority of sexually abusive acts may not provide any physical signs or symptoms of abuse and therefore no actual evidence. This does not, however, mean that the child/young person has not suffered significant harm.

3. Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child/young person's basic physical and or psychological needs, likely to result in the child's health or development being impaired.

The corrosive effect of continuous neglect can have a significant impact upon a child's or an adolescent's mental health. Failure to thrive, without a medical reason may be the result of neglect.

4. Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child, such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on a child's emotional and physical development.

Although it can occur alone, some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill-treatment of a child.

5. Forced Marriage

There is a clear distinction between a forced marriage and an arranged marriage. In arranged marriages, the families of both spouses take a leading role in arranging the marriage, but the choice of whether or not to accept the arrangement still remains with the prospective spouses. However, in forced marriage, one or both spouses do not consent to the marriage but are coerced into it. Where it affects children and young people, it is child abuse. It is a criminal offence.

It can happen to both women and men, although many of the reported cases involve young women and girls aged between 16 and 25. There is no "typical" victim of forced marriage. Some may be over or under 18 years of age, some may have a disability, some may have young children, and some may also be spouses from overseas.

6. Female Genital Mutilation

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) comprises all procedures involving the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or any other injury to the female genital organs for nonmedical reasons.

FGM is sometimes known as 'female genital cutting' or female circumcision. Communities tend to use local names for referring to this practice, including 'sunna'. FGM is a form of child abuse, and Staffordshire Women's Aid consider it to be a grave violation of the rights of girls and women.

Under the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 (amended 2015) it is an offence in England, Wales and Northern Ireland for anyone (regardless of their nationality and residence status) to:

- Perform FGM in the UK.
- Assist the carrying out of FGM in the UK.
- Assist a girl to carry out FGM on herself in the UK.
- Assist from the UK a non-UK person to carry out FGM outside the UK on a UK national or permanent UK resident. This would cover taking a girl abroad to be subjected to FGM, even in countries where the practice is not a criminal offence.

7. So called 'Honour' Based Abuse

'Honour' Based Abuse (HBA) is abuse which is committed because there is a misguided notion about honour and dishonourable behaviour in a family and/or community and is in response to individuals trying to break away from constraining 'norms' of behaviour that their family or community are imposing. 'Honour' based abuse has been identified to stem from traditional notions of patriarchy and gender roles and may involve multiple perpetrators. Individuals and communities may not explicitly use the term 'honour' and other words used may include 'shame', 'respect', 'reputation', 'izzat', 'disgrace', 'sharaf' and 'sharam'. Women and girls make up the majority of victims, but men and boys can also be at risk.

8. Harmful Practices

Harmful Practices are forms of violence which have been committed primarily against women and girls in communities and societies for so long that they are considered, or presented by perpetrators, as part of accepted 'cultural' practice. In these cases, religion, culture, patriarchal codes of behaviour and perceived notions of 'honour' are used by one or more perpetrators as an excuse for coercive control, threats and abuse. The most common are forced or early marriage, so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C) and other lesser reported forms such as faith-based abuse, menstrual huts, acid attacks, so called 'corrective' rape and others. Harmful practices occur across all sexes, sexual identities and genders. They are not unique to a culture or religion. Often one or more forms of harmful practices occur at the same time, escalating risks and resulting in barriers to disclosure.

9. Violent Extremism

This may involve children and young people under the age of 18 being exploited, groomed and coerced into risky and illegal behavior around extreme ideology. It is important to be cautious in assessing Violence Extremism to avoid stigmatizing or stereotyping.

Staffordshire Women's Aid recognises that these types of abuse are not exhaustive or mutually exclusive, and that staff need to be mindful of professional curiosity to aid disclosures and of the impact that inappropriate adult behaviour can have on vulnerable children.

SECTION TWO

PROCEDURES FOR CHILD PROTECTION

1. Responsibility of Staffordshire Women's Aid to a child requiring protection

Such are the circumstances of some children that their safety and welfare cannot be assured or achieved through the support services of Staffordshire Women's Aid and other agencies, In these circumstances the child may be suffering significant harm, or he/she is likely to suffer significant harm, When this situation is **suspected** or **known**, child protection procedures **must** be invoked and the details of any believed abusive behaviour **must** be referred to the relevant **Social Service Department**. Referral must be done as soon as possible not only for the sake of the child, but delay in referral causes evidence of abuse e.g. bruising and the presence of body fluids, to be lost.

In most circumstances, a child protection referral should only be made with the support and guidance of a Line Manager. If the immediate Line Manager is not available, then another should be contacted, or the Child Protection Officer.

Staffordshire Women' Aid staff and volunteers can act alone in referring a suspected or a known abusive situation *where delay would put the child in greater danger* but must immediately report their actions to their Line Manager, or another Manager. In all other circumstances apart from such an emergency, staff and volunteers must consult with their Line Manager, the Child Protection Officer or another manager, before submitting a Child Protection referral.

Whatever the circumstances, and whatever decision is made, the process must always be recorded and added to the Safeguarding Log on Oasis (see Appendix 1). Even where a decision has been made not to make a child protection referral, this should be logged, and the reason for the decision must be recorded.

The Police can also intervene in circumstances when the perceived harm is due to neglect, physical harm or sexual abuse.

2. Sharing your concerns

When a member of Staffordshire Women's Aid is uncertain about acting upon unspecified concerns, set out the facts known to you and have a **preliminary discussion** with other project workers, preferably your Line Manager, and the Child Protection Officer. The relevant Children's Practitioner should be involved in this process, or she must be informed as soon as possible.

A decision to take no action should never be taken alone, if in doubt ALWAYS share your concerns.

3. Acting upon concerns

If the child is in immediate danger or has serious injuries ring the Police 999. In less urgent cases of concern discussion with a manager or the Child Protection Officer is essential. If the raising of a concern or referral is agreed, then a call should be made to Staffordshire Children's Advice & Support (SCAS):

Tel: 0300 111 8007 (Monday to Thursday: 9.00am – 5.00pm) (Friday: 8.30am- 4.30pm)

If you have a concern about the safety of a child and need to report it overnight, over a weekend or on a Bank Holiday, contact the Emergency Duty Service:

Tel: 0345 604 2886

Email: eds.team.manager@staffordshire.gov.uk

4. Confidentiality

Whilst the Staffordshire Women's Aid Data Protection, Confidentiality and Access to Information Policy and general Good Practice, suggest that workers should share their concerns with the family, and where possible seek their agreement prior to making a referral, obtaining consent should not jeopardize appropriate action being taken in protecting the child. Where the child is of sufficient age and understanding their agreement should also be considered. This is referred to in the Children Act 1989 Section 1 (3). However, it may still be necessary to refer an incident without the consent or involvement of the child.

The following distinctions may be helpful:

- (i) Where the child is clearly at risk of significant harm or harm is suspected, the consent of parents/carers to disclose personal information is not required and neither is there a requirement to inform them of any action that is to be taken.
- (ii) Where risk of significant harm may apply, good practice requires that a parent/carers is informed of intended actions by staff, including the disclosure of personal information.
- (iii) Where the need to safeguard children does not arise, permission from the parent/carers should be sought to disclose personal information between agencies

Bearing in mind the common law duty of confidence, it is important that the staff and volunteers at Staffordshire Women's Aid should feel able to share concerns in a responsible way. In some situations, it may jeopardize the future safety of the child and other children if the family members and others know the proposed actions of the staff, this is particularly so in the case of suspected sexual abuse.

Where practitioners need to share special category personal data, they should be aware that the Data Protection Act 2018 contains 'safeguarding of children and individuals at risk' as a processing condition that allows practitioners to share information. This includes allowing practitioners to share information without consent, if it is not possible to gain consent, it cannot be reasonably expected that a practitioner gains consent, or if to gain consent would place a child at risk.

5. Making a Referral

Wherever possible, staff and volunteers **MUST** first speak to their Line Manager, or another Line Manager, or the Child Protection Officer prior to making any referral for Child Protection.

Referrals and concerns are made to **Staffordshire Social Services team by phone or by completing the referral form on the Staffordshire County Council Website** [Report a concern online - Staffordshire County Council](#) or out of hours to the **Social Services Emergency Duty Team**. The person receiving the call (usually the Duty Officer) may ask the caller a number of questions including:

- Child(ren)'s name(s) and any aliases
- Address and previous address(es)
- Date(s) of birth
- Details of other family members
- Basis of concerns
- Any other relevant information
- Health status of child and family members
- Is the child(ren)'s name on or has been on a Child Protection Register
- Is the family known to the police?
- Is there any previous Social Service involvement?

If the referral indicates that a criminal offence may have been committed, the Social Services will immediately inform the Police. This will enable the Police to work in partnership with Social Services and/or other agencies. In all cases where the Police are involved the decision about when to inform the parents will be a decision taken by the Police and Social Services. This is particularly important when the referral is from a third party, and more important when sexual abuse is suspected. The Police should also be contacted.

6. Serious Injury

Should the child be seriously injured he/she will require immediate medical treatment, either by a GP, ambulance paramedic or at a hospital. Even though the child is then in the care of the hospital a referral to Social Services must still be made, the Police should also be contacted

7. Anonymity of the Referrer

Staff and volunteers of Staffordshire Women's Aid, as a voluntary agency with a duty of care to its service users, should be prepared to disclose their identity to Social Services when making a referral or seeking advice. However, staff and volunteers passing on information from an identifiable source which may render they themselves vulnerable to abuse, should be protected wherever possible

SOCIAL SERVICES ACTION FOLLOWING A REFERRAL

1. Action taken when Concerns of Abuse are not substantiated

Following a referral, enquiries by Social Services may not substantiate the original concerns about the child being at risk of or suffering significant harm. In these

circumstances no further action may be necessary, however the child may be identified as 'a child in need' therefore he/she and their family may be assessed and offered relevant support under Section 17 Children Act. This support may well include provision of services provided by Staffordshire Women's Aid.

2. Responsibility of Staffordshire Women's Aid to a Child in Need

Staffordshire Women's Aid, through their work with mothers and children, recognise the needs of children in their specific circumstance and provide services and a safe environment, which safeguards and promotes their welfare. This service complies with the legal requirement, in that it promotes the upbringing of the children by their families, through services and support to both the mother and her child. Staffordshire Women's Aid also refers mothers and children to other supportive agencies, particularly Social Services and Health.

3. Action taken when Concerns of Abuse are Substantiated

After initial enquires by Social Services, as per Section 47 Children Act, concerns for a child are substantiated, following an initial assessment by Social Services; the inter-agency child protection process will commence with an Initial Child Protection Conference. Staff from Staffordshire Women's Aid, whether or not they were the initial referrer may be asked to contribute information and to attend the Initial Child Protection Conference. Where possible a representative from Staffordshire Women's Aid should attend, however if the alleged perpetrator is going to attend presenting escalated risk or attendance is not possible for any other reason, a full report should be submitted.

THE INTER AGENCY CHILD PROTECTION PROCESS

Inter-agency process will include Child Protection conference, core group meetings and possibly the child/ren being put on a Child Protection Plan. It is expected that wherever possible Support practitioners and or Child Support Practitioners will be active participants within the Child Protection process

1. The Role of Staffordshire Women's Aid in a Child Protection Plan

Should a child receiving services from Staffordshire Women's Aid become the subject of an Initial Child Protection Conference, staff members may be called to share their information and be involved in the decision making at the Conference. This may also happen where Staffordshire Women's Aid are supporting a woman with a child or children who are subjects of a Child Protection Plan, even where Staffordshire Women's Aid is not directly supporting the child or children. They may be called upon to provide a service to meet the aims in the plan to protect the child and therefore become a member of the core group. Women's Aid staff should not agree to provide services which are outside their remit. Any doubt in this area should be referred to their Line Manager.

2. Children on a Social Service Child Protection Plan residing in the Refuge

When a new family enters the refuge or use their services, and it is ascertained that a child in that family is on a Social Service Child Protection Plan, this information should be relayed to Stafford Social Services by the overseeing Social Worker. Similarly, when a child on the register leaves the refuge, or the child's circumstances change this information must be given to the Social Service worker. Social services have a statutory

duty and the ability to contact other Social Service departments and Police services throughout the UK and beyond for children in these circumstances.

DISCLOSURE

Concern for a child's circumstances will be brought to the attention of staff and volunteers in various ways, usually through observation of the child's physical condition, their demeanour, their behaviour, staff witnessing an incident or through the child or others disclosing information. Disclosure of any information by whoever should be treated confidentially and with respect, however, no one must promise that the information will be kept a secret.

It is imperative that a record is made of the conversation, and the circumstances surrounding the disclosure. Always record the exact words used by the children and adults, make a note of the questions you ask and the child's/adult's response. Questions should be kept to a minimum and apart from giving a sympathetic response; interrogation and comments must be avoided. Once the disclosure has been made there must be no further questioning by other members of staff.

Make your recordings as soon as possible, they must be timed, dated and signed. It is more important to do this on paper readily to hand, than to wait until you have formal records.

It is not the role of Staffordshire Women's Aid to investigate the situation. Information given at disclosure should then be passed to Social Services/ Police. It will be their decision as to how they use the information and when that disclosed information is made known to the mother/ carer/ child.

Disclosure by a Child of Abuse by their Mother/Carer

Should a child disclose to a Support Practitioner or any SWA staff member that they have been abused by their mother/carer, this information should be recorded as above and passed to Social Services as a referral or an already allocated Social Worker. Staffordshire Women's Aid staff must be advised and guided by Social Service and the Police, who will decide when and what action should be taken. It is not necessary to seek consent from the mother/carer before information is passed to the statutory agency. It is the agency that then has the responsibility of notifying the parent/carer.

Whether a child is disclosing current abuse or past abuse, the action should always be that Women's Aid refers to Social Services for advice and guidance. This should be recorded by the Support Practitioner accurately, without bias and ensuring confidentiality.

1. Disclosure by the Child of Abuse by a Previous Carer or any other person

Even though the child is no longer under the care of the alleged abuser, any disclosure must be referred to Social Services. This referral is imperative especially if the abuse was of a sexual nature, not only for the protection of the known child, but for the protection of other children.

2. Disclosure by another Resident of abuse to a Child

This must always be taken seriously. The information then recorded and referred to Social Services. Any person disclosing information concerning abuse can speak directly

to Social Services and should be encouraged to do so, although they may remain anonymous if they wish.

ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE MADE AGAINST A MEMBER OF STAFF OR VOLUNTEER

Experience shows that children can become victims of abuse by those who work with them in any setting. It is well documented that adults who have a duty of care either in a professional capacity or as a volunteer may abuse children. Therefore, any allegation, whether historical or contemporary, must be taken seriously and if there is any possibility the accusation is true, referred to Social Services or the Police; it will then be treated in accordance with Child Protection Procedures. The allegation must be kept confidential and only disclosed to those who can act on the information.

An allegation against a fellow staff member may make it difficult to believe, however the situation should be taken seriously and referred to a manager through the correct channels.

All allegations will be treated seriously and investigated thoroughly in line with SWA's Disciplinary Procedures or Volunteer Policy as appropriate.

Should a member of staff have any difficulty in reporting an allegation of abuse by a fellow worker, they must contact the Chair of the Board of Trustees. The allegation will be treated with respect and confidentiality and the person reporting the allegation will be supported in their referral to Social Services. **(Refer to Staffordshire Women's Aid Whistle Blowing Policy)**

CIRCUMSTANCES SPECIFIC TO THE WORK OF STAFFORDSHIRE WOMEN'S AID

1. Mother/Carer resuming a Relationship with an Abuser

It is a matter of fact that women who are the victims of domestic violence return to the abusive environment many times before they make a final break. Generally, their decision to return has to be supported. If, however, there are concerns regarding the welfare of children also returning, then it is the duty of Staffordshire Women's Aid to inform the local Social Services department to ensure that the welfare of children is protected.

2. Allegations of Abusive Behaviour during Contact Visits

Contact visits may be agreed within the family or may be carried out after court proceedings decree that contact be maintained between child and a former family member. In either situation abusive behaviour either to the mother or to the children cannot be accepted. The mother must be encouraged to document the incident as she sees it, as must others who witnessed the behaviour.

When the contact is as a result of court proceedings, the Social worker must be informed.

When the contact has been made as part of the family arrangements the mother must be advised to suspend any further contact to ensure the safety of herself and her children, and she must be encouraged to report the incident to Social Services and to the Police as a criminal matter.

Any such incident may warrant immediate intervention by the Police.

ESCALATION IN REGARD TO OTHER AGENCIES

Occasionally a situation may arise when SWA have raised a safeguarding concern in relation to a child/children and it is felt the response from statutory services is not a safe one. The safety of individual children is the paramount consideration in any professionals' disagreement and workers should feel able to challenge decision making in a timely fashion in order to best safeguard the child

Where a staff member feels a decision has been made that is not safe or is inappropriate, she should raise it internally with the designated safeguarding children lead or another manager in order to clarify thinking and identify a course of action. If it is felt the decision needs to be challenged this should be done between the worker/agency and the relevant front-line practitioner, or if appropriate her manager, in the first instance.

If the problem is not resolved the line manager/designated safeguarding lead will raise the problem with the equivalent manager in the other agency.

If the problem continues the issue will be escalated to a member of SWA's senior management team who will raise it at a more senior level and, if agreement cannot be secured, may consider referring to the Chair of the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Safeguarding Board, and/or utilizing the Board's Escalation Policies and Procedures.

In all cases the primary focus will be on ensuring the safety and welfare of the child concerned and all stages of the process will be recorded using established BSWA paperwork

CONCLUDING STATEMENTS

1. The child's welfare is paramount.
2. The protection of children is an interagency process and depends on the best possible working practice of all agencies and voluntary groups who have a duty of care to children.
3. Practitioners must not take on the role of other professionals and service providers.
4. Service providers must not take on duties outside of their remit.
5. Protecting children is the responsibility of families and of the general public.
6. Good record keeping prevents ambiguity, provides factual information and objective comments, which are crucial when providing evidence of abuse.
7. Concerns must always be shared; practitioners must never operate alone. In the case of Refuge Out of Hours Staff, the on-call member of staff must be contacted to discuss concerns.
8. A Safeguarding Log on Oasis should always be completed if a concern has been raised, even if it does not result in a referral.
9. Delay can prove disastrous for the child; referrals should be considered and prompt.

Staffordshire Women's Aid
Safeguarding Log – OASIS

Safeguarding - Anne Other (28336)  Cost of Living

 SAVE

Details

Referrals In (0)

Referrals Out (0)

Children (0)

Service Record (0)

Notes (0) 

Click here to add a new safeguarding incident to this case

Start Date	Alert Raised	Alert Raised By	Associated Service	Outcome	Status	
24/04/2024	-	-	Refuge	-	Open	

Safeguarding Details

Start Date

24/04/2024 

Safeguarding Alert Raised

☐

Closed Date



Date Alert Raised



Associated Service

Refuge 

Alert Raised By

- Please Select - 

Safeguarding Alert Notes