

# Briefing for schools: protecting children from abuse of position of trust

**October 2017**

It is an offence for a teacher or member of school staff to enter into a sexual relationship with a student under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (England and Wales) the Sexual Offences Order 2008 (Northern Ireland) Sexual Offences Act 2009 (Scotland), and may carry a custodial sentence.

If a student has left the school and there is evidence to suggest that an inappropriate relationship with a member of the school staff started while they were still a student, the teacher could face a professional misconduct panel hearing and subsequent ban from teaching.

## **What schools can do to safeguard against abuse of position of trust**

### **Safe recruitment**

Effective recruitment and selection procedures for staff and volunteers can help to screen out and discourage unsuitable people from working with children. Reference checking is crucial as information can be shared between organisations, if an adult's behaviour has caused concerns in the past. Asking questions during an interview that probe into a person's values and attitudes towards safeguarding children is also a good way of assessing suitability. At least one member of each recruitment panel should have attended safer recruitment training.

Criminal record vetting checks must also be carried out on any member of staff who will be regularly working with children.

### **Safeguarding policies and procedures**

In order to work towards protecting young people from sexual abuse, schools should:

- have procedures in place for dealing with child protection concerns, disclosures or allegations in order to support staff/volunteers, young people and parents through the process of reporting any concerns. All staff should know who the lead person for child protection is. This person is usually referred to as the designated safeguarding lead
- make sure all staff, volunteers and governors have attended child protection training appropriate to their role

- have clear guidelines or a code of conduct for staff and volunteers. This should include a section on e-safety which should advise staff against befriending or accepting friend requests from students on social networking sites
- keep accurate records of all incidents and concerns arising in relation to members of staff or volunteers. The significance of each seemingly small piece of information is only appreciated when all the information is considered and patterns of behaviour are detected
- have a whistleblowing policy so that staff can confidentially disclose concerns they may have about the behaviour of a colleague.
- be familiar with local procedures and know how to contact the local authority for advice regarding concerns or allegations against staff.

### **Helping children understand what abuse of position of trust is**

Schools should create an environment where all children feel confident to approach a member of staff if they are worried about something or are being made to feel uncomfortable by either an adult or another child.

The school should promote healthy relationships through PSHE and relationship and sex education (RSE) to help children understand appropriate boundaries between adults and children. Perpetrators of sexual abuse can be male or female and regardless of gender, it is not acceptable for any adult to behave inappropriately towards a child. E-safety should also be covered in the curriculum so children can learn to keep themselves safe online.

It is a good idea for schools to display posters around the building signposting children to services that might be able to help them if they are worried such as [Childline](#).

### **Recognising the signs of abuse of position of trust in a school setting**

Some children can be more vulnerable than others and victims are often selected because the offender perceives them as isolated, and/or emotionally needy.

Some potential signs for concerns in the school environment include:

- a member of staff giving a student special attention or preferential treatment
- excessive time spent alone with a student outside of the classroom
- frequently spending time with a student in private or isolated areas
- transporting a student to or from school
- making friends with a student's parents and visiting their home
- acting as a particular student's "listening ear"
- giving small gifts, money, toys, cards, letters to a student
- using texts, telephone calls, e-mails or social networking sites to inappropriately communicate with a student

- being overly affectionate with a student
- flirtatious behaviour or making suggestive remarks or comments of a sexual nature around a student
- other students making jokes or references about a member of staff and specific students.

### **Reporting concerns about a member of staff who may have abused their position of trust**

Any concerns should be reported to the school's designated safeguarding lead as set out in the child protection policy. Concerns about professionals who are suspected of having abused their position of trust should be referred to the local authority designated officer (formerly LADO in England and Wales).

### **Useful resources**

[NSPCC Helpline – 0808 800 500](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/0800800500)

[Safeguarding in education self-assessment tool \(ESAT\)](#)

[Sexual Offences Act 2003](#) England and Wales

[Sexual Offences Order 2008](#) – Northern Ireland

[Sexual Offences Act 2009](#) – Scotland

**Contact the NSPCC's Knowledge and Information Service with any questions about child protection or related topics:**

**Tel: 0808 800 5000 | Email: [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk) | Twitter: [@NSPCCpro](https://twitter.com/NSPCCpro)**

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