

Process and guidance for anyone dealing with a safeguarding concern

Dealing with disclosures

It can be very difficult for individuals to reveal abuse. Often, they fear there may be consequences. Some people delay telling someone about abuse for a long time, while others never tell anyone, even if they want to. People value being believed, and it is vital that you act on what you have been told.

Definitions of abuse are available from:

- [Department of Health: Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in NI \(August 2017\)](#)
- [Northern Ireland Adult Safeguarding Partnership \(NIASP\) Adult Protection Operating Procedures, Adults at risk of harm and Adults in need of protection \(2016\)](#)

Below is some additional guidance to help you manage the situation.

- Ensure the immediate safety of the person. If urgent medical/police help is required, call the emergency services.
- Listen carefully. Avoid expressing your own views on the matter. A reaction of shock or disbelief could cause the person to 'shut down', retract or stop talking so try to stay calm.
- Let them know they have done the right thing. Reassurance can make a big impact to the person, who may have been keeping the abuse secret.
- Tell them it's not their fault. Abuse is never the person's fault and they need to know this.
- Say you believe them. A person could keep abuse secret in fear they won't be believed. They've told you because they want help and trust you'll be the person to believe them and help them.
- Do not talk to the alleged abuser. Confronting the alleged abuser about what you've been told could make the situation a lot worse for the individual.
- Explain what you'll do next. If age appropriate, explain to the person you'll need to report the allegation to someone who will be able to help.
- If you think a crime has occurred be aware that medical and forensic evidence might be needed. Consider the need for a timely referral to the police service and make sure nothing you do will contaminate it.
- Do not delay reporting the allegation. The sooner the allegation is reported after the person discloses the better. Report immediately to a Designated Safeguarding Officer so action can be taken quickly.

Please be aware the University provides a range of services to support staff and students in need, including 24/7 counselling support through Inspire Wellbeing (see Appendix 2 for contact details).

Do not:

- Stop the person disclosing with you
- Criticise the alleged perpetrator
- Probe for more information/investigate (as this may contaminate verbal evidence)
- Promise confidentiality
- Make promises about the future
- Use leading questions or put words in the individual's mouth
- Disclose the information to other colleagues
- Press the person for more details or make them repeat the story (as this may contaminate verbal evidence)

- Gossip about the disclosure or pass on the information to anyone who does not have a legitimate need to know
- Make contact with the person alleged to have caused the harm
- Attempt to investigate yourself
- Leave details of your concerns on a voicemail or send these by email

Report immediately to a Designated Safeguarding Officer.

1. Designated Safeguarding Officers

Ulster University's Designated Safeguarding Officers are responsible for acting as a source of advice on safeguarding matters, for co-ordinating action within the Ulster University and for liaising with Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts, the PSNI, and other agencies about suspected or actual cases of abuse. There will be a suitable number of Designated Safeguarding Officers who will ensure they carry out all relevant designated officer duties (Appendix 2).

The Designated Safeguarding Officers will be made known to all staff/volunteers and students and those who use our services, as the people to address safeguarding concerns.

When an alert is raised within an organisation in relation to a safeguarding concern or disclosure, the Designated Safeguarding Officer, will ensure the following actions occur:

- Where immediate danger exists or the situation warrants immediate action ensure any necessary medical assistance has been sought and refer to the relevant HSC Trust Adult Protection Gateway or PSNI.
- Consider whether the concern is a safeguarding issue or not. This may involve some 'checking out' of information provided whilst being careful not to stray into the realm of investigation.
- If it is decided that it is a safeguarding issue, the situation should be reported to the HSC Trust Adult Protection Gateway service. The HSC Trust will then conduct a risk assessment and decide what response is appropriate.
- Support staff to ensure any actions take account of the individual's wishes.
- Where it has been deemed that it is not a safeguarding issue, other alternative responses should be considered such as monitoring, support or advice to staff or volunteers.
- If a crime is suspected or alleged, contact the HSC Adult Protection Gateway Service directly.
- Act as the liaison point for any investigative activity which is required and ensure easy access to relevant case records or staff.
- Record all action taken on a safeguarding incident and inform the Child Safeguarding Officer within the relevant boundaries of confidentiality.

2. Consent and Capacity

If an adult at risk does not want a referral made to the HSC Trust or PSNI, the Designated Safeguarding Officer must consider the following:

- Do they have capacity to make this decision?
- Have they been given full and accurate information in a way that they understand?
- Are they experiencing undue influence or coercion?
- Is the person causing harm a member of staff, a volunteer or someone who only has contact with the adult at risk because they both use the service?
- Is anyone else at risk from the person causing harm?
- Is a crime suspected or alleged?

The HSC Trust may determine that a referral without consent should be made and you should follow their instructions for making the referral.

If it is determined by the Adult Safeguarding Team that the concern(s) do not meet the definition of an adult at risk or an adult in need of protection and a referral cannot be made without consent, the concerns raised must be recorded; including any action taken; and the reasons for not referring to HSCT.

In situations where the adult in need of protection is in imminent danger it may not be possible to discuss with them their wishes and obtaining a valid consent may not be achievable. Under these circumstances, staff/volunteers should take whatever action they feel is appropriate to protect the adult in need of protection, including seeking medical and/or PSNI intervention.

3. Safeguarding Concerns about a Designated Safeguarding Officer

If the concern is about a Designated Safeguarding Officer, staff/volunteers should report to University Secretary/Child Protection Officer (see Appendix 2 for contact details)

4. How to Record a Disclosure or Concern

If someone discloses abuse / makes an allegation to you, you must complete a [Safeguarding Incident Form](#) (online or at Appendix 1.1). If you have literacy or language difficulties, the Designated Safeguarding Officer may assist you to complete the form, but this must be acknowledged on the incident form.

The Safeguarding Incident Form will be retained securely and confidentially by the Child Protection Officer. Safeguarding records will be retained with protected status under the Data Protection Act.

When recording the disclosure, you must:

- make a note of what the individual has said using their own words as soon as practicable;
- describe the circumstances in which the disclosure came about. Take care to distinguish between fact, observation, allegation and opinion. It is important that the information you have is accurate; and,
- be mindful of the need to be confidential at all times, this information must only be shared with your Designated Safeguarding Officer and others only on a need to know basis.
- If the individual involved is part of an organised group, the University Designated Safeguarding Officer will inform the group's leader and will make every effort to agree an appropriate course of action.
- Depending on the individual circumstances e.g. age, level of understanding, it may be necessary for an advocate to be present to enable the individual's voice to be heard more effectively. This might be a group leader, carer or parent, unless she or he is the person of concern. If the supervising person is not available, another member of staff can be contacted to assist in representing the individual if appropriate.