

Responding to Concerns about Child Abuse

Concerns or instances of abuse should be reported to Rod Edwards 01730 267642 (child protection office) or Pam Gruber 01730 301270 (project co-ordinator)

There may be children within the group who are being or who have been abused. As Woodcraft is a supportive accepting environment in which children know they will be listened to, it is possible that a child will disclose abuse within that setting. How you respond is crucial. Remember you have been selected to hear this, use all your good listening skills, and specifically:

DO

Believe the child and tell them that you believe them. Tell the child you're glad they told you. Acknowledge that the child has been brave to tell you.

Ask if another adult/ leader can become involved to provide additional support for both the child and yourself. In some circumstances it may be difficult to provide this support locally or it may impinge on subsequent legal action. In this case an independent representative can be requested from the Folks head office.

Reassure the child that what has happened is not their fault: that the abuser is responsible for what has happened to them. You may need to bear in mind that a consenting sexual act between a 15 and 16 year old is unlikely to be classed as abuse.

Be clear and honest about your own position, what happens next, who you will have to tell and why. Do this fairly early into the conversation. Remember the child's right to request you to remain silent is overridden by a legal obligation on your part to inform children services and other agencies. Keep relevant individual notes.

Keep the child fully informed about what you are doing and why. Continue to give support and let them express their feelings.

Give the child information about other confidential sources of help (phone lines etc). These are located in a group leader confidential folder at present held by Pam Gruber and Lee Edwards.

REMEMBER

If the abuse is within the home consult with the local child protection services in Children Services (01730 265462). Outside of their office working hours contact 0845 600 45 55.

Do not attempt to deal with the matter internally within the Woodcraft Folk.

If the abuse is within the Woodcraft Folk immediately seek advice from the Folks General or Deputy General Secretary (Tel: 0845 458 9535/020 8 672 6031) and from the local Children Services (01730 265462). Contact the parents as they hold parental responsibility. Speak directly with the districts child protection officer (01730 267642) or the district co-ordinator(01730 301270). They will implement the suspension of the adult or young person in accordance with the Folks procedures on Suspension and Expulsion of Members of the Woodcraft Folk. An investigation panel appointed by the General Council will compile a report.

Should you require the police contact 0845 045 45 45 (24hrs).

If the abuse is within the child's school or wider community, contact the child's parents and children services.

DON'T

Try to counsel or interrogate the child with leading questions – this may hinder subsequent legal action.

Make promises you can't keep. Remember as a leader you have legal obligations.

Cast doubt upon what the child tells you. Remember, it has taken a great deal of courage for them to tell you.

Say anything, which might make the child feel responsible for the abuse (e.g. why haven't you told anyone before).

Communicate feelings of anger without saying that it is the abuser you feel angry towards; the child may think you are angry with them.

Don't panic. When confronted with the reality of abuse there is often a feeling of needing to act immediately. Action taken hastily can often be counter productive.

On average a child discloses abuse to NINE adults before one hears what they are saying. Make sure you hear what the children in your group are saying to you.

IF YOU ARE NOT CONFIDENT YOURSELF ABOUT ANY ACTION TO BE TAKEN SEEK HELP FROM A CONFIDENTIAL SOURCE.
Pam Gruber/woodcraft folk/Word/woodcraft policies/Responding to concerns about child abuse Reviewed 3rd March 2005,19 Jan 2006.