



Walsall Council

Walsall Children's Services



Walsall Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) Newsletter

SPRING 2019

No allegation of harm but you're still concerned

Here is a scenario for you to consider based on some recent LADO cases:

A worker is breaching your expectations of their behaviour. Their relationships with young people seem inappropriate (eg the children whisper to him and stick up for him), there are minor boundary breaches around physical contact and other staff are uncomfortable but there is nothing concrete. The children like him a lot and there are no complaints made about him.

These can be tricky to manage, especially where the behaviour is feared to be grooming but has not led to any allegation of harm or clear evidence of harm. You may be managing this through professional advice but worry there is a bigger concern.

In such cases the Walsall LADO is always happy to have a discussion about the behaviour and what can be done. It can assist in clarifying concerns and evidence and ruling out other possibilities (for example prejudice from other staff against someone who is 'different' in some way). Where the concerns are of grooming the LADO does not need an allegation of harm to offer advice and, where appropriate, the concern can be logged. If someone did present a risk they are likely to move on before there is any formal finding of concern, however, if already flagged with the LADO this could help identify a pattern of concern later.

In one such case, previous concerns flagged with the LADO were crucial in allowing an employer to dismiss because of a pattern of behaviour which would not have been identified otherwise.

The importance of references


A number of cases recently, where there has been a concern about a worker, have led to references being reviewed. Some of these indicated that, in hindsight and 'reading between the lines', there may have been some concerns in the previous role. This reminds us of the importance of references in safer recruitment - they are not just an admin exercise. Where a candidate is excellent on paper and has interviewed well, sometimes it can be tempting to accept references, which raise no specific concerns, as a formality, but consider the case in the article on this page. Such an individual may resign when the concerns are never proved sufficient to allow a specific comment in a reference, however, they may be indicated if you read between the lines and consider what is not said.

In these cases call the referee to get some more information, this is likely to make it clearer whether you should be concerned. Getting it wrong at this point can cost dearly and put children at risk.

Update from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) has completed a number of reports which may be of interest, the latest of which is regarding the Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions. These extensive inquiries hold some valuable lessons.

Reports are available from the [Inquiry website](#)



Feedback and ideas for future items always welcome

If any of the above has raised any questions or you would like to discuss the implications further please feel free to contact me.

Hearing the child's voice in allegations

Not all allegations about workers are made by children themselves, some come from parents, colleagues or arise from observed concerns, and the child's voice can remain absent. Even if the child has made an allegation their voice can be lost in the subsequent investigation. We always need to make sure we hear what children are saying, here are some considerations:

People in positions of trust hold power and respect – this can impact on what children say and they can minimise concerns - possibly through fear or shame but also out of respect or concern that someone might lose their job, these can be powerful influences. The child may themselves have done something wrong and be reluctant to complain. They may feel they will not be believed or, especially if there is a delay, that no one is really interested.

To mitigate this think what can you learn from non-verbal cues and behaviour and do not be satisfied that the child has been 'heard' if it is possible that you might be hearing what you want to hear – challenge yourself.

Think who is best to talk to the child and can engage them best. How can the child be reassured they are really being listened to – what actions demonstrate this?

Children can add to information or change their mind later and should be allowed to do so safely (but never in any way that might suggest you are encouraging them to change their mind).

Getting this right sends a powerful message that children are listened to - this helps children feel safer and leads to environments where allegations are less likely to occur.

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