

Volunteering with Safety

Exercise: Safeguarding – True or False?

One of the things that can get in the way of our safeguarding responsibilities is assumptions and preconceptions about individuals and situations. Just as the stereotype of the 'dirty man in the rain mac' gets in the way of our seeing the much more common husband or boyfriend when thinking about sexual offences, stereotypes of victims and offenders can prevent us from seeing abuse, neglect and other types of harm.

This exercise gives you ten statements about a range of safeguarding issues. You simply need to say for each whether it is true or false. Answers and explanations follow at the end.

- 1. All abusers come from deprived backgrounds and have a below average I.Q.**

True ✓

False x

- 2. If you have a concern about a child or vulnerable adult's welfare it's best to go home and sleep on it before you have a discussion with someone.**

True ✓

False x

- 3. Children are always safe in groups.**

True ✓

False x

- 4. All physical injuries observed on a child, such as bruises, are a cause for concern and should result in a Child Protection referral being made.**

True ✓

False x

5. Children and adults often make things up (e.g. that they have been abused) so we must take what they say with a 'pinch of salt' and think about their ulterior motives.

True ✓

False x

6. Most children about whom a Child Protection referral is made will end up being removed from their parents.

True ✓

False x

7. It is ok for adults to use violence to chastise children and each other.

True ✓

False x

8. In some cultures what we think of as abuse is acceptable.

True ✓

False x

9. If you talk to the appropriate (Designated) person at work about concerns that you have and don't feel you have been listened to or taken seriously it's best to just leave it.

True ✓

False x

10. If you have concerns about a colleague's conduct it's ok to have a quiet word with them and say no more about it.

True ✓

False x

Answers

1. All abusers come from deprived backgrounds and have a below average I.Q.

False. Abusers come from a wide range of social backgrounds and may well be married, well-liked and well-respected members of a community (e.g., youth leaders, social workers, and teachers). A key feature is often their ready access to victims at home, work or through volunteering. Abusers have a range of I.Q. ability and come from a range of intellectual backgrounds. However, the additional stresses caused by poverty, social exclusion, poor housing and unemployment can contribute to the abuse of others (i.e., can make parents vulnerable or compromise their parenting) and so are things we should be aware of when thinking about the vulnerability of our clients.

2. If you have a concern about a child or vulnerable adult's welfare it's best to go home and sleep on it before you have a discussion with someone.

False. It is crucial that information is shared with the appropriate person in your organisation as soon as possible. They will offer advice and make the necessary decision regarding what needs to happen next.

3. Children are always safe in groups.

False. It is often true that groups increase safety, but children can be abused or groomed even when in a group. Peer groups of older children can be the sites for abuse, which can be facilitated by electronic communication devices. It is important to talk to children about their experiences and activities.

4. All physical injuries observed on a child, such as bruises, are a cause for concern and should result in a safeguarding referral being made.

False. Children do sustain accidental injuries. How worried we should be depends on the age of the child (are they walking independently?), on what injuries they have, where they are and how often they occur. Remember, we are not just worried about violence between parents and children, but also injuries caused by neglect. If you are concerned or uncomfortable with what you see or are told you should have an immediate discussion with your organisation's safeguarding lead.

5. Children and adults often make things up (e.g., that they have been abused) so we must take what they say with a 'pinch of salt' and think about their ulterior motives.

False. In children, 'made up' stories can be due to displacement (something else needs to be addressed in the child's life) or misinterpretation (the adult fails to recognise there is a concern) but

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children need to be taken seriously, no matter how bizarre or unbelievable what they are telling us seems, and the matter investigated by the appropriate agencies. While there are cases of adults making things up to punish or damage the reputations of others, these are vanishingly rare in comparison with the number of cases of actual abuse. If someone discloses abuse, it should be taken seriously – remember, you are not in a position to investigate and should pass that role onto the correct authority.

6. Most children about whom a safeguarding referral is made will end up being removed from their parents.

False. Adults often worry about what might happen next or that they will damage their relationship with parents – but a child’s safety and welfare should be our first concern. It is not your job to second-guess what referral outcomes will be or to decide whether or not to share information. If you are concerned you must follow procedures.

7. It is ok for adults to use violence to chastise children and each other.

False. English law allows parents to use ‘reasonable punishment’ but marks or injuries to a child - ‘physical abuse’ - are punishable by imprisonment. Violence towards adults which results in injury or marks can also be considered assault.

Even mild violence is a cause for concern as it creates a situation which can escalate easily - what happens if the initial violence doesn’t work? It can also point to wider issues around self-control and anger management which can also escalate. In all but the rarest of cases, violence is not the best solution to a problem and even reports of mild violence should make us concerned.

8. In some cultures what we think of as abuse is acceptable.

False. With rare exceptions, such as female genital mutilation, the abuse of others – sexual, physical, emotional, financial, neglect or other - is not acceptable in any culture and there is no one group that has more or less child abuse than another. Abuse crosses all classes, cultures, religions, ages, sexualities and genders. It is important to remember that there is as much difference in behaviour within groups as between them – we shouldn’t be distracted from abuse within our own cultural groups by non-harmful differences in practice from other groups.

9. If you talk to the safeguarding lead at work about concerns that you have and don’t feel you have been listened to or taken seriously it’s best to just leave it.

False. It is important that you feel able to go back to the safeguarding lead and make your feelings and concerns known. They may not be able to tell you exactly what has happened as a result of you passing your



concerns to them - remember, information is shared on a 'need to know basis'. This can feel disempowering and difficult, and these are feelings you should discuss. If you remain concerned or do not feel that you have been listened to you should inform the safeguarding lead that you intend to speak to another senior member of staff or manager about this – do this on the same day!

10. If you have concerns about a colleague's conduct it's ok to have a quiet word with them and say no more about it.

False. You may want to address any immediate concerns with the person in question, thereby ensuring that a person is safe. You should be clear about the process for reporting concerns about a colleague or 'whistle blowing' as it is sometimes known.