

Child Protection

National Policy

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1. Overview

Relationships Scotland members are committed to keeping all children, and adults using their services, safe and protected from harm. As a Network, we are fully committed to promoting children's rights, notably their right to be protected from harm, abuse and exploitation and to be involved in any decisions that directly affect them.

All Relationships Scotland policies affecting children and young people are considered within the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This requires a continuum of preventative and protection work.

We are also committed to GIRFEC (Getting it Right for Every Child) to give children and young people the highest level of protection and support possible. Relationships Scotland will review all policy and practice procedures through the application of our Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIA).

This policy is based on the following principles:

- the welfare of children is paramount
- that all children without exception have the right to protection from abuse
- that all suspicions, disclosures and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately

2. Child Protection Policy

This policy provides the framework within which Relationships Scotland staff, individually and collectively, can understand their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding, child protection and promoting the welfare of children.

2.1. Definitions

2.1.1. Differing legal definitions of the age of a 'child' can be confusing. The priority is to ensure that a vulnerable young person who is or may be at risk of harm is offered support and protection. References within this policy to children are intended to refer to children and young people up to the age of 18 years.

2.1.2. A protected adult is defined as an individual aged 16 or over who is provided with (and thus receives) a type of care, support or welfare service. A protected adult is therefore a service-based definition and avoids labelling adults on the basis of them having a specific condition or disability.

2.1.3. A 'parent' refers to an adult with parental responsibilities, or other adult in "loco parentis".

3. Principles of this Policy

The welfare and rights of all children, young people and protected adults are always the primary concern;

- Protecting children, young people and protected adults is **everyone's** responsibility;
- Every child, young person and protected adult should be treated as an individual and have a right to a positive sense of identity. [UNCRC Article 8 - I have a right to an identity](#)
- All children, young people, and protected adults have the right to be protected from all forms of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. [UNCRC Article 19 - I have the right to be protected from being hurt or badly treated](#)
- All children, young people and protected adults have the right to express their views on matters affecting them. [UNCRC Article 12 - I have the right to be listened to and taken seriously](#)

To promote these principles, we will:

- treat everyone with respect and encourage children, young people and protected adults to respect others.
- protect the rights, including privacy and dignity, of children, young people and protected adults as defined by the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#)
- respect confidentiality and only share information and concerns about children, young people and protected adults with those who need to know.
- take action to stop any inappropriate verbal or physical behaviour and emotional abuse, including bullying behaviour.
- treat all concerns and allegations seriously and respond appropriately, operating within our agreed policy, procedures and guidance.
- refer our concerns, or any concerns received, to the appropriate authority. **We will not investigate.**

4. Legal and Policy Framework

In 2023 the Scottish Government issued a refreshed National Guidance for Child Protection. It provides guidance to all agencies working with children and their families in the statutory, voluntary, and independent sectors who may have concerns about the welfare of a child and who may have to respond to information that a child is at risk of harm. It stresses the importance of collective responsibility and information sharing between agencies.

4.1. Protection Measures

There are a number of measures to protect children from those unsuitable to work with children. One of these is 'The Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020 (Disclosure Act)' and 'The Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007'. Disclosure Scotland issued an updated 'Code of Practice' in March 2025. This policy refers to the definitions within this document as follows:

4.1.1. The PVG (Protection of Vulnerable Groups) scheme safeguards vulnerable people by ensuring that those individuals carrying out a regulated role are suitable to do so.

4.1.2. The Disclosure Act is an Act of Parliament relating to the disclosure of criminal history and other relevant information. It is designed to improve the disclosure system in Scotland by focusing on protecting the public, while balancing the need for people to move on from offending and simplifying the process for disclosing criminal history information.

4.2. Statutory Bodies

Three statutory bodies are responsible for investigating matters of child abuse in Scotland;

Police Scotland, NHS Scotland and Social Work Services.

There is a local protocol as to where, and under what circumstances referral should be made to each of these agencies, and this will be set out in the local (Protection Committee (CPC) or Public Protection Committee (PPC) Policy and Procedures document.

Each local authority and its relevant health board are required to jointly prepare a Children's Services Plan for each three-year period. This relates to services which have a significant effect on the wellbeing of, or are of benefit to, babies, children and young people. The Scottish Government has provided [statutory guidance on children's services planning](#) (Scottish Government, 2020).

Local CPC or PCC guidance will take precedence in any conflict between their guidance and Relationships Scotland Child Protection Policy and Procedures.

Referral to Police Scotland (101 or 999) is in the case of immediate danger to a child.

Local authority websites have details about referrals for Child Protection and Public Protection. There will be contact details for out of hours and normal office hours referrals.

4.3. Relationships Scotland Workers

Relationships Scotland ensure our staff and volunteers are carefully selected, screened, trained and supervised. Furthermore, we endeavour to keep up to date with national developments relating to the care and protection of children and young people.

Practitioners adhere to Codes of Practice for Mediators, Counsellors and Child Contact Centres. The Relationships Scotland Network also respects and upholds the Codes of Practice and Ethics that our professionals are committed to.

5. Child Protection Guidance for Workers

The policy statement and procedural guidance apply to everyone involved in the delivery of Relationships Scotland service provision, and includes committee members, paid employees, sessional workers, volunteers, researchers, and others contracted to the service. This includes counsellors, mediators and child contact centre practitioners.

Throughout this document, they are referred to as 'workers'. All workers doing regulated work with children i.e. are likely to have sole charge of children as a normal part of their duties **must** to register with the PVG scheme through Disclosure Scotland and share their record with their employer or the Member Service they are volunteering with.

Documents which must be available in Member Service's for workers to refer to and for staff training are:

- Relationships Scotland National Child Protection Policy
- Guidance that includes contact details for local relevant statutory agencies, including local CPC and PPC policy statements
- Relationships Scotland Codes of Practice as appropriate

Other documents that workers can refer to are:

- The Scottish Government National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland
- 2021; updated 2023
- Scotland's Children: Children (Scotland) Act 1995 Regulations and Guidance, Volume 1:

- Support and Protection for Children and their Families;
- The Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003; and
- COSRT, COSCA, BACP, AFT and Child Contact Centre Codes of Practice and Ethics, if appropriate
- Care Inspectorate and Scottish Social Services Council: Protection Policy (June 2023)
- The Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020 updated 2025

Waiting or reception areas **must** have a Relationships Scotland Child Protection information poster (appendix 1) for client reference. This will detail that copies of the policy and procedures can be made available for reference.

Member Services will make all users aware of the appropriate policies, including those on confidentiality and child protection during intake meetings or at the first meeting clients have with a worker.

6. The Role of RS Member Services in Information Sharing

Relationships Scotland members are charitable organisations and have no statutory remit or role in investigating child abuse. However, they do have a responsibility and duty to refer any concerns that may arise in relation to the welfare and/or safety of a child to relevant statutory agencies. This includes any concern over a possible offence against a child, whether or not that child is directly involved in the use of the Member Service. The appropriate agency will assess and address any concerns raised.

During intake or initial meetings, Relationships Scotland staff must check for child protection and domestic abuse issues and remain alert should these issues become evident at any time during a client's involvement with the Service.

The Relationships Scotland National Policy on Confidentiality makes it clear that where there is concern about the welfare and/or safety of a child, there is a duty of care to refer this concern to appropriate agencies.

If one of the three statutory bodies, i.e. Police Scotland, NHS Scotland or Social Work Services approaches a Relationships Scotland Member Service for information about a client, they should be asked if this relates to a Child Protection or a wellbeing issue. If it is a Child Protection concern, the Member Service has a duty to assist and provide such information that they feel is necessary, relevant and proportionate. It is not necessary to seek permission from the family / child before providing this information as this may increase the risk to the child.

If the enquiry relates to a child's wellbeing, then the Relationships Scotland Member Service is not legally obliged to supply any information unless there is a service level agreement stating that the service is obliged to respond to requests for information. However, it is good practice to consider requests where sharing wellbeing information is in the best interests of the child. In these cases, the Member Service should seek permission from the family / child first where possible and only provide such information that they feel is necessary, relevant and proportionate.

When information is shared, a record should be made of when it was shared, with whom, for what purpose. Any decision not to share information should also be recorded. See appendix 5.

7. Circumstances where services may not be offered

There are some circumstances where Relationships Scotland members may not offer a

service until a risk assessment carried out by the relevant statutory agencies, shows, to the satisfaction of those undertaking the assessment, that service provision is appropriate.

If any of the following circumstances were not known at the commencement of client involvement, but were revealed during the course of any part of service delivery, then the service must be suspended until a risk assessment carried out by the relevant statutory agencies shows, to the satisfaction of those undertaking the assessment, that it is appropriate to resume the delivery of a service. The decision of the service provider is final.

These circumstances include:

- when an investigation is underway, or about to commence, into a child being at risk of abuse or involved in a criminal case
- where any of the clients are the subject of an investigation into an offence against a child, even if outside the family unit
- where a child is currently care experienced and under a Supervision Requirement and/or on a Child Protection Register and/or under Investigation

7.1. Child Contact Centres

The decision as to whether or not individuals classed as Schedule One Offenders should be able to use a Child Contact Centre is a matter of judgement for the Management Committee and Chief Officer of that Member Service.

7.1.1. Supported Contact

- Child contact centres will not accept a referral for supported contact where an individual involved in the referral is known by the Service provider to have been charged, convicted or is under investigation of a Schedule One Offence.
- Child contact centres will not accept a referral for supported contact when an individual in the referral is known by the Service provider to be on the Sex Offenders Register.
- In cases where a child contact supported contact is taking place and it subsequently becomes known that a client is a Schedule One Offender or on the Sex Offenders Register, the service must be suspended, and contact must be made with relevant statutory body in order to determine whether the child's continued use of the service is appropriate. The Member Service will decide, in consultation with the statutory body, what is in the best interests of the child. If the service is continued, contact will be required to be supervised. A record of the dialogue with the statutory body must be kept.

7.1.2. Supervised Contact

- A Member Service will only accept a referral for contact with an individual known to be a Schedule One Offender if it is to be supervised by an appropriately trained person (Contact Supervisor) and will take place when no other clients are present.

8. Child Protection Disclosures

Child protection concerns may arise at any stage of a family's involvement with a Member Service and disclosures can be presented in many ways. Some examples are:

- allegations made directly by a child or young person
- allegations made directly by an adult

- a third party contacting the Member Service
- a direct observation by a worker
- a client disclosure or observation of inappropriate behaviour
- a client disclosing information about a third Party

It is essential that where a worker is concerned that an offence may have been committed against a child, the immediate effect of continuing the service is considered carefully. Even where information is only partial, it is **not** the role of a Relationships Scotland Member Service to investigate.

If there is any doubt about a concern, advice and guidance should be sought from Social Work Services. They will provide advice and guidance on the next steps. This may be taking a referral by telephone, or they may provide further advice. It is essential that all workers follow: ***If in doubt: refer.***

A disclosure may be an allegation about a particular incident or behaviour. However, it may also be where a client makes reference to something that gives the worker concern that a child has been, is or may be at risk, leading to concern about the safety and/or welfare of a child, for example:

- a disclosure that the child sees, hears or is present during or is likely to be adversely affected by any form of domestic abuse
- a client admits to accessing or downloading pornography that involves a child under the age of 16
- a client names a person who abused them when they were a child
- a client discloses alcohol or drug use whilst responsible for a child that suggests the child might not be safe
- a client makes an allegation of abuse against an ex-partner

Workers must never ignore any statement made by a child that they, or any other child, have been abused. Action taken will depend on the circumstances at the time the child decides to report the alleged abuse, the age of the child, and an assessment of the immediate threat to the child's wellbeing.

8.1 Recording a Child Protection Disclosure

It is essential that workers:

- listen to disclosures and record them carefully, where possible in the exact words of the person making the disclosure
- the worker should not pursue questioning in the form of an investigation as this may lead to consequences for evidential purposes
- workers should be non-judgmental and allow the adult or child to tell what they want to say. This can be done by using 'what', 'when', 'where', 'how' and only if appropriate "who"
- workers must resist clarifying matters further in their questioning, no leading questions must be asked or anything that could be construed as a leading question
- when referred on, the statutory bodies will lead the investigation more fully
- do not promise to keep disclosed information confidential

It is crucial that a clear and accurate record is taken of the conversation; the worker should record what they hear verbatim using the child's/adult's own words. This must be signed and dated by the worker and stored within a Child Protection folder.

Member Services must have a clear protocol to inform the designated Child Protection

Officer of any disclosures. The Child Protection Officer should help support the worker that has taken the disclosure and with any recording and storage of information.

Where a referral is made to a statutory body, they will want to hear, where possible, from the person with first-hand knowledge of the disclosure. The person making the referral should be supported by the Chief Officer or person with delegated responsibility for Child Protection.

After a disclosure, the person making the referral should seek support for themselves through their line manager or other member of staff responsible for Child Protection in the Member Service.

9. Summary

9.1 Child Protection Officer

Each member service must have a designated Child Protection Officer and Deputy Child Protection Officer. They are responsible for training and ensuring that all staff understand their responsibilities around Child Protection (CP). A log of staff training must be retained, and staff should sign that they have completed their CP training. It is recommended that CP training is completed at least every two years. New staff should be given CP training as part of their induction programme.

9.2 Child Protection Case File

The Child Protection Officer (CPO) is responsible for opening a case file for each reported CP case. These files must be stored safely and securely (in a locked filing cabinet) and only be accessible to the CPO, Deputy CPO or Head of Service. The case file should contain any notes taken about the reported CP concern and the action taken. If subsequent information is requested by Police, Health or Social Work, a copy of the information shared must be retained in the CP case file. Information stored in a CP file should follow a clear pattern e.g. items all stored in chronological order.

9.3 Responsibilities

Child Protection is everyone's responsibility. Staff should feel confident and comfortable taking appropriate steps to record a disclosure, should one occur, or make the CPO know that they require additional training/advice.

Appendix 1: Child Protection Poster for Offices

This poster **must** be amended to reflect your own setting. Designated Child Protection Officers and local contact details **must** be inserted. The amended poster must be available in all public areas of your Member Service. This appendix is available as a word document for ease of editing.



Relationships Scotland

IF YOU HAVE ANY CONCERNS REGARDING THE HEALTH AND WELL BEING
OF ANY CHILD
PLEASE CONTACT OUR **DESIGNATED CHILD PROTECTION OFFICER**



1

The Designated Member of Staff (DMS) for
Child Protection for Relationships Scotland
National Office is
Jane Malcolm
Head of Professional Practice for Child Contact
Centres



2

The Deputy Designated Member of Staff for
Child Protection for Relationships Scotland
National Office is
Stuart Valentine CEO

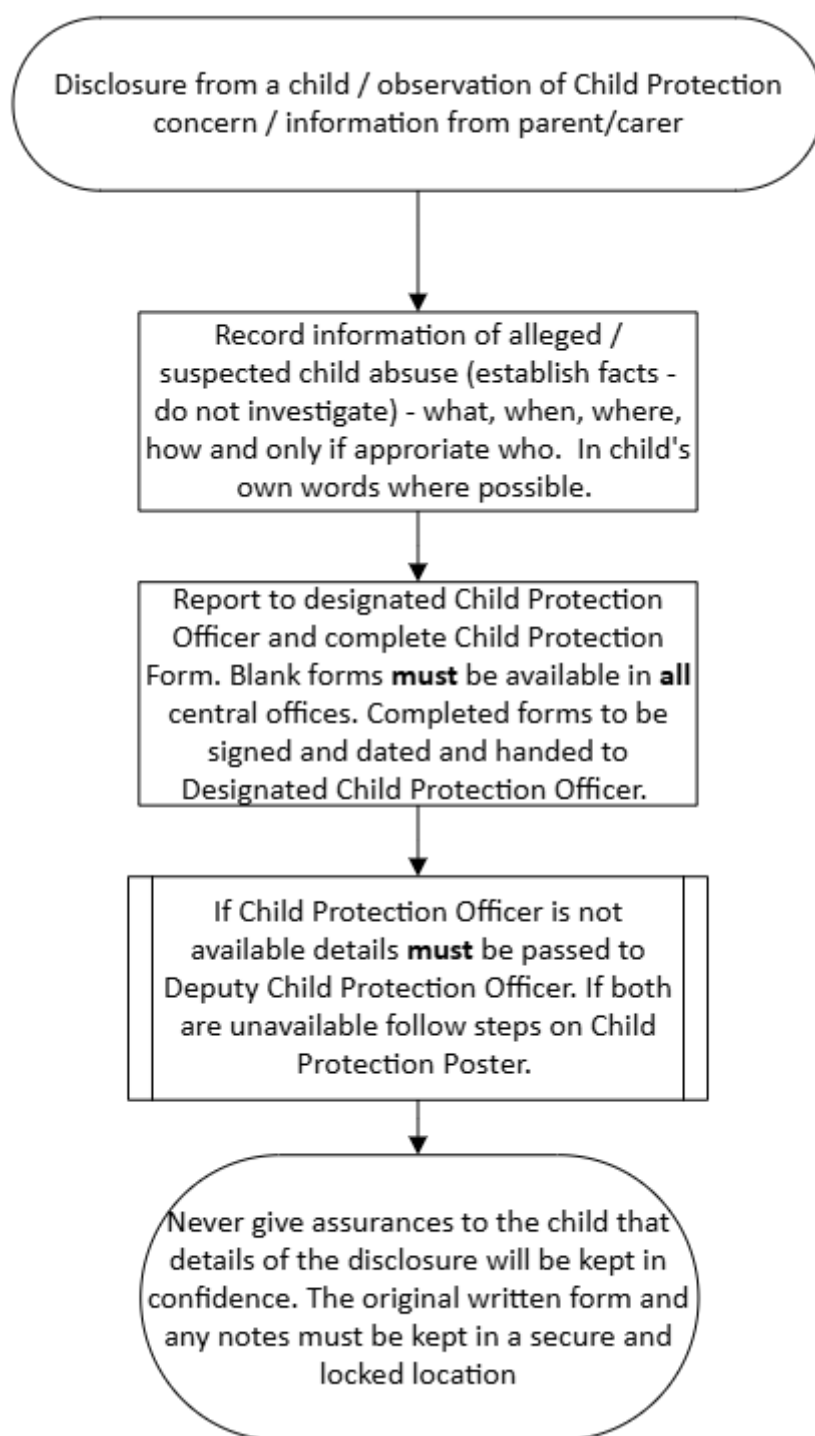
CHILD PROTECTION – KEY TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Edinburgh City Council – Social Care Direct 0131 200 2324 Please inform the duty officer you are making a child protection call/enquiry	Emergency Social Work (After Hours, weekends, public holidays) 0800 731 6969
Police Scotland (After hours, weekends, public holidays) 101 or 999 in an emergency	
Health Child Protection 0131 446 4123 Ask for the Paediatrician on call for Child Protection	Health (After hours, weekends, public holidays) 0131 536 0000
For general information regarding child protection in the Lothians please see: Edinburgh and the Lothians Multi-agency Child Protection Procedures	





Appendix 2: Flowchart – Recording a Disclosure



Appendix 3: Child Protection Disclosure Form



Reporting a Child Protection Concern Form

Baby / Child / Young Person - Details	Person recording details
Name:	Name:
Date of Birth	Agency / Establishment:
	Role:

When completed, return to the designated Child Protection Officer as soon as possible.

Description of concern(s):

Details of the disclosure, record child's own words verbatim. Only use what, when, where, how and only if appropriate who. Include any actions taken, i.e. people contacted. Never promise confidentiality to a child or young person sharing their disclosure.

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Signature:

Date:

Reporting a Child Protection Concern Form (page 2)

Has the concern(s) been shared with the parent / carer? Yes No

If yes, what did the parents say about the concern? If no, detail reasons.

Has the concern(s) been shared with the child / young person? Yes No

If yes, what did the child / young person say about the concern? If no, detail reasons.

**This section to be completed by Designated Child Protection Officer or person referring to
Social Work / Police / Health**

Has the concern(s) been shared with anyone else? Yes No

If yes, please specify:

Comments / Actions:

Feedback given to the referrer? Yes No Date:

By who:

Name:

Job Title:

Date:

Appendix 4: Definitions of Harm and Abuse

Definition of harm relating to child protection

When we say children at risk of harm, we mean children up to the age of 18 years who need urgent support due to being at risk of harm from abuse and/or neglect. We include in this term children who need urgent support due to being a significant risk to themselves and/or others or are at significant risk in the community.

Types of abuse:

- **Physical abuse:** causing harm through actions like hitting, shaking, or burning.
- **Emotional abuse:** persistent emotional ill-treatment that causes significant harm to a child's emotional development.
- **Sexual abuse:** involving any activity for the sexual gratification of another person, which is illegal and harmful.
- **Child sexual exploitation:** a form of sexual abuse where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a person under 18 into sexual activity in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator.
- **Criminal exploitation:** refers to the action of an individual or group using an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under that age of 18 into any criminal activity in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, or for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator.
- **Child trafficking:** involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt, exchange or transfer of control of a child under the age of 18 years for the purposes of exploitation.
- **Neglect:** failing to provide the necessary care and support that a child needs, which can lead to harm.
- **Female genital mutilation:** an extreme form of physical, sexual and emotional assault upon girls and women involves partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.
- **Forced marriage:** a marriage conducted without the full and free consent of both parties and where duress is a factor.

These definitions are crucial for understanding the legal and ethical responsibilities in child protection and ensuring the safety and well-being of children in Scotland.

Appendix 5: Information Sharing with Statutory Bodies

Information may be requested as part of an investigation by Police, Social Work or Health. There is no legal duty to provide this information unless a legal mandate is provided. Where Child Protection is being investigated, it may be in the best interests of the child to share limited, specific information. If the concern is specifically related to Child Protection, you do not need to declare this to the child or parent, however, an accurate record of what information has been shared must be kept in the individual's Child Protection File.

Baby / Child / Young Person - Details	Person requesting details
Name:	Name:
Date of Birth	Agency / Establishment:
	Role:
	Date requested:
	Information requested:
	Purpose of information sharing:
	Agreement to share information:
	Yes No
Information shared:	

