

# Barriers for professionals to reporting abuse and neglect

**This briefing provides insights into barriers for professionals when reporting child abuse and neglect. This is drawn from what professionals told the NSPCC Helpline and NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line in 2022/23**

**March 2024**

## Key Findings

- From 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 the NSPCC Helpline responded to 1,142 contacts from people who came into contact with children whilst at work or in a volunteer role.
- From 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 the NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line responded to 339 contacts.
- Some professionals were not always confident that their concerns were “serious enough” or that they knew enough detail to share with others.
- Some professionals were worried that speaking out could put the young person at further risk, or could compromise their own safety.
- Some professionals were worried about the impact on their own job if they raised safeguarding concerns about their workplace.

- Some professionals had already raised their concerns, but organisational safeguarding procedures had not been followed or the appropriate action had not been taken to respond to the safeguarding concerns and prevent further harm.

## Introduction

Helplines insight briefings aim to raise awareness and increase understanding of different topics by sharing the voices of people who are contacting the NSPCC with concerns about a child's welfare or wellbeing.

All organisations that work with, or come into contact with, children should have safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure that appropriate action is taken to protect children from harm. Setting up and following robust child safeguarding procedures means that staff and volunteers at these organisations will know what they should do to make sure children are safe from adults, and other children, who might pose a risk.

Our learning from case review briefing series has shown that even when an organisation has child safeguarding processes in place, staff and volunteers can still face barriers in effectively raising concerns or taking action to protect a child's safety and wellbeing.<sup>1</sup> Timely action is crucial in reducing the harm to a child at risk of experiencing abuse and neglect.<sup>2</sup> By better understanding barriers to reporting we can consider how they could be removed.

---

1 [nspcc.org.uk/casereviewlearning](https://nspcc.org.uk/casereviewlearning)

2 Cossar, J. et al (2013) 'It takes a lot to build trust'. Recognition and telling: developing earlier routes to help for children and young people (PDF). London: Office of the Children's Commissioner.

Not all organisations that interact with children have suitable child safeguarding policies and procedures in place. In other organisations, child safeguarding procedures and policies exist, but these are not being applied or followed, leaving children at risk. If someone has a concern about a dangerous or illegal activity or any wrongdoing within their organisation, they may need to “whistleblow”.<sup>3</sup> NSPCC has been a prescribed whistleblowing body for child welfare and protection since 2014 (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2015; HM Government, 2023), meaning any worker who has a child protection or welfare concern can make a disclosure to us and we can seek to protect them against unfair treatment at work. The NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line was commissioned by the Home Office in 2016, as a direct response to the recommendation for “a new whistleblowing national portal for child abuse related reports” set out in the Government’s 2015 Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation report (HM Government, 2015).

Professionals are encouraged to raise child safeguarding concerns they encounter at or through work to their employer in the first instance. However, the Whistleblowing Advice Line offers free advice and support for professionals who have concerns about the way child protection issues are being handled in their own organisation. Where professionals have concerns outside of work, they are encouraged to contact the relevant local authority or the main NSPCC Helpline, where child protection specialists will listen, give advice, and take action if needed.

This insight briefing looks at contacts to both the NSPCC Helpline and the Whistleblowing Advice Line to identify barriers for people who came into contact with

---

<sup>3</sup> NSPCC (2023) About the Whistleblowing Advice Line [Accessed 09/01/2024]

children and young people whilst at work or volunteering<sup>4</sup> (referred to here as “professionals”) in raising abuse or neglect concerns. Not all examples within the briefing are instances of whistleblowing.

Some professionals were seeking advice about what to do when they had concerns about a child, including with questions specific to a particular scenario or situation. Others were worried about reporting their concerns because of potential repercussions for the child, family, or their own job. Further contacts to the helplines shared issues around a lack of training or no safeguarding procedures provided by their employer. The helplines also heard about issues with poor safeguarding cultures within organisations which put children at risk.

**This briefing contains summarised and anonymised quotes from adults which mention sexual abuse (including online), physical abuse, domestic abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect. Further support is available from the NSPCC Helpline, Whistleblowing Advice Line and Childline. Contact details and guidance can be found at the end of the briefing.**

## Gaps in knowledge and confidence

---

<sup>4</sup> Volunteers are not currently legally protected by whistleblowing legislation (Public Disclosure Act 1998 c. 23) which is solely for ‘workers’ (HM Government, 2019). Some individual charitable organisations do have whistleblowing policies and procedures for volunteers, including the NSPCC (NSPCC, 2019). Volunteers can report wrongdoings at a charitable organisation to the [Charity Commission](#), seek advice from [Protect](#) or [Citizens Advice](#), and any child safeguarding concerns should be raised with NSPCC Helpline.

Signs of abuse or neglect in children and young people, or identifying adults putting them at risk or danger, can arise in a variety of ways. These can include:

- direct – from specific verbal statements
- indirect – from ambiguous verbal statements which suggest something is wrong
- behavioural – through behaviour that signals something is wrong (this may or may not be deliberate)
- non-verbal – through letters, pictures, online material, or other forms of communication

It is not always easy to know if a child or young person is being abused or neglected. Safeguarding policies should encourage professionals not to wait until they are certain and to speak up about any concerns as soon as possible. However, contacts to the Helpline and Whistleblowing Advice Line highlight areas where professionals felt uncertainty and apprehension about taking those steps.

### Insufficient evidence or details

The NSPCC Helpline and Whistleblowing Advice Line heard from adults who had identified safeguarding concerns but hesitated in mentioning these to others as they felt they did not have enough details or evidence.

**“Jordan, a teen I work with, has been telling me about their ‘friend’ who was sexually assaulted. The last few times they've been in, Jordan has been showing me posts on social media where an account is talking about a sexual assault, but it doesn't share any names of anyone involved. To be honest I haven't been sure what to do besides agree that it's awful if it's happened - this other person isn't linked to our work, they might not even be a child, I'm not sure what I could do for someone online who hasn't given many details? But I'm also not sure if this is**

**Jordan on an account and this is how they're telling me they've been raped? I don't really know the next steps for that either, because it's not a clear disclosure. Was I meant to go to the police already with just what I know, or tell Jordan to do that, or ask for more details?"**

*Youth Professional*

This topic was also linked to concerns that their worries would not be taken seriously if raised formally.

**"I want to talk about behaviours of concern I've seen from a senior member of staff. My worry is that it will be swept under the rug and seen as 'low level' stuff because I don't have evidence. Some of the other women on the staff have already made complaints about inappropriate comments and touching that they've received; these were put down to personal disagreements and misunderstandings. I can't prove for sure that anything has happened with students, but I've overheard him say problematic sexual things, and I can say he has 1-2-1 meetings with older girls who aren't even doing his subject or in his form. I just don't have proof, beyond what I've seen and heard, that he has crossed a line. I strongly feel that there's no smoke without fire, but it's my word against his, so I've held off mentioning it"**

*Teacher*

There were also worries that without more detail they were misinterpreting a situation which had a legitimate explanation.

**"Billie told me a few weeks ago that they're scared of their mum's new partner. Other staff had also noticed a change in Billie's behaviour; they**

**were more withdrawn and sometimes cried at home time. Last week though Billie wasn't brought in on a couple of days, and now hasn't come in at all this week, with no explanation from mum. I couldn't get hold of mum, but I eventually got hold of another relative who was quite gruff with me. They said Billie and their mother were at appointments this week, but wouldn't say more or suggest when Billie will be back in. I'm unsure what to do next really. If that's the explanation for all this then I don't want to cause additional stress. I want to speak to the mother directly but that hasn't been possible. My main concern is that both the child and the mother are ok and not in a situation where abuse is taking place."**

*Early Years Professional*

NSPCC Helpline would advise that even if someone feels that they do not have all the information about a situation, they can always seek advice and guidance on the next steps to take. Additionally, any personal insights could add weight to concerns raised by others, creating a more complete picture of the risk or abuse taking place, which could make all the difference in protecting a child.

### + Relevant resources

- **Recognising and responding to abuse**

<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/recognising-and-responding-to-abuse>>

- **Summary of after-school clubs, community activities and tuition: safeguarding guidance for providers**

<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/2020/a-summary-of-after-school-clubs-community-activities-and-tuition-safeguarding-guidance-for-providers>>

- **Social media and online safety**

<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/social-media-and-online-safety>>

## Waiting for permissions

Other professionals felt, or had been told, that they needed permission or cooperation from the person experiencing abuse or neglect to report it. In these instances, agreement to raise concerns was sought from children, parents, and colleagues.

**“A boy in my class, Samuel, told me that his father was being sexually abusive to him and his mother. He said his father touches him in private places even though he's asked him not to and described his father hurting his mother in their bedroom. I spoke to my Head of Department about it, and they said no one else had mentioned a disclosure, just that Samuel wasn't engaging as well as he used to. They didn't seem willing to take it further until Samuel told someone else or his mum confirmed there's domestic abuse going on. I've been trying to catch Sam's mum at pick up for the last few weeks to talk to her. When I saw her briefly last week, I sort of mentioned that Samuel said things weren't great at home. She begged me not to tell anyone at the time, she looked very scared that I brought it up. Thankfully, today she's let me know she's ok with me getting authorities involved”**

*Teacher*

**“A 16-year-old girl I've been tutoring told me that she was groomed by a teacher a few years ago. She said she had a long-term 'relationship' with them but wouldn't share more about what she meant by that. She said it was too difficult to talk about and wasn't ready to report it. She first told**



**me in our session last month and I've been debating what to do ever since if she didn't want to report it. After I saw her again today, I let her know that I had to report this to someone even though she found it really difficult to talk about"**

*Tutor*

Professionals also mentioned feeling conflicted about raising concerns when those affected by the abuse denied it was happening.

**"I have a co-worker, Kate, who sometimes brings her child, Amelia, into work as she's struggling with childcare at the moment. It sounds like she doesn't have much support after she left her child's father for being abusive. The thing is, I've started seeing bruises on her arms and Amelia told me a few weeks ago that 'Daddy is hitting mummy again'. When I asked Kate about it, she denied it and said Amelia was making it up, just repeating things she used to say. Today Kate's come in with bruises on her face and neck, her phone is all smashed up, and she's talking about quitting work because childcare is too complicated. Even if Kate's denying what's going on, I'm worried about both of them and this is escalating"**

*Hospitality Professional*

The guidance from NSPCC Helpline would be that ideally consent would be gained from a child and their family to share information about them; but it is not necessary to obtain consent before sharing information about safeguarding concerns.

## + Relevant resources

- **Managing allegations of abuse**

<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/managing-allegations-of-abuse>>

- **Safeguarding and child protection for tutors**

<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/recognising-and-responding-to-abuse>>

## Unfamiliar safeguarding scenarios

Another source of uncertainty for some professionals was when they were faced with safeguarding scenarios where they did not have a policy or had not received training. This created situations where they were not confident in understanding the risk to the child, were not sure how to handle the situation, or did not know if or where it should be reported.

**“I'm not sure if this is something inappropriate or if I'm completely overthinking things. I work in events; we often have children attending and we usually have roaming photographers to take promo shots or to give or sell to the clients and attendees. What I've noticed though is sometimes when the little girls are using things like the bouncy castles or climbing equipment, this one photographer doesn't really avoid taking pictures when their skirts are up, and their underwear is on show. I would say I have seen him actively move closer and crouch down to get those pictures. I've seen this behaviour at multiple events and worry where those pictures will end up. If I'm nearby I'll tell the children to adjust their clothes or comment out loud to let the girls keep their modesty; sometimes parents agree but others have sort of laughed it**

**off, like I'm making a big deal out of nothing? I do know this particular guy hasn't done our safeguarding training since he's not a direct employee, but then again our training doesn't mention things like this"**

*Events Professional*

**"A parent let me know a few weeks ago that one of the older boys at our football club has been sending violent gore videos and pornography to some of the younger boys. He's also made comments before about performing sexual acts on them. I spoke to him about each incident, and to some of the parents involved, but I don't know if that's enough? We've had some general safeguarding training about grooming and sexual abuse from adults, we know to escalate that, but I don't know how to handle this situation. I don't think there are children in the videos he's sent, but all the boys who received the videos are 13, 14, 15 years old and the older boy just turned 17"**

*Sports Coach*

### **Example of Helpline's response to this type of contact:**

**"** It is always better to ask for advice than worry in silence. The issues that you have raised sound concerning and we feel that further investigation may be required. We will make a referral to the relevant services on your behalf, to support those impacted by your concerns. We recommend that you speak to the safeguarding unit for the sports organisation your club is part of to help them develop their safeguarding policy should any similar instances arise in the future. We also have resources on the [NSPCC Learning](#) website about [safeguarding in sport](#) to support you and others at the club. Keep a

note of your reference number and if you need to share any further information or get any more advice you can get back in touch”

*Helpline Child Safeguarding Professional*

### + Relevant resources

- **Photography and sharing images guidance**

<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/briefings/photography-sharing-images-guidance>>

- **Safeguarding in sport**

<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/what-is-safeguarding-in-sport>>

## Fears around sharing concerns

### Disrupting and breaking up families

Some professionals contacting the NSPCC Helpline had hesitations about raising concerns because of presumed responses from agencies. Specific fears were predictions of negative reactions from parents in response to agencies potentially becoming involved or that a child or children would be removed from their homes.

**“I'm a carer for an elderly lady who lives with her daughter, son-in-law and their toddler. I'm worried about some of the things I've seen. Unless it's mealtime, the child is left unsupervised in the playroom - in all my visits I've only ever seen him in there or in their highchair. I'm not sure why it's called a playroom because I can't see any toys in there. When**

**the parents do interact with the child, they're really quite rough and shout at him over what seem to me to be minor things - or things that he's too young to understand. I did once raise it with the mother, but she told me it's not my place to judge her parenting. I'm not a parent myself so she may well be right. I don't want to be the reason that the child is removed so didn't want to say anything, but I think they need extra help"**

*Carer*

**"I've been supporting someone in the community to look after their two children but they're really struggling with their mental health. It's at the point now where I don't think that they can look after their children. I know they're self-medicating with alcohol and cannabis and they're in bed most days when I go round. If I wasn't bringing them our food parcels, I know there wouldn't be anything in for the kids to eat, but we're limited with what we can keep doing. The thing is, I'm reluctant to get child services involved; the parent has told me that they couldn't go on living if their children were removed. With their current mindset I believe they could and would hurt themselves, and I don't want to make things worse getting anyone else involved if there's other options"**

*Professional*

### **+ Relevant resources**

- **Early help and early intervention**

<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/early-help-and-early-intervention>>

- **Child protection system in the UK**

<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-protection-system>>

## Personal safety and safety of others

There were instances in contacts to the Helpline and Whistleblowing Advice Line where professionals talked about fears that raising their concerns would increase the risk to the child and family or put their own safety at risk. Anonymity was mentioned or requested as a necessity.

**“I feel stuck with how to help without making things worse. I tutor online, and I asked Kara about some bruises on her arm; after everyone else had logged off she admitted that that her father did it. When I mentioned speaking to her mother, Kara looked so scared and said her mother would kill her for talking about it outside the family. I haven't seen any more marks, but it's hard through a screen and she's often wearing long sleeves. Kara has been quite angry and wilful in our lessons since. I feel very uncomfortable knowing something could be continuing but I don't know how to approach it without putting her at risk of more violence. If it's clear that I made the report then I worry that Kara will be taken out of my classes and then she will have even fewer safe adults to turn to or check on her”**

*Tutor*

**“I've been worried about Jennifer for months. It started with overhearing mum saying some concerning things and Jennifer being really quite violent with other children in class. She's only 8 and she is really punching them and saying things like "stop being stupid, you're pissing me off!". The mum has been heard threatening to beat Jennifer when she's home, but the**

**mum also threatens to hurt herself saying "Is that what you want to make me do? To make me kill myself?". When I called mum and her partner in for a meeting about Jennifer's behaviour and wellbeing, they were furious that I raised any of this. I was scared they were going to get physical right then and there, they swore at me and threatened to get me kicked out of teaching. This really needs to be anonymous because the mum knows the other concerns came from me and I'm worried she's going to take her anger out on me"**

*Teacher*

### Job insecurity

Before they could report their safeguarding concerns, there were some professionals who felt that they had to consider the risk to their own job security. Some contacts came from professionals in less secure and non-standard employment, where people were either not employed on permanent contracts, or were not employed directly by the organisation they worked for. This type of employment includes, but is not restricted to, subcontractors, agency roles, temporary roles, zero-hour or on-call employees, freelance or "gig" work, and dependent self-employment (Florisson, 2022).

In these instances, professionals sometimes felt they would be easily identified by the individuals, employers, or families they had concerns about, or they had already seen negative outcomes for others who had reported concerns in their place of employment. Others worried that being known for reporting concerns would negatively impact their immediate financial stability but also prevent them gaining future employment in their field.

**"I want to report my workplace for unsafe practices, specifically not having a high enough ratio of staff to children, but I know it will put all**

**our jobs at risk. We've had so many accidents and near-misses because we can't watch all the children and not everyone is fully qualified or has completed their training. The owner blames us, she says we should be thankful she gives us the hours she does and pays us at all, and she just tells us to not record all of the incidents. A lot of us come from abroad though, and I think some of the staff might not be properly employed, I don't know what everyone would do if this place was shut down"**

*Professional*

**"I've seen what happens when people report any concerns, even minor ones. Management bullies you, reduces your shifts, stops giving you what you need to support the kids. You're expected to buy everything yourself for them instead of it being provided. If you thought you were on track for a permanent job, forget it. We're all agency and contract staff relying on this income and a bad reference screws you over for future jobs too. I need to know that if I do make my report, I've got some support"**

*Special Education Needs Professional*

Some professionals had already experienced repercussions in their workplace for flagging safeguarding concerns to their organisation. This included bullying in the workplace and reductions in working hours. Professionals spoke about how this had impacted their mental and physical health, and some had left their role or profession as a result of how they were treated.

**"I had concerns about a lack of risk management in the classroom, with a notable number of near misses; an allergic reaction I didn't know to watch out for; violent melt downs where a child hits me and others; a**



**child who frequently tries to run away that I wasn't warned about; plus, what I considered to be unsafe restraint practices. I asked multiple times for details of the children's needs, and this was met with attitude and brushed off. I emailed the senior leadership team with my concerns, and I was asked to come and talk to them about it the next day. Verbally they said they shared my concerns, and I was moved to another class while they did their own investigation, which I was fine with. It became clear though that this teacher was very popular; she may have been spoken to at most, but nothing became of their 'investigation'. I was asked not to raise it again and was ostracised by other staff as someone who blows things out of proportion and a 'snitch'. The stress was so severe I had to go on sick leave and have now resigned. With the high turnover of staff here, I suspect this has happened to others as well. I've spoken to my union rep now but want to make a referral here too"**

*Education Professional*

### + Relevant resources

- **Recommended adult to child ratios**

<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/briefings/recommended-adult-child-ratios-working-with-children>>

- **Safeguarding d/Deaf and disabled children and young people**

<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/deaf-and-disabled-children>>

## Issues with organisational responses

NSPCC Helpline can be a first point of contact for anyone worried about a child, but it is also available for people who have tried to raise concerns through other channels first. Some professionals told us about inadequate or inappropriate responses from their organisations which had, at times, created further barriers to steps being taken to protect the children at risk.

### Lack of safeguarding processes

NSPCC Helpline and the Whistleblowing Advice Line heard from professionals who wanted to follow safeguarding procedures or speak to safeguarding leads but found these did not exist at their organisation.

**“Two siblings I work with disclosed that they're experiencing physical abuse and emotional abuse at home. It was when this happened that I realised we don't have a safeguarding procedure, we don't have a safeguarding lead. We never had safeguarding training. I only knew what to do because I'd had training in past jobs. When I raised it with the company owners, they said they'd deal with it but have since been reluctant to do anything. It's evident to me this is because they genuinely don't know what to do in this type of situation. I can't wait on them acting any longer”**

*Tutor*

**“Our charity didn't used to work directly with children but over the last year we've started taking groups of local children on trips. I've had increasing concerns about inappropriate behaviour from a member of the executive board. It's a small charity so he often comes on the trips; I**

**am aware he has been giving his number out to some of the boys attending, giving some of them gifts, insisting they sit with him on the coach. He has no reason to be doing this. We're not a big organisation and we don't have a safeguarding policy that I could find. Any concerns would usually go to the board, but for obvious reasons I don't feel I can do that here"**

*Charity Professional*

### + Relevant resources

- **Charity trustees – safeguarding and child protection for your organisation**  
<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/charity-trustees>>
- **Protecting children from abuse by someone in a position of trust or authority**  
<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/briefings/preventing-abuse-positions-of-trust>>
- **Safeguarding in faith communities**  
<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/for-faith-communities>>

### Dismissive responses

Where professionals had taken steps to follow their organisation's safeguarding policies and procedures to report concerns, they sometimes found responses to be non-existent, dismissive, and slow. Where concerns were disregarded, it was not always clear to the referrer why the issues were not being acted upon or taken seriously. As a result, professionals were not satisfied that steps taken had removed

or reduced the risk to the child. Within this, there were examples of professionals describing their organisation or colleagues viewing safeguarding training and policies as “tick-box” exercises or a “waste of time”.

**“I have seen with my own eyes some of the staff here screaming and shouting at the children and objectively not meeting their support needs. The children are scared of the staff, and I have heard this from parents too. When I spoke to senior management, they said they would deal with it. We are months down the line from that and these staff members are still in the same roles, interacting with the same children. I was told some of the issues were just from language barriers, ‘problem children’ and ‘problem families’ complaining, and that doing safeguarding training would be a waste of time. They see having safeguarding procedures as a tick box exercise.”**

*Teacher*

**“Some of the coaches in my sport have been acting inappropriately. I heard about luxury gifts being given to particular teenage athletes and some people have said there is touching going on during international trips. The other risk was these favoured athletes being chosen to compete at higher levels than they’re ready for; they could get seriously hurt. I reported it to our international sporting organisation weeks ago, but I haven’t managed to get a response or anyone there to talk to me. When I tried to talk about it at my club, I was treated like a disgruntled coach because my athletes aren’t the ones being picked to compete. This isn’t the case; I have genuine concerns for the safety of the children being targeted”**

*Sport Professional*

## + Relevant resources

- **Safeguarding children who come from Black, Asian and minoritized ethnic communities**

<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/children-from-black-asian-minoritised-ethnic-communities>>

- **Safeguarding LGBTQ+ children and young people**

<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/lgbtq-children-young-people>>

## Concealing abuse

At times professionals described to the Helpline or Whistleblowing Advice Line that they had reported concerns internally, but the actions taken were to hide, destroy or change evidence of the issue rather than resolve it.

**“At work we recently found some sexually explicit images on a shared computer, and we don’t think they’re all pictures of adults. What I’m most worried about though is when we reported it to management, we were just told to delete them. We can’t work out if it was the children, they have access to the computer unsupervised so feasibly could have downloaded things, or if it was a member of staff. I feel either way other action needs to be taken to deal with this”**

*Professional*

**“A child got seriously hurt during an activity with us and the local authority is now involved. It was sort of inevitable, we’re always understaffed, and it’s known that people just tick the equipment and safety check lists without actually doing checks. I logged the incident**

**after it happened, including with pictures. Now that incident report is missing from the log, and I was threatened with being reported for taking pictures of the child; they weren't inappropriate pictures at all, it was to show the injuries. Management are downplaying the incident around us and without the incident report I think they'll be sending a false, at least misleading, statement to the LADO<sup>5</sup>. The child involved has communication issues and can't really say for themselves what happened, I think that's part of why management think they can do all this"**

*Professional*

**"I'm dealing with an incident where a group of students filmed themselves assaulting a younger boy and sending the video to their friends. They tried to say it was a game that got out of hand. This was outside of school and a couple of staff were told different versions of events, but we all notified the safeguarding lead immediately. He said to each of us that he would deal with it. I've come to find that he hasn't reported it any further and doesn't plan to. He's asked the students involved to delete the video and was heard referring to the situation as 'just kid stuff' and 'best put behind us'. All students involved are still allowed to mingle with everyone else, parents haven't been brought in, nothing sent to the police. I trusted this was being resolved professionally and appropriately when I spoke to him. What message**

---

<sup>5</sup> In England, a Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), also called a Designated Officer (DO) or (DOLA), is responsible for managing allegations against adults who work with children.

**does this send to the victim and to the other children who know this happened?”**

*Professional*

### + Relevant resources

- **Managing allegations made against a child**

<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/managing-allegations-made-against-a-child>>

- **Safer activities and events**

<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/safer-activities-events>>

- **Safeguarding in the performing arts**

<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/for-performing-arts>>

## Conclusion

This briefing highlights some of the barriers that professionals can face when they have concerns for the safety and wellbeing of the young people and children they work or come into contact with. Sharing these concerns is key to understanding any risks that a child, young person or their family is facing. This can enable the right support or protections to be put in at the right time, preventing concerning situations from becoming more serious, and stopping abuse and neglect from continuing. It was evident from contacts to the NSPCC Helpline and Whistleblowing Advice Line however that these barriers were hindering effective information sharing when abuse or neglect concerns were present.

Contacts to the helplines identified a need for increased knowledge and confidence in recognising signs of abuse and neglect and knowing how to respond appropriately to a wide range of safeguarding concerns. There also needs to be improved understanding of what happens if a report or referral is made, including that a child won't automatically be removed from a family unless this is determined by the appropriate services to be the necessary response due to the severity of risk.

Staff and volunteers across a wide range of roles need to be supported by clear safeguarding procedures, regular training, and a culture of safeguarding across the organisation. This needs to be upheld at all levels of management and across everyone working for an organisation, including contract and agency staff.

All of the professionals who got in contact with the NSPCC Helpline or Whistleblowing Advice Line did the right thing by raising their concerns. Our Helpline and Whistleblowing Advice Line child protection specialists are available to listen to anyone who is worried about a child safeguarding concern at their organisation. Our child protection specialists can provide advice, guidance and signposting to anyone who comes into contact with children whilst at work or volunteering to think about what steps can be taken to keep children safe. If concerns suggest that a child is at risk of harm, our Helpline and Whistleblowing Advice Line child protection specialists will make a referral to external agencies such as children's services or the police.

Anyone with concerns about a child experiencing abuse or neglect can call the NSPCC Helpline on **0808 800 5000**, Whistleblowing Advice Line on **0800 028 0285**, email [help@NSPCC.org.uk](mailto:help@NSPCC.org.uk) or [report abuse online](#).



## Methodology

When people contact the NSPCC Helpline or NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line, our trained child protection specialists record what they tell us. The insights in this briefing are taken from contacts to the Helpline and Whistleblowing Advice Line where we recorded information about abuse (domestic abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse and exploitation, online sexual abuse and exploitation) or neglect and the person contacting works with, or during their work comes into contact with, children (referred to as “professionals” in this briefing). Quotes are created from real Helpline contacts but all names and potentially identifying details have been changed to protect the identity of children involved and the individuals contacting the NSPCC.

## References

Cossar, J. et al (2013) **'It takes a lot to build trust'. Recognition and telling: developing earlier routes to help for children and young people (PDF)**.

London: Office of the Children's Commissioner.

<[https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/It\\_takes\\_a\\_lot\\_to\\_build\\_trust\\_FINAL\\_REPORT.pdf](https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/It_takes_a_lot_to_build_trust_FINAL_REPORT.pdf)>

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2015) **Blowing the whistle, list of prescribed people and bodies [PDF] [London]:** Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

<[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/431221/bis-15-289-blowing-the-whistle-to-a-prescribed-person-list-of-prescribed-persons-and-bodies-2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/431221/bis-15-289-blowing-the-whistle-to-a-prescribed-person-list-of-prescribed-persons-and-bodies-2.pdf)>

HM Government (2023) **Guidance: Whistleblowing: list of prescribed people and bodies** [Accessed 19/01/2024].

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/blowing-the-whistle-list-of-prescribed-people-and-bodies-2/whistleblowing-list-of-prescribed-people-and-bodies#childrens-interest>>

HM Government (2015) **Tackling Child Exploitation [PDF]** [London]: Cabinet Office  
<[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/408604/2903652\\_RotherhamResponse\\_acc2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/408604/2903652_RotherhamResponse_acc2.pdf)>

Public Disclosure Act 1998 c. 23, Available at:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/23> [Accessed 19/01/2024]

<<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/23>>

HM Government (2019) **Guidance: Report serious wrongdoing at a charity as a worker or volunteer** [Accessed 19/01/2024]

<<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-serious-wrongdoing-at-a-charity-as-a-worker-or-volunteer>>

NSPCC (2019) **Our whistleblowing policy: Guidelines for raising serious concerns [PDF]** [London]: NSPCC

<<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/about-us/nspcc-staff-whistleblowing-policy.pdf>>

Florisson, R. (2022) **The UK Insecure Work Index: Two decades of insecurity [PDF]** Work Foundation: Lancaster University

<<https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/media/lancaster-university/content-assets/documents/lums/work-foundation/UKInsecureWorkIndex.pdf>>

## Resources

### Writing safeguarding policies and procedures

#### ➤ [Learn more about Safeguarding children and child protection](#)

<[nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding](https://nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding)>

➤ **Learn more about Writing safeguarding policies and procedures**

<<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/writing-a-safeguarding-policy-statement/>>

For schools and other education professionals, further information can be found on the NSPCC Learning Safeguarding and child protection in schools pages. For leaders of voluntary, community and faith groups guidance is also provided in the introductory guide to safeguarding and child protection for the voluntary and community sector and NSPCC Safeguarding and Child Protection Standards for the Voluntary and Community Sector.

➤ **Learn more about safeguarding and protection in schools**

<[nspcc.org.uk/schools](https://nspcc.org.uk/schools)>

➤ **Access our resources for to safeguarding and child protection in the voluntary and community sector**

<[nspcc.org.uk/VCS](https://nspcc.org.uk/VCS)>

### **Auditing safeguarding policies and procedures**

If you would like support auditing your current policies and procedures, NSPCC Learning has a free safeguarding and child protection self-assessment tool and support can be sought from NSPCC Safeguarding and child protection consultancy.

➤ **Access the NSPCC Learning safeguarding and child protection self-assessment tool**

<[nspcc.org.uk/self-assessment-tool](https://nspcc.org.uk/self-assessment-tool)>

➤ **Learn more about NSPCC Safeguarding and child protection consultancy**

<[nspcc.org.uk/consultancy](https://nspcc.org.uk/consultancy)>

## + More ways to help you protect children



Contact our **Helpline** if you're worried about a child, or if you need support for something you experienced as a child



Contact the **NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line** if you're concerned about how child protection issues are being handled by your own or another organisation



Sign up to our weekly current awareness email newsletter  
[nspcc.org.uk/caspar](https://nspcc.org.uk/caspar)



Visit **NSPCC Learning** for more information and resources about safeguarding and child protection

