



Guidelines: How to manage disclosures of abuse

A Safeguarding Concern is anything that leads you to believe the safety and wellbeing of a child or adult client, customer or Corps participant is at risk due to the behavior or practices of another person.

You can become aware of a safeguarding concern through something you see or hear either on a single occasion or over a period of time.

You might also become aware of a safeguarding concern by something someone tells you. You can be told about a safeguarding concern by:

- Someone you work with;
- Someone from another organization;
- The person who has experienced harm;
- The person who has committed harm; and/or
- Another client, Corps participant or resident.

If a person discloses to you about a safeguarding concern:

- **Listen carefully** to what is being said and go at the person's pace – don't interrupt the flow or try to rush;
- **Acknowledge** what you are told – use short, neutral verbal indicators such as 'Uh-hah' and/or body language such as head-nods and show the person they have your full attention – maintain face-to-face contact as much as possible. Do not suggest you don't believe what you are being told;
- **Stay calm and 'present'** – Try your best not to show alarm or discomfort at what you are told as this can disrupt a disclosure. Also, avoid leaving the person who is trying to disclose abuse to go get another member of personnel – it is better to stay and listen if safe to do so as leaving can disrupt the disclosure process;
- **Provide reassurance** – Show this verbally by telling the alleged victim/survivor it is good they have told you and thank them for taking time to talk to you. You can also show this through body language by not showing shock or anger (even if you feel these things strongly);
- **Use open questions** – Rather than closed questions which require a short or one-word-answer, ask open and clarifying questions which encourage the person to give more details in each response. This reduces the number of questions you need to ask overall and helps reduce the risk of re-traumatising an alleged victim/survivor.

Avoid leading questions – those where the answer is implied in the question asked – because these can compromise a formal investigation.



When asking open questions, remember, your objective is to understand enough about the alleged abuse to be able to make a useful report to TSA management and external authorities to ensure the alleged victim/survivor and other persons are protected. **You should not be 'interviewing'** anyone or trying to 'prove' anything. Therefore, only ask as many questions as you need to in order to achieve your objective.

Examples of open and clarifying questions which should be asked include:

- *"Tell me more about that"*
- *"What else happened?"* or *"Then what happened?"* (Can be used interchangeably to draw out more detail, allowing free recall, as many times as required)

- *“Tell me more about the part where you said...”*
- *“Has this happened once or more than once?”* followed by *“Can you tell me about another time this happened?”* (Only if abuse occurred more than once)
- *“Was anyone else there?”*
- *“Who else was there?”* (Only if other people were present at the time the abuse took place)
- *“When did this happen?”* (Even a day of the week or rough timeframe is enough)
- *“Where were you when this happened?”*
- *“When will you see [alleged abuser’s name] again?”* (If not already known)
- *“Do you live with [alleged abuser’s name]?”* (If not already known)

Examples of leading questions which should not be asked include:

- *“Did your dad hit you?”*
- *“Did it happen on Tuesday when you saw your uncle?”*
- *“Was he being a bit rough when this happened?”*
- *“Was it just an accident, do you think?”*
- *“Are you sure it happened that way?”*

Avoid questions that start with *“Why?”* as these can sound confrontational or suggest that you do not believe what the person is telling you;

- **Tell** the alleged victim/survivor what you will do next unless you strongly feel that telling them will place the alleged victim/survivor(s) at greater risk than not telling them.