

Policy Briefing

WAKEFIELD & DISTRICT safeguarding children board

Briefing Note

The Munro Review of Child Protection

The purpose of this LSCB Policy Briefing is to provide professionals in Wakefield with brief information in relation to how to respond when sexually harmful behaviour is exhibited by children and young people.

Professionals encountering this issue should ensure that they consult the West Yorkshire Interagency Safeguarding Children Procedures. Section 5.1 of the procedures contain detailed procedure and guidance which must be followed by all agencies. The safeguarding children procedures can be found at www.proceduresonline.com/westyorksbc

Key principles:

- There is a difference between “sexually harmful behaviour” and what is normal developmental behaviour. In some cases, a behaviour exhibited by a child or young person will clearly be outside normal boundaries, however in some cases, assessment of the behaviour will be more difficult.
- In cases where the behaviour is not obviously harmful, professionals should consider issues such as the age and level of understanding of the child or young person, whether the behaviour involved violence, threats or coercion, whether there is a power imbalance between victim and perpetrator etc.
- In **all** cases where a child or young person is felt to have exhibited sexually harmful behaviour or been a victim of such behaviour, a prompt referral should be made to Social Care Direct.
- Professionals do not need the consent of a parent/carer or the young person to make this referral.
- The professional making the referral should consult with Social Care Direct about whether the parent/carer/young person should be informed about the referral. In some cases, to do so may place someone at greater risk, or may impact on a future criminal investigation.
- In all cases, children's social care will hold a Strategy Discussion with West Yorkshire Police in order to plan the investigation. Sometimes this investigation will be undertaken jointly, however in others, particularly

where the children are under the age of 10, and hence under the age of criminal responsibility, the investigation will be undertaken by a Social Worker from the Safeguarding and Family Support Directorate of Family Services.

- In **all** cases where a child or young person has displayed sexually harmful behaviour, the needs of both the victim and perpetrator are of equal priority. A Social Worker will need to make an assessment of these needs, and of any harm or risk of harm to both victim and perpetrator. Both victim and perpetrator and their families are likely to need support, and the Social Worker will need to establish the level of risk posed by the perpetrator to other children and to themselves.

If you are concerned about possible sexually harmful behaviour by a child or young person, your first step is to access the procedures at www.proceduresonline.com/westyorksrb.

If you are still uncertain about what to do next, speak without delay to a named safeguarding professional within your agency, or contact Social Care Direct for advice and discussion. Social Care Direct is a 24/7 service that can be contacted on 0845 8 503503.