

NSPCC Helpline.

The NSPCC is urging professionals working with young people to call their free Helpline if they are ever uncertain about a child's welfare.

Working regularly with children and young people, it is important to have a clear child protection procedure to follow if a child discloses abuse but, it may not always feel that simple. A child may come to you about a friend without saying who they are talking about, or you may have vague concerns that a child is being neglected, without being certain. A young person may approach you who at 16 or 17 wants to talk to someone without the abuse being reported.

If you are uncertain about what to do, the NSPCC Helpline can provide you with help and support. The Helpline is for any adult who needs advice about a child's welfare, including staff and volunteers who work regularly with children and young people. As John Cameron, head of the Helpline, explains: "We know how difficult it can be to spot the danger to a child and how complex the issues can be. We also understand that professionals have dilemmas about reporting safeguarding issues they feel uncertain about. When a child or someone discloses abuse, the first thing you must always do is take what they may say seriously, record things well and follow your procedures but, if you're unsure what to do next, then we'd encourage you to speak to us."

The Helpline is a free service staffed by trained child protection advisors, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. When you speak to an advisor you can remain anonymous. The Helpline will help you assess the situation, advise you about your responsibilities to the child and explain what to do next. Where the Helpline advisor is made aware of the identity of a child at risk of abuse they will make a referral to children's services or the police even though professionals will have clearly defined reporting protocols locally. The Helpline will always encourage professionals to follow these procedures.

The Helpline can be particularly useful in more difficult situations, for example where you don't have enough information to make a referral, or if you feel uncertain about whether or not the child is at risk. John Cameron says: "We would always prefer people to talk to us, than to struggle with a situation on their own. That's why we set up the Helpline and are now expanding it through the Child's Voice Appeal - so people don't have to. Together we can stop children from suffering and make sure they are protected. So if you are uncertain, don't talk yourself out of it, talk to us."

You can contact the NSPCC Helpline by phoning 0808 800 5000 or emailing help@nspcc.org.uk

Over the next three years the charity plans to grow the Helpline and its ChildLine service through the Child's Voice Appeal, so that it can protect more children.

