Staff personal safety

Policy statement

This setting believes that the health and safety of all staff is of paramount importance and that all staff have the right to work in a safe environment. We support safe working both on and off the premises, acknowledging the needs and diversity of children and their family.

Procedures

*General*

* All staff in the building early in the morning, ensure doors are kept locked.
* Where possible, at least the first two members of staff to arrive in the building arrive together, and the last two members of staff in the building leave together.
* Visitors are generally only allowed access with prior appointments and only admitted once their identity has been verified.
* Managers have good liaison with local police and ask for advice on safe practice where there are issues or concerns.

*Home visits*

Where staff members conduct home visits, this is done at the manager’s discretion and the following health and safety considerations apply:

* Prior to a home visit the manager undertakes a risk assessment that is specific to the visit being undertaken.
* Members of staff normally do home visits in pairs – usually the manager/deputy manager with the key person.
* Other staff members are aware of the timings of the Home Visit and the expected time to return.
* If there is any reason for staff to feel concerned about entering premises, they do not do so, for example, if a parent appears drunk.
* Members of staff carry a mobile phone when going out on a home visit.
* Staff identify an emergency word/phrase, which is made known to all staff in the setting, so that if they feel extremely threatened or endangered on a home visit they can covertly alert other members of staff via a telephone call to the situation. Use of the agreed word/phrase will initiate an immediate 999 call to be made.
* If staff do not return from the home visit at the designated time, the contact person attempts to phone them and continues to do so until they make contact.
* If no contact is made after a reasonable amount of time has passed, the contact person rings the police.

*Dealing with agitated parents in the setting*

* If a parent appears to be angry, mentally agitated or possibly hostile, two members of staff will lead the parent away from the children into the hallway, but will not shut the door behind them.
* Members of staff will try to empathise and ensure that the language they use can be easily understood.
* Staff will speak in low, even tones, below the voice level of the parent.
* Members of staff will make it clear that they want to listen and seek solutions.
* If the person makes threats and continues to be angry, members of staff make it clear that they will be unable to discuss the issue until the person stops shouting or being abusive, while avoiding potentially inflammatory expressions such as ‘calm down’ or ‘be reasonable’. It may be suggested that the parents make an appointment with the manager to discuss issues they may have.
* If threats or abuse continues, members of staff will explain that they need to leave the premises otherwise the police will be called and emphasise the inappropriateness of such behaviour in front of children.
* After the event, details are recorded in the child’s personal file together with any decisions made with the parents to rectify the situation and any correspondence regarding the incident.

Threats and abuse towards staff and volunteers

The setting is responsible for protecting the health and safety of all staff and volunteers in its services and has a duty of care in relation to their physical and emotional well-being. We believe that violence, threatening behaviour and abuse against staff are unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Where such behaviour occurs, we will take all reasonable and appropriate action in support of our staff and volunteers.

* Staff and volunteers have a right to expect that their workplace is a safe environment, and that prompt and appropriate action will be taken on their behalf if they are subjected to abuse, threats, violence or harassment by parents, service users and other adults as they carry out their duties.
* The most common example of unreasonable behaviour is abusive or intimidating and aggressive language. If this occurs, the ultimate sanction, where informal action is not considered to be appropriate or has proved to be ineffective, is the withdrawal of permission to be on the premises.
* Where a person recklessly or intentionally applies unlawful force on another or puts another in fear of an immediate attack, it is an offence in law which constitutes an assault. We would normally expect the police to be contacted immediately.

Any staff member or volunteer who feels under threat or has been threatened, assaulted, or intimidated in the course of their work must report this immediately to Sue Thirsk who will follow the setting’s procedures and guidance for responding.

999 should always be used when the immediate attendance of a police officer is required. The police support the use of 999 in all cases where:

* there is danger to life
* there is a likelihood of violence
* an assault is, or is believed to be, in progress
* the offender is on the premises
* the offence has just occurred, and an early arrest is likely

If it is not possible to speak when making a 999 call because it alerts an offender, cough quietly or make a noise on the line, then follow the prompts to dial 55 (mobiles only) for a silent call. Police may be able to trace the call and attend the premises.

Harassment and intimidation

Staff may find themselves subject to a pattern of persistent unreasonable behaviour from individual parents or service users. This behaviour may not be abusive or overtly aggressive but could be perceived as intimidating and oppressive. In these circumstances staff may face a barrage of constant demands or criticisms on an almost daily basis, in a variety of formats for instance, email or telephone. They may not be particularly taxing or serious when viewed in isolation but can have a cumulative effect over a period of undermining their confidence, well-being, and health. In extreme cases, the behaviour of the parent or other service user may constitute an offence under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, whereby:

*A person must not pursue a course of conduct:*

*(a) which amounts to harassment of another, and*

*(b) which he knows or ought to know amounts to harassment of the other.*

If so, the police have powers to act against the offender. Such situations are rare but, when they do arise, they can have a damaging effect on staff and be very difficult to resolve. If the actions of a parent appear to be heading in this direction, staff should speak to Sue Thirsk who will take appropriate action to support. This may include Sue Thirsk sending a letter to the aggressor, warning them that their behaviour is unacceptable and may result in further action being taken against them. All incidents must be recorded and reported to the setting’s line manager using form.

Banning parents and other visitors from the premises

* Parents and some other visitors normally have implied permission to be on the premises at certain times and for certain purposes, and they will not therefore be trespassers unless the implied permission is withdrawn.
* If a parent or other person continues to behave unreasonably on the premises a letter will be sent to them from the owners/directors/trustees, withdrawing the implied permission for them to be there.
* Further breaches may lead to prosecution of the person concerned by the police and they are treated as a trespasser.
* Full records are kept of each incident, in the Reportable Incident Record, including details of any person(s) who witnessed the behaviour of the trespasser(s), since evidence will need to be provided to the Court.

Dealing with an incident

* We would normally expect all cases of assault, and all but the most minor of other incidents, to be regarded as serious matters which should be reported to the setting manager and/or the police and followed up with due care and attention.
* A record of the incident must be made whether the police are involved or not.
* Whilst acknowledging that service users i.e. parents and families, may themselves be under severe stress, it is never acceptable for them to behave aggressively towards staff and volunteers. Individual circumstances along with the nature of the threat are considered before further action is taken.
* All parties involved should consider the needs, views, feelings and wishes of the victim at every stage. We will ensure sympathetic and practical help, support and counselling is available to the victim both at the time of the incident and subsequently.
* A range of support can be obtained:
* from the setting manager, owners/directors/trustees and/or a staff colleague
* from Victim Support on giving evidence in court
* In non-urgent cases, where the incident is not thought to be an emergency, but police involvement is required, all staff and volunteers are aware of the non-emergency police contact number for the area.
* 999 calls receive an immediate response. Unless agreed at the time, non-emergency calls are normally attended within 8 hours (24 hours at the latest).
* When they attend the setting or service, the police will take written statements from the victim (including a ‘Victim Personal Statement’) and obtain evidence to investigate the offence in the most appropriate and effective manner.
* The police will also consider any views expressed by the setting manager and owner/directors/trustees as to the action they would like to see taken. The manager should speak to the victim and be aware of his or her views before confirming with the police how they wish them to proceed.
* In some cases the victim may be asked by the police if he/she wishes to make a complaint or allegation against the alleged offender. It is important to ensure that the victim can discuss the matter with their line manager, a colleague or friend before deciding on their response. It is helpful for the victim to be assured that, if there is a need subsequently to give evidence in court, support can be provided if it is not already available from Victim Support.
* The decision regarding whether an individual is prosecuted is made by the police or Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) based on the evidence and with due regard to other factors.
* After the incident has been dealt with, a risk assessment is done to identify preventative measures that can be put in place to minimise or prevent the incident occurring again.

Harassment or intimidation of staff by parents/visitors

* The setting manager should contact their line manager for advice and support.
* Where the parent’s behaviour merits it, the setting manager, with another member of staff present, should inform the parent clearly but sensitively that staff feel unduly harassed or intimidated and are considering making a complaint to the police if the behaviour does not desist or improve. The parent should be left in no doubt about the gravity of the situation and that this will be followed up with a letter drafted by the setting manager but sent to their line manager for approval before being issued.
* The setting manager and/or their line manager might wish to consider advising the parent to make a formal complaint. Information about how to complain is clearly displayed for parents and service users.
* If the investigation concludes that the parent’s expectations and demands are unreasonable, and that they are having a detrimental effect on staff, the findings can strengthen the setting manager’s position in further discussions with the parent and subsequently, if necessary, with the police.

Complaints relating to potential breaches of the EYFS Safeguarding and Welfare requirements will be managed according to the Complaints procedure for parents and service users.

Please also see:

Settling in Policy

Complaints Policy

M.Riches - July 2023