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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE  
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To: Local Education Authorities  
All maintained schools  
Other bodies

WORKING TOGETHER FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN FROM ABUSE: PROCEDURES WITHIN THE  
EDUCATION SERVICE

INTRODUCTION

1. There is increasing concern about child abuse generally, and specifically in relation to the report of the Inquiry into Child Abuse in Cleveland. The Secretary of State wishes to secure effective arrangements so that everyone who is in a position to help to protect abused children, or children at risk of abuse, is enabled to do so effectively, whatever his or her relationship to the children concerned. The DHSS Circular LAC(88)10 and Guide entitled "Working Together", copies of which are enclosed with this Circular, emphasises the importance of, and provides guidance on, cooperation between the agencies concerned with the protection of children. This Circular accordingly provides advice on action which should be taken within the education service to enable cases of suspected or identified abuse to be properly considered and pursued.
2. Primary responsibility for the protection of children from abuse rests with local authorities' Social Services Departments (SSDs). The NSPCC and the police also have statutory responsibilities, and they with SSDs and health authorities are the principal agencies involved in investigating and dealing with individual cases. In addition to the education service, others whose contacts with young people put them in a position to help include family practitioner services, probation services, local authority housing departments, local social security offices, the Armed Forces where the families of Service personnel are concerned, and voluntary and church organisations.
3. In brief, the principal recommendations of this Circular are for:
  - each LEA to designate a senior official as having LEA-wide responsibility for coordinating policy and action; to review its procedures; to ensure that its procedures are set out in a widely-available document; and to develop appropriate arrangements for in-service training;
  - each school to designate a senior member of staff as having responsibility, under the procedures established by the LEA, for co-ordinating action within the school and for liaison with other agencies.
4. The term "child abuse" is defined in "Working Together". It includes physical injury, neglect including emotional neglect, continued ill-treatment and sexual abuse.

INDICATIONS OF ABUSE

5. Because they are in regular and frequent contact with children, school staff are particularly well placed to observe outward signs of abuse, or unexplained changes in behaviour or performance which may indicate abuse. Bruises, lacerations and burns may be apparent, particularly when children change their clothes for physical education and sports activities. Possible indicators of physical neglect, such as inadequate clothing, poor growth, hunger or apparently deficient nutrition, and of emotional neglect, such as excessive dependence or attention-seeking, may be noticeable. Sexual abuse may exhibit physical signs, or lead to a substantial behavioural change including precocity or withdrawal. These signs and others can do no more than give rise to suspicion — they are not in themselves proof that abuse has occurred. But as part of their pastoral responsibilities teachers should be alert to all such signs. The designation of a coordinating teacher should not be seen as diminishing the role of all teachers in being alert to signs of abuse.

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