Safeguarding: GMC Guidance

Protecting children and young people: Short guide for GPs

This has been reproduced from the GMC document with the same title and can be accessed online along with the full guidance at: www.gmc-uk.org/childprotection.

All doctors have a duty to act if they think a child or young person is at risk of abuse or neglect. General practitioners (GPs) are in a unique position because they may be caring both for an adult who poses a risk to a child and for the child who is at risk, and have a duty of care to both.

As the primary care provider, a GP may also be able to give valuable insights into a child or young person’s family as part of child protection procedures.

This short guide summarises the key points from our guidance Protecting children and young people: the responsibilities of all doctors for GPs.

You can read the full guidance at www.gmc-uk.org/childprotection.

In the guidance ‘abuse or neglect’ refers to maltreatment, which has led, or may lead, to significant harm to a child or young person.

Identifying children and young people at risk of, or suffering, abuse or neglect

1. You must consider the safety and welfare of children and young people, whether or not you routinely see them as patients. When you care for an adult patient, that patient must be your first concern, but you must also consider whether your patient poses a risk to children or young people.

2. You must have the knowledge and skills to recognise signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect. You must be aware of the risk factors that have been linked to abuse and neglect and look out for signs that the child or young person may be at risk. You can find references to helpful resources in the full guidance.

3. You should have a working knowledge of local procedures for protecting children and young people in your area.

4. You should develop your understanding of the practices and beliefs of the different cultural and religious communities you serve. You must make sure your own cultural or religious background does not affect your objectivity.

5. You should look out for signs that a family may need extra support, and provide such support if that is part of your role, or refer the family to other health or local authority children’s services so they can get appropriate help.

6. You must act on any concerns you have about a child or young person who may be at risk.
of, or suffering, abuse or neglect. If in doubt, you should ask for advice from a named or designated professional or a lead clinician or, if they are not available, an experienced colleague.

**Communication and support**

- You should be able to use methods of communication that are appropriate to your patient group. For example, you should be able to adapt your methods to communicate with very young children or people with learning disabilities.
- You must listen to children and young people and talk directly to them, and take their views, age and maturity into account when making decisions. If you think having a parent present may discourage a child or young person from being open, you should consider speaking to them without the parent present.
- If you know in advance that child protection concerns will be discussed during a consultation, you should make sure arrangements are in place to meet the language and communication needs of the child or young person and their parents. If you suspect abuse or neglect, you must not rely on family members to interpret for each other.
- Most people do not intentionally harm children in their care. You must listen carefully to parents, children and young people, explore inconsistent accounts and keep an open mind about the cause of a child’s or young person’s injury or another sign that may suggest abuse or neglect. You should acknowledge parents’ understanding of their children’s health and work in partnership with families where possible.
- You should normally discuss any concerns you have about a child’s or young person’s safety or welfare with their parents. You should only withhold information about your concerns, or about a decision to make a referral, if you believe that telling the parents may increase the risk of harm to the child or young person or anyone else.
- You should give parents information about where they can get extra support and independent advice if they are involved in child protection procedures. There are examples of organisations that can help in the full guidance.

**Working in Partnership**

- You should understand and respect the child protection roles, responsibilities, policies and practices of other agencies and professionals and cooperate with them.
- You must be clear about your own role and responsibilities in protecting children and young people, and be ready to explain this to colleagues and other professionals.
- You should make sure you have effective systems for communicating with health visitors, child protection leads and other statutory agencies, either on a regular basis or as the need arises. You must know who to contact and how to contact them.
- If you are asked to take part in child protection procedures, you must cooperate fully. This should include going to child protection conferences, strategy meetings and case reviews to provide information and give your opinion. If you are not able to go to meetings, you must try to provide relevant information about the child or young person and their family to the meeting.

**Confidentiality and Sharing Information**

- You must tell an appropriate agency promptly if you are concerned that a child or young person is at risk of, or is suffering, abuse or neglect.
- You should get advice if you are concerned about a child or young person, but do not believe that they are at risk of significant harm.
- You should consider all requests for information for child protection purposes seriously and quickly, bearing in mind that refusing to give this information, or a delay in doing so, could
increase the risk of harm to a child or young person or undermine efforts to protect them.
You should only share information that is relevant to the request.

- You should ask for consent before sharing confidential information unless there is a compelling reason for not doing so. Information can be shared without consent if it is justified in the public interest or required by law. Do not delay disclosing information to obtain consent if that might put children or young people at risk of significant harm.

- You should tell your patient what information has been shared, with whom and why, unless doing this would put the child, young person or anyone else at increased risk.

Keeping Records

- You must keep clear, accurate and legible records. You must record your concerns, including minor ones, and the details of any action you have taken, information you have shared and decisions you have made relating to those concerns.

- You must make the records at the time that the events you are recording happen, or as soon as possible afterwards.

- You should make sure information that may be relevant to keeping a child or young person safe is available to other clinicians providing care to them.

- If there is not enough evidence to support your concerns that a child or young person is being abused or neglected, or the evidence shows that your concerns are not correct, you should record this clearly in the child’s or young person’s medical record and in the parents’ records.

Child Protection Examinations

- You must be satisfied that it is necessary and appropriate to carry out a child protection examination.

- You need consent or other legal authorisation to carry out a child protection examination.

- You must be satisfied the person giving consent understands the purpose of the examination and what it will involve. The full guidance gives advice on what to do if consent is refused.

Training and Development

- You must develop and maintain the knowledge and skills to protect children and young people at a level that is appropriate to your role. Information about the level of child protection training that is needed for different roles, and how often doctors should receive that training, is provided in the intercollegiate document Safeguarding Children and Young People: roles and competences for health care staff, Sept 2010.

- You should reflect regularly on your own performance in protecting children and young people, and your contributions to any teams in which you work.

- You should learn from other colleagues and professionals where opportunities are available for example, by taking part in multidisciplinary training or by sharing best practice and skills.
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