

STOCKPORT WOMEN'S AID PROTECTION FROM ABUSE

PURPOSE:

To set out the approach of Stockport Women's Aid in relation to protecting the women and children using its services from abuse.

INTRODUCTION

This document contains a policy statement (Part One) and procedural guidance (Part Two). The functions of each are set out briefly below.

Part One – Policy Statement. The policy statement sets out the broad framework of principles within which the particular area of work will be carried out. It sets out the organisation's broad style and approach to the issue, including any aims and guiding principles.

Part Two – Procedural Guidance. The procedural guidance sets out the details that staff will require to carry out their duties in this particular area of work. It also sets out the specific tasks involved in undertaking this area of work and identifies who is responsible for carrying them out.

PART ONE – POLICY STATEMENT

AIMS AND PRINCIPLES

1. SWA is committed to protecting all women and children who use its services from abuse. SWA will not tolerate any kind of abusive behaviour regardless of the age, status or position of the perpetrator and the age, status or position of the person experiencing the abuse.
2. Abusive behaviours include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - Physical or sexual violence
 - Sexual, racial or any other harassment
 - Bullying
 - Threatening, intimidating or aggressive behaviour or language

- Emotional and psychological abuse (which may include humiliation and degradation of an adult or a child)
 - Verbal insults, smacking and other forms of corporal punishment
 - Damage or theft of property or any other behaviour which could reasonably be expected to cause fear or distress
 - Neglect of service users or children
 - Financial Abuse. Theft, borrowing or unsolicited loaning of money and/or property.
3. SWA is committed to providing a service delivery environment which is free from abuse. SWA will therefore:
- undertake checks on all staff and volunteers at the recruitment stage through the Criminal Records Bureau
 - ensure that staff, volunteers, management committee members and service users maintain appropriate boundaries at all times.
 - operate confidential reporting systems so that anyone who suspects that abuse is taking place or is concerned about it can 'blow the whistle'.
 - operate clear processes for child protection at all times.
 - take action against staff, volunteers, management committee members or service users who use their positions, or any influence, power or authority they may have to abuse others or the organisation.
4. In upholding this commitment to an abuse-free environment, SWA will provide training, support and supervision to staff along with clear policies and procedures to which they must work.
5. In turn, staff will provide the necessary support to service users to assist them to uphold an abuse-free environment.

PART TWO – PROCEDURAL GUIDANCE ON PROTECTION FROM ABUSE

UNDERTAKING RECRUITMENT CHECKS

1. Candidates for all posts with SWA will be required to undergo a check by the Criminal Records Bureau as set out in the Recruitment and selection policy and procedure. New employees will not be allowed to work unsupervised until such a check has been successfully completed.
2. Volunteers will be subject to checks and safeguards as described in the Volunteer policy.

APPROPRIATE BOUNDARIES FOR STAFF

3. All staff and volunteers must follow the guidelines on appropriate professional boundaries that are set out in Appendix One.
4. All staff and volunteers will receive training in these boundaries and discussion of them will form part of regular support and supervision sessions.

REPORTING ABUSE

5. Anyone who suspects or knows that abuse is taking place must raise their concerns by following the procedure set out in the Whistle blowing policy and procedure.
6. If there are children involved, the guidance on Child Protection (including the procedures for reporting and dealing with such cases) must be followed in Appendix Two.

TAKING ACTION AGAINST ABUSE

Allegations against members of staff, volunteers or management committee members

7. If allegations of abuse are made against a member of staff, they may be suspended immediately with pay so that the allegations can be thoroughly investigated using the Disciplinary action policy and procedure. Volunteers and management committee members in this

position will also be suspended immediately and be subject to the Disciplinary action policy and procedure.

8. Should the investigation determine that there is a case to answer, the staff member, volunteer or management committee member will be subject to disciplinary action. The police may also be contacted to pursue legal action against them.
9. Should the investigation determine that there is no case to answer, the staff member, volunteer or management committee member will be offered additional support and supervision to assist them in returning to work.

Allegations against service users or their children

10. If allegations of abuse are made against another service user or a member of their family (whether an adult or a child), that service user (and their children) may be offered other temporary accommodation until an investigation has been carried out.
11. In cases of alleged sexual abuse, temporary accommodation will always be used. In other cases, the decision to offer temporary accommodation will depend on the nature of the alleged abuse and its seriousness.
12. If a service user refuses to accept an offer of temporary accommodation in these circumstances, she may be moved-on from the refuge immediately using the Move-On policy and procedure.
13. Should the investigation fail to find that there is a case to answer, the service user and her children, if any, may return to the refuge or be offered alternative accommodation in line with her wishes and the advice of SWA. If they return to the refuge, they will be offered additional support.
14. Should the investigation find that there is a case to answer, SWA may notify Social Services and/or the Police as appropriate (refer to the guidelines on Child Protection in Appendix Three). The service user and her children will not be allowed back to the refuge but SWA will make reasonable attempts to assist them to find alternative accommodation and support.

Allegations against visitors

15. Should a visitor to the refuge be subject to an allegation of abuse, they will be excluded from the refuge until an investigation has been carried out. SWA may involve Social Services and the Police in such an investigation as it deems appropriate.

APPENDIX ONE

APPROPRIATE PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

As a member of staff, a volunteer or a management committee member of SWA you must follow the guidelines below which set out the professional boundaries you must maintain.

You are expected to remain alert to these issues at all times and to discuss them openly and proactively at support and supervision sessions. If urgent concerns arise, you are expected to raise them with your line manager/a colleague immediately.

- **You must maintain a professional relationship with service users at all times. This means that you must not form a sexual or personal relationship with service users.**
 - Part of your role is to befriend service users but this does not mean that you become 'friends' with them.
 - You need to be aware that service users may develop strong or close feelings about you but you have a responsibility to manage this within the boundaries of your role as a professional. To allow your relationship to develop beyond the boundaries of a professional one would be to abuse your relationship with the service user, given the power imbalance between you.

- **You must not initiate or respond to any unprofessional physical contact towards or from service users.**
 - No contact should be made which could reasonably be perceived as sexual.
 - No contact should be of such force that it causes harm.
 - All contact should be within the boundaries of what is considered fair and reasonable in the circumstances. Only when it may cause offence or seem inappropriate not to, should staff have physical contact such as hugging or holding hands with service users. Staff should always remain mindful that service users may be vulnerable and that individuals have different perceptions of personal space.
 - You should not act in such a way that you put yourself or others in a position of danger. Retreat from physical danger is always the most favoured option.
 - No action should be reasonably perceived as threatening.

- **You must not impose your own personal, cultural, religious, philosophical or other beliefs on service users.**

- You must operate within SWA's value system as set out in its mission statement, aims, objectives, service description etc.
 - You must be sensitive to the cultural needs and differences of service users.
 - You should not seek to persuade or influence a service user in terms of your own personal beliefs.
 - Where directly asked for a personal opinion or belief from a service user, you may state this whilst making it clear that it is your own personal view. You should remain aware of the imbalance of power in your relationship with a service user before acting in this way. You also need to be aware of your own prejudices before offering a personal view.
- **You must act in a way that promotes and safeguards the well being and interests of service users, staff members and the organisation at all times.**
 - There may be times when you feel that there is a conflict between the interests of these various parties.
 - You are therefore expected to raise any such issues in support and supervision sessions or more immediately with a colleague or line manager as and when they arise.
- **You must not disclose any personal information to service users relating to yourself or other colleagues without the prior consent of that person.**
- **You must not give your home telephone number or address to service users.**
- **You must not lend money to service users.**
 - You must not lend your own money or make personal gifts.
 - Where SWA would normally lend money to a service user, you may do so within the confines of your delegated authority to make such a decision.
 - In such cases, you must make it clear that you are lending the money on SWA's behalf.
- **You must not borrow money or property from service users.**
- **You must not witness wills for service users or act as a named executor.**
- **You must not act as a God Parent for a child of a service user.**
- **You must not sell or buy property from service users.**

- **You must not accept free services from service users where such services would normally be charged for.**
- **You must not give service users gifts.**
- **You must declare gifts from service users.**
 - You must never solicit gifts from service users or their families.
 - If you are offered a gift you may accept it where to refuse it would give offence. However, you must declare the gift and explain to the service user the policy and procedure for dealing with gifts and that you will declare the gift to your line manager.
 - If the gift is deemed inappropriate, you may be instructed to return the gift.
 - Alternatively, gifts may be donated to charity.
- **You must declare gifts from service providers or firms with which S WA works.**
 - SWA contracts with other firms, organisations and individuals and the utmost discretion must be exercised if gifts or hospitality is offered.
 - You must always declare such gifts and offers of hospitality and explain S -You may be instructed to decline the gift or offer of hospitality if it is deemed inappropriate.
 - If the gift is inexpensive, it may be accepted (with your line manager authorisation) and/ or shared amongst staff or raffled.
- **All Keyworking and other one-to-one interaction with residents should take place in the office or interview room.**
 - Staff should only enter a resident's room if accompanied by another member of staff. Where necessary a resident may be approached at her front door and asked to come to the office to speak to you.
 - Staff should ensure the office door is left open during the evening and at weekends, unless this would be inappropriate. This is to allow residents access to support from staff. The lounge is the resident's space and should not be occupied by staff for any length of time.
 - Staff should ensure they are never alone with a child. If a mother asks you to watch her child, always ensure another member of staff is present. In exceptional circumstances it may be possible to watch a child in the presence of other service users i.e. in the lounge. This would only be at staff discretion.
- **All interactions with service users outside the workplace must be conducted on a professional basis.**

- You must not arrange to meet service users when not in work.
 - If a chance meeting occurs you must bear in mind your professional relationship at all times and notify a manager member of any significant conversation or contact.
 - If a chance meeting occurs when outside of work and in a social context, you have the right to choose whether to engage with the service user or not.
- **You must not take your friends or family into the workplace.**
 - This applies at all times except in exceptional circumstances and then only by the prior arrangement of a manager or management committee member (for example where a child care arrangement has broken down unexpectedly).
- **You must not take your family or friends on outings with service users.**

(Unless by prior arrangement with the Project Manager, such as outings on which all staff are invited)
- **You must not take service users into your own home.**
- **You should only provide transport in your own vehicle when accompanying service users to appointments.**
 - If you are in any doubt about the purpose of your journey, you should contact a colleague or your line manager for advice.
 - All staff should have business use car insurance if they are transporting service users.
- **You must not consume alcohol or drugs on duty or be unfit for work through the consumption of alcohol or drugs.**
 - During social events with service users which have been arranged by SWA or during chance encounters in which you have decided to engage with a service user you may consume alcohol in moderation.
 - However, you should always remain fit for work.
- **You must not take any action that could undermine the position of any staff members in the eyes of service users.**
 - You are expected to support decisions and actions that have been made within SWA's policies, procedures and delegated authorities.
 - You should not discuss or denigrate other staff or team members with service users. Confidentiality around your own and your colleagues personal information should always be maintained.

- **You must not take any action that could undermine SWA or the position of any staff or management committee members in the eyes of less senior staff / volunteers / students.**
 - You should not discuss or denigrate other staff/ team / management committee members or consultants with less senior staff within the organisation.
 - Personal issues that may have an impact on your work should not affect the integrity of SWA .
 - You should not discuss confidential or sensitive information relating to SWA business / personnel issues with less senior staff within the organisation.
 - This does not supersede your right and your responsibility to raise issues of concern through the Whistle blowing and Protection from Abuse policies and procedures.

- **Relationships between employees / management committee**
 - SWA does not encourage the formation of relationships between employees because this can cause tensions and conflicts within an organisation or a team.
 - However, SWA acknowledges that relationships can develop and in this event you must declare this to your line manager or a management committee member.
 - Where a relationship does exist, you must conduct it outside the workplace.
 - You must ensure that your relationship does not impinge on your work in any way.
 - You may not directly supervise or be supervised by the person with whom you are having a relationship.

APPENDIX TWO

CHILD PROTECTION GUIDELINES

This is a summary of SWA Child Protection Procedures. In the event of any concerns relating to child protection issues, please refer to the Women's Aid National Policy 'Child Protection and Confidentiality 2002' for SWA comprehensive guidelines. This should also be read in conjunction with Stockport Child Protection Committee Child Protection Policy and Procedures Handbook 2002

Introduction

1. SWA believes that all children have a right to enjoy an environment that is safe, caring, happy and free from fear and abuse.
2. These child protection guidelines outline:
 - what constitutes child abuse
 - how SWA will support women who are finding it difficult to cope with their child/children
 - what you should do if you suspect a child is being abused
 - how SWA will respond to suspicions or reports of abuse.

What constitutes child abuse

3. Child abuse occurs when children or young people under the age of 18 are hurt physically, emotionally or in some other way. Children can be abused in any section of our society. Abuse occurs within all cultural, ethnic and religious communities. Children may be abused by family or friends, by professionals who are in a caring role or by strangers. All forms of abuse are wrong and have damaging effects on children and young people.
4. There are four main areas of abuse:
 - **Physical abuse** includes hitting, kicking, and punching and may even lead to death.
 - **Emotional abuse** includes degrading punishments, threats and withholding love and affection, which can undermine a child or

young person's confidence. All abuse involves some element of emotional mistreatment.

- **Neglect** occurs when basic needs such as food, warmth and medical care are not met.
- **Sexual abuse** includes all forms of sexual activity where children and young people are sexually exploited. This includes rape and oral sex. It also means inappropriate touching eg. of the young person's genitals or breasts but extends to any touching or involvement in activities with which the child feels uncomfortable or which could be damaging.

How SWA will support women who are finding it difficult to cope with their child/children

5. SWA recognises that residents may bring their children up differently and it is important to be sensitive to and tolerant of customs and views which may be held by residents, while at the same time making clear what is acceptable behaviour and what is not.
6. SWA acknowledges how difficult living in a refuge can be and the effects it can have on children's behaviour. Staff members will work closely with women through their Individual Support Plan to assist them in developing appropriate parenting skills and responses. This will include giving women practical and emotional support, as well as providing information about support from other agencies (for both them and their child/children).
7. SWA will also offer training and information sessions about positive parenting, including alternative ways to manage children's behaviour in a non-threatening way.
8. Child Support Workers will also offer additional support to children and young people by providing one to one work focused on helping them cope better.

What you should do if you suspect a child is being abused

9. Everyone working for SWA has a responsibility to report their concerns to ensure all children and young people are safe. If you are concerned that a child is suffering harm or is likely to suffer harm from another person you have a responsibility to protect the child by reporting your concern to a line manager/colleague immediately.

10. There are many forms of abuse and some are less clear than others, although this does not mean that they are less harmful. You are expected to heed your 'gut feeling' and to trust your instincts. What you see and what you know about a child is important and should be acted on.
11. If another service user has reported the abuse, staff must maintain confidentiality by not discussing the case further with the person reporting it. However, that service user may require support to deal with their feelings which staff members may provide.
12. Once informed of the concern, the line manager will support the staff member to resolve the situation within the refuge, unless sexual abuse or serious physical abuse is involved. In cases of suspected or actual sexual abuse or serious physical abuse, SWA has a duty to contact Social Services and this will be done immediately.
13. SWA will put together a Child Care Plan in conjunction with the woman. This Child Care Plan will be carefully reviewed, evaluated and monitored by SWA. This may include accessing support from other agencies as well as support provided by SWA.
14. If a child has been abused, SWA will provide structured support for the child, as well as involving any other relevant agencies that can provide support.
15. If SWA continues to have concerns about a woman's behaviour towards her child/children and feel she is not accepting the support offered, SWA will inform Social Services. The Project Manager or other nominated staff member will usually make the report.
16. If a resident leaves whilst SWA still has concerns for a child or young person in her care, the woman will be encouraged to contact Social Services and other agencies for support and help. If she does not agree to do so, SWA will give her details and forwarding address to the relevant Social Services department.
17. Follow up work may be offered with the child and carer concerned. This will be carried out in conjunction with the Social Services Department if they have become involved.
18. If it is suspected that a child has been abused and the mother/carer still brings the child back into an unsafe situation where there is a risk of further abuse, SWA will have no alternative but to inform Social Services of its concerns and give them any relevant information they may require. This would usually be done in

partnership with the Project Manager or other nominated staff member.

19. If the alleged abuser is a resident or a resident's child, that family will be placed in temporary accommodation immediately, pending investigation.
20. If the alleged abuser is a worker, volunteer, or student they will be suspended immediately pending investigation.
21. If the alleged abuser is a visitor, they will be excluded from SWA's properties pending investigation.