

# **Advocacy Action**

**Developing Advocacy in Wakefield District**

## **Policy and approach on protecting vulnerable adults from harm or abuse**

Most people who obtain or are in need of advocacy support are in vulnerable situations. Many people who are referred to advocacy services are already suffering from abuse of some kind. And since abuse also includes being overprotective towards people and thus preventing them from making their own decisions and choices, a sensitive balance needs to be found. It is imperative that no one connected to Advocacy Action should contribute in any way to any kind of abuse.

All of Advocacy Action's work is based around practices that protect vulnerable people from abuse, and all of our principles and policies support this aim. This policy should be read in this wider context, although at the same time it brings together important information specifically relating to adult protection issues.

While Advocacy Action mainly works with other advocacy organisations, and does not have a great deal of contact with vulnerable individuals, it is still important for all our staff and volunteers to be aware of and use this policy.

This policy will:

- raise awareness of the different types and circumstances of abuse
- ensure any suspected abuse is quickly and efficiently reported and addressed
- safeguard staff and volunteers of Advocacy Action from false allegations of abuse.

### **Wakefield District Multi Agency Adult Protection Policy (MAAPP)**

This policy is designed to work with the District-wide MAAPP. The MAAPP provides clear definitions of abuse, directions on reporting suspected abuse, and procedures for investigating and dealing with abuse. If there are ever any doubts about a possible abuse situation that this policy does not answer, the MAAPP guidance should be followed. Copies of the MAAPP are kept in the Adult Protection folder in the Advocacy Action office.

## ***What is abuse?***

For the purposes of this policy we say:

**Abuse is when somebody does something to you that you don't like and that makes you frightened, unhappy or uncomfortable.**

We have taken this from a guide written by Sunderland People First. It is more wide-ranging than the usual definition of abuse agreed by the Government and used by the MAAPP, but we like it because it's person-centred and easier to understand.

## ***How does abuse happen?***

Abuse may occur as a result of deliberate intent, negligence or ignorance, or as a result of a developed poor practice. A person may be abused by more than one individual, and some perpetrators will abuse more than one victim. Abuse may be a single event or repeated events or, as in the case of neglect, it may be a process going on over time.

Poor practice and abuse may occur when someone's needs exceed their carer's capacity to cope. In these cases not only must action be taken to safeguard the person suffering abuse, but at the same time urgent consideration will need to be given to services to support the carer such as respite care, day services, support in the home, etc.

Sometimes evidence of abuse will emerge slowly over time as different isolated incidents begin to appear as a pattern. It is important that all incidents are recorded, no matter how isolated they may appear, so that patterns of abuse can be detected and acted on.

We all have a responsibility to report all concerns regarding abuse or suspected abuse. We all have the right to expect that our concerns are acted upon and treated seriously.

## ***Who can be the abuser?***

Anyone can be an abuser, including relatives, carers, professional staff, care staff, volunteers, other users of services, neighbours, friends, strangers, organisations which allow a culture of poor practice to develop - even advocates.

Abuse does not always just involve the actions of one person towards another. Institutions and services can become abusers if they persistently fail to take account of the needs of the people using that service, if they provide inadequate staffing or equipment to enable people's needs to be met adequately and safely, or if they allow some individuals to be seen as different from the rest of the service users.

## ***Examples of abuse:***

Abuse can take many different forms. Here are some simple person-centred descriptions, adapted from Sunderland People First. They are a starting point for thinking about and learning to recognise evidence of people's much more varied experiences of abuse.

**Physical abuse** is when somebody punches you, kicks you, spits on you, pulls or pushes you or attacks you. This can be in the street, in your home, at a club or anywhere.

**Psychological abuse** is when someone makes you feel unhappy, afraid, or not worth very much as a person. It includes threatening to hurt or leave you, making you feel embarrassed in front of other people, blaming or controlling you, or calling you names.

**Discriminatory abuse** is when people are treated unfairly because other people see them as different. You might suffer from discriminatory abuse because of your gender (man or woman), because you are unwell or disabled, because of your religion or your race or the colour of your skin, because of how well you did at school, because of the work you do or because you don't have a job, because of the way you speak, or for many other reasons.

**Sexual abuse** is when people touch you in places you don't want them to, or when they talk to you about sex when you don't want them to, or when they show you pictures of sex or of naked people. Anyone can be a sexual abuser - a man or a woman, a husband or a wife, a parent or other family member, another service user, or a carer or other professional.

**Institutional abuse** is where you can never make any choices because there are too many rules or not enough options. It is also when people do things to you without explaining them properly, or when people stop you from complaining. Institutional abuse can happen in your own home as well as in care homes and other big places.

**Social abuse** is when people can't go out when they want to see friends or family, or when people can't get the support they need to lead a full and active life. Social abuse includes when you have to stop doing something you like because it's too much bother for staff or family.

**Neglect** is when people are not given enough support. This can be to keep clean or to eat good food. It can be to let you live in a dangerous place or not turning on the heating so you always feel cold. Neglect can be deliberate or by mistake. It stops people having a good life.

**Financial abuse** is when someone takes something of yours without asking. It can be money, clothes, DVDs, or anything that is yours. It includes when someone tricks or forces you to give them something, or when someone tries to persuade you that they are nicer than someone else so that you will give them something.

## ***Reporting***

The key to protecting people from abuse is effective and appropriate reporting. This is especially true for cases of 'creeping' abuse, where the abuse can build up over time without the abuser or the victim necessarily realising. Too often people see things that worry them, but say nothing because they don't want to cause trouble. This may make some people's lives easier, but it does nothing for the victims.

Advocacy Action is all about ensuring that people have the courage to speak out and make their voices heard so that people can access services and be safe. This is not the same as shouting out about things though, and there are some practical steps to ensure that suspected abuse is reported and dealt with effectively.

Step 1: Make some notes of what you saw or heard, who was involved, when and where the incident took place, what did people say, how did they react, etc. **Do not** alert the alleged abuser, as this could cause more problems for the victim, and it could make any investigations harder to carry out.

Step 2: If you have any doubts about what happened or what you should do, talk to someone you trust about it. This could be your supervisor or manager, a colleague, or a person with some responsibility over the area the abuse has occurred (an appropriate manager or team leader).

Step 3: At the end of the day, you have to trust your instincts - it's better to report something and find out it's ok than to let potential abuse continue.

Step 4: Decide who the best person is to report the suspected abuse to. This is usually a Manager with a duty of care for the victim. If you are in doubt, call Social Care Direct on 01924 303456 - they act as a central referral point.

Step 5: Make sure you are kept informed of what action is taken and the results. As the person reporting an incident, you should be satisfied that appropriate action has been taken. Speak to your supervisor if you have any worries.

## ***Using this policy***

This is a part of the core policy framework for Advocacy Action. It should be read in its wider context together with our Equal Opportunities Policy, the Confidentiality Policy, the Child Protection Policy, and the Complaints Policy.

This policy will be taken into account during our recruitment and selection procedures, induction and training sessions, and during ongoing supervision and monitoring. See the relevant procedures for full details.

Finally, always remember the two key messages:

1. **Be aware** of what abuse is
2. **Report** anything suspicious