

Responding to Disclosures Policy & Procedure

Purpose

At the Huon Valley PCYC, we are committed to upholding the safety and wellbeing of all people who attend our facility and programs. We acknowledge that we are a trusted organisation within the community, and we work closely with vulnerable demographics. All 'workers' are engaged in a mentorship role, either directly, or indirectly and as such are in a designated position of trust. Being in a position of trust carries a higher likelihood of receiving and responding to disclosures of actual or potential abuse, neglect, harm, violence and/or exploitation.

This policy is designed to provide guidance on the processes and procedures regarding disclosures of actual or potential abuse, neglect, harm, violence and/or exploitation, which may be received during an employee's duties and across all areas of the Huon Valley PCYC's functions and undertakings.

Scope

Who this policy applies to "Workers":

- Huon Valley PCYC Staff, Volunteers, Committee Members, Internal and External Liaisons, Facility Users, Members, Contractors, and Consultants.

What this policy applies to:

- All activities in the organisation involving users of all ages.

Responsibilities

The Huon Valley PCYC, its staff and volunteers have a responsibility to comply with this policy and procedure and ensure that:

- All disclosures of actual or potential abuse, neglect, harm, violence and/or exploitation are managed with sensitivity and in accordance with this policy and procedure.
- All people attending the Huon Valley PCYC in a private or professional capacity (including employees and the public) and all those interacting or collaborating with the Huon Valley PCYC have a duty of care to support and protect the children and young people with whom they are professionally involved.



Procedure

This is six STEP procedure.

IF AT ANY POINT IN THE DISCLOSURE PROCESS YOU FEEL UNABLE TO FOLLOW THIS PROCEDURE, REFER THE PERSON TO A SENIOR STAFF MEMBER.

When speaking to an adult or a child, it's okay to say "It sounds like you're about to tell me something very important, and I might not be the right person. Is there someone else we can talk to? I think (insert name) would be a great help."

STEP 1: LISTEN

It is important to listen and allow the adult, or child to speak. When responding to disclosures, silence is okay. It may feel uncomfortable or unnatural to allow silence, but it is important to allow the person the space to speak.

Don't:

- Take over.
- Offer advice.
- Speak about your personal experiences, or
- Use phrases such as "I know..."

Do:

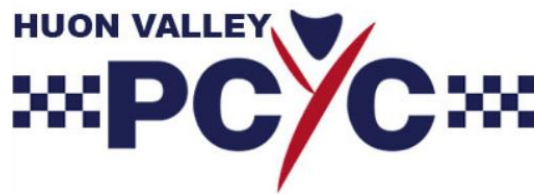
- Allow silence.
- Repeat back what you have heard.
- Use 'Active Listening' (e.g. Nodding)
- Let them take their time.
- Tell them what you plan to do next.
- Reassure them that it is right to tell.
- Let them use their own words.

STEP 2: BELIEVE

All disclosures must be believed. If someone feels that they are not being believed they are likely to shut down and not continue the disclosure. It is important as a first responder to reassure the adult, or child, that they are being believed. Validate and acknowledge that what is being said is accurate and true for that person.

It is NOT a first responders' responsibility to be judge or jury.

It IS a first responders' responsibility to provide support.



STEP 3: REGULATING EMOTIONS

It is inevitable that hearing a disclosure of abuse, neglect, harm, violence and/or exploitation will evoke strong feelings for the first responder. For some, the news may be overwhelming. Particularly if the disclosure is from a child. It is important to maintain a calm appearance. When a first responder is unable to regulate their own emotions, it can cause the adult, or child, to become more overwhelmed and shut down. If the person becomes aware of your distress, it is important to reassure them that it is not their fault and that you care.

Don't:

- Make promises you can't keep.
- Try to fix the situation.

Do:

- Remember to breath.
- Escalate to a senior staff member if you become unable to regulate your emotions.

STEP 4: QUESTIONS

It is important to ask questions. This shows the adult, or child that you are listening, that you care and that you want to understand. Important details may also be needed during an investigation. When a person has experienced trauma, it is common for them to struggle to recall key details.

Do:

- Ask simple questions about basic information (ie. Names, dates, times, places).
- Clarify what is being said to ensure that you understand.
- Ask "Are you safe now?".
- Ask "Do you need immediate support?"

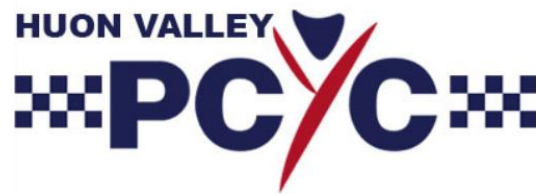
Don't:

- Ask leading questions (ie. Was it....? Or Who was it?)
- Information obtained through leading can not be used as evidence in investigations.

STEP 5: REFER

Offer to refer the person to an appropriate support service. In the case of sexual assault, both adults and children can be referred to SASS. As a first responder, you should offer to contact SASS on their behalf, and you should explain the process and supports that are offered.

SASS: 1800 697 877



Supports:

- 24 hours.
- An intake worker will take the call and a trained counsellor will phone the person, or child, back immediately.
- A counsellor can attend the Police Station with the victim to make a report.
- A counsellor can attend the hospital with the victim for a FME (Forensic Medical Exam)
- Financial assistance with costs such as taxi's.

STEP 6: REPORT

Once the first responder has ensured that the person is SAFE and receiving appropriate support, it is important to follow internal and external reporting procedures. The first responder should complete an incident report and if required, discuss the incident with a senior manager – in private.

Where the incident relates to a child or person with a disability, the first responder **MUST** then follow the **HVPYC External Reporting Policy**.

STEP 7: CONFIDENTIALITY

It is imperative that first responders maintain confidentiality after receiving a disclosure. Legal obligations to maintain confidentiality are outlined in the Tasmanian Government Legislation: Personal Information Protection Act 2004 and the HVPYC Privacy & Confidentiality Policy. In addition, maintaining confidentiality is integral to preserving trust in a mentor/mentee relationship. Particularly when working with children and young people.

The Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997 outlines:

Duty to maintain confidentiality:

- (1) A person engaged in the administration of this Act who, in the course of that administration, obtains personal information relating to –
- (a) a child; or
 - (b) a guardian of a child; or
 - (c) a family member of a child; or
 - (d) any person alleged to have abused, neglected or threatened a child –
- must not divulge that information.

The matter should not be discussed with friends, family, or other employees, and doing so may result in criminal, civil and/or internal disciplinary action.



STEP 8: SEEK SUPPORT

It is normal for a first responder to require support and counselling after receiving a disclosure. First responders are encouraged to contact the HVPCYC EAP line on 1800 064 039

If further support is required, employees should speak with senior management.

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