



CHILD SAFETY AND WELLBEING PLAIN LANGUAGE GUIDE: RESPONDING AND REPORTING APPENDIX B

Authorisation

Document	CSW Responding and Reporting Appendix B Plain Language Guide
Version	1.0
Date	27 May 2026
Status	Current
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Next review	Annually.

Why this guide exists

A child or young person has come to you. They are telling you something hard. The next five minutes shape what happens next — for them, for you, for everyone else involved.

This guide is for that moment. It is the plain-language companion to Appendix B of the Responding and Reporting Procedure (Managing a disclosure of child abuse). The Procedure sets out the five-box framework — Listen, Reassure, Close, Record, Follow up. This guide walks through each box in plain language, with what to say, what not to say, and why it matters.

This guide is not the authoritative document. The Procedure is. If anything here is unclear, phone the District Youth Protection Officer.

Before anything else — make people safe

If the young person is in immediate physical danger, or a crime is occurring now or has just occurred, call 000 first. This guide is about the conversation that follows once everyone is safe.

If the young person needs medical attention, get it — without waiting for the conversation, the F11, or anyone else's permission.

A disclosure may not look like one

Sometimes a young person walks up and says “I want to tell you something.” More often, the disclosure arrives sideways: a question that sounds odd, a story about “a friend,” a behaviour that seems unusually private, a moment when the room goes quiet. The disclosure may come over a meal, after a session, in a corridor, or as you are saying goodbye.

What matters is recognising the moment. If something in you says “this is not a passing comment, this is the young person telling me something” — you are probably right. Stop what you were doing. Give them your full attention. The next five boxes follow from there.

The five boxes

The five boxes follow the arc of a disclosure conversation: Listen while they are speaking, Reassure that they did the right thing in telling you, Close the conversation safely, Record what was said, Follow up by phoning the right officer.

1. Listen — while they are speaking

Do:

Listen attentively. Stay calm. Keep your face neutral — even if what you are hearing is shocking. A young person watches your face closely and will stop talking if they see panic, disgust, or distress.

Acknowledge that it takes courage to say what they are saying.

Let them speak in their own words, in their own time. Silence is fine. They may pause for long stretches.

If you need to ask something, ask open questions — “Can you tell me a bit more about that?” rather than “Did he do X?”

Avoid:

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Do not interrogate. You are not the investigator.

Do not lead them. Do not suggest names, places, or details they have not given you.

Do not ask “why” questions. “Why did you not tell anyone?” “Why did you go there?” These can sound like blame, even when you do not mean it that way.

Do not blame, criticise, or judge — the young person, the people they mention, or anyone else.

Do not show panic, shock, or disgust on your face. They will stop talking.

2. Reassure — while they are still with you

Do:

Tell them you are taking what they are saying seriously.

Tell them it was not their fault.

Tell them they were brave to come to you.

Tell them they did the right thing by speaking up.

Avoid:

Do not promise to keep it secret. You cannot, and you should not.

Do not promise specific outcomes — “they will be punished,” “everything will be fine,” “you will never have to see them again.” You do not know what comes next, and false promises break trust later.

Do not share your own emotional response or your own similar experiences. The conversation is theirs, not yours.

3. Close — ending the conversation safely

Do:

Explain in age-appropriate language what happens next. That you will tell the right people, who they are, and why.

Make sure they know they are not in trouble.

Stay with them, or arrange for a trusted adult to stay with them, until they are safe and supported.

Thank them.

Avoid:

Do not end the conversation by sending them straight back to a setting where they might be unsafe.

Do not leave them alone immediately afterwards.

Do not tell other young people what was said. Not even oblique references.

4. Record — immediately afterwards

Do:

Record the conversation as soon as possible after it ends. Memory fades — and memory fades fastest in the first hour.

Use the young person’s own words wherever you can. Direct quotes are worth more than paraphrase.

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Note the date, time, location, and who was present.

Note what was said and what was observed (their behaviour, their tone, any visible distress). Stick to what actually happened.

These notes feed into the Rotary Youth Protection Incident Report (Form F11).

Avoid:

Do not add your interpretation, opinion, or guesses about what the young person meant.

Do not paraphrase quotes if you can avoid it — use the exact words.

Do not write anything you would not be comfortable seeing read out in a courtroom. Because it might be.

5. Follow up — phone the right officer

Do:

Phone the right officer at your level immediately (see the Quick contacts in the Appendix A Plain Language Guide). Within minutes, not hours.

If sexual abuse or harassment has been disclosed, the matter must also be reported to law enforcement. The CYPO or DYPO handles that — your job is to make sure they know.

Once the F11 is underway, check on the young person. A follow-up word a few days later matters more than you might think.

Avoid:

Do not delay because you are not sure. The DYPO is the safe default if you cannot work out who to phone.

Do not try to corroborate the story before phoning. No “let me just check with the other kids first.” That is investigation, and it is not your job.

Do not disappear from the young person's life after the disclosure. They told you for a reason.

A note about the difference between secrecy and confidentiality

A young person may ask you to keep what they have said a secret. You cannot. But you can be honest about what confidentiality actually means:

“I can not keep this a secret — what you have told me is too important. But I will only tell the people who need to know to keep you safe. I will not tell other young people. I will not tell your friends. I will tell the right adults, and they will decide what happens next.”

Secrecy protects the wrong people. Confidentiality protects the young person.

What this guide is not

This is a plain-language guide. The authoritative document is Appendix B of the Responding and Reporting Procedure. If anything here is unclear, or if you face a situation it does not cover, phone the DYPO.