

CHILD WELFARE

It is the duty of all staff to promote and safeguard the welfare of the young people for whom they are responsible or with whom they come into contact. The School Policies outlined below give practical guidance on how this might best be achieved.

Child Protection and Abuse

All schools are required by law to have a Child Protection Policy and related procedures. Eton College's nominated Child Protection Officer is Dr. R.M. Stephenson (The Deputy Head, Lower Master) or, in his absence, the Head Master. All staff are checked by the Criminal Records Bureau before employment commences.

Introduction

All teaching, domestic, and other staff should know what to do if they suspect that someone is being physically or sexually abused, or if someone tells them that this is happening.

Never imagine that abuse is impossible in a school such as Eton or that an accusation against someone whom you know well and whom you trust is bound to be unjust. Even light-hearted bullying can easily develop into physical, sexual or emotional abuse – as can idiosyncratic punishments introduced by individuals.

Members of the teaching, domestic, and other staff will be vigilant at times when, or in places where, there is a high risk of bullying or other illicit activities.

Boys often tell their friends or older boys about abuse, rather than adults: House Masters will make sure that any senior boys in positions of responsibility are familiar with these guidelines. Senior boys receive guidance from a qualified Child Protection Officer on these matters.

Guidance for members of staff on what to do.

Always stop and listen straight away to someone who wants to tell you about incidents or suspicions of abuse.

If you possibly can, make brief notes of what they tell you while they are actually speaking – and keep these original notes, however rough they may be, since what you write down at the time is far more valuable than an 'improved' version written down subsequently. If you cannot make notes at the time, make notes of what was said as soon as possible afterwards. All such notes may help later if you have to remember exactly what was said.

Do not give a guarantee that you will keep what is said confidential or secret – if you are told about abuse, you have a responsibility to tell the right people to get something done about it. If asked, explain that if you are going to be told something very important that needs to be sorted out, you will need to tell the people who can sort it out, but that you will tell only those people who absolutely have to know.

Do not ask leading questions ("Did he do X to you?", for instance). Ask questions such as "What do you want to tell me?" or "Is there anything else you want to say?".

Contact the Lower Master (or Head Master if you cannot contact the Lower Master) immediately – do not on any account tell other adults or boys what you suspect or have been told.

Discuss with the Lower Master whether any steps need to be taken to protect the person who has told you about the abuse – this may need to be discussed with that person.

Never attempt to carry out an investigation yourself of suspected or alleged abuse – by interviewing the people involved, for example. The Lower Master is the person designated to take specific responsibility for child protection matters in the School under the Children Act and he knows the proper procedures.

Physical Contact

Staff should never touch children, however casually, in ways or on parts of the body that may be considered indecent. If there is any physical contact it must be appropriate to the situation. For example in games coaching or music tuition it might be appropriate to demonstrate a particular technique. However, in these circumstances the member of staff must clearly indicate that this is necessary before commencing and not continue if the pupil is uncomfortable or refuses permission for such contact.

Staff must bear in mind that perfectly innocent actions can be misunderstood and so may lead to allegations of misconduct.

Bullying

Bullying and unkindness, whether physical or psychological, are entirely unacceptable in any school. Flagrant cases are fortunately not normal features of Eton life, but all staff should be aware that bullying – whether by physical aggression or more often by verbal taunting – can rear its head amongst boys at any time, and that patterns of bullying, once established, can easily repeat themselves, even to the extent that those who have suffered themselves may in their turn cause others to suffer. Discreet but constant vigilance is therefore essential and is a major part of welfare policy.

If staff do become aware of or observe a boy being bullied it is their duty to report the details of any such incident to their Head of Department who will inform the relevant House Master. Clearly the more detail available (names of boys involved etc.) the more effective such action will be.