Responding to Adults expressing a Concern or making an Allegation

It is often very difficult for people to talk about abuse, so it is important to make sure that a safe environment of listening carefully and actively is created, in which a victim/survivor feels able to disclose as much as they can remember. This will help the statutory agencies to investigate the incident as thoroughly as possible.

Do not question beyond checking what has been said. It is the responsibility of Social Care agencies and the Police to investigate. There should be no probing for detail beyond what has been freely given.

People may raise concerns or make allegations about:

• Abuse that happened to them when they were a child or young person;

• Something they’ve been told by someone else and that they strongly believe is true (disclosure);

• Seeing signs of abuse, such as physical injuries on a child or young person;

• Something they have witnessed that makes them feel uncomfortable.

Where information is given in person, consider the following:

• Adopt a listening style that is compassionate, calm and reassuring. If the information given causes shock, disgust or distress, do not allow these feelings to show. Doing so may inadvertently dissuade the person from giving any further information;

• Listen carefully to that person, but do not ask intrusive or leading questions;

• Stay calm, take what the person raising the concern says seriously, and reassure them;

• Allow the person to continue at their own pace;

• Check with the person to make sure what they actually said has been understood. Do not suggest words – use their words;

• Make no promises that cannot be kept, particularly in relation to confidentiality, but listen carefully to what is being sought in this regard;

• Explain the referral procedures to the person. If you are not sure what the referral procedures are, say that you will seek advice on what to do next;

• Do not make any comments about the respondent; do not make assumptions or speculate;

• Be aware that a person’s ability to recount their concern or allegation will depend on their age, culture, nationality or any disability that may affect speech or language;

• Avoid statements about your reaction to the information given;

• Do not offer wording or language to the person raising the concern or making the allegation that may affect the way they provide an account. To do so may prejudice any criminal investigation.

Make a note of your conversation as soon as possible. Make careful notes of what is said, record dates, times, events and when you are told

(Remember – if an adult tells you of abuse they suffered as a child, others might have also been abused or still be at risk. It is not your role to investigate this but passing it on might prevent a present harm as well as addressing a past injustice)