Handout 11: Responding to Abuse

What might make you suspect that a person is being abused?

1. They tell you - this is called a disclosure.

2. Physical indicators - e.g. bruising, urinary tract infections, sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy.

3. Emotional indicators - e.g. depressed, tearful, angry, unusually fearful.

4. Behavioural indicators - e.g. changes in usual behaviour, withdrawn, inappropriate sexual behaviour, unexplained aggression, loss of skills.

These indicators may be present even if the abuse happened a long time ago.

How should you respond if you suspect abuse is happening? Depending on your role and responsibility, your response may include:

- Making sure the person is safe from further risk of abuse and providing support to access services such as counselling, medical assistance, legal assistance
- Follow agency procedures such as reporting to your supervisor
- Seek assistance from independent advocacy or complaints services
- It may be your role to support a person while an investigation happens but it is not your responsibility to conduct an investigation
- If the person is an adult, you will need to seek their consent to take any action on their behalf. However reporting abuse or suspected abuse to your supervisor is a requirement under service policy
- Maintaining a person's privacy and confidentiality is essential
- If the person is a child, it is mandatory to report to the Government child protection agency.

Services and individuals have an obligation to prevent and respond to abuse. Most services have policies and procedures about what to do if abuse occurs. Individual workers have a responsibility to be aware of these policies.

Service providers should also ensure that the way they provide a service prevents abuse from occurring. For example, bedrooms and bathrooms should be set up to be private areas and everyone should respect this. Staff should be trained so that they can provide high quality care e.g. to be able to feed people with feeding difficulties so that they do not suffer from malnutrition. People should have education about their rights to be free from abuse and what they can do about it if they are concerned their rights are being ignored.

Library Link
