

Student protection policy

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Forward

All children and young people need a safe and stable childhood in order to flourish and grow, and in order to have the best conditions for learning. Luckily, most children have this kind of life. – Undervisnings Ministeriet

This policy describes Lolland Municipality's preparedness for dealing with cases of general concern with a child's wellbeing, neglect and/or cases where there is a suspicion or knowledge of abuse against children and young people.

All professionals in Lolland Municipality have a responsibility to protect children and young people, including contributing to ensure that we become aware of and react as early as possible if a child or young person is exposed to neglect, violence or sexual abuse. Consideration for the child must always come first, and as professionals we have a responsibility to ensure that action is taken quickly and relevantly when the concern arises.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide staff with guidelines to promote the well-being of children and respond appropriately to concerns or cases of abuse and neglect.

This policy has been written in accordance with the following legislation and documents:

- Handleguide for bekymringsbørn: Lolland Kommune.
https://www.lolland.dk/Files/Files/Lollandkommune/Kommunen/Kommunens_forvaltning/Handleguide_for_bekymringsboern/E-handleguide_2023_godkendt_UA.pdf
- Professional Concern- A guide for schools on children and young people who have welfare issues and are in need of special support, Undervisnings Ministeriet (The Ministry of Education).
- Children's Rights and the School's Responsibility- Notifications and UN Children's Convention, DISN (Danish International Schools Network)
- Consolidation Act on Social Service, 2013, Serviceloven. Sections 152-155 (<https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=191895>) (Danish Law)

Definitions

Child- refers to a student, under the age of 18.

Staff- means people working at LIS and includes employees, contactors, consultants, students, associates and volunteers whether working on a full time, part time, casual, or temporary basis.

Kommune- refers to the local municipal council that the child lives in and the different service and agencies within.

Underretning- refers to the notification, or compulsory reporting that is sent to the local kommune

Børn, Unge og Familie - refers to the Lolland Kommune child services department.

Underretning- What do you do when you are concerned?

You have an obligation to notify Børne, Unge og Familie when you believe that a child or young person may need special intervention.

The notification obligation is with you. This means that if your leader takes no action, you still have a duty to notify the authorities.

The obligation to notify is not required in situations where the problem can be solved, for example, via social, pedagogical or education efforts in school.

An underretning is sent when:

1. There is a suspicion or knowledge of smacking, violence, or sexual abuse. Contact your leader as an underretning must be sent immediately. See section 2 for signs of abuse.
2. If a FamilieDialog process has already been initiated, and the parents themselves are not able to create the relevant changes that are deemed necessary, you can involve Børne, Unge og Familie by inviting them directly into the FamilieDialog. After this, the "case" is formally registered in the and it will be dealt with in the same way as with a written underretning. Alternatively with the use of the 'børnelinje' to gauge your level of concern, a written underretning may also be sent in.
3. Unknown/unapproved absence is more than 15 per cent within a quarter.

Parent cooperation

In Lolland Kommune's child and youth policy, the focal point is on dialogue and cooperation with parents about their responsibility to ensure good conditions for their children. The child's parents are systematically involved in formulating what is causing problems for the child or young person. Work for a solution together.

What should the notification contain?

It is important that you distinguish between what you know and what you assume. The underretning must be based on:

- Your concrete observations and concerns. You may provide examples from everyday situations. Include the cooperation with the parents and how have they responded to your concern.
- Your professional assessments in relation to the child's well-being and development.

The aim of notification is to identify and address welfare issues and abuse at an early stage so that the child can receive the proper help and support

Bullying

It is important to be aware that children can harm other children. These behaviours are outside of what may be considered the normal range, and can extend to bullying, violence or sexual assault. Therefore, when a child alleges inappropriate harmful behaviour by another child then the notification procedures outlined in this policy must be considered for both the children.

See 'Bullying prevention and response strategy' for full details.

Concern for wellbeing and neglect

The starting point, in your professional judgement:

- Is the child thriving?
- Is the child receiving sufficient care from the adults around them?

It is crucial that you, as a professional, involve and talk to the parents about the observations that have been made and assess whether the parents themselves can create a relevant solution. If, for example, you meet children whose hygiene is very poor or where the diet is insufficient, you as a professional should talk to the parents about this and through dialogue try to change the parents' behaviour. This takes place in FamilieDialog, where you can involve other professional resources as well. It is only if this effort is not successful that you as a professional must consider whether the conditions for notification have been met.

Definition of neglect

By neglect, we understand that parents or the persons who care for the child inflict physical or psychological harm on it or neglect it so seriously that the child's physical and/or psychological health and development are at risk. Source; Killén, 2005, inspired by Kempe, 1979.

Indicators of neglect

There are rarely clear signs that a child is being neglected or abused. Children express themselves differently.

Some are more direct than others, but in general:

- Are there clear changes in the child's behaviour, mood and interaction with others?
- Problems controlling impulses- frequent tantrums, lack of anger control, cries without cause.
- Emotional- seems sad, depressed, anxious, overly stressed, or emotionally burdened, lack curiosity.
- Learning- concentration difficulties, anxious, quiet, diligent but anxious, tend to isolate themselves.
- Relational- contact problems, may be afraid of touch or eye contact, clings to adults or distances themselves from adults-
- Behavioural changes (outside normal areas of development) - loss of pleasure in things and activities, early sexual knowledge, early sexual activity, violent masturbation, sleep disturbances, unclean, self-harming, compulsive play.
- Physical- - neglected in terms of personal care, sleep and food. Physical complaints, headache, stomach pain or abdominal pain, unexpected bruises, redness, torn skin around orifices.
- Eating disorders - severely overweight or underweight. Issues with diet.
- Inappropriate alcohol or drug abuse habits.
- Often absent from school.

Parent indicators of neglect

These signals can be signs that the parents are not taking sufficient care of the child:

- The parents are impulsive or cold towards the child, or have inappropriate behaviour towards the child.
- The parents show signs of a lack of understanding of what can be expected from a child of the age in question.
- The contact with the child is characterized by a lack of empathy, anger, reproaches, scolding, threats, rejection, indifference, etc.
- The parents come up with vague, unreliable or different explanations for the child's injuries.
- The parents underestimate a child's illness or injury and seek treatment late.
- The parents provide no or only inadequate care for the child's safety and physical needs. For example, that parents do not ensure that the child receives medicine.

Suspicion or knowledge of abuse

It is harmful for children and young people to be exposed to violence and sexual abuse, therefore it is important that professionals detect and act as early as possible if there is suspicion or knowledge that children and young people are exposed to abuse.

It is often through the child themselves that you gain knowledge or suspicion of abuse, and although it is rarely possible to immediately confirm or disprove the suspicion, it is important that you as a professional have professional knowledge of the possible signs and reactions that the child may show.

Violence

Violence in the family is a broad term for physical and psychological violence, either between family members, between partners or ex-partners or between parents and children.

Violence is often understood as physical violence, where marks are left or where physical pain is involved. However, the term should be defined more broadly and also includes psychological violence, where, for example, threats are used, the child is intimidated or is otherwise exposed to belittling or humiliating actions. Added to this are actions that the child witnesses, for example violence between parents or other close carers.

Violence is always destructive to the child's development.

Sexual assault

Sexual assault is a broad term for assault which is regulated in the Criminal Code. It can be about rape and thus direct physical abuse, or it can be about intercourse or other sexual acts with a child under 15 years of age. Furthermore, it can be about indecency violations, touching, verbal abuse or the recording and possession of pornographic films and photos of young people under the age of 18.

Indicators of Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional ill treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effect on the child's emotional development. This can include a pattern of rejecting, degrading, ignoring, isolating, corrupting, exploiting or terrorising a child. It may also include age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. It also includes the seeing or hearing the ill treatment of others.

Physical Indicators:

- Bed wetting or bed soiling with no medical cause
- Frequent psychosomatic complaints (e.g. headaches, nausea, abdominal pains)
- Non-organic failure to thrive
- Pale, emaciated
- Prolonged vomiting and/or diarrhoea
- Malnutrition
- Dressed differently to other children in the family

Behavioural Indicators:

- Severe developmental lags with obvious physical cause
- Depression, anxiety, withdrawal or aggression
- Self-destructive behaviour. This can include self-harm, suicide, alcohol and drug abuse
- Overly compliant
- Extreme attention seeking behaviours or extreme inhibition
- Running away from home, avoiding attending at school
- Nightmares, poor sleeping patterns
- Anti-social behaviours
- Lack of self esteem
- Obsessive behaviours
- Eating disorders

Caregiver Indicators:

- Labels the child as inferior or publicly humiliates the child (e.g. name calling)
- Treats the child differently from siblings or peers in ways that suggest dislike for the child
- Actively refuses to help the child
- Constantly threatens the child with physical harm or death
- Locks the child in a closet or room for extended periods of time
- Teaches or reinforces criminal behaviour

- Withholds physical and verbal affection
- Keeps the child at home in role of servant or surrogate parent
- Has unrealistic expectations of child

involves child in adult issues such as separation or disputed over child's care

Exposes child to witnessing situations of arguing and violence in the home

Indicators of Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is a non-accidental act on a child that results in physical harm. This includes, but is not limited to, beating, hitting, shaking, burning, drowning, suffocating, biting, poisoning or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical abuse also involves the fabrication or inducing of illness.

Physical Indicators (often unexplained or inconsistent with explanation given):

- Bruises, welts, cuts and abrasions
- Burns - small circular burns, immersion burns, rope burns etc
- Fractures and dislocations - skull, facial bones, spinal fractures etc
- Multiple fractures at different stages of healing
- Fractures in very young children

Behavioural Indicators:

- Inconsistent or vague explanations regarding injuries
- Wary of adults or a particular person
- Vacant stare or frozen watchfulness
- Cringing or flinching if touches unexpectedly
- May be extremely compliant and eager to please
- Dresses inappropriately to hide bruising or injuries
- Runs away from home or is afraid to go home
- May regress (e.g. bedwetting)
- May indicate general sadness
- Could have vision or hearing delay
- Is violent to other children or animals

Caregiver Indicators:

- Inconsistent or vague explanations regarding injuries

- May appear unconcerned about child's wellbeing
- May state the child is prone to injuries or lies about how they occur
- Delays in seeking medical attention
- May take the child to multiple medical appointments and seek medical treatment without an obvious need

Indicators of Sexual Abuse

Sexual Abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities (penetrative and non-penetrative, for example, rape, kissing, touching, masturbation) as well as non-contact acts such as involving children in the looking at or production of sexual images, sexual activities and sexual behaviours.

Physical Indicators:

- Unusual or excessive itching or pain in the genital or anal area
- Torn, stained or bloody underclothing
- Bruises, lacerations, redness, swelling or bleeding in genital, vaginal or anal area
- Blood in urine or stools
- Sexually transmitted infections
- Pregnancy
- Urinary tract infections
- Discomfort in sitting or fidgeting as unable to sit comfortably

Behavioural Indicators:

- Age-inappropriate sexual play or language
- Bizarre, sophisticated or unusual sexual knowledge
- Refuses to go home, or to a specific person's home, for no apparent reason
- Fear of a certain person
- Depression, anxiety, withdrawal or aggression
- Self-destructive behaviour. This can include self-harm, suicide, alcohol and drug abuse
- Overly compliant
- Extreme attention seeking behaviours or extreme inhibition
- Dresses inappropriately to hide bruising or injuries
- Eating disorders
- Compulsive behaviours

Parent Indicators:

- May be unusually over-protective of the child
- Accuses the child of being sexually provocative
- Misuses alcohol or drugs
- Invades the child's privacy (e.g. during dressing, in the bathroom)
- May favour the victim over other children

Intimate Partner Violence or Family Violence

Intimate Partner Violence includes threatening to harm people, pets or property, and causes family members to live in fear. Children are always affected either emotionally or physically where there is family violence even if they are not personally injured or physically present.

While some men experience violence from partners and family members, women and children are the most likely victims of family violence.

Indicators in the Child:

- Physical injuries consistent with the indicators of Physical Abuse
- Absenteeism from school
- Bullying or aggressive behaviour
- Complaints of headaches or stomach aches with no apparent medical reason
- Talking or describing violent behaviours

Indicators in the Victim:

- Physical Injuries including: bruising to chest and abdomen, injuries during pregnancy
- Depression and/or anxiety
- Inconsistent explanations for injuries
- Fearful
- Submissive

Indicators in the Perpetrator:

- Isolates and controls partner and children
- Threatens, criticises, intimidates, uses aggressive and physical abuse towards partner and children
- Minimises and denies own behaviour, or blames victim for the perpetrators own behaviour

