

If a child makes an allegation

You are changing a nappy and notice a bruise on a child's leg ... you are playing tickle and a child starts to cry because his rib is hurting: you look and see a mark that looks like a burn. If you don't have an 'accident / injury at home' form completed by parents when they brought their child that morning I think the normal reaction for most childminders is to ask the child, 'What happened?'

If the child makes an allegation – also known as a disclosure of abuse – daddy did it... mummy hurt me... aunty hit me... you are legally required to follow the steps set out in your safeguarding procedures.

If you are looking after a non-mobile baby with an unexplained mark or bruise you must take advice as well - It is recognised that non-mobile babies are unlikely to be injured unless someone has caused them harm because they are not able to move into situations where they are likely to be hurt. Most LSCBs have a 'non-mobile baby protocol' which all early years providers must follow.

You are not qualified to ring parents and investigate a child's allegation / disclosure of abuse – you are not qualified to make a judgement as to whether or not the child is telling the truth – you are legally required to report the allegation / disclosure immediately and let your LSCB decide what to do next / take over the investigation.

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Here is a true story I shared on the Independent Childminders Facebook group recently – note that some of the circumstances have been changed to protect the childminder –

A child arrived at his new childminder's house - day 1 of the contract - the child had an unexplained bruise on his foot - the childminder asked the child what it was and the child said 'daddy hurt me' ... followed soon after by 'I dropped a toy on it' ... followed by something else a little later.

As the child's story changed a few times over the course of the day, the childminder made a decision I think many of us might be tempted to make – she waited until collection time and asked the child's mum what had happened. Mum said it was an accident and gave a plausible explanation - the childminder logged it as a pre-existing injury and mum signed the paperwork.

What the childminder did not know was that the child was being abused – and to make matters worse the mum accused the childminder of hurting the child a few days later. The childminder was suspended by Ofsted, investigated by the police, her family was investigated by Social Services – her life was taken to pieces.

As a result of the allegation, the childminder ended up in court accused of abusing a child - along with other family members also accused by mum of hurting the child.

This happened because the childminder didn't listen to the child's first disclosure of abuse and report it following her safeguarding procedures.

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We **must** remember that we are not qualified to investigate an allegation / disclosure - if a child tells us that they have been hurt by an adult we are legally required to follow our safeguarding procedures... if you make a judgement call not to do that then that's your choice but we cannot advise you otherwise...

To protect yourself, it is good practice to have some printed 'pre-existing injury' forms with your register – ask parents regularly if their child has sustained any home injuries they need to let you know about – get parents into the routine of writing things that have happened at home down in the child's diary – remind parents in your newsletter that they need to let you know if their child has had an accident or sustained an injury since you last cared for them.

Explain to parents – if your child makes an allegation / disclosure of abuse I am legally required to take advice from safeguarding – I cannot ring you and ask you about it because I am not qualified to investigate. Please tell me about any accidents your child has at home so they can be recorded – this will protect you, your child and me from allegations.

I read an interesting and very worrying article yesterday in Nursery World magazine written for nurseries but it is relevant here - providers were being advised not to accept gifts from parents because 'that nice mum who gave us the wine and chocolates couldn't possibly be abusing her child' ...

I hope that clarifies.

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