



## **Summary on confidentiality in schools**

This summary gives guidance on drawing up a policy on confidentiality and discusses situations in which confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Schools should ensure that they are familiar with the procedures set out in the DfES's Child Protection circular 10/95 – 'Protecting Children from abuse: The role of the Education service'

1. Schools must be absolutely clear about the boundaries of their legal and professional roles and responsibilities. A clear and explicit confidentiality policy should ensure good practice throughout the school which both pupils and parents understand. Teachers cannot offer or guarantee absolute confidentiality.
2. It is only in the most exceptional circumstances that schools should be in a position of having to handle information without parental knowledge. Where younger pupils are involved child protection issues should be addressed.
3. Regarding Child Protection- Joint guidance by the DfEE and DH 'Working together to Safeguard Children' sets out how agencies should work together to promote children's welfare and protect them from abuse and neglect.
4. Confidentiality policy. Schools should consider setting their policy on Confidentiality within their Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) policy it should include:
  - making sure that pupils and parents or carers are aware of the school's confidentiality policy and how it works in practice
  - reassuring pupils that their best interests will be maintained
  - encouraging pupils to talk to their parents and carers and giving them support to do so
  - ensuring that pupils know that teachers cannot offer unconditional confidentiality
  - reassuring pupils that, if confidentiality is broken, they will be informed first and supported appropriately
  - if there is any possibility of abuse -following the school's child protection procedure
  - making sure that pupils are informed of sources of confidential help, for example the school nurse, counsellor, GP or local person's advice service ;and
  - using ground rules in lessons

5. Personal disclosures- disclosures may take place at an inappropriate place or time. If this happens, the teacher should talk again to the individual before the end of the school day. The teacher may be able to discuss the issue with an appropriate colleague without having to give the name of the pupil. If not, the teacher should follow the school's confidentiality policy.

#### 6. KEY POINTS

- Schools should have a clear and explicit confidentiality policy/statement which is advertised to pupils, staff, parents and visitors
- Teachers cannot offer or guarantee pupils unconditional confidentiality
- Teachers are not legally bound to inform parents or the head teacher of any disclosure unless the head teacher has specifically requested them to do so.
- Teachers should follow a set of procedures if a child under 16 is having or contemplating having sex
- If sexual abuse is suspected, teachers should follow the school's child protection policy
- Health professionals are bound by their professional codes of conduct in a one to one situation with individual pupils but in a classroom situation they should follow the school's confidentiality policy