

🔍 “What would you do if a child said, ‘I’ll tell you, but you must promise not to tell anyone’?”

It’s a situation every member of staff could face.

Perhaps a child wants to talk about a friend. Perhaps they have overheard something worrying. Perhaps they are concerned about another pupil's safety or wellbeing.

Your response at that moment matters. As a former headteacher and now safeguarding consultant, one of the most important messages I share with staff is this:

⚠️ **Never promise to keep a safeguarding concern secret**

Children often seek reassurance before sharing something difficult. While their trust is important, making promises you cannot keep may prevent the right people from taking action to keep children safe.

💡 **What should you say instead?**

- "Thank you for telling me."
- "You've done the right thing by speaking to me."
- "I can't promise to keep it a secret, but I will only share it with people who need to know so we can help."
- "Take your time and tell me what you want me to know."

Remember:

- 👂 Listen carefully without interrupting
- ❓ Avoid asking leading questions or investigating
- 📝 Record the child's words accurately as soon as possible
- 🚪 Report the concern promptly to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)
- ❤️ Reassure the child that they have done the right thing by speaking up

Whether the concern is about themselves or another pupil, the principles are the same:

- ✓ Listen
- ✓ Reassure
- ✓ Record
- ✓ Report

⚠️ The greatest mistake is often made with good intentions. Promising confidentiality may feel supportive, but safeguarding requires transparency with those who can help.

When staff understand how to respond confidently and consistently, children are more likely to be heard, supported and protected.