

Safeguarding scenario: What would you do? ❤️🇬🇧

As a former Headteacher and now Safeguarding Consultant, one of the questions I often ask during safeguarding training and audits is:

? **What would you do if a child told you their parent constantly shouts, belittles or humiliates them?**

Imagine a pupil tells you:

- ♦ "My mum tells me I'm useless and I'll never be good at anything."
- ♦ "If I make a mistake, my dad says he wishes I wasn't his child."
- ♦ "I get shouted at every day. Sometimes I just stay in my room because it's easier."

Unlike physical abuse, emotional abuse often leaves no visible injuries. Yet the impact on a child's confidence, emotional wellbeing and development can be profound and long-lasting.

⚠️ **Emotional abuse can be harder to spot, but it is no less harmful.**

Children often minimise what they experience because they believe it is "normal", blame themselves, or fear getting a parent into trouble. Repeated humiliation, rejection, intimidation or persistent criticism may indicate emotional abuse.

✅ **So what should schools do?**

🇬🇧 **Listen without judgement**

Give the child time to talk. Listen carefully, stay calm and reassure them they have done the right thing by speaking to you. Avoid asking leading questions or making promises you cannot keep.

📝 **Record the disclosure accurately**

Record the child's own words, noting how often the behaviour occurs, who is involved and any impact on the child's emotional wellbeing, behaviour, attendance or presentation.

🔍 **Look beyond the single incident**

Emotional abuse is often characterised by a pattern of behaviour rather than one isolated event. Consider whether there are other concerns, such as anxiety, withdrawal, low self-esteem, self-harm, poor attendance or changes in behaviour.

👂 **Share concerns with the DSL**

Even if the concern appears low level, it should always be shared with the DSL. Small pieces of information, when viewed together, may reveal a much wider safeguarding picture.

❤️ **Support the child**

Children experiencing emotional abuse may need ongoing reassurance, trusted relationships and opportunities to be heard. Continue to monitor their wellbeing and provide appropriate pastoral support.

☎️ **Consider the next steps**

The DSL should consider whether the concerns require Family Help, support for the family, or a referral to children's social care, always acting in the child's best interests.

♥ **Remember...**

Words can leave wounds that are just as damaging as physical injuries.

Children who are repeatedly told they are worthless, unloved or unwanted may begin to believe it.

Safeguarding is about recognising patterns, listening to the child's lived experience and responding before harm escalates.

-  Professional curiosity
-  Accurate recording
-  Sharing concerns promptly
-  A child-centred approach

Sometimes the most significant safeguarding concerns are those that cannot be seen.

 **How confident are staff in your school at recognising the signs of emotional abuse? Would everyone know when persistent criticism, humiliation or rejection should be treated as a safeguarding concern rather than simply "strict parenting"?**