



CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

Rationale and statement on the importance of confidentiality

At The Bridges Federation we believe that:

- The safety, well being and protection of our children are the paramount consideration in all decisions staff at our schools make about confidentiality. The appropriate¹ sharing of information between school staff is an essential element in ensuring our children's well being and safety.
- It is an essential part of the ethos of our schools that trust is established to enable children, staff, and parents/carers to seek help both within and outside the schools and minimise the number of situations when personal information is shared to ensure pupils, staff are supported and safe
- Children, parents/carers and staff need to know the boundaries of confidentiality in order to feel safe and comfortable in discussing personal issues.
- The Federation's attitude to confidentiality is open and easily understood and everyone should be able to trust the boundaries of confidentiality operating within the schools.
- Everyone in our Federation's communities needs to know that no one can offer absolute confidentiality.
- Everyone in our Federation's communities needs to know the limits of confidentiality that can be offered by individuals within the Federation's communities so they can make informed decisions about the most appropriate person to talk to about any personal issue they want to discuss.

Definition of Confidentiality

The dictionary definition of confidential is "something which is spoken or given in confidence; private, entrusted with another's secret affairs"

When speaking confidentially to someone the confider has the belief that the confidant will not discuss the content of the conversation with another. The confider is asking for the content of the conversation to be kept secret. Anyone offering absolute confidentiality to someone else would be offering to keep the content of his or her conversation completely secret and discuss it with no one.

In practice there are few situations where absolute confidentiality is offered in The Bridges Federation. We have tried to strike a balance between ensuring the safety, well being and protection of our children and staff, ensuring there is an ethos of trust where children and staff can ask for help when they need it and ensuring that when it is essential to share personal information child protection issues and good practice is followed.

This means that in most cases what is on offer is limited confidentiality. Disclosure of the content of a conversation could be discussed with professional colleagues but the confider would not be identified except in certain circumstances.

The general rule is that staff should make clear that there are limits to confidentiality, at the beginning of the conversation. These limits relate to ensuring childrens' safety and well being. The children will be informed when a confidence has to be broken for this reason and will be encouraged to do this for themselves whenever this is possible.

Different levels of confidentiality are appropriate for different circumstances.

1. **In the classroom in the course of a lesson** given by a member of teaching staff or an outside visitor, including health professionals.

Careful thought needs to be given to the content of the lesson, setting the climate and establishing groundrules to ensure confidential disclosures are not made. It should be



made clear to children that this is not the time or place to disclose confidential, personal information.

When a health professional is contributing to a school health education programme in a classroom setting, s/he is working with the same boundaries of confidentiality as a teacher.

2. One to one disclosures to members of staff (including voluntary staff).

It is essential all members of staff know the limits of the confidentiality they can offer to both children and parents/carers (see note below) and any required actions and sources of further support or help available both for the children or parent/carer and for the staff member within the schools and from other agencies, where appropriate. All staff at our schools encourage children to discuss difficult issues with their parents or carers, and vice versa. However, the needs of the child are paramount and staff will not automatically share information about the child with his/her parents/carers unless it is considered to be in the child's best interests.

(Note: That is, that when concerns for a child come to the attention of staff, for example through observation of behaviour or injuries or disclosure, however insignificant this might appear to be, the member of staff should discuss this with the Designated Child Protection Co-ordinator as soon as possible. More serious concerns must be reported immediately to ensure that any intervention necessary to protect the child is accessed as early as possible. Please see the school Child Protection Policy.)

3. Disclosures to a counsellor, school nurse or health professional operating a confidential service in the school.

Health professionals such as school nurses can give confidential medical advice to children provided they are competent to do so and follow the Fraser Guidelines (guidelines for doctors and other health professionals on giving medical advice to under 16s). School nurses are skilled in discussing issues and possible actions with young people and always have in mind the need to encourage children to discuss issues with their parents or carers. However, the needs of the child are paramount and the school nurse will not insist that a child's parents or carers are informed about any advice or treatment they give.

The legal position for school staff:

School staff (including non-teaching and voluntary staff) should not promise confidentiality. Children do not have the right to expect that incidents will not be reported to his/her parents/carers and may not, in the absence of an explicit promise, assume that information conveyed outside that context is private. No member of this school's staff can or should give such a promise.

The safety, well being and protection of the child is the paramount consideration in all decisions staff at this school make about confidentiality.

School staff are NOT obliged to break confidentiality except where child protection is or may be an issue, however, at our schools we believe it is important staff are able to share their concerns about children with colleagues in a professional and supportive way, on a need to know basis, to ensure staff receive the guidance and support they need and the child's safety and well being is maintained. School staff should discuss such concerns with the Headteacher.

Teachers, counsellor and health professionals:

Professional judgement is required by a teacher, counsellor or health professional in considering whether he or she should indicate to a child that the child could make a disclosure in confidence and whether such a confidence could then be maintained having heard the information. In exercising their professional judgement the teacher, counsellor or health professional must consider the best interests of the child including the need to both ensure trust to provide safeguards for our children and possible child protection issues.



All teachers at this school receive basic training in child protection as part of their induction to this school and are expected to follow the schools' child protection policy and procedures.

Visitors and non-teaching staff:

At The Bridges Federation, we expect all non teaching staff, including voluntary staff to report any disclosures by children or parents/carers, of a concerning personal nature to the designated child protection co-ordinator as soon as possible after the disclosure and in an appropriate setting, so others cannot overhear. This is to ensure the safety, protection and well being of all our children and staff. The designated child protection co-ordinator will decide what, if any, further action needs to be taken, both to ensure the child gets the help and support they need and that the member of staff also gets the support and supervision they need.

Parents/carers:

The Bridges Federation believe that it is essential to work in partnership with parents and carers and we endeavour to keep parents/carers abreast of their child's progress at school, including any concerns about their progress or behaviour. However, we also need to maintain a balance so that our children can share any concerns and ask for help when they need it. Where a child does discuss a difficult personal matter staff at our schools, they will be encouraged to also discuss the matter with their parent or carer themselves.

The safety, well being and protection of our children is the paramount consideration in all decisions staff at our schools make about confidentiality.

Links to other school policies and procedures:

This policy is intended to be used in conjunction with the Federation's

PSHE

Drugs

Sex and Relationship

Safeguarding

Bullying

Behaviour

Whistle-Blowing

& Looked After Children Policies

Statement of ground rules to be used in lessons

We adopt ground rules to ensure a safe environment for teaching in particular in PSHE and Circle time. This reduces anxiety to children and staff and minimises unconsidered, unintended personal disclosures.

At the beginning of each PSHE lesson and Circle time, children are reminded of the groundrules by the teacher. The teacher establishes the ground rules together with the children at the beginning of each half term of teaching PSHE and Circle time.

When confidentiality should be broken and procedures for doing this:

See the Safeguarding Policy

Where this does not apply and you are still concerned and unsure of whether the information should be passed on or other action taken you should speak to the Headteacher or a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

If the Headteacher issues instructions that s/he should be kept informed, all staff must comply. There is always a good reason for this, which you may not know about.

The principles we follow at The Bridges Federation are that in all cases we:

- Ensure the time and place are appropriate, when they are not we reassure the child that we understand they need to discuss something very important and that it warrants time, space and privacy.



See the child normally (and always in cases of neglect, or abuse) before the end of the school day. More serious concerns must be reported immediately to ensure that any intervention necessary to protect the child is accessed as early as possible.

- Tell the child we cannot guarantee confidentiality if we think they will:
 - hurt themselves
 - hurt someone else
 - or they tell us that someone is hurting them or others
- Not interrogate the child or ask leading questions
- We won't put children in the position of having to repeat distressing matters to several people
- Inform the child first before any confidential information is shared, with the reasons for this
- Encourage the child, whenever possible to confide in his/her own parents/carers

Dissemination and implementation:

This policy has been distributed to all teaching and non-teaching staff, including volunteers, at our schools as part of a whole school training day, where all staff received training on the content and practical applications of the policy.

There is a simplified version for children and parents/carers, which forms part of the schools prospectus.

All new staff, including volunteers, receive a copy of this policy, together with basic training on the Federation's Safeguarding Policy and procedures from the Designated Child Protection Co-ordinator.