




INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN

# Guidance on Anonymous Reporting





Anonymous reporting pathways are a crucial piece of a school's child safeguarding toolkit. Most schools offer designated confidential reporting pathways, where the person who reports a concern is only known to the members of the child safeguarding and protection team. When an anonymous report is made, the reporter is not known to anyone. There are a number of factors that may result in some members of a school community suffering in silence rather than sharing a report or disclosure that is tied to the reporter—even if the reporter is promised confidentiality. Anonymous reporting pathways encourage reporting and disclosures.

First, especially with sexual abuse, but also with other forms of abuse, children can be threatened to keep the abuse a secret. The threat might be explicitly stated, or just implicitly understood. A child might worry that their abuse will become more severe if they report, or that other people will be harmed if they report. Children might also be close to the people who abuse them and fear causing trouble for those they love, and they may believe that they are at fault for the abuse. For all of these reasons, some children are more likely to use anonymous pathways (rather than confidential pathways) if they are brave enough to disclose. The same goes for staff members and other community members who might fear retribution for reporting their concerns. Anonymous pathways support disclosures.

Second, the term “confidential” implies that what a child tells a trusted adult will stay with that trusted adult. In reality, that isn't true. Once a child discloses or reports abuse, a chain of events is set in motion that make it highly unlikely that the reporter's identifying information will not be shared. Once a report is elevated, it's possible that people will figure out who reported or disclosed. Anonymous reporting pathways protect the reporter from having their identity shared, although it is always possible that people involved will figure out who made the report.

Concern	Response
Anonymous reports are easier to falsify.	In general, intentional false allegations of abuse made by children are unusual. Just as with any type of reporting system, anonymous reports must be thoroughly investigated to determine the validity and the details of the case.
Anonymous reports make follow-up impossible, or at least extremely difficult.	<p>As with all reporting mechanisms, schools should be transparent in sharing how they will respond to reports so that anyone reporting anonymously will understand the next steps that are being taken, even if those next steps are not visible. Information that comes through anonymous reporting pathways should be treated in the same way as information that comes through the designated reporting pathways—all reports deserve the same follow-up.</p> <p>If the school creates the anonymous reporting pathway, then the school has control over what information is requested, which makes the following inquiry easier to complete. For example, if the school uses an online form that allows anonymous reporting of child safeguarding concerns, then the form can ask for all the information that the school needs to start an inquiry.</p>
Creating anonymous reporting pathways encourages anonymous reporting rather than reporting through the designated pathways.	If you don't create the pathways for anonymous reporting, then you will receive anonymous reports through other means like social media posts or notes slipped under doors. When you receive reports in this way, you do not have control over what information is requested in the report. You also do not have control over who might see the report. It's much easier to supply a form that can be completed anonymously, that asks for the information you need, and that will only be viewed by the school's child protection lead.

<p>Anonymous reports are difficult to investigate and substantiate.</p>	<p>It is not the school’s job to investigate concerns. Investigations should be done by law enforcement or other agencies with the authority to investigate crimes.</p> <p>The school should do an inquiry when they have data points that indicate a concern is present. Anonymous reports are data points. Some might be serious enough to immediately instigate an inquiry, while some might provide information about a low-level concern that is worth monitoring.</p>
<p>Anonymous reports can harm the school’s reputation.</p>	<p>Anonymous reports that are made through uncontrolled means like social media may harm the school’s reputation. If the reports are properly taken and managed they should only be visible/ available to the relevant employees of the school.</p> <p>Providing anonymous reporting pathways shows that you take CP seriously.</p>
<p>When a reporter is anonymous, they might not know that we have taken the report seriously and that we are responding.</p>	<p>Broadcast your procedures for responding to reports. Be transparent in sharing how you respond to reports and make sure that the process is followed. Transparency of process should be in place for all reporting pathways.</p>
<p>The more we open ourselves up to reports, the more reports we’ll receive.</p>	<p>The existence of the reporting mechanism does not necessarily impact the frequency of the occurrence of abuse—it only provides transparency and the ability to respond.</p> <p>It’s better to know about potential problems so they can be addressed.</p>
<p>We may get reports that have nothing to do with safeguarding.</p>	<p>Schools that start this process do often initially receive inappropriate or low-level reports, but when the school takes all reports seriously and people see the response to their concerns, then more serious concerns begin to be reported.</p> <p>It is a journey to set up this kind of reporting system</p>

	<p>so schools should not expect to go from nothing to serious reports immediately. There may be a transition phase where students test the system.</p>
<p>What if the reporter is wrong?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● We waste time and energy looking into something, when we could have spent that time and energy elsewhere.</li> <li>● We put people’s reputations in danger by looking into a report that we do not think is true.</li> </ul>	<p>What if the reporter is right?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● We can save multiple children from suffering abuse and/or shorten the time that a child is exposed to abuse.</li> <li>● Our school could be the school that stops a person who is seeking opportunities to harm children from continually gaining employment at other schools.</li> <li>● If the reporter is a child, we can show them that we are trusted adults and we do care about them and we take their concerns seriously.</li> <li>● If the reporter is an adult, we can show them that all voices in our community matter.</li> <li>● Responding to an anonymous report encourages people to speak up in person the next time.</li> </ul>

**Suggestions for successfully implementing an anonymous reporting system:**

- Make sure you have a comprehensive safeguarding program in place, including transparent procedures for handling all reports, whether anonymous or not.
- Plan with your safeguarding team how you will handle reports that are incomplete. Are there ways you can address concerns generally, either through your safeguarding curriculum or other means?
- Ensure that the anonymous reporting pathway you choose is truly anonymous and information can’t be traced back to the person who reported it. Also ensure that the reporting platform is secure.
- Limit the number of people who have access to online reports to the safeguarding lead(s) and the school director, principal, or head. They can decide what to share from the report with the child safeguarding team.
- Offer the reporter the option to give their name and contact details if they wish, but don’t make that a required question.

- Ask students to indicate their grade level in broad terms (for example, elementary, middle, or high school) so that safeguarding leads and counselors responsible for those grades can be alert to signs of distress or difficulties amongst peer groups.
- Provide information to students before and after they make the report, such as:
  - On the reporting form, give students the outline of the school's response procedures for addressing concerns.
  - After the form is complete, display a message that includes information like:
    - What happens now?
      - The safeguarding lead will use what you and other young people have told us to help improve the school's safety systems and protect students from harm.
    - If you would like to talk about things a bit more or if you feel worried or upset, you can:
      - Speak to **NAME OF SCHOOL SUPPORT** or another adult you trust.
      - Contact [insert details of local child helpline which you can find [here](#)].

Helpful article:

[Anonymous Reporting of Child Abuse Protects Child Well-Being](#)