

Working Safely with Service Users

All of MCFB's work with service users is based on our mission and values, "Working in a way which is flexible, respectful, caring and empowering". We always work in partnership with service users, guided by the principles of informed consent. Many of our service users will be living in situations of vulnerability and stress and may be at risk of abuse from partners, carers or other family members, or from hate crime in the wider community. MCFB staff and students should at all times be aware of the potential risks to vulnerable children and adults and the need to consider appropriate action, for instance under MCFB's Child Protection Policy. It is also important to remember that these risks may extend to visitors to the house e.g. an abusive ex-partner may arrive during a visit. It is important for MCFB staff and students to be aware at all times of the complexities of risk and work in a way which safeguards their own safety as well as that of service users.

MCFB has a responsibility to create a safe working environment for staff and students under the *Health and Safety at Work Act (1974)* and the *Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999)*. These regulations require identifying the actual or potential risks which may occur during an intervention, assessing the risks arising and then putting measures in place to enable students and staff members to manage the identified risk. Managing risk should not be seen as a one-off task but as an ongoing process. A simple form is attached as an appendix and may be used as an initial guide.

General Principles

- Service users, staff and students all have the right to be and feel safe.
- Staff and students if they find themselves in a situation where they do not feel safe, should take steps to leave and alert others to ensure their own safety and that of the service user.
- It is important that others know where you are. MCFB operates a diary system which all staff and students should use.
- All staff and students should know who the duty senior is and discuss any concerns with them. Duty seniors will always give this priority.
- Students should ensure that their mobile numbers are on the duty computer and that they have the mobile numbers of senior members of staff stored. If a student or member of staff does not have a personal mobile phone an agency phone is available for use on visits.
- If staff or students have a medical condition or any other reason which might make them more vulnerable they should ensure that their line manager or practice teacher/link worker is aware of it so that appropriate protective measures can be put in place. This should not be in any way detrimental to the member of staff/student.

In the office

Service users should always be welcomed and treated with respect. It is important to appreciate that some service users will be in distress. Staff and students should also be alert to possible risks. If there is any concern about risk to or from a service user the duty senior – or if they are unavailable another senior member of staff – should be contacted and protective measures discussed and put in place. These could include two workers seeing the service user/s together, thinking about safe location including outwith MCFB (such as the Social Work Centre) or rearranging the meeting. If meetings are being held in the office thought should be given to safe seating arrangements.

In service users' homes

Staff and students will commonly be working in service users' homes, and whilst the voluntary nature of MCFB contact with families means that incidents of aggression against staff and students are rare, staff and students should remain alert to this possibility. They may also be exposed to risks that face service users e.g. abusive partners or ex-partners or hostile neighbours. Thought should be given beforehand to how known risk factors can best be managed. Protective measures might include two people visiting or ensuring a safe exit. Staff and students should be particularly wary of creating further risk for service users e.g. by angering a violent partner. Where staff or students are involved in any incident of aggression they should seek to remove themselves safely and consider what action may be necessary to protect service users. In particular they should consider MCFB's Child Protection Procedures.

In the community

- Staff and students may be exposed to risk e.g. of hate crime directed either against themselves or service users they are accompanying. Staff and students should leave any area where they feel unsafe and report any incident to the duty senior. Action taken thereafter should be in line with Edinburgh's Hate Crime Strategy including ensuring that information is passed to the police.
- When accompanying children and young people, either individually or in groups, there will be risks associated with traffic or other accidents. Risk assessments should be undertaken prior to any group activity and staff and students should remain alert at all times.
- When using their own cars staff and students should consider keeping the doors locked when in motion and on arrival to give themselves time to assess the situation. Valuables should never be left in cars even out of sight, and cars should be parked wherever possible in well-lit areas.

Out of hours

When working out of normal office hours staff and students should:

- Ensure that the duty senior knows where you are and when you expect to be finished.
- Phone to let the duty senior know when you are safely on your way home.

Current as of 10/03/10

Appendix – risk assessment questionnaire

Risk factor	Risk identified to service user	Risk identified to MCFB staff/student	Protective measures
History of violent behaviour			
Other family members/friends			
Household animals			
Health hazards			
Housing e.g. dark stairs			
Neighbours/community			
Other			