



LOW-LEVEL CONCERNS POLICY

This is an important policy. It is in place to promote a safer environment for individuals receiving care and/or treatment. The policy aims to ensure that colleagues understand the need to share any concerns, including those that do not meet the threshold for harm.

APRIL 2024

Everyone has a duty to speak up if they see or hear of anything that could indicate a low-level concern.

INTRODUCTION

This Low-Level Concerns Policy supports South West Intervention Services (“SWIS”) unequivocal commitment to promoting and maintaining a safe organisational culture. It sets out the context and expectations of behaviour of all colleagues (i.e., staff/employees).

The policy applies to all concerns (including allegations) about colleagues, visiting professionals, agency staff and contractors. Our Low-Level Concerns Policy should be read in conjunction with our Allegations Policy, Safeguarding Policy, and our Whistleblowing Policy.

Our approach to safeguarding is informed by a range of statutory and non-statutory guidance. In the context of this policy, we have adopted practice requirements from Keeping Children Safe In Education (KCSIE) (2022). Although published to ensure schools and colleges have effective measures in place to safeguard children, SWIS believe that good practice should not be limited to specific sectors. This is echoed within the Eastman, et al., (Farrer & Co, Safeguarding Unit) paper ‘Developing and Implementing a low-level concerns policy’ (Sept. 2022), within which the authors propose:

That there is considerable potential in this context to create a safer environment for children, and that there is a need for a revised national approach – in organisations which work with children across all sectors. [Noting that] if this is not adopted, such organisations risk enabling the creation of further victims through missed opportunities to identify and effectively intervene in inappropriate, problematic, or concerning behaviour.

DEFINING LOW-LEVEL CONCERNS

Part Four of KCSIE (2022) identifies two levels of concern regarding allegations. These are concerns or allegations that:

- **ONE: MAY MEET THE HARM THRESHOLD.**
- **TWO: DO NOT MEET THE HARM THRESHOLD.**

CONCERNS & ALLEGATIONS THAT MEET THE HARM THRESHOLD

Concerns that meet the harm threshold should be addressed through the conditions of our Allegations Policy. The policy provides clear guidance on the need to speak up about any concerns colleagues may have about a child or young people accessing support provided by SWIS.

Our Allegations Policy aims to provide clarity on what colleagues must do if they have concerns indicating that a colleague, an agency staff professional or contractor has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child; and/or
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; and/or
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates [they] may pose a risk of harm to children, and/or
- Behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children, including where a child is not directly involved, such as by uploading extreme views on social media, carrying a weapon, drunken brawling, and relationship abuse for example (i.e., behaviours that should not be modelled to children).

It should be noted that the above points include ‘behaviour that may have happened outside [the setting] that might make an individual unsuitable to work with children [or young people],’ which ‘is known as transferrable risk’ (KCSIE, P. 86). Examples include colleagues and other individuals who connected with external facilities such as sports clubs, activity providers and other such institutions.

CONCERNS & ALLEGATIONS THAT DO NOT MEET THE HARM THRESHOLD

Concerns and allegations that do not meet the harm threshold must be raised as part of an organisational approach to promoting an open and transparent, psychologically safe culture in which ‘all concerns about adults working for or on behalf of [SWIS] are dealt with promptly and appropriately’ (KCSIE, P. 99).

SWIS accept and embrace the principle creating a culture in which all concerns and allegations ‘about adults are shared responsibly and with the right person, recorded and dealt with appropriately, is critical’ (KCSIE, P. 99).

For the purposes of SWIS, colleagues must raise concerns with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). The DSLs are Donna Greep and Emily Lowman. If the concern is about the DSL, our allegations policy provides clear guidance on who must be contacted instead.

By speaking up about low-level concerns, SWIS will support safe and effective practice by:

- Enabling colleagues to identify inappropriate, problematic, or concerning behaviour early.
- Minimising the risk of harm and abuse.
- Ensuring that colleagues are clear about professional boundaries and act within these boundaries, and in strict accordance our safeguarding ethos and values.

WHAT IS A LOW-LEVEL CONCERN?

It is important to establish that the term 'low-level' does not mean that such concerns are insignificant. All safeguarding concerns relating to children and young people must be taken seriously, particularly when they relate to a colleague's conduct and behaviour. KCSIE provides the following guidance:

A low-level concern is any concern – no matter how small, and even if no more than causing a sense of unease or a 'nagging doubt' - that an adult working in or on behalf of the school or college may have acted in a way that:

- Is inconsistent with the staff code of conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work.
- Does not meet the harm threshold or is otherwise not serious enough to consider a referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).

Examples of such behaviour could include, but are not limited to:

- Being over friendly with children or young people.
- Having favourites.
- Using their personal mobile phone to take picture of children or young people.
- Engaging with a child on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or any such location.

Concerns arising from any such behaviour encompass a broad range of concerns, from 'the inadvertent or thoughtless, or behaviour that may look to be inappropriate, but might not be in specific circumstances, through to that which is ultimately intended to enable abuse (KCSIE, P. 100). Please refer to Page 14 for a summary of the 'Spectrum of Behaviour' which provides clarification of conduct amounting to (a) a concern that meets the harm threshold, (b) a low-level concern, and (c) appropriate conduct.

Low-levels concerns can be presented in several ways, such as through a suspicion, a complaint, or a disclosure, as well as resulting from suitability checks during the recruitment process. In all cases, it is essential that low-level concerns are shared with the DSL who will ensure that information is recorded and managed effectively. This includes protecting colleagues from 'becoming the subject of potential false low-level concerns or misunderstandings' (KCSIE, P. 100).

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

SWIS aim to promote and maintain a psychologically safe environment where colleagues are encouraged and able to share concerns about the behaviour of any person whose conduct is questionable or leads to feelings of unease, for example.

We have a primary duty to ensure that children and young people are protected from harm and that their welfare remains a priority.

A vital part of this commitment is recognising that we are all responsible for promoting and embracing the following principles of a psychologically safe environment.

WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AT WORK?

The Center for Creative Leadership defines psychological safety as a ‘belief that you won’t be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes.’

WHY IS PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IMPORTANT TO SWIS?

The US Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (2022) provides a helpful introduction that clarifies the reasons for promoting a psychologically safe working environment:

The term psychological safety is defined as an individual’s “sense of being able to show and employ oneself without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status or career” (Grailey KE, Murray E, Reader T, et al.) and at the group level as “a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking.” (Edmondson A.).

The term embodies individual confidence in the belief that speaking up will not result in embarrassment, rejection, criticism, or punishment from others.

It is clear from the above that psychological safety can promote and inform a safe culture, with each area supporting the other.

SWIS believe that in nurturing a culture of psychological safety we will enhance our commitment to maintaining an open and transparent working environment. For example, empowered colleagues who are enabled to question and challenge without fear of disadvantage is an imperative of safer organisational practice.

The next section provides clarification on what must happen when concerns are identified.

SHARING LOW-LEVEL CONCERNS

The process for sharing concerns within SWIS is consistent with the procedure laid out in our Allegations Policy and Safeguarding Policy. Colleagues are reminded that:

- Donna Greep and Emily Lowman who are the Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) for SWIS.
- The overall safeguarding lead is Alison Moore (Managing Director). She is the Nominated Safeguarding Lead (NSL). NSL delegates operational responsibility for safeguarding to the DSLs.

This policy provides a clear, easily to understand procedure for sharing low-level concerns that all colleagues are required to follow:

RAISING A CONCERN

Any colleague with low-level concerns must share these with the DSL as soon as possible (i.e., without unreasonable delay). Please note: If the DSL is the subject of the concern, colleagues have a range of options clarified in our Allegations Policy. This includes notifying the NSL directly.



SHARING CONCERNS

The DSL will share the concern(s) with the Nominated Safeguarding Lead (NSL). Together, they will collaborate to decide upon whether the concern is low-level or if the concern meets the harm threshold (in which case a referral to LADO will be necessary). Please note: Colleagues must call 999 if they have reason to believe a young person is at immediate risk or if a crime has been committed.



RECORDING CONCERNS

The DSL must ensure that accurate records are taken. Records must include details of the concern, the context in which the concern arose, and action taken. The name of the individual sharing their concerns should be noted. If the individual wishes to remain anonymous, this should be respected as far as reasonably possible. Records must be held securely and comply with the conditions of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

In the first instance, colleagues should share their low-level concern verbally with the DSL. Additionally, colleagues have the option of completing the low-level concerns form and handing it or sending it to the DSL. (Please refer to Appendix One).

Where the low-level concern is provided verbally, the recipient will make an accurate record of the conversation, either during or immediately following the discussion. Sound professional judgement will be exercised in determining what information is necessary to record for safeguarding purposes. The name of the individual sharing the low-level concern, and their role, should be stated, as should the name of the individual about whom the concern is being raised, as well as their role within the organisation at the time the concern is raised.

If the latter individual has an opposing factual view of the incident, this should be fairly recorded alongside the concern. The record should include brief context in which the low-level concern arose, and concise details (which are chronological and as precise and accurate as possible) of any such concern and relevant incident(s). The record must be signed, timed, and dated. Records will be held securely in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Those with access to records will be limited to those who need to know, including the NSL.

RESPONDING TO A LOW-LEVEL CONCERN

Once the DSL has received what is believed (by the person raising it) to be a low-level concern, they should (not necessarily in the below order but in an appropriate sequence according to the nature and detail of the particular concern shared with them):

- a) Speak with the person who raised the concern (unless raised anonymously), regardless of whether a written summary or completed low-level concerns form has been provided.
- b) Speak with any potential witnesses (unless advised not to do so by the LADO/other relevant external agencies, where they have been contacted).
- c) Speak with the colleague about whom the low-level concern has been raised (unless advised not to do so by the LADO/other relevant external agencies, where they have been contacted).
- d) Review the information and determine whether:
 - i. The behaviour is in fact appropriate – i.e., entirely consistent with SWIS' expectations of conduct and the law.
 - ii. The behaviour constitutes a low-level concern.
 - iii. There is any doubt as to whether the information which has been shared about a colleague as a low-level concern in fact may meet the harm threshold, in which case they should consult with their LADO.
 - iv. In and of itself the behaviour may meet the harm threshold, and should be referred to the LADO/other relevant external agencies, or
 - v. When considered with any other low-level concerns that have previously been shared about the same individual, the behaviour may meet the harm threshold, and should be referred to the LADO/other relevant external agencies. (Continued Over)

f) Make appropriate records of:

- i.** All internal conversations – including with the person who initially shared the low-level concern (where this has been possible).
- ii.** The adult about whom the concern has been shared (subject to the above), and any relevant witnesses (subject to the above).
- iii.** All external conversations – for example, with the LADO/other external agencies (where they have been contacted, and either on a no-names or names basis).
- iv.** Their determination (See ‘d’) above).
- v.** The rationale for their decision.
- vi.** Any action taken.

MANAGING THE RESPONSE TO LOW-LEVEL CONCERNS

The DSL’s approach (including following any consultation with the LADO, as above, where action (if/as necessary) should be taken in accordance with their advice) should also be informed by the following:

If it is determined that the behaviour is consistent with SWIS’ expectations of conduct:

- It will still be important for the DSL to update the individual in question and inform them of the action taken as above.
- In addition, the DSL will speak with the person who shared the low-level concern to provide them with feedback about how and why the behaviour is consistent with SWIS’ expectations of conduct (Please refer to Pages 11 & 12) and the law.
- Such a situation may indicate that:
 - i.** SWIS’ expectations of conduct are not clear and require review.
 - ii.** The briefing and/or training has not been satisfactory.
 - iii.** This low-level concerns policy is not clear enough.

Please note: If the same or a similar low-level concern is subsequently shared by the same individual, and the behaviour in question is also consistent with SWIS’ expectations of conduct (Please refer to Pages 11 & 12), then an issue may need to be addressed about how the subject of the concern’s behaviour is being perceived, if not about the behaviour itself, and/or SWIS may need to access the effectiveness of the implementation of this policy. If it is determined that the behaviour constitutes a low-level concern:

- a)** Any investigation of low-level concerns should be done discreetly and on a need-to-know basis.
- b)** Most low-level concerns by their very nature are likely to be minor. Some will not give rise to any ongoing concern and, accordingly, will not require any further action. Others may be most appropriately dealt with by means of management guidance and/or training. In all cases, matters should be recorded as specified in this policy. **(Continued Over)**

- c) In many cases, a low-level concern will simply require a conversation with the individual about whom the concern has been raised. Colleagues must note that it has long been understood that lasting change in behaviour is least likely to be achieved by an approach experienced as critical or threatening.
- d) The DSL should initiate a 'values-based conversation' (characterised by a spirit of genuine enquiry) that will seek to understand what happened and why, and what can be done to ensure the colleague and the DSL can be confident it will not happen again. A values-based conversation will help to maintain a positive professional relationship.
- e) Any such conversation should include being clear with the colleague about why their behaviour is inappropriate, problematic, or concerning. It should address what change is required in their behaviour and any support needs. There must be clarity about the consequences if they fail to reach the required standard or repeat the behaviour in question. For example, monitoring of the colleague's behaviour may be required. An action plan or risk assessment which is agreed with the colleague, and regularly reviewed with them, may also be appropriate.
- f) If the concern meets the threshold for disciplinary or capability procedures to be invoked, the DSL will liaise with HR to settle upon an agreed course of action that is in keeping with company policy.
- g) Where a low-level concern relates to an agency worker or a contractor their employer must be notified, so that any potential patterns of inappropriate behaviour can be identified.
- h) Where low-level concerns do trigger SWIS' disciplinary, capability, grievance, whistleblowing or other procedures, these procedures should be followed as appropriate.
- i) If HR advise that SWIS' disciplinary procedure is triggered, we will aim to ensure that colleague has a full opportunity to respond to any factual allegations which form the basis of a disciplinary case against them.

MEETING THE HARM THRESHOLD

If it is determined that the colleague's behaviour (i) in and of itself may meet the harm threshold, or (ii) when considered with any other low-level concerns that have previously been shared and recorded about the same colleague, may meet the harm threshold it will be referred to the LADO/other relevant external agencies, in accordance with the SWIS' Allegations Policy and Safeguarding Policy.

IMPORTANT

Records will be retained and reviewed so that potential patterns of inappropriate, problematic, or concerning behaviour can be identified. Where a pattern of such behaviour is identified, SWIS will decide upon a suitable course of action, either through our disciplinary procedures or where a pattern of behaviour moves from a low-level concern to meeting the harm threshold, it will be referred to LADO. Consideration will be given to whether there are wider cultural issues within SWIS that enabled the behaviour to occur and where appropriate policies could be revised, or extra training delivered to minimise the risk of it happening again.

MONITORING INCIDENTS

SWIS maintain a record of lessons learned and low-level concerns.

- The lessons learned record provides a summary of every incident. It aims to capture how any learning will improve practice and enhance measures to protect young people from harm.
- The low-level concerns record documents a summary of low-level concerns and allegations, as well as those that meet the harm threshold. There is a summary of what happened and any resulting action. As stated above (P.4), the record provides the means to identify potential patterns of inappropriate, problematic, or concerning behaviour.

Both records will be subject to strict conditions of confidentiality, in line with the GDPR. The Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) includes a specific provision which permits organisations to process even the most sensitive personal data where it is necessary for the purposes of protecting children (under 18-years) from harm.

ENGAGEMENT

SWIS are committed to ensuring that colleagues:

- Work in and promote a psychologically safe professional environment (Please refer to Page 9).
- Receive effective, high-quality training that aims to ensure they have a sufficient understanding of the importance of action in response to low-level concerns, how raise low-level concerns and to whom, as well as what will happen when low-level concerns are raised.
- Are empowered to speak up about any behaviour, presentation and/or action of concern.
- Understand that they have a duty and a responsibility to speak up.
- Understand that if a low-level concern is raised about them, they will be provided with appropriate support and guidance that will address unprofessional or problematic behaviour at an early stage. All concerns will be handled responsively, sensitively, and proportionately. For example, it may be that a colleague is genuinely unaware that their behaviour is a cause for concern. If so, they will be provided with support to address matters arising. Equally, in raising a low-level concern it may be that initial enquiries identify other concerns that meet the harm threshold, in which case SWIS must notify the LADO. Therefore, any action will be proportionate to the potential impact of the alleged behaviour.
- Helped to understand that the sharing of low-level concerns must be seen as a neutral act.
- Understand that they have the option to “self-report” if they feel their behaviour falls below the expected standard or they find themselves in a situation which could be misinterpreted or may appear compromising to others. (Continued Over)

- Self-reporting can be positive for several reasons:-
 - i. It is self-protective, in that it enables a potentially difficult issue to be addressed at the earliest opportunity.
 - ii. It demonstrates awareness of the expected behavioural standards and self-awareness as to the individual's own actions or how they could be perceived, and crucially,
 - iii. It is an important means of maintaining a culture where everyone aspires to the highest standards of conduct and behaviour.

The implementation of this Low-Level Concerns Policy aims to ensure that colleagues understand the need to speak up about low-level concerns without being inhibited by the potential for negative consequences regarding their employment or colleague interaction. Therefore, all colleagues must be aware that their conduct and behaviour is open to challenge, and that this is:

- An opportunity for learning to improve practice and/or awareness.
- A means to explain what was happening and why.
- A way to bolster organisational approaches to safeguarding, such as any need to clarify policy points or review procedures.

The above list is not exhaustive, but it does provide a few key examples. The emphasis of embedding a psychologically safe environment cannot be underestimated, and it is particularly relevant when providing assurance that speaking up will 'not result in embarrassment, rejection, criticism, or punishment from others' (ibid., 2022). SWIS will promote 'a shared belief held by colleagues that others on the team will not embarrass, reject, or punish them for speaking up.' In fact, speaking up about a concern is a vital part of ensuring that SWIS remains a safe organisation.

SWIS' CORE STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

SWIS provide the following essential standards of conduct (See over) in the form of a list of mandatory "Dos" and "Don'ts" to aid understanding and compliance.

All colleagues are expected to ensure they understand and remain familiar with the following mandatory "Dos" and "Don'ts". If they have any doubts or concerns, colleagues must speak with a manager to gain clarity and/or further insight. In all cases, "I didn't know" will not be an acceptable response to a breach of these conditions.

Please note that some of concerns (listed on the next page) relate to behaviour and conduct that would meet the harm threshold, whilst others are more consistent with low-level concerns. In all cases, failure to comply with any of the essential standards will result in disciplinary measures. Colleagues should remember that although a low-level concern (in itself) may not warrant a referral arising from a belief that the harm threshold is met, the raising of such concerns over a period could result in a pattern of behaviour that does meet the harm threshold.

“DOS” – APPROPRIATE & ACCEPTABLE PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOUR

The following provides examples of acceptable behaviour. Colleagues must always:

- **Respect and promote the rights of children and young people.**
- **Speak up about/raise any concerns you may have about the behaviour of any colleague, including any low-level concerns.**
- **Be responsible and accountable.**
- **Promote an environment that supports openness and transparency.**
- **Be open to reasonable challenge and welcome opportunities to enhance practice.**
- **Be empathic and understanding.**
- **Be polite, courteous, and friendly.**
- **Be honest.**
- **Work transparently.**
- **Respect the need for professional boundaries.**
- **Respect personal space.**
- **Respect the privacy of children and young people.**
- **Listen to children and young people. Take any concerns they have concerns seriously.**
- **Be factual when reporting or recording information.**
- **Communicate effectively with all stakeholders.**
- **Be punctual.**
- **Maintain confidentiality and share information responsibly (on a need-to-know basis).**
- **Turn off personal mobile phones (or any personal portable internet enabled device) when working with children and young people.**
- **Protect sensitive information.**
- **Engage in training and development opportunities, with particular regard to core training requirements.**
- **Engage with team meetings, supervisions, and appraisals.**
- **Work together to safeguard children and young people.**
- **Protect the welfare of children and young people.**
- **Advocate for children and young people.**
- **Be familiar with the DSL and NSL, as well as their function within the organisation.**
- **Ask a senior colleague if in any doubt about what to do.**

SWIS recognise that the above list is non-exhaustive. However, it does provide a simple way to promote a safe working environment for everyone.

SWIS expect that all colleagues will embrace and maintain the above mandatory requirements, which are regarded as fundamental standards of conduct.

“DON'TS” – INAPPROPRIATE & UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR

The following provides examples of unacceptable behaviour. SWIS expect that colleagues will speak up and raise a concern if they (a) witness, (b) hear of, or (c) suspect an adult of any of the following points. For clarity. If a colleague becomes aware of a:

- Low-level concern they must follow the procedure outlined in this policy.
- Concern that may meet the harm threshold, they must follow the conditions of our Allegations Policy and/or our Safeguarding Policy.

Colleagues must never:

- Be overfriendly with children or young people.
- Have favourites or treat individual children and young people differently from their peers.
- Engage with a child or young person on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or any such location or environment. For example, behind the closed door of a young person's bedroom.
- Arrange to meet or see a child or young person outside working hours without the knowledge and agreement of a manager.
- Take a child or young person to their home or other such private address.
- Disclose personal information to children and young people.
- Accept “friend requests” from children and young people on social media platforms.
- Belittle or humiliate children and young people, thereby creating a sense of shame.
- Be abusive or rude to any child, young person, and/or any adult.
- Strike, lash out or in any way physically harm any child, young person, and/or any adult.
- Be sexist or make any comments with deliberate sexual innuendo.
- Exhibit prejudice towards any individual or group (i.e., regarding their religious belief, race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.).
- Use their personal mobile phone (or any camera) to take picture of children or young people.
- Drive above speed limits and/or dangerously (i.e., without due care and attention).
- Falsify any record and/or attempt to cover up or hide a matter of concern.
- Give or lend children and young people any keys to property, cars, etc.,.
- Let children and young people drive personal vehicles or company vehicles (where applicable)
- Consume alcohol or smell of alcohol.
- Consume illegal drugs/smell of illegal drugs.
- Smoke or vape in front of children and young people.
- Give children or young people any of your personal possessions or purchase gifts for them.
- Purchase anything from children or young people.
- Make promises to children to keep their confidence.
- Ignore or dismiss any matter, issue or occurrence that could indicate a low-level concern or a concern that meets the harm threshold. (N.B., Not raising such a concern could be seen as a form of complicity).

SUMMARY

This Low-Level Concerns Policy is an important part of SWIS' unequivocal commitment to promoting and maintaining a safe organisational culture.

SWIS accept that some colleagues may feel distressed or undermined if challenged. However, they should be assured that when a low-level concern is raised it is about supporting them to understand that their behaviour and conduct could be misunderstood or misinterpreted. They will be encouraged to reflect and consider how their actions could be perceived by others.

Colleagues are actively encouraged to self-report if, upon reflection, they feel their behaviour falls short of the expected standards. As stated by Eastman, *et al.*, (Farrer & Co, Safeguarding Unit):

Self-reporting in these circumstances can be positive for a number of reasons: it is self-protective, in that it enables a potentially difficult issue to be addressed at the earliest opportunity; it demonstrates awareness of the expected behavioural standards and self-awareness as to the individual's own actions or how they could be perceived; and, crucially, it is an important means of maintaining a culture where everyone aspires to the highest standards of conduct and behaviour.

The overall effectiveness of the policy is dependent upon colleagues being alert to the behaviour and conduct of others. It does not mean that colleagues should "Police" one another, but it does mean that everyone has a clear duty and responsibility to speak up and/or raise any concern that could indicate a low-level concern. This means remaining alert to potential concerns and exercising curiosity, rather than actively seeking to undermine colleagues, which could be seen as bullying and harassment.

Promoting a psychologically safe environment will mean that reasonable challenge about the conduct and behaviour of colleagues should be welcomed and embraced. It will help to inform good practice and crucially, support the need to protect children from harm and potential harm.

To augment the conditions of this policy, Appendix Two provides case studies that should help colleagues to understand the importance of raising low-level concerns.

IMPORTANT

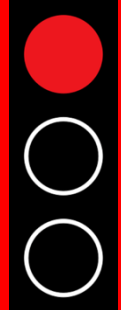
It is important to remember that whilst low-level concerns will be addressed internally (by SWIS), concerns arising from allegations or disclosures that meet the harm threshold will be referred to the LADO. This includes concerns arising from a pattern of behaviour identified through the logging of several recorded low-level concerns about a colleague's behaviour.

GUIDANCE ON THE SPECTRUM OF BEHAVIOUR

CONCERN THAT MAY MEET HARM THRESHOLD

Behaviour which indicates that an adult who works with children has:

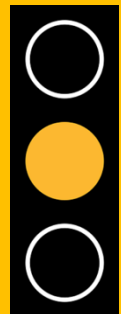
- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child or young person, or may have harmed a child or young person; and/or
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child or young person; and/or
- Behaved towards a child or children or a young person or young people in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children or young people; and/or
- Behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children or young people.



LOW-LEVEL CONCERN

Does not mean that it is insignificant. A low-level concern is any concern – no matter how small, and even if no more than causing a sense of unease or a 'nagging doubt' – that an adult working with children or young people may have acted in a way that:

- Is inconsistent with an organisation's staff code of conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work; and
- Does not meet the harm threshold or is otherwise not serious enough to merit a referral to the LADO.



APPROPRIATE CONDUCT

Behaviour which is entirely consistent with the organisation's staff code of conduct, and the law.



IMPORTANT

Please use this form to share any concern – no matter how small, and even if no more than causing a sense of unease or a ‘nagging doubt’ – that an adult may have acted in a way that:

- Is inconsistent with SWIS' staff code of conduct (as confirmed in our low-level concerns policy – see pages 11 - 12), including inappropriate conduct outside of work; and
- Does not meet the harm threshold / is otherwise not serious enough for a referral to the LADO.

You should provide a concise record (online/electronically or hard copy) – including brief context in which the low-level concern arose, and details which are chronological, and as precise and accurate as possible – of any such concern and relevant incident(s) (and please use a separate sheet if necessary).

The record should be signed, timed, and dated. Once completed, this form must be sent to the Designated Safeguarding lead (DSL) without delay.

Colleague (Completing this form):	Role:
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Colleague (Subject of LLC):	Role:
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Signed:	Time & Date:
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Received by:	At (Time):	On (date):
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Action taken: (Please be specific)

Signed:	Time & Date:
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This record will be held securely in accordance with SWIS' low-level concerns policy.

Please note that low-level concerns will be treated in confidence as far as possible, but SWIS may in certain circumstances be subject to legal reporting requirements or other legal obligations to share information with appropriate persons, including legal claims and formal investigations.

‘Developing and Implementing a low-level concerns policy’ (Sept. 2022) provides 15 case studies of child sexual abuse by adults in organisational settings. Its purpose is to illustrate that it is rare for cases of organisational child sexual abuse to occur without there having been preceding concerns observed by others. It also highlights other relevant issues about the circumstances of the abuse.

Appendix Two offers two case studies, extracted from the above to emphasise the same above point for the purposes of this policy.

CASE STUDY ONE

Case and source of information	Robert Stringer (Sector: Education, State Primary (UK)). Raynes, B (2011) Executive Summary of Serious Case Review Written About Teacher Mr X, Hillingdon Local Safeguarding Children Board.
The perpetrator	Male; joined the school as a newly qualified teacher. Committed suicide when due for trial in 2010, aged 56. Known to have abused girls between 2003 – 2009. Concerns about Mr. Stringer’s behaviour were raised in 1998 – the year he joined the school. Charged with 25 offences against four girls between 2000 – 2007. Set up and led a prestigious drama club with which Mr. Stringer used to test out the likely resistance of children he targeted for abuse. Difficult to manage, he flouted school rules and his lessons were known to lack structure.
Known victim(s)	Girls under 13 years old, the youngest aged 9. Known to have favourites. Pupils were aware that Mr. Stringer had access to a large knife used in drama productions. Pupils sought status through selection for roles in the drama club. Pupils were told Mr. Stringer would go to prison if they disclosed and no-one would then be able to look after his disabled wife.
Colleagues	Head and colleagues found Mr. Stringer “difficult.” Mr. Stringer instilled fear in staff through his behaviour e.g., shouting at them. Staff expressed concerns about Mr. Stringer’s relationship with pupils in the drama club. Anonymous referral was made to the headteacher. Reported concerns included suspicious photos on Mr. Stringer’s computer and him showing 15 rated DVD with explicit sex scenes to year 5 (9-year-old) pupils. This latter concern was reported by the parent of another child. Two teachers who attended safer recruitment training informed the headteacher that Mr. Stringer “ticks all the boxes of the [training] exercise Profile of an abuser.”
Organisational culture	Mr. Stringer’s offending spanned the tenure of two headteachers. Weak leadership of the first headteacher, and personal distractions of the second headteacher, fostered a culture where safeguarding was not taken seriously. Lack of record keeping meant patterns of behaviour were not identified.
Family and community	Parents were desperate for their children to get into the drama club which Mr. Stringer used to foster strong relationships with parents. Parents petitioned for Mr. Stringer to return to the school when suspended. Mr. Stringer had strong backing from the governing body making it difficult for the second headteacher to challenge him.

CASE STUDY TWO

<p>Case and source of information</p>	<p>William Vahey (Sector: Education, Secondary private/International (UK)). Secondary private/International (UK). Davies. H. (2014) Southbank International School Independent Review arising from the criminal conduct of William Vahey: Final Report, London, Farrer & Co, LLP. Wonnacott, J. and Carmi. E. (2016) Serious Case Review: Southbank International School, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster LSCB.</p>
<p>The perpetrator</p>	<p>Male teacher. Identified as an abuser in 2014. Committed suicide aged 64 in 2014 prior to being apprehended by the FBI. Known to have abused 54 secondary aged boys between 2009 – 2013 (possibly having offended for decades in a career that involved teaching in a number of international schools). Concerns about Mr. Vahey’s behaviour were raised during his first week at the school in 2009. Mr. Vahey’s previous history in the USA (1969) of abusing children was not picked up in pre-employment checks. Mr. Vahey ran a prestigious ‘travel club’ involving residential trips abroad. On trips Mr. Vahey drugged victims, many of whom were not then, and are still not, aware that they were abused. Mr. Vahey aligned himself with those in power, making it difficult to challenge behaviour that may have caused concern. Mr. Vahey’s abuse came to light after he had left the school and was working abroad, when a domestic maid stole a data stick containing images of his abuse.</p>
<p>Known victim(s)</p>	<p>Abused boys aged between 12 – 14 years. Chose either very popular pupils or those with some vulnerability. Pupils were ‘chosen’ or selected to go on trips, and trips were used as a way for Mr. Vahey to be alone with pupils. Pupils joked that Mr. Vahey was a “paedo” but his popularity and mechanism for abusing boys when they were drugged meant that no formal allegations were made.</p>
<p>Colleagues</p>	<p>Some staff were uneasy about Mr. Vahey’s behaviour but put it down to his “informal style.” Mr. Vahey was not universally popular with staff but was difficult to challenge as he aligned himself with those in power. Staff were overtly threatened that Mr. Vahey could use his wife’s influence (she held a high-profile position in the professional community) to damage their careers. Training on safeguarding had focused mainly on abuse within the family, and did not equip staff to understand indicators of abuse in their own organisation or how to report them.</p>
<p>Organisational culture</p>	<p>Laissez-faire and relaxed under first headship. Changes in leadership, management and proprietors caused uncertainty and rifts in the staff group. This diverted attention from any concerns about Mr. Vahey. There was over-reliance on external inspection regimes rather than reflective practice with clear lines of accountability concerning governance to scrutinize effectiveness of safeguarding practice.</p>
<p>Family and community</p>	<p>Mr. Vahey quickly normalised behaviours such as being alone with children and manipulating staff ratios for trips. Popular with parents and pupils – Mr. Vahey came second in teacher popularity ratings. Families from abroad may not have been familiar with child protection expectations and procedures in UK and were provided with very limited information. The school was a strong social hub for families from abroad where the school was perceived as “part of the family.”</p>

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