



**Mental Health and
Emotional Wellbeing
Service for Children
and Young People**

Underage Substance Misuse Policy

Implementation Date: December 2013

Reviewed: April 2016

Reviewed: June 2018

Review Date: November 2021



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Background

For the purposes of this policy substance misuse refers to all drugs, including illegal and legal drugs, tobacco, alcohol and volatile substances.

The best interests of the young person are paramount on every occasion and information should be treated as strictly confidential and be made available only to those who have a need to know. Every effort should be made to obtain the young person's consent before passing on personal information.

What do I do if a young person under the age of 16 discloses they are misusing substances?

All issues relating to confidentiality and information sharing must be in a context that is legal. The importance of confidentiality cannot be underestimated. A young person seeking help or advice about substance misuse is not going to disclose to a therapeutic practitioner if they believe that the information will immediately be shared with their parents or the police. At the same time it is essential that practitioners work within the law. The vital ingredient in the development of any successful working relationship between practitioner and young people is trust. A young person sharing personal issues with a practitioner can expect that confidentiality will be maintained. However practitioners cannot promise total confidentiality. They must explain clearly to young people the circumstances under which information may need to be disclosed and to whom. CHUMS practitioners routinely set boundaries at the start of any piece of work, stating quite clearly that confidentiality will be maintained unless they believe the young person or someone they know is 'at risk of harm'.

CHUMS has a duty of confidentiality to young people and is not legally obliged to inform parents of a young person's substance misuse. In a situation where a young person's substance misuse has been disclosed by themselves or others, the worker must assess the impact on the young person of informing the parents of their child's alleged use, and be very clear of the potential results of a disclosure. All cases should be discussed with the Safeguarding Lead.

Concern will also be with regards to the age of the young person, there is an increased element of harm if the young person is under the age of 14.

However, each case must be decided on its own merits. In making the decision the practitioner must weigh up what might happen if the information is shared against what might happen if it is not, and to make a decision based on a reasonable judgment.

Sharing confidential information without consent will normally be justified in the public interest:

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- When there is evidence that the child is suffering or is at risk of suffering significant harm; or
- Where there is reasonable cause to believe that a child may be suffering or at risk of significant harm; or
- To prevent significant harm arising to children and young people or serious harm to adults, including through the prevention, detection and prosecution of serious crime

It is imperative that any cause for concern should be documented in a timely fashion.

Onward Referral

If established that a young person is regularly misusing a harmful substance, referral on to an appropriate agency should be considered and discussed with the young person. Discussion should also take place with the Safeguarding Lead.



Appendix A

Aquarius - covers Central Beds and Bedford Borough – support for those aged 5-18 who misuse drugs or alcohol or are affected by someone else's use.

22 Grove Place, Bedford, MK40 3JJ – 01234 344911

ResoLUTiONs – covers Luton – support for young people up to the age of 19 who are misusing drugs (or up to the age of 25 for those who are considered to be vulnerable)

14-16 Chapel Street, Luton - 0800 054 6603

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Governance Committee Authorisation

Signature *

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H.B.", is placed over the signature line.

Name Print: Hannah Baron

Position/Role: Senior Clinical Psychologist

Date: June 2018

Date of Review: November 2021

- Authorised signatory must be the chair (or deputising chair) of Governance Committee