

Confidentiality within OOSH

Management and staff of OOSH services have access to information which should be treated as confidential. Parents/Guardians using the service will disclose information about their personal circumstances. They will expect their privacy to be respected at all times. It would be inappropriate for this information to be given out. Management and staff should adopt the view that no information is to be given out without written authority from the legal guardian. There are some exceptions to this rule of professional confidence, for example the police may require information if there is a legal proceeding in progress. The police would have written documentation for this.

Confidentiality for staff

Staff working in the service also have the right to privacy. Employers should be sensitive to issues relating to staff. Each service should have a staff policy giving clear guidance on issues such as staff roles and responsibilities, staff conduct, supervision, grievance procedures and other issues. Many services have identified a person from management who has the main responsibility for staff issues.

Ways to improve confidentiality

Firstly, a 'Confidentiality Policy' needs to be developed. This clearly gives guidelines to staff and management so that everyone is aware of what is expected of them and how they should act in certain situations. The following is a checklist of what should be included in the policy.

Storage of Information

Where is confidential information to be stored?

The service needs to identify a place to store confidential information. This should be a secure lockable cupboard or filing cabinet, which is accessible only to the appropriate people.

Access to Information

Who has access to information?

Certain people will need to gain access to confidential information. The Co-ordinator should have easy access to the enrolment forms. A designated management committee member might also need access to certain files. Many services divide roles amongst the management committee, so depending on the area of responsibility, you will be able to identify the appropriate information they need to access.

Confidentiality Form

Some services have now adopted a confidentiality form which management committee members, staff, volunteers all sign when taking up their positions. This is a good way of raising people's awareness about confidentiality and to clearly outline their responsibility.

Confidential issues at a meeting

A confidential issue can be discussed at a meeting without the personal details of the individuals involved. It is important to remember that once the meeting is closed, details of the meeting should not be discussed with other people outside the committee.

Complaints Procedure

The policy will need to outline the process for complaints. Parents may want to address a sensitive issue. The management committee will need to decide on a fair and consistent approach, which encourages both positive and negative feedback.

Communication over the telephone

Decide what information is to be given over the telephone. This is especially important if there is a current court order.

Communication with parents

There will be times when parents need to speak in confidence with staff at the service. It is important that their conversations take place in a quiet area, or if this is not possible whilst children are in attendance, arrange to meet the parent at another convenient time.

Confidentiality is a serious issue which needs to be taken seriously within services. Sometimes it is an area which has not been given a great deal of thought. A professional approach is needed at all times and everyone made aware of their responsibility. All of this will aid to the smooth running of the service and give parents and staff confidence in the organisation.