

Children waiting to give evidence in court



More in-depth guidance is available in the joint Stoke and Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board inter-agency Pre-Trial Protocol, available for download from the following websites.

www.staffsscb.org.uk

www.safeguardingchildren.stoke.gov.uk

What's the problem?

Many professionals who work with children become understandably anxious when a child they know is to be a witness in court — especially if the evidence is to do with abuse they have made allegations about. The anxiety centres around the fear that they may be called to court to give account of conversations they have had with the child, or that they will be accused of coaching or influencing the child. However, children need a great deal of help in the run up to a court appearance and professionals must be available to give them support.

For further specific advice and information about the particular situation you are in, contact your agency's designated safeguarding officer.





The one thing we must not do is encourage the young person to describe or analyse the specific crimes committed against them. However, if the young person chooses to speak about the offences, we must not stop them; but we must not encourage further disclosure with questions either.

So, make the rules clear at the beginning.

When talking, use words that the child has used so that he or she does not pick up adult jargon. Clarify the distinction between:

- the crime itself,
- the effects of the crime,
- and the person who has caused these effects.

You are free to help the child to express their feelings about what has happened, and about the person who has hurt them. You are also free to help them to solve problems in the here-and-now.

Neither the Police nor the Crown Prosecution Service can prevent a child from receiving counselling or therapy. However, they need to be informed about it because they have to decide if the child's credibility as a witness is being affected.

Keep good records

If the child chooses to talk about the specific criminal allegations, make sure you write down as accurately as possible the exact words used; not what you thought they meant or were referring to. Make a note of the time, place and context of the conversation, and identify anyone else who was present.



Inform your designated safeguarding officer about the conversation because the police officer handling the case may need to have access to your recording.

