

## Disclosure: 'a revelation of abuse or harm'

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Whilst working with a group of primary school children recently one of them made a disclosure to me. This is something that all of us working with children and young people known may happen and so we should make sure we know the local procedure to be followed and how best to react to such a thing. But those of us in playwork, particularly those working in a peripatetic sense travelling from venue to venue never staying long but consistently enough to establish a relationship with the children we are working with, possible experience this more than some others might.

It is largely about the transitory yet close relationship we build-up but it is also because we blur the boundary between being adult and being child. The fact that we are neither teachers, nor carers or parents is also a key point and although we can never 'be' children if we get it right we can become as close to a trusted peer as might be possible.

When I was working as a travelling games worker in the 1980s the nature of the relation being formed between me and the children I was working with made it ripe for disclosures - not every day you understand but certainly a handful of times a year. And it got to me every single time to the extent that on a number of occasions I seriously considered leaving that type of work behind.

The nature of my work now means that these disclosures have not happened for some time, we could measure it in years in fact; so when it was clear that it was going to happen this time I wasn't sure how I was going to react.

I knew in advance it was going to happen. It was with a small group I had been working with for around five months and while we were out walking around the playground making some decisions about where new areas should be created one of the group, an eight-year old girl insisted on holding my hand. As we heading off back into the school buildings she pulled me to one side and asked if she could whisper something in my ear. "Here it comes", I thought.

I had already gone though in my head and reminded myself what the disclosure procedure was and I had already rehearsed what I was going to say: something along the lines of, "Thank you for telling me that. That must have been a hard thing to do. It's very important that we tell someone this and please don't worry but I must tell other people that you have told me this."

When I bent down she actually lifted my long hair up so she could whisper closely in my ear. What she said wasn't quite what I was expecting but in some respects it was much worse. She simply said, with tears in her eyes, "Marc, I'm very, very unhappy." When she expanded on this she said no-one at school would play with her and that at both school and home she spent a large amount of time on her own. She is quite recognisably a quiet girl but clearly she didn't want to be.

I have a message to all those out there that might not have much respect for the well-being agenda or who might believe that the issue of children's happiness is nothing but a modern fad that has no real bearing on the real world. You're an idiot. This child was unhappy on a day to day basis and it was tearing her apart.

It was recorded, it was passed on and for the few remaining weeks of the project I made a point of asking how she was doing and what was going on. In the long term some of the changes we were about to make at this school will help her and in the future I think it's unlikely that she will ever remember holding up the hair of an aging playworker to whisper a secret into his ear. But he will remember because one thing that proved no different this

time to any other time such a thing has happened to him in the past was that it quite got to him. It still does as he writes this now.

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