

CHILDREN (EQUAL PROTECTION FROM ASSAULT) (SCOTLAND) ACT 2019

ABERDEENSHIRE MULTI-AGENCY OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE

On 7 November 2020, the Children (Equal Protection from Assault) (Scotland) Act 2019 (from here on referred to as 'the Act'), was introduced. The Act provides children with the same rights as adults against assault by a parent or person with charge or care of them.

The Act will repeal Section 51 of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003, which provides a parent or carer a defence in court allowing them to justify an assault on a child as 'reasonable chastisement' or 'justifiable assault' in exercising their parental rights.

This is a significant change and you, along with every individual involved in working with children in any capacity across the Aberdeenshire children's services partnership will have a crucial role to play in successfully implementing the Act. Aberdeenshire's Child Protection Committee and the extensive children's services partnership in the Shire welcomes this legislative change.

The requirements of this legislation are relevant to, and will be incorporated across, all our multi-agency training in the months to come. This document will act as guidance and highlights the processes that should be followed if you witness an assault on a child by a parent or carer, or if such a matter is reported to you.

First and foremost, when dealing with children for Equal Protection (EP) incidents or any other matter, it must be remembered that ensuring their safety, care and wellbeing is critical. Whilst investigating EP incidents will be the remit of the Police, the duty of care towards families involved has not changed and will remain part of your duties, as it is currently.

PREVENTION

The prevention of EP incidents will be key to ensuring children's safety, care and wellbeing, and as such the Aberdeenshire Child Protection Committee (CPC) will be coordinating media messaging to highlight the new legislation to parents, carers, children and the wider public. Generic messaging will be prepared and distributed through appropriate media channels, including social media, as part of a national campaign.

It will be for all services to decide how best to spread this message widely during day-to-day dealings with parents, carers, and children. The more informed and educated individuals are regarding the new legislation, the less likely offences are to occur.

ASSESSMENT

This document is intended to provide guidance for practitioners who encounter instances of equal protection which were previously deemed 'reasonable chastisement'. These instances of reasonable chastisement will now be classed as an offence of assault and will be reported to Police.

If such an assault is witnessed by you or reported to you by any means, an immediate assessment must be made regarding the circumstances in which the assault has occurred, and the relevant system checks should be carried out to ascertain if the incident is considered to be an isolated minor incident or if it forms part of wider child protection concerns. There is no requirement to carry out checks wider than your own service unless there is information to suggest child protection concerns need to be considered (on receipt of an EP report Police will carry out an investigation, see below).

Whilst not an exhaustive list, factors to be considered in making an immediate assessment should include.

- Is the offence a minor physical assault?
- Is the child injured and requiring medical attention?
- Is there any evidence of physical injury or adverse effects, including fear or alarm?
- Do the circumstances of the assault raise Child Protection concerns?
- Are there any other risk or safety considerations in relation to children?
- Has the person responsible for the assault previously been investigated (to your knowledge) for offences against children?

It should be noted the child protection guidance remains that any hit to the head, use of excessive force or use of any implement should be deemed an assault and child protection guidelines followed.

REPORTING

Should the assessment of the circumstances conclude the assault is an isolated Equal Protection incident you should report this to **Police via the 101 number**. When making the report you should provide details of the circumstances of the assault, the informed assessment as to why it is considered to be an equal protection matter and any other information you feel is relevant.

The continuum between what is or is not a child protection matter is one which you and your colleagues assess and make decisions upon regularly.

If you are in any doubt, follow child protection guidelines and consult supervisors and/or partners to ensure the most appropriate course of action is taken.

Should the decision be made the circumstances amount to an isolated Equal Protection incident, it is crucial that after it is reported to Police, you and your service continue to offer the support you consider to be relevant to the family involved as would be the case currently.

INVESTIGATION

Police will record a crime and investigate all reported incidents of Equal Protection. Police will carry out checks (other than when the report is received directly from Social Work) through Aberdeenshire Council Social Work to establish if there are any wider child protection considerations. For all Equal Protection incidents reported to Police, an iVPD will be created and, where appropriate, shared with partners.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

The impact the EP legislation will be subject to ongoing monitoring by both individual services and the wider CPC and may be subject to review moving forward.

It should be noted this advice is aimed at services within the wider CPC partnership and there may be nuances or partner specific queries that should be dealt with through service leads. Any partnership issues, improvements or points requiring clarity on this guidance should be reported through the same service leads for the consideration of the CPC.

