Dealing with a disclosure of abuse

When a pupil tells me about abuse they have suffered, what should I remember?

- Stay calm
- Do not communicate shock, anger or embarrassment
- Reassure the child. Tell him/her you are pleased that s/he is speaking to you
- Never enter into a pact of secrecy with the child. Assure her/him that you will try to help but let the child know that you will have to tell other people in order to do this. State who this will be and why
- Tell her/him that you believe them. Children very rarely lie about abuse; but s/he may have tried to tell others and not been heard or believed
- Tell the child that it is not her/his fault
- Encourage the child to talk but do not ask "leading questions" or press for information
- Listen and remember
- Check that you have understood correctly what the child is trying to tell you
- Praise the child for telling you. Communicate that s/he has a right to be safe and protected
- Do not tell the child what s/he experienced is dirty, naughty or bad
- It is inappropriate to make any comments about the alleged offender
- Be aware that the child may retract what s/he has told you. It is essential to record in writing, all you have heard, though not necessarily at the time of disclosure
- At the end of the conversation, tell the child again who you are going to tell and why that person or those people need to know
- As soon as you can afterwards, make a detailed record of the conversation using the child's own language. Include any questions you may have asked. Do not add any opinions or interpretations
- If the disclosure relates to a physical injury do not photograph the injury, but record in writing as much detail as possible and complete the body map with a blue form.

NB it is not the staff's role to seek disclosures. Their role is to observe that something may be wrong, ask about it, listen, be available and try to make time to talk.

Immediately afterwards:

You should not deal with this yourself. Clear indications or disclosures of abuse must be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Leads or a deputy without delay, and recorded on CPOMs as soon as possible.

Children making a disclosure may do so with difficulty, having chosen carefully to whom they will speak. Listening to and supporting a child/young person who has been abused can be traumatic for the adults involved. Support for you will be available from the DSL or Head Teacher.