

A volunteer not following guidance given

A case study

Martha is a fairly new volunteer helping with a young people's group. She has had an induction, including guidance on expectations for working safely with young people. During one of the sessions the group leader finds that Martha is in a room alone with one of the 12 year-olds, having a chat.

How might this be followed up by the group leader?

Listen – the group leader listens to what is going on in the room, without comment about her concern. By listening to both the helper and the young person she finds out why they were having a private chat and is also able to judge whether the atmosphere is supportive and healthy.

Respond – the group leader remains in the room and at a suitable moment checks whether the young person would like to go down to help make the drinks for the break, go back to her group or remain where she is. She opts to return to the group.

Reflect – The group leader reflects while she is listening. Is it better to speak to the helper immediately or at a later date? Which will be most effective in helping Martha to follow the guidance about not being in a private space with a young person but avoid her feeling undermined or accused? She also reflects that if Martha hasn't followed the guidance given to her, it may be necessary to make the point more clearly in future to new volunteers.

Consult – this isn't necessary in this case. The group leader knows that Martha has not followed the guidance and consulting others would just magnify the issue.

Decide – The group leader decides to have a quiet word with Martha after the young person has returned to her group. She decides that this is best because the session is half way through and Martha will then be able to finish the session and the leader can check at the end of the session whether Martha seems happy and affirm her before she goes home.

Communicate – The group leader compliments Martha on her positive, supportive relationship with the young person and mentions that although there will be times when it is helpful to talk to a young person alone, this must be done somewhere visible to others, either by being in a quiet corner of a public space or by leaving the door open. She listens to Martha's reaction to this information. If Martha acknowledges that she now remembers the guidance the group leader simply affirms this. If she is more defensive, the group leader reminds her of the guidance and that it is designed both to keep young people safe from harm and to protect volunteers from damaging accusations.

The group leader could then have a more general chat to help Martha move on from this particular issue.

The group leader makes a note of this incident so that if questions arise or follow up is necessary she can refer back to her notes.

Take heart! This may sound like a huge amount of thinking or action but it all takes place in a relatively short space of time and although it can feel briefly awkward, effective action is best for all concerned.