

GUIDANCE FOR COMPLETION OF ACORNS UNIVERSAL REFERRAL FORM

These notes are to provide more information about Acorns and the services we provide as well as to assist you in completing the referral form.

ABOUT ACORNS

Acorns is a small voluntary sector charity based in North Shields. The project offers counselling, play therapy and one to one outreach support for children and young people who have lived with domestic violence and abuse and who are:

- 4 -18 years old
- Resident or at school in North Tyneside
- Showing signs of the impact of their experiences; and
- In a safe, stable environment

Acorns runs its services from dedicated premises in North Shields. As well as providing counselling and play therapy we have Children & Young People's Workers who are able to support children and young people in school or any other appropriate venue on a one to one basis, as well as providing group and one to one work around domestic abuse and healthy relationships. We also have an Advice and Support Worker able to offer emotional and practical support to non-abusive resident parents or carers who have a child referred to the service, from when a child is placed on the waiting list.

REFERRAL CHECKLIST

This checklist is to enable you to ensure you have completed all sections of the form. Any incomplete or missing information will **delay the referral**.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE CHILD

Basic details about the child including their **current address**. This may be the parental home, foster care or with other family members.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE PARENT/CARER

Please provide information about who is caring for the child, what their relationship is to the child and their contact details. If this person is not the child's parent, please provide information about the child's parents/s as well. If there are any relevant Child Arrangement Orders it would be helpful for you to include this information.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE REFERRER

Please include your contact details as well as information about your current involvement with the family.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

Please give as much information as you have about the nature of any involvement with Children's Services and any other agencies involved. This will speed up the referral process as it will take Acorns less time to speak to relevant agencies when assessing the referral.

CONTACT WITH THE PERPETRATOR

Please include, where possible, the name of the perpetrator/s as well as the area in which they live. This is about assessing risk to the child from accessing Acorns, as well as identifying confidentiality issues when multiple children may be connected to the same perpetrator.

Acorn's priority is the safety and welfare of the children referred to the service. In addition, for therapy to be suitable and helpful for the child, it is important for children/young people to be living in a safe and stable environment. The project will provide support to children and young people who are having contact

with the perpetrator if that contact is assessed as safe and not excessive. **However, Acorns will not accept referrals for children who are still living with the perpetrator, if that perpetrator is still in a relationship with their non-abusive carer or if there are any unresolved issues around contact, safety or any other risk factors.** A member of staff from Acorns will contact you to discuss this if this is the case.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE REASON FOR THE REFERRAL

Please give us as much information you can about the child's experience of DVA, their response to it and what the concerns are around their current welfare and behaviour. This allows acorns to make a fuller, safer assessment of a child's situation and appropriateness for therapy.

We do not take referrals:

- about apparent mild or transient concerns
- for school based problems without emotional health or family based issues
- where there are current child protection concerns under investigation or pending
- where the referrer has closed or is about to close the case
- where the child has not been seen or consulted and given their consent
- where the child or young person is accessing counselling or therapy via another service
- where the resident carer is unable to support the child accessing the service, or whose own mental health will negatively impact a child's recovery process

Acorns cannot process a referral for support if this has not been discussed – in an age appropriate way, with the child and they have given consent for the referral. There is no pressure on children to continue the process, the first step for them will be to come for a visit and they can then decide if they would like to continue.

ACORNS SERVICES

Please indicate which of our services you feel may be most useful. If you are not sure don't worry – we will discuss this when we receive the referral and advise accordingly.

PARENT/CARER COMMUNICATIONS

We will send out communications to the parent/carer as follows:

1. To advise we have received a referral for their child
2. When the referral has been considered and a decision has been made – e.g. not suitable, added to waiting list - or if we need more information and this is delaying the referral.

Please ensure that you indicate a parent/carer's preferred method of communication.

PARENTAL CONSENT

Acorns cannot process a referral for a child if the parent or current carer has not read and signed the consent for the referral. If this is not signed, acorns will return the form to the referrer to gain parental consent. Electronic signature is acceptable. Please ensure that the parent/carer is aware that we may seek to speak to other agencies about the referral if more information is required.

REFERRER SIGNATURE

Please sign the referral form.

A NOTE

Research with children and young people living with domestic violence and abuse shows that they have very individual reactions to their experiences. They have their own views and interpretation of the abuse they are living with. It is particularly important to avoid assumptions of permanent psychological damage and notions of 'cycles of abuse'. There are several factors that moderate the risk of harm and negative experiences of children including parenting capacity, individual resilience, support from wider family, school and a range of other protective factors. Not all children need therapy. In order to recover from their experiences, children need:

An end to their exposure to violence and abuse

Living with continuing domestic abuse (including conflict around child contact arrangements) has the most damaging impact on a child's physical and emotional health and welfare.

A safe place to live

With access to school, healthcare, money, friends and opportunities to play and be a child.

Strong, safe parenting

Based on love, warmth, affection and predictable, consistent routines and boundaries.

In addition children need:

- Age appropriate information about what is happening in the family
- To be listened to and have the opportunity to talk within the family about the day to day stuff of school and friends as well as how they are feeling
- 'Permission' to talk about what has happened and someone to talk to outside of the family
- Information about how to keep themselves safe

The messages children need to hear about domestic violence and abuse are:

- The abuse is not your fault
- It is not your responsibility to keep adults safe
- When adults fight it is an adult problem and adults need to fix it
- It's OK for you to get help
- It's OK for you to talk to someone about what has happened