**GUIDANCE FOR COMPLETION OF ACORNS REFERRAL FORM**

For all contact details and referral forms, please click here <https://www.acornsproject.org.uk/contact/>

*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**

We offer a range of services 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 or Northumberland
* Showing signs of the impact of their experiences.

We run our services from dedicated premises in North Shields and out in the community. We provide counselling and play therapy in house and on an outreach basis in Northumberland, and offer support to 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, through our outreach services. These include a dedicated ‘First Response’ service, offering short term safety planning and emotional support to children aged 11+ who are experiencing abuse at home or within their own relationships.

We have a number of additional services that are available to parents/carers when a child is accepted to Acorns, including a family support service, offering emotional and practical support in a range of areas, and access to counselling.

**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**.

1. **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.

1. **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.

1. **Information about the referrer (If not a self-referral)**

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

1. **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 we will know who we need to contact if we need any more information to assess the referral.

1. **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.

Our priority is the safety and welfare of the children referred to the project. For our therapy services to be suitable and helpful for the child, it is important for children/young people to be living in a safe and stable environment. We will provide therapeutic 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 therapeutic services 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 if this appears to be the case as we may have other more suitable services available, including our First Response Service for children aged 11 or over or, for young people 13+, our flexible drop in support.

1. **Information about the reason for the referral**

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

We do not take referrals:

* For apparent mild or transient concerns;
* For school based problems without emotional health or family based issues;
* 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.

1. **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.

1. **Parental responsibility**

We ask for this information to inform the child’s care plan. We work to the Department of Education guidelines on parental responsibility - as such, we accept consent for children and young people’s services from the resident parent/carer. However, in some instances we may be asked to share information about the child’s support with someone else who has parental responsibility for the child.

We will only share information with named parents/carers recorded on our system. We will not share information with any parent where this has not been previously arranged without informing and consulting the resident parent/carer first.

However, family law states that “a person with parental responsibility can make decisions about the child’s upbringing and is entitled to information about their child. For example, they can give consent to the child’s medical treatment and make decisions about the child’s education. They also have the right to receive information about their child’s health and education.”

This means that, if we are contacted by a non-resident parent/carer and parental responsibility can be evidenced, we may then be required by law to share information with them about the child’s support. You may wish to consider in advance of submitting your referral - would the other parent expect to be kept informed? Would this present with difficult situations for you to manage if the non-resident parent becomes aware of our support through a third party? Are there any risks involved? How is this discussed with the child?

It is important, where there is shared parental responsibility, that children are able to be open and transparent about their engagement with Acorns, and we are happy to advise parents on how best to approach this and the related issues described above. Please give us a call for a chat if this is something that you feel may be a barrier to your child coming to Acorns.

1. **Parent/carer/child 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, we 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.

**Child consent**

We are able to accept self-referrals from young people aged 13 and over under the Gillick competence, where we will consider:

* The child's age, maturity and mental capacity;
* Their understanding of the services we offer and what they involve - including advantages, disadvantages and potential long-term impact;
* Their understanding of the risks, implications and consequences that may arise from their decision;
* How well they understand any advice or information they have been given;
* Their understanding of any alternative options, if available;
* Their ability to explain a rationale around their reasoning and decision making.

If we are confident of the young person’s understanding of the above, they may be able to access support without their parent’s knowledge. However, we prefer to have parental consent and will always maximise the involvement of parents/carers as much as possible, if it is in the best interests of the young person.

More information about this can be found at the following link:

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-protection-system/gillick-competence-fraser-guidelines#heading-top>

**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