



Protecting Children and Young People:

# The Charter

EXPLANATORY BOOKLET

# Protecting Children and Young People: The Charter



As children and young people, we have a right to be protected and be safe from harm from others.

When we have difficulties or problems we expect you to:

Get to know us

Speak with us

Listen to us

Take us seriously

Involve us

Respect our privacy

Be responsible to us

Think about our lives as a whole

Think carefully about how you use information about us

Put us in touch with the right people

Use your power to help

Make things happen when they should

Help us be safe



**We want to give every child and young person the best possible start in life. Helping our children realise their potential is the key to giving them a sense of self-fulfilment and equipping them for their future. But to do this children and young people need to be kept safe from harm and neglect.**

This Charter reflects the voice of children and young people and what they feel they need, and should be able to expect, when they have problems or are in difficulty and need to be protected. This is a message to all of us – politicians, communities, parents, families, neighbours; as well as police, health, social work and education authorities; and people who work directly with children and young people - about what is important to them in how we go about helping to protect them.

This booklet provides an insight on what lies behind the 13 statements from children and young people in the Charter.



## About the Charter and who it is for:

- This Charter has been developed in consultation with children and young people who have experienced harm and been in need of help and protection. It also reflects what they have the right to expect.
- Children and young people are more keenly aware of relationships and attitudes others display rather than processes and events. The statements in the Charter reflect the value children put on these. They are a reminder and a tool for critical reflection for all of us as to how we handle these relationships – particularly where children can be scared, embarrassed, unsure what to do and what might happen to them.
- There are key messages here for those who deliver services to children – whether within the police, health, social work or education environment – about the importance of maintaining a child-focus rather than a process or single-agency focus and the need to reflect this in practice.
- While particularly important and relevant to those who are clearly identified as in need or at risk, the Charter reflects the principles of how all children should be responded to when they are in difficulties at various times in their lives. How these situations are handled, and the relationships and trust that can be developed, can help prevent escalation.
- The statements in the Charter can equally apply to how children and young people, whatever their age, can be expected to treat each other and adults.
- The Scottish Executive is committed to delivering improved services for children and young people. As part of the Child Protection Reform Programme, a Framework for Standards for child protection has been developed which builds on these Charter statements and the pledges made to help deliver better, more joined-up, child-focused services for vulnerable children and young people.

- Included in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is that children and young people have the right to be protected and to participate in decisions which affect them.

## **How was the Charter developed?**

- Save the Children consulted with 83 children and young people who took part individually, in small groups, and as part of a large consultation event, between March and September 2003. Parents and carers were also involved.
- In addition, professionals from voluntary and statutory agencies participated in seminars, meetings, by email and telephone.
- Desk research on other consultations with children and young people and charters, such as the UNCRC, were examined.

## **How do children and young people feel when they are unsafe or have been harmed by another person?**

- Almost all talked in terms of their feelings and how these affected them. They felt scared about what had been happening and that they often did not know what to do to improve the situation. Most who had been involved in formal child protection procedures expressed feelings of being scared about this because they did not know the people who would be at meetings, were unsure of what would happen, and were worried about the possible outcomes. They were also anxious when they thought they might see, in court, the people who had harmed them.



*She would then  
be called a grass  
(girl, 14 years)*

- Some were apprehensive that a situation could be made worse by sharing a concern with an adult.
- The formality of adults was often frightening. This included how they communicated with them, their style of dress, the language they used, and the environment of meeting places.
- They found it difficult when they did not know or understand what was happening and when they felt they did not have any influence over decisions made about their safety and well-being. For many this resulted in: finding it hard to sleep; not wanting to eat; falling behind with school work; getting angry and irritated with people close to them.
- They also felt embarrassed. Reasons for this included concern about how other people would perceive them and their families if they found out and not wanting to be seen as “different” from their peers.
- For some, ChildLine was the agency of choice to confide in because they could explore issues safely without the worry of others finding out.
- They spoke about the positive outcomes from speaking to someone who was able to help and the importance of doing so.



*Because  
sometimes... you are  
embarrassed to  
talk about what is  
happening so if  
you can't see the  
person you are  
telling it may make  
it a bit easier  
(boy, 12 years)*

## The Charter Statements

The Charter comprises 13 statements derived from the consultation process with children and young people. The response is a set of 11 pledges and an outline of work to be done to help deliver on these. The 13 statements are

presented as statements from children and young people to adults. These are:



### **“Get to know us”**

Relationships with other people were key in providing children and young people with environments and opportunities where they could seek help when needed.

They had a strong sense of the characteristics which made for supportive relationships. Being able to trust the person was important, this could be developed through having time to get to know the person and experience how they had dealt with situations in the past.

Other important characteristics were: understanding; respect; being genuine; being reliable; and consistency in approach and attitude.

Children and young people were aware of the statutory responsibilities of some professionals. This sometimes impacted negatively on their relationships.



They just think  
that every  
normal person  
stays with their  
mum and dad

(girl, 15 years)

### **“Speak with us”**

Many children and young people felt that adults often made assumptions about their lives and what their experiences were likely to be.

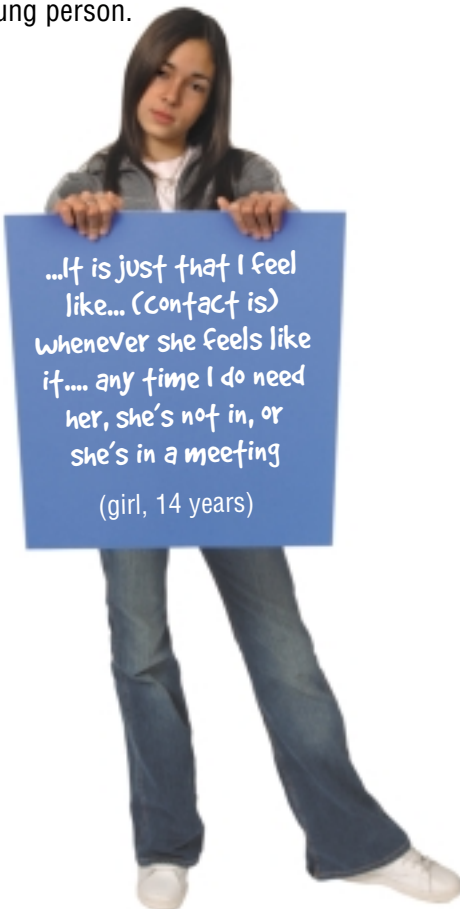
They felt that there was an emphasis on living with two parents as being “normal” with little recognition of the diverse circumstances children and young people experience.



## “Listen to us”

Children and young people felt that being listened to provided a good basis for other interactions with adults and other young people. It was important that adults actively listened to what children are saying and took account of their behavioural responses to situations.

Many felt that contacts with professionals were designed to meet the obligations of the professionals rather than the needs of the child or young person.

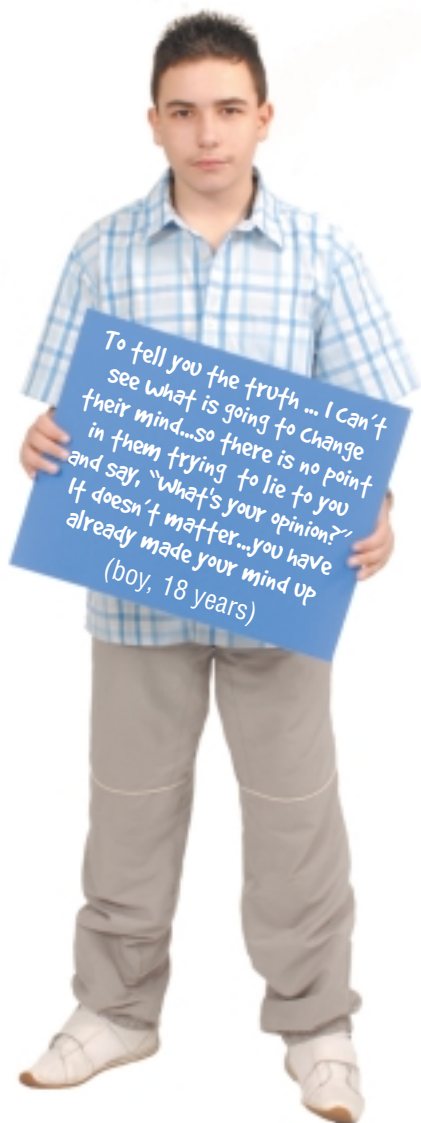


They found it difficult to participate in child protection procedures when they felt that they were not being listened to and able to influence what would happen.

### **“Take us seriously”**

Children and young people wanted other people to take them seriously when they spoke to them about a worry or concern regarding their safety.

Most felt that they had to *“work harder”* than adults to be believed. Some took measures to collect *“evidence”*, for example, on tape so that they could *“prove”* what had happened to them. They felt that this was necessary because their complaints were likely to be dismissed or not believed by other people.



## **“Involve us”**

For children and young people it helped to be involved in decisions and to understand what was happening. This enabled them to maintain a sense of control over their situation.

They spoke very positively about people who gave them space and support to work through the complexity of their situations, allowing them to define and prioritise issues and to make decisions about what they wanted to do. They identified a number of techniques that had allowed them to express how they felt through speaking, drawing or writing. Not being pressured by time and the discussion being relaxed and informal were also identified as important.

## **“Respect our privacy”**

Many children and young people were frightened other people they knew would find out what was happening and this would make the situation worse. This does not mean that information should not be shared when it would help protect a child or young person.

Having private time and places to talk to other people was vital in giving children and young people the opportunity to think through what was happening to them and to decide how to deal with the situation.



...they say... we will do  
this, we will do that,  
and they don't...

(boy, 16 years)

### **“Be responsible to us”**

Children and young people were aware of times when action to improve a situation had been agreed but people had not fulfilled their responsibilities.

### **“Think about our lives as a whole”**

Children and young people felt that insufficient consideration was taken of how the different people and places in their lives related to one another.

Actions taken could resolve a situation in one environment, but make it worse in another.

### **“Think carefully about how you use information about us”**

Children and young people showed awareness of why information needs to be shared and why, at times, there may be no choice in this.



Sometimes they  
have to tell other  
people about it who  
have had more  
experience of the  
problem that  
you've given them

(girl, 10 years)

When information needed to be shared, they wanted consideration given as to how people might perceive them and their families and the potential problems this could cause for them, for example, bullying.

It was important that they felt they had influence over when information was shared. Where they felt that this had not happened and it had not been explained to them why, their response included not speaking about concerns to the person (or others in a similar position) again.

### **“Put us in touch with the right people”**

The majority of children and young people recognised the roles that others had if they were unsafe or had been hurt. Often, however, they were unsure of who was the right person to speak to for help. So, they often relied on those that they already knew to put them in touch with the appropriate people and agencies.

### **“Use your power to help”**

Children and young people described a number of ways they would deal with a situation where they felt unsafe or had been hurt. Many suggested speaking to an adult could help. Certain adults were viewed to be particularly influential and so in a position to help. The main people identified were teachers, police and social workers.

Parents and other adults were often seen as intermediaries in this process. Children and young people felt that adults were more influential than they were when speaking to people in positions of authority. Some chose not to speak to anyone. This was often because they did not believe it would improve the situation or could make it worse.

Friends were seen as a key source of support, as well as siblings for some. Friendship networks allowed concerns to be discussed informally and action taken if appropriate. Many had developed personal coping strategies. Failure by professionals to recognise these, or their ability to protect themselves, often served to alienate them further from interacting with formal procedures.

They talked about other actions such as running away from home or behaving disruptively, which was often a result of feeling upset about what was happening.





### “Make things happen when they should”

Children and young people wanted the problem to stop straight away.

They did, however, recognise that time may be needed to involve the necessary people and to decide on the most appropriate actions. The uncertainty in this period was a major concern and source of worry for many children, with the potential that the situation would get worse.



### “Help us be safe”

Children and young people felt that it was important to acknowledge the role that they play in keeping themselves safe and the role of adults to support them in this.

All of the 13 Charter statements are underwritten by one clear guiding principle – “help us be safe”.



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