

# Safeguarding Handbook

A group of school children in uniform are gathered outdoors. In the foreground, a girl with blonde hair and a boy with brown hair are both looking down at their mobile phones. They are wearing blue blazers over light blue shirts. The girl is also wearing a blue and black plaid skirt. Other children are visible in the background, also in uniform. The overall scene suggests a school setting where mobile phone use is being discussed or monitored.

**September  
2025  
Edition**

**Andrew Hall**



# Safeguarding Handbook for Schools

Andrew Hall

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## Version Control

File Version <sup>1</sup>	Date	Change
15.0	September 2024	<p>Reviewed and revised to take account of new Keeping Children Safe in Education (2024).</p> <p>Reviewed and revised to take account of updated Working Together published in December 2023.</p> <p>Reviewed and revised source documents for updates and changes.</p> <p>Added revised flowcharts from Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)</p> <p>Added further section about a systemic approach to safeguarding</p> <p>Added Cyber Security section</p> <p>Added Developing a vulnerability matrix</p>
16.0	September 2025	<p>Reviewed and revised to take account of new Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025)</p> <p>Add new sections on: Artificial Intelligence (AI) Cumulative Harm Seasonal Safeguarding The Manosphere and Incel Culture</p> <p>Updated sections on: County Lines Domestic Abuse Staff and social media</p>

<sup>1</sup> The file version of this specific edition of the Safeguarding Handbook can be found on the inside pages close to the spiral binding



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## **The difference between Safeguarding and Child Protection**

In essence,

Safeguarding applies to all children and young people.

Child Protection refers to the procedures and support given to those children and young people who have experienced abuse in their lives.

**Safeguarding and Child Protection is about managing risk.**

**Safeguarding and promoting the  
welfare of children is everyone's responsibility.**

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility. Everyone who comes into contact with children and their families has a role to play. In order to fulfil this responsibility effectively, all practitioners should make sure their approach is child centred. This means that they should consider, at all times, what is in the best interests of the child.

(Source: *Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025)*, paragraph 3)

**In short:**

*Safeguarding is proactive and child protection is reactive.*



## What is Safeguarding?

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined for the purposes of this guidance as:

- providing help and support to meet the needs of children as soon as problems emerge
- protecting children from maltreatment, whether that is within or outside the home, including online
- preventing the impairment of children's mental and physical health or development
- ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care
- taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes

(Source: Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) paragraph 3)

### **Children includes everyone under the age of 18**

*A child is anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. The fact that a child has reached 16 years of age, is living independently or is in further education, is a member of the armed forces, is in hospital or in custody in the secure estate, does not change their status or entitlements to services or protection.*

(Source: Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023) Appendix A)

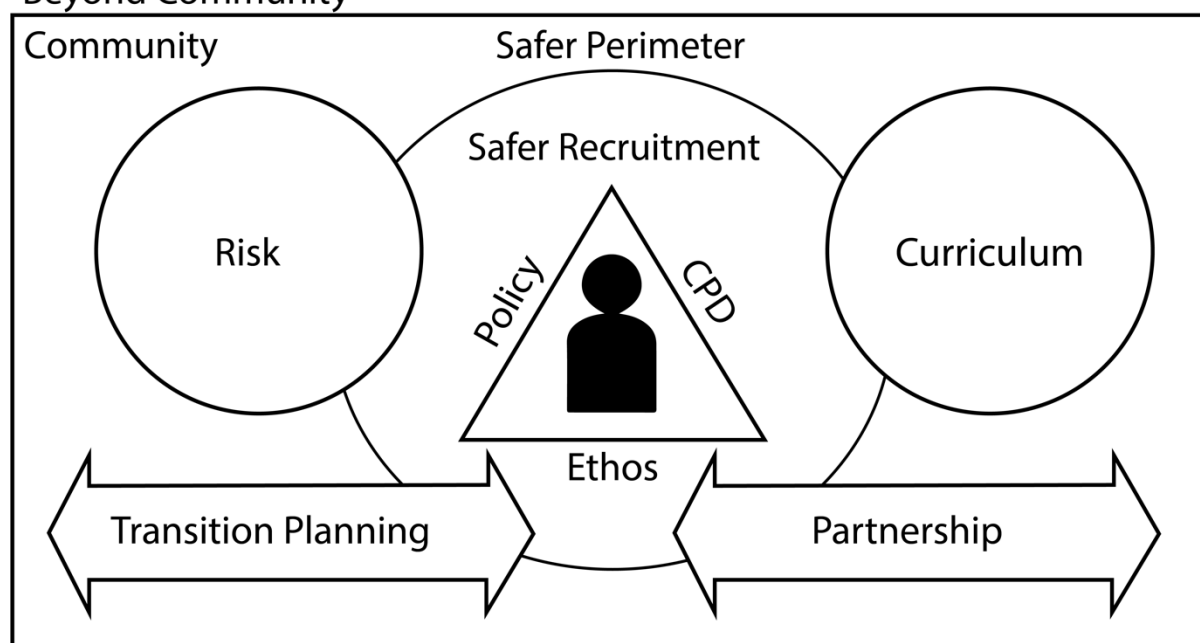
## Effective Safeguarding

It is important to remember that Safeguarding and Child Protection are not the same.

Safeguarding is what we do for all children and young people to keep them safe whilst in our care. Child Protection describes the policy and procedures specifically for those young people who are at risk of serious harm or have been seriously harmed.

The diagram below shows how the aspects of safeguarding link into each other.

### Beyond Community



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Safeguarding is what we do for all children and young people. Child Protection is what we do for children who are at risk of significant harm and those who have been significantly harmed

### Ethos

- The essential starting point of the school's approach to safeguarding and child protection
- The 'heartbeat' of the organisation
- Could be negative or positive
- Openness
- Transparency
- Supportive
- Respectful

## **Policy**

- Set out statutory duties
- Should describe the 'Gold Standard of Expectation'
- Should be personalised and relevant to the school
- Should set out exactly how concerns are raised

## **Continuing Professional Development (CPD)**

- Aim to develop knowledge over time, one safeguarding session each year probably isn't enough to cover all the information staff need to know
- Staff CPD should be 'regular' and 'updated'
- Building Capacity to Safeguard: as a school, in teams and as individuals
- Standing item on every meeting agenda, sometimes short, sometimes longer items
- Plan the safeguarding CPD over time
- Staff know they have to read Keeping Children Safe (Part One), the staff Code of Conduct, the behaviour policy and the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Important to use these learning events to develop consistency across the school

## **Safer Recruitment**

- Know who is in the school and that they have been suitably vetted
- Single Central Record
- Identifying which roles are 'regulated activity'
- Safer recruitment practices in place
- The 'Safeguarding Commitment' noted on all recruitment materials
- Job Descriptions
- Person Specification
- Interview questions
- Safer Recruitment training for all relevant staff (not just those involved in interviewing)
- Thinking the Unthinkable – even after appointment
- Right to work in the UK
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Guidance for Safer Working Practices (2023)

## **Safer Perimeter**

- Aiming for one single point of entry (and exit); and that adults supervise any other open entry/exit points when necessary
- Appropriate fencing and buffer zones
- Ensuring that pupils and vehicles are separated
- Recognising that the start and end of the school day is most risky
- Traffic and road safety
- Identifying visitors



- Recording visitors who have accessed the site
- ID checks
- Lanyards and perhaps photo ID badges
- Visitors' acceptable use of phones, tablets and laptops
- Visitors' acceptable use of social media
- Leaflets outlining safeguarding approach
- Security measures that prevent pupils bring in dangerous or unsuitable items, eg. knives, drugs or extremist materials
- Use of CCTV cameras and the prevention of misuse or challenge under the Data Protection Act
- Lock down or critical incident planning

## **Community**

- Risks, responsibilities and sources of support
- School community: staff, pupils, parents
- Wider local community and the different communities within that
- Socio-economic issues

## **Beyond Community**

- The online world
- Features strongly in sexual exploitation and grooming, radicalisation and financial scams
- Social Media aims to link people together from across the world
- Ease of connection to others, including staff to pupil
- Safe Use and Misuse
- People can pose as someone other than themselves
- Multi-billion pound industry, both legitimate and illegal
- Normalising the abnormal; extreme content is not unusual
- 24-hour news coverage provides no time for assimilation
- Not all information presented online as news is factual
- 24-hour availability prevents sleep and 'downtime'
- See also 'Teaching online safety in schools' (DfE, 2019)

## **Risk**

- Goes hand-in-hand with curriculum
- Local, National and International
- Annual assessment of risk
- What are the internal risks?
- What are the external risks?
- What are the most frequent risks to pupils in our school?
- What are the most serious risks?
- How effective are our risk assessment processes?
- Are our risk assessments evolving?
- Who is involved in the risk assessment process?

- How effective is our Critical Incident Planning (CIP)?
- Is the CIP robust?
- Can our CIP be practised without alarming pupils, staff, parents or the local community?
- Do we need lockdown procedure?
- How will it be activated?
- Consider health emergencies or medical situations

## **Curriculum**

- Goes hand-in-hand with risk
- Curriculum should help pupils recognise, understand, cope and develop resilience to the risks around them
- Structured curriculum
- Unstructured curriculum
- 'Hidden' curriculum or 'Peer-led' Curriculum (what students are learning from each other) (How can the school 'disrupt' this learning to ensure that it is a positive experience)

## **Partnership**

- Safeguarding Partnerships (statutory partners are the local authority; a clinical commissioning group for an area; and the area's chief officer of police)
- Traditional partners: other schools, local authority, health, social care, police, etc
- Wider partnerships, eg. business, charities or counsellors and therapists
- Partnerships in the local area, for example, local DSLs forum to include social workers, police, GPs. (May lead to better understanding of risk in the local area)
- Global partnerships

## **Transition Planning**

- To ensure that children do not 'fall through the net'
- There is timely sharing of information
- Transition is effective at all transfer points, whether between Key Stages, schools and colleges or mainstream to special settings
- To prevent 'start again syndrome'
- To be able to evidence transfer of records with a receipt

## **Monitoring and Evaluation**

- Essential to ensure that the processes are effective
- Think about the ways that this can be done: surveys, focus groups, discussions

## Aspects of Safeguarding

Safeguarding is not just about protecting children from deliberate harm. It includes issues for schools such as:

- ❖ bullying, including cyber-bullying
- ❖ child abduction and community safety incidents
- ❖ children missing education
- ❖ child sexual exploitation
- ❖ children with family members in prison
- ❖ 'County Lines'
- ❖ criminal exploitation of children
- ❖ cybercrime
- ❖ domestic abuse
- ❖ drug and substance misuse
- ❖ educational visits
- ❖ e-safety
- ❖ fabricated or induced illness
- ❖ faith abuse
- ❖ female genital mutilation (FGM)
- ❖ forced marriage
- ❖ gangs and youth violence
- ❖ gender-based violence/violence against women and girls (VAWG), including so-called 'honour-based' abuse
- ❖ harassment and discrimination
- ❖ homelessness
- ❖ intimate care
- ❖ management of contractors
- ❖ management of visitors
- ❖ meeting the needs of pupils with medical conditions, including mental ill-health
- ❖ modern-day slavery
- ❖ child-on-child abuse
- ❖ private fostering
- ❖ providing first aid
- ❖ pupils' health and safety
- ❖ racist abuse
- ❖ preventing radicalisation
- ❖ school security
- ❖ self-harm
- ❖ serious youth violence
- ❖ sexual violence and sexual harassment between children
- ❖ sharing nudes and semi-nudes
- ❖ teenage relationship abuse
- ❖ trafficking
- ❖ use of physical intervention
- ❖ other issues which may be specific to a local area or population

## **The four Categories of Child Abuse**

### **EMOTIONAL ABUSE**

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate.

It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyberbullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

### **PHYSICAL ABUSE**

Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

### **SEXUAL ABUSE**

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.



## NEGLECT

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment);
- protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger;
- ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers); or
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

**These and other useful definitions can be found in *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (2023), Appendix A.**

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## National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE)

The documentation from the 'National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence' (NICE) has a number of guidance documents and pathways to identify child maltreatment and related issues. Some of the most useful include:

### **When to suspect child maltreatment (CG89)**

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/CG89/>

### **Child abuse and neglect (NG76)**

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng76>

### **Children's attachment (NG26)**

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng26>

### **Harmful sexual behaviour among children and young people (NG55)**

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/NG55>

### **Domestic violence and abuse: multi-agency working (PH50)**

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph50>

## Signs of child abuse and neglect

### Sexual Abuse

**Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities including non-contact activities, including online abuse.**

#### Key features

There may be few physical signs and more likely to be emotional and behavioural factors.

- Aggression
- Withdrawn
- Self harming, including eating disorders
- Drawings of sexually explicit behaviours
- Inappropriate sexualised conduct
- Sexually explicit behaviour
- Reluctance to remove clothing for swimming or PE

Sexual abuse can be very difficult to recognise and reporting sexual abuse can be an extremely traumatic experience. Studies indicate that over 90% of cases involve a known adult.

Sexual abuse can take place online and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse.

### Neglect

**Neglect is the failure to meet a child's physical and or psychological needs.**

#### Key features

- Persistently hungry
- Inadequate clothing for the child's size, weather or time of year
- Underweight for age
- Frequent school absences
- Poor health
- Emotionally needy

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### Further Information

The statutory guidance for schools is set out in the following documents:

**Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE)**

**Working Together to Safeguard Children (DfE)**

### High Risk Factors

- Families with complex needs
- Parental substance use
- Poor parental mental health
- Parents with learning difficulties
- Children with disabilities
- Families with past history of childhood abuse

### Physical Abuse

**Physical abuse involves any action that causes physical harm to a child including fabricating the symptoms of or deliberately inducing illnesses.**

#### Key features

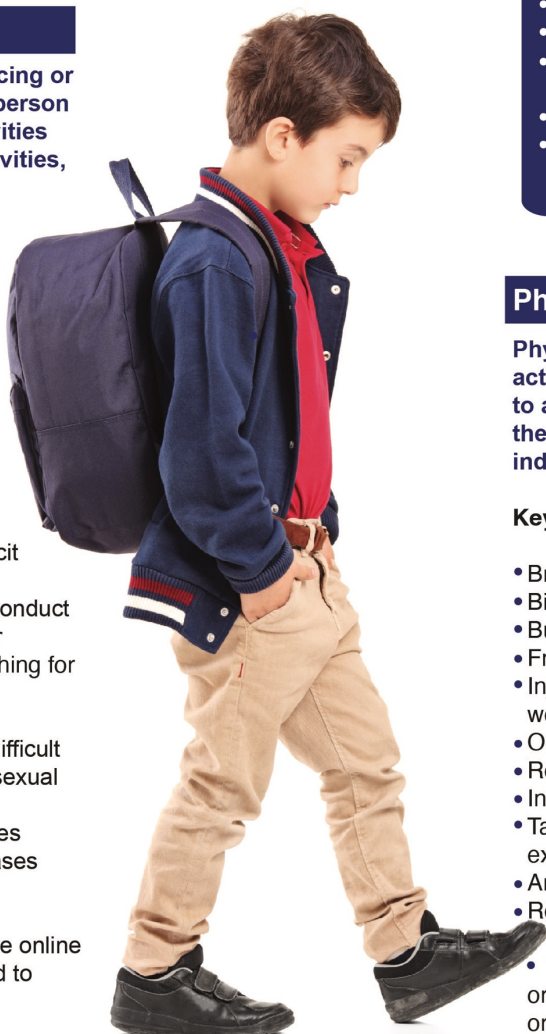
- Bruising of various ages
- Bite marks
- Burns and scalds
- Fractures in non- mobile children
- Injuries in unusual areas or with well-defined edges
- Old injuries or scars
- Refusal to discuss injuries
- Inconsistent explanations
- Talk of punishment which seems excessive
- Arms and legs kept covered
- Reluctance to remove clothing for swimming or PE
- The parents are uninterested or undisturbed by an accident or injury

### Emotional Abuse

**Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child.**

#### Key features

- Development delay.
- Abnormal attachment to parent/ carer.
- Low self-esteem.
- Lack of confidence.
- Inappropriate emotional response.



## Adverse Childhood Experiences

The first study to look at Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), was in America in the mid-nineties. This study found a high correlation between the number of Adverse Childhood Experiences and the prevalence of risk taking behaviours, ill-health and life-long difficulties, greater than those experienced by the general population. In 2013 there was a study in England and in 2015 the Wales government also commissioned a study into Adverse Childhood Experiences. The results between the three studies are broadly similar, but in Wales, there were a greater proportion of people who lived with 4 or more Adverse Childhood Experiences than in England.

Adverse Childhood Experiences relate to either a single, one-off event, or a continuous threat over a long period of time. The Adverse Childhood Events may affect the care of the child, put at risk their safety or security, make harder to trust people, or might threaten their 'bodily integrity' through physical or sexual abuse. For children and young people affected by Adverse Childhood Experiences, they often need to revert to their own innate safety responses. They need to adapt to survive. These responses may include finding safer places or people and develop a sense that they are in control of their own environment. This sometimes means being in control of their own body.

Adverse Childhood Experiences in the American study fell into these broad groups. Adjustment may be global, for example, moving from one country to another, as a result of war or famine; or may be changes within the family dynamic or location. Other adverse experiences might include being treated inhumanely, perhaps even being tortured. Early adult responsibilities, as a young carer, or child worker, have their impact too. Adversity may include the loss of a close family member or perhaps surviving a traumatic event when others did not.



In the England study participants were asked questions about nine areas:

- Were your parents ever separated or divorced?
- How often did your parents or adults in your home ever slap, hit, kick, punch, or beat each other up?
- How often did a parent or adult in your home ever hit, beat, kick, or physically hurt you in any way? This does not include gentle smacking for punishment
- How often did a parent or adult in your home ever swear at you, insult you, or put you down?
- How often did anyone at least 5 years older than you (including adults) ever touch you sexually?
- How often did anyone at least 5 years older than you (including adults) try to make you touch them sexually?
- How often did anyone at least 5 years older than you (including adults) force you to have any type of sexual intercourse (oral, anal, or vaginal)?
- Did you live with anyone who was depressed, mentally ill, or suicidal?
- Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic?
- Did you live with anyone who used illegal street drugs or who abused prescription medications?
- Did you live with anyone who served time or was sentenced to serve time in a prison or young offenders' institution?

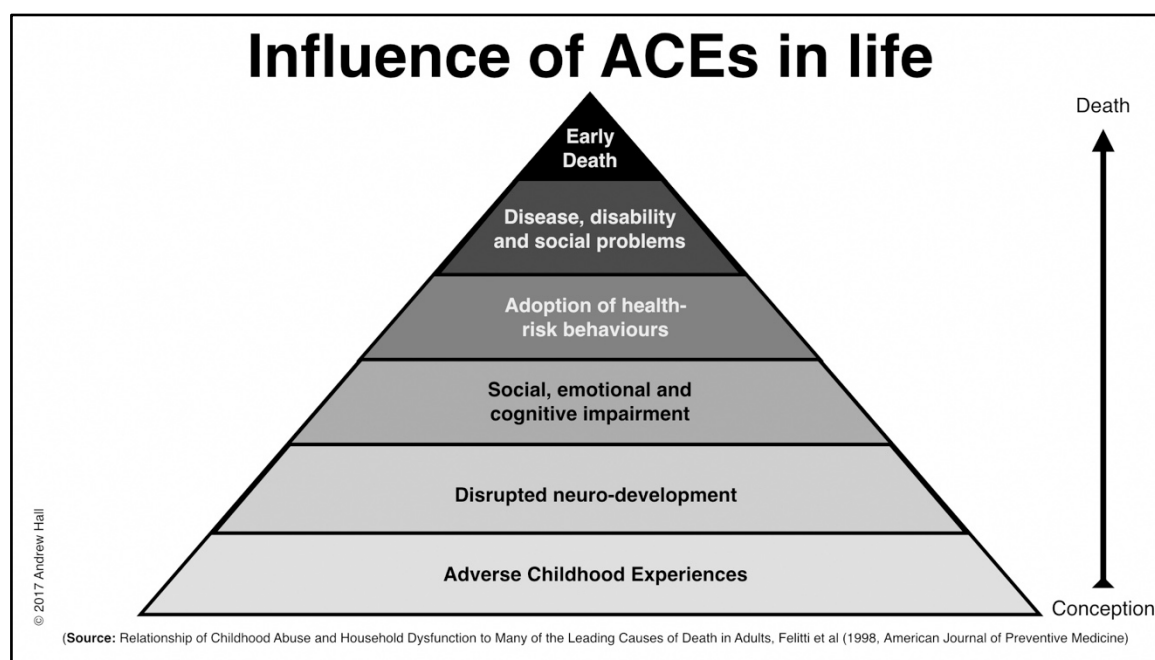


From the sample of 4,000 people, just over half had experienced none of the nine ACEs in the questions asked. A quarter of participants recalled 2 or more Adverse Childhood Experiences and 9% told researchers that they had experienced four or more ACEs. (In Wales, that figure was 14%)

The greater the number of Adverse Childhood Experiences, the greater the likelihood that this would have a life-long impact on quality of life and even lifespan. The American study indicated that people with four or more ACEs could die as much as twenty years sooner than



people who lived with no such adversity. Unsurprisingly experiencing adversity in childhood, leads to a greater risk of mental ill-health, including serious mental health conditions. But the highest increases in risk are for violence, as both victims and perpetrators; imprisonment; and for the use of illegal drugs.



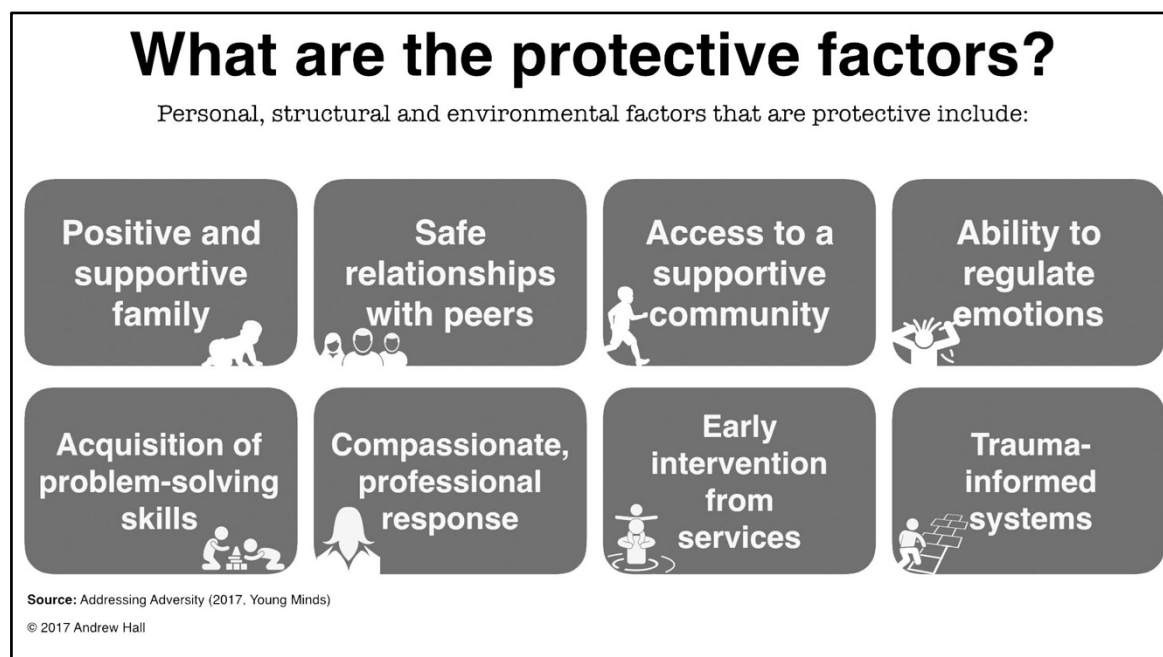
The original American study showed how the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences affect people right from conception throughout life. Early ACEs disrupt the development of the brain, which may lead to impairment in the development of social, emotional and cognitive skills and knowledge, often leaving them behind educationally. People with an increasing number of Adverse Childhood Experiences, adopt behaviours that put their health at risk, increasing further their risk of disease, disability and social problems.

The studies show how the impact of adversity can be reduced.

- positive and supportive family
- safe relationships with peers
- access to a supportive community
- ability to regulate emotions
- acquisition of problem-solving skills
- compassionate, supportive response
- early intervention from services
- trauma-informed systems

A positive and supportive family is a key protective factor, but sometimes, the adults are creating the adversity themselves. Whilst a positive and supportive family might not be a possibility for some children with a high number of ACEs, the other six, perhaps seven, could be offered or developed by schools and other organisations. Many of these protective factors can be taught, particularly problem-solving and an ability to understand and regulate their emotions. Perhaps the greatest protection factor that we can control, is the ability to develop and integrate trauma-informed systems.

## Protective Factors



### Using protective factors to support children and young people

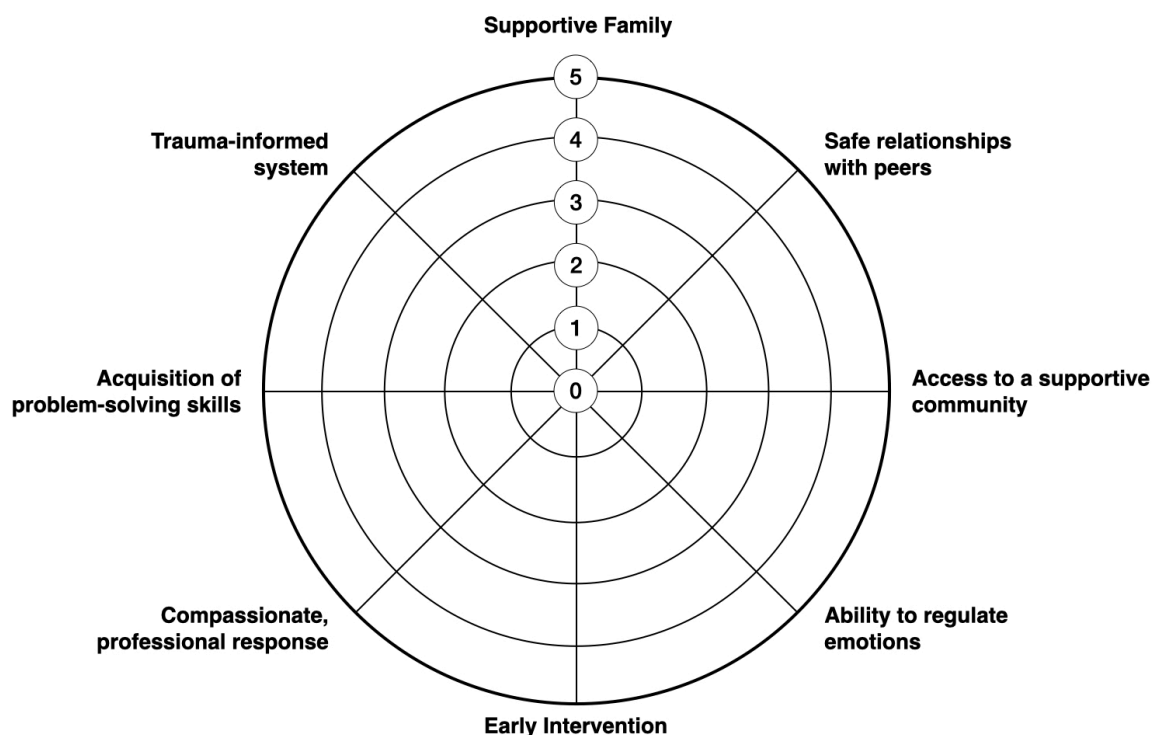
For some children, it can be difficult to develop a suitable support system as there may be some many elements in their life that are challenging. For these children and the adults alongside them, time spent discussing how the protective factors could be strengthened will be essential. Not all the eight protective factors (above) will present for every child, and where they are present, not all will be of equally importance.

The radar diagram (see below) shows how the protective factors could be assessed, particularly for children with complex lives, trauma and needs. One way to use this diagram would be to think of the protective factors for a specific child and 'score' the protectiveness of out 5, where 5 is very protective and 0 is not at all protective and might even be potentially harmful.

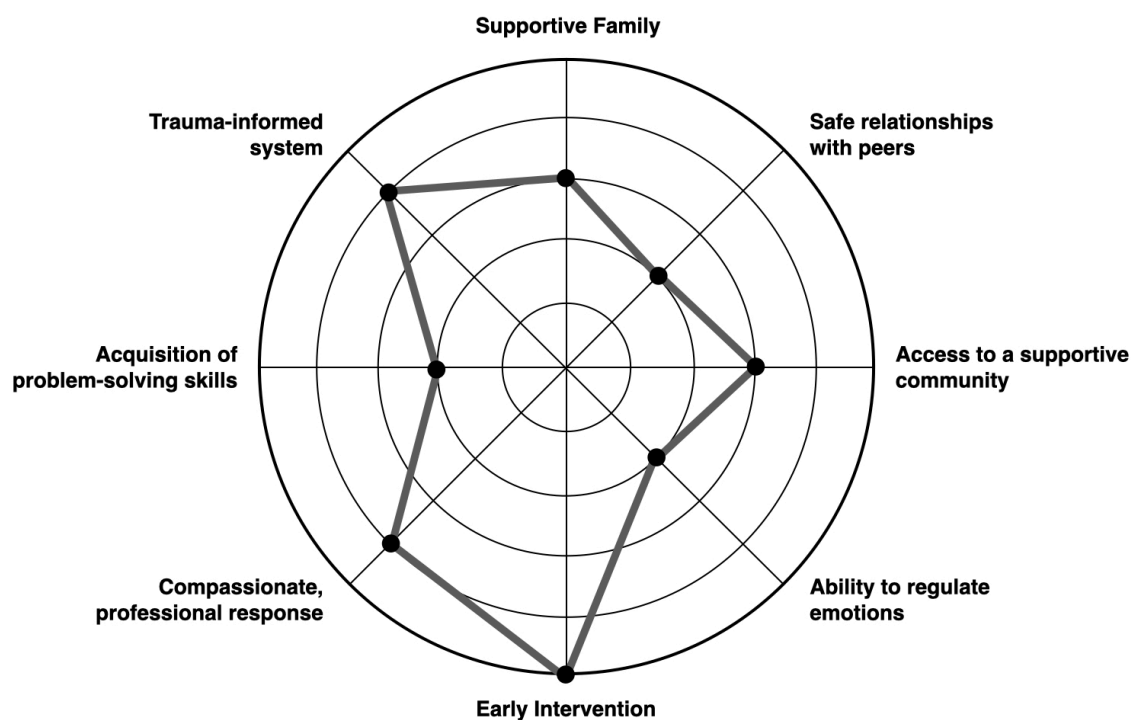
Once the protective nature of each factor has been identified, it will usually become clear where the most useful interventions and support might lie. It doesn't mean that the other factors will be ignored, but does allow some focus and consistency. This is especially important as many children with complex needs benefit when all the adults work in a similar way, even using the same phrases and language.

Although the radar diagram, and the wording of the protective factors, is aimed at professionals, it would be interesting to develop something similar using more suitable language, as a starting point for a conversation with a pupil or parents.

An example of how this might work can be seen on the next page.



The completed diagram shows how areas for focus can emerge. Once they do, decisions can be made as what practical steps are to be taken.



## **Further Reading**

Addressing Adversity (Downloadable Book) (2017, Young Minds)

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/professional/resources/addressing-trauma-and-adversity/>

Adverse Childhood Experiences (2016, Public Health Wales NHS Trust)

<https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/adverse-childhood-experiences/>

Adverse Childhood Experiences (CDC-Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study 1995 – 1997)

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/about.html>

## **Useful Resources**

Beacon House Therapeutic Services and Trauma Team

<https://beaconhouse.org.uk/resources/>

## Cumulative Harm

*Cumulative harm may be caused by an accumulation of a single adverse circumstance or event, or by multiple different circumstances and events. The unremitting daily impact of these experiences on the child can be profound and exponential, and diminish a child's sense of safety, stability and wellbeing.*

**Source:** Bromfield, L. and Miller, R. (2007) *Specialist Practice Guide: Cumulative Harm*. Melbourne, Vic: Department of Human Services, State Government Victoria.

Cumulative harm refers to the ongoing accumulation of harms, incidents, and experiences that—taken together—are far more damaging than a single significant event. While a single disclosure or serious incident can trigger immediate action, neglect and chronic adversity usually present as a relentless build-up of harmful moments.

This unremitting daily impact can profoundly diminish a child's sense of safety, stability, and wellbeing. Over time, what should be recognised as serious concern is too often dismissed as “background noise.”

### The Danger of Background Noise and Professional Drift

When professionals work with families over long periods, they may unintentionally begin to normalise harmful situations. This is sometimes referred to as professional drift. Over time, persistent concerns can be minimised because they have become familiar. Staff may say things like: “It’s always been like this” or “There’s nothing we can do.” These kinds of comments diminish the seriousness of the child’s lived experience.

Professional drift can occur for several reasons:

- Long-term familiarity: When practitioners have known a family for years, harmful patterns can come to feel “normal” rather than urgent.
- High caseloads and competing pressures: Safeguarding staff working under constant strain may focus on the most immediate crises, unintentionally overlooking ongoing harm that is less visible but just as damaging.
- Desensitisation: Continuous exposure to neglect and adversity can dull professional sensitivity, making harmful environments appear less shocking than they truly are.
- Loss of professional curiosity: Over time, staff may stop asking “why is this happening?” or “what does this mean for the child?” and instead accept a family’s situation at face value.



The impact on siblings should also be considered. Where cumulative harm is present for one child, it is highly likely that brothers and sisters are experiencing similar environments. Sometimes, professionals may focus on the child most visibly at risk while overlooking others in the household. This can lead to repeated cycles of harm going unnoticed.

In blended families, there can also be patterns of scapegoating, where one child is singled out for blame, rejection, or harsher treatment than others. This may mask the reality of wider neglect or abuse, as the focus of professionals and family members becomes concentrated on the “problem child.” Recognising scapegoating as a possible dynamic is essential, as it can distort assessments and leave significant harm unaddressed.

Reflective supervision, regular team discussions, and maintaining a focus on the child’s voice are vital safeguards against professional drift and normalisation.

### **How Harm Manifests Over Time**

Cumulative harm is not just a series of separate incidents; it is an escalating process that affects both the body and the mind. Research highlights several common manifestations:

- Increase in anxiety disorders – which may appear as quiet withdrawal or, conversely, aggression and violence.
- Distorted beliefs – such as negative body image, which may lead to eating disorders.
- Disturbance in interpersonal relationships – where trust is absent, leading to difficulties forming and sustaining close connections.
- Affects memory and attention – often seen in the classroom as reduced focus and declining academic progress.
- Disturbed meaning of events – where children may misinterpret or mistrust the intentions of others.
- Somatisation – psychological distress expressed through physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach pain, joint aches, or sinus trouble.
- Feelings of despair and excessive risk-taking – particularly as children grow older.

**Source:** van der Kolk, B., Roth, R., Pelcovitz, D., Sunday, S. & Spinazzola, J. (2005). *Disorders of extreme stress: The empirical foundation of a complex adaptation to trauma*. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 18(5), 389–399.

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These effects are not random. They represent the way children adapt to ongoing trauma, with responses that may look outwardly negative but are in fact rooted in deep anxiety and stress.

## **Developmental Trajectories**

The impact of cumulative harm varies depending on the child's stage of development.

- **Early Childhood:**

In the early years, cumulative harm can disrupt the development of secure attachment, emotional regulation, and basic trust in adults. Delays in speech, language, and social skills may emerge, alongside heightened sensitivity to stress. These early disruptions can set the foundation for long-term difficulties in learning and relationships.

- **Adolescence:**

In adolescence, the impact often presents differently. Young people may display heightened risk-taking, substance misuse, or withdrawal from positive peer and adult relationships. They may also struggle with identity formation and show increased vulnerability to coercion or exploitation.

Recognising how harm manifests at different ages is crucial for timely intervention. What may appear as “difficult behaviour” in a teenager may in fact be the long-term consequence of cumulative harm that began much earlier.

## **The Transition to Secondary School**

One of the challenges in safeguarding is that the impact of cumulative harm from a child's earlier years is not always fully recognised once they move into secondary education. Staff may see behaviour, poor attendance, or lack of engagement as current problems without understanding the long-term trauma that lies beneath.

Without a clear chronology and careful handover from primary colleagues, the legacy of neglect and adversity can be lost in transition. This means that secondary schools risk responding to the symptoms rather than the causes of distress. For example, a young person's aggression or withdrawal may be treated as poor behaviour rather than a continuation of earlier trauma.

It is vital that secondary schools seek out and listen to the child's history, using chronologies, records, and professional dialogue across phases. Understanding the cumulative impact of early harm helps teachers and safeguarding leads to interpret behaviour more accurately and to provide support that is both compassionate and effective.

## **Seeing Through the Child's Eyes**

Serious case reviews consistently highlight how children's voices are minimised or ignored. Understanding harm from the child's perspective is essential.

Building and maintaining a chronology of concerns plays a critical role. By recording incidents consistently, linking past events to current concerns, and noting dates and examples, practitioners create an evidence trail. This not only strengthens advocacy for the child but also ensures professionals do not lose sight of patterns over time.

## **Resilience and Cumulative Harm**

The term resilience is often used to describe how children cope with adversity. However, adapting to harmful or neglectful environments does not necessarily mean that children are unaffected. Apparent coping can mask the internalisation of stress, which may have long-term consequences for development and wellbeing.

## **What Professionals Must Do**

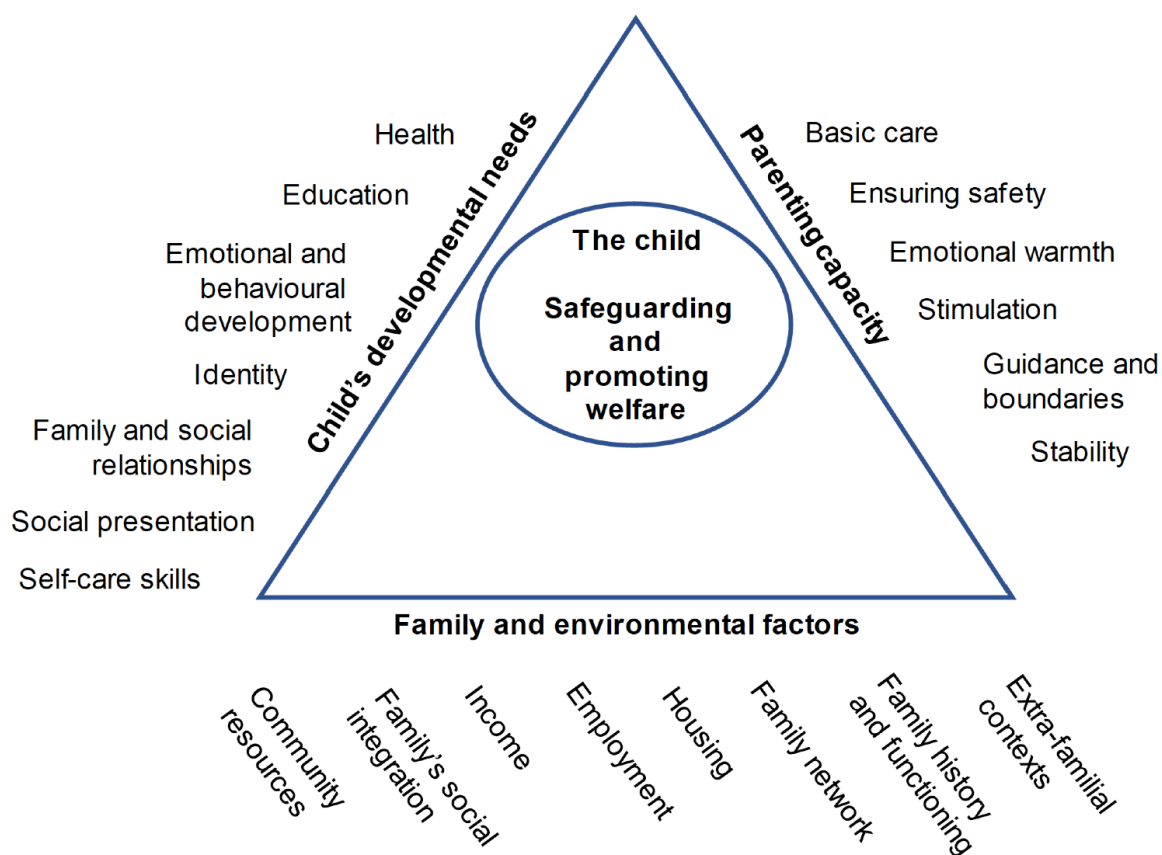
Dealing with cumulative harm is often frustrating. Referrals may be rejected, cases may be closed quickly, and thresholds may not be met. Yet persistence is vital:

- Never stop referring. Record the dates, outcomes, and reasons when thresholds are not met, and revisit concerns as new evidence emerges.
- Challenge decisions. Use escalation procedures when you believe the level of harm is underestimated.
- Advocate persistently. Schools and frontline staff are often the only consistent voice for children, and their persistence can be the key to securing protection and support.

## **Final Thought**

Cumulative harm is not about isolated events, it is about the unrelenting weight of daily adversity. Recognising it, recording it, and responding with professional persistence is essential if we are to protect children from its profound and lasting effects.

## The Impact of Parenting Issues



Source: Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023), page 57

## Understanding and Implementing a Seasonal Safeguarding Framework

### Introduction

Safeguarding concerns do not pause for holidays or confine themselves to particular times of year. Abuse, neglect, exploitation and mental health difficulties can emerge at any time. However, patterns do exist — shaped by changes in routine, family pressures, environmental factors, and developmental changes across the year.

The *Seasonal Safeguarding Framework* encourages designated safeguarding leads (DSLs), senior leaders and all staff to adopt a **seasonal mindset**. This doesn't mean dividing safeguarding work into quarters, but rather staying alert to *when* certain risks are more likely to appear, change form, or escalate.

Recognising these rhythms can sharpen professional curiosity, encourage earlier intervention, and align safeguarding systems with the school year's natural transitions.

### Framework Applications

This framework supports strategic and practical safeguarding across the school year:

- **Termly Planning:** Set safeguarding priorities that align with seasonal patterns
- **Staff Development:** Train staff to spot context-specific risks before they escalate
- **Governance and Reporting:** Inform governing bodies and trustees of seasonal safeguarding themes
- **Community Adaptation:** Factor in your local context, demographics, and events

### Autumn: Change, Settling In, Identity Formation (September – November)

#### Context

The start of the school year brings significant transitions. New routines, peer groups, classrooms and staff may offer fresh opportunities — but also surface vulnerabilities. Autumn is when pupils begin disclosing concerns that arose over the summer or become evident as new relationships form.

#### Key Risks

- **Increased disclosures** once trust develops with new adults
- **Bullying, initiation or hazing behaviours** as social hierarchies form

- **Escalation of domestic abuse** with return to structured routines
- **Early signs of anxiety or mood changes** linked to seasonal shifts
- **Secretive behaviours** such as vaping or self-harm
- **Financial pressures** due to uniform, school meals, and Christmas build-up
- **Risks around Halloween and Bonfire Night** (antisocial behaviour, unsafe gatherings)

### **Proactive Steps**

- Prioritise check-ins with pupils returning from alternative provision
- Track attendance for patterns that may signal emerging concerns
- Gather soft intelligence from support staff and lunchtime supervisors
- Start transition planning early, particularly for vulnerable pupils

### **Winter: Withdrawal, Isolation, Hidden Harm** *(December – February)*

#### **Context**

Shorter days, increased family stress and prolonged indoor time can lead to safeguarding concerns becoming harder to detect. Disruption to routine during the holidays may also sever vital support for vulnerable children.

#### **Key Risks**

- **Domestic abuse and neglect** during the festive season and school closures
- **Online grooming, sextortion, and livestream abuse** during periods of unsupervised screen time
- **Isolation-related radicalisation risks** and exposure to harmful ideologies
- **Anxiety and seasonal mood changes**, including withdrawal or school avoidance
- **Digital poverty**: lack of access to tech support or online services
- **Young carers' burden** intensified during long periods at home
- **Supply staff** covering for illness — risk of gaps in safeguarding awareness

### **Proactive Steps**

- Conduct pre-holiday safeguarding reviews for at-risk families
- Brief supply and temporary staff thoroughly on safeguarding procedures

- Prepare for post-holiday disclosures and disclosures linked to Christmas events
- Coordinate referrals with food banks and voluntary services

### **Spring: Transition, Exploration, Risk-Taking**

*(March – May)*

#### **Context**

As the weather improves and pupils gain independence, risk-taking increases — especially in public spaces or online. Spring also brings academic pressure and emotional volatility as exam season approaches and transitions are confirmed.

#### **Key Risks**

- **Exploitation in public spaces** (parks, transport hubs, town centres)
- **County lines targeting** mobile, unsupervised young people
- **Exam stress and academic anxiety** (especially KS4 and KS5)
- **Online risk-taking** as exploration increases (challenges, grooming, inappropriate content)
- **Transition-related anxiety** about moves between schools or key stages
- **Exposure to extremist material** near relevant dates or anniversaries
- **Inconsistent safeguarding practice** during revision leave or supply periods

#### **Proactive Steps**

- Review contextual safeguarding plans for increased outdoor risk
- Strengthen exam-season support for emotional regulation
- Coordinate transition support with feeder schools
- Include AI-generated threats in digital safety briefings

## **Summer: Freedom, Exposure, Reduced Supervision** *(June – August)*

### **Context**

End-of-year changes and summer holidays mean many vulnerable pupils lose daily contact with trusted adults. Social pressures, online activity, and a sense of freedom can increase exposure to risk, especially where supervision is limited.

### **Key Risks**

- **Sexual harassment and child-on-child abuse** in unstructured social gatherings
- **Online grooming, blackmail, and sextortion** — often involving AI-generated content
- **Increased county lines activity** during school closures
- **Breakdown of support networks** due to staff transitions or end-of-year changes
- **Unrecognised anxiety** masked by assumptions of summer happiness
- **Drowning in open water** during heatwaves
- **Safeguarding blind spots** during staff absences or supply-heavy weeks

### **Proactive Steps**

- Plan clear, boundaried closure of relationships between pupils and staff
- Map out vulnerable pupils and ensure information is passed on
- Circulate contact information and support access during school holidays
- Educate on water safety and harmful summer myths (e.g. “you can tell if someone’s drowning”)



## Seasonal Safeguarding Checklist

<b>AUTUMN</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Plan check-ins with newly vulnerable pupils</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Gather soft intelligence from support staff</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Monitor disclosures from summer incidents</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Track attendance for early warning signs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Communicate Halloween / Bonfire Night safety</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Prepare staff for identity formation and peer shifts</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>	<b>WINTER</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Conduct pre-holiday safeguarding checks</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Prepare for post-holiday disclosures</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Address online grooming, sextortion, livestream abuse</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ensure supply staff are briefed properly</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Support families with digital access and heating costs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Refer young carers for additional help</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>
<b>SPRING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Update contextual safeguarding for public-space risks</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Watch for peer pressure and risk-taking trends</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Support emotional wellbeing during exams</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Brief staff on extremist content dates</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate transitions for vulnerable pupils</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Review digital safety practices</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>	<b>SUMMER</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Plan handover for all vulnerable pupils</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Address county lines and social gathering risks</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Educate pupils on online blackmail and grooming</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Deliver water safety sessions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Brief supply staff thoroughly</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>

### YEAR ROUND

- ☐ Monitor all transitions (Y6, in-year, exits)
- ☐ Review safeguarding trends and adapt policies
- ☐ Maintain governor/trustee oversight
- ☐ Build and use community-specific risk maps

## Particularly Vulnerable Children

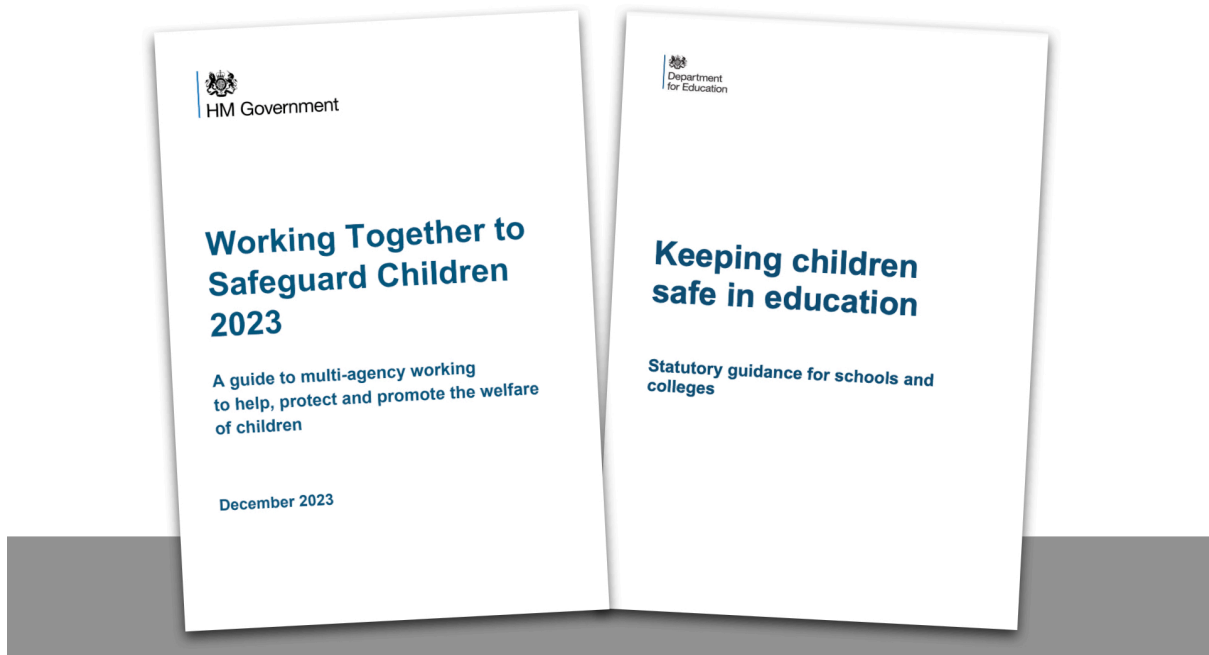
### Children who may be more vulnerable to being harmed

- babies and younger children
  - The under-ones are particularly vulnerable to abuse (although it should be remembered that abuse can happen at any age).
  - The homicide rate for under-ones is seven times greater than the average.
  - Babies under one have the highest rate of child protection plans
- disabled children (6% of childhood population)
  - 3.8 time more likely to be neglected
  - 3.8 more likely to be physically abused
  - 3.1 times more likely to be emotionally abused
- children who are isolated
- children who are already thought of as a problem (e.g. children in care; children in secure accommodation, children with emotional/behavioural difficulties)

### Children living in particularly stressful circumstances. These include families:

- living in poverty;
- where there is domestic violence;
- where a parent has a mental illness;
- where a parent is misusing drugs or alcohol;
- where a parent has a learning disability;
- that face racism and other forms of social isolation;
- living in areas with a lot of crime, poor housing and high unemployment.

## The Legal Framework



### Publications

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)  
Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025)

### Key Legislation

The Children Act 1989	Section 17 Duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are “in need”  Section 47 Duty to investigate whether a child is at risk of serious harm
Local Government Act 2000	Effective joint working across local authority sectors
Education Act 2002	Duty on Local Education Authorities to exercise safeguarding functions for children and young people up to the age of 18 who are in full-time education
Children Act 2004	Established a range of safeguarding and child protection provisions and duties on local authorities and partner agencies
Children and Social Work Act 2017	Set up local safeguarding partnerships and further provision about the regulation of social workers
Domestic Abuse Act 2021	Defined domestic abuse for the first time. Importantly, children are now to be identified as victims (not witnesses)

## **Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023) describes how statutory agencies, such as local authorities, clinical commissioning groups and the police should work together.

‘Working Together’ is about ensuring that there is an effective and co-ordinated response to safeguarding and child protection; and to ensure that learning from serious cases is embedded into practice. Whilst schools are an important part of this process, their day-to-day work is detailed in ‘Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025)’.

The following statutory guidance is covered in Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023):

- the legislative requirements placed on individual services
- a framework for the three local safeguarding partners (the local authority; the clinical commissioning group for the area; and the chief police) to make arrangements to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of local children including identifying and responding to their needs
- the framework for the two child death review partners (the local authority and the clinical commissioning group) to make arrangements to review all deaths of children normally resident in the local area, and if they consider it appropriate, for those not normally resident in the area

## **Statutory Guidance: Keeping Children Safe in Education**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>

### **Introduction**

'Keeping Children Safe in Education' forms the basis of the statutory guidance to schools and colleges. It would be useful for schools to ensure that they are also familiar with the latest Ofsted 'Inspecting Safeguarding' briefing.

### **Safeguarding and Child Protection**

'Keeping Children Safe in Education' is a consolidation of previous guidance changes and takes into account learning from Serious Case Reviews. The new document is clear that safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility. It is timely to remember that whilst often used synonymously the phrases safeguarding and child protection are different: safeguarding refers to strategies to keep all children safe; and child protection meaning the policy and procedures to protect children from serious harm. The 'Working Together' document is essentially about child protection and 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' is about safeguarding.

'Keeping Children Safe in Education' has five parts:

- 1. Safeguarding information for all staff
  - This section contains guidance about the importance of creating a school ethos where safeguarding is important and understood by everyone in the school community.
  - There is a clear emphasis in this section on issues that have arisen from a number of high-profile Serious Case Reviews
  - All staff in schools and colleges must have read at least part one of 'Keeping Children Safe in Education'; all staff working directly with children must also read Annex A. This should form part of the induction of new staff, along with the school's child protection policy, behaviour policy, and the school's procedures for children missing education.
- 2. The management of safeguarding
  - This part deals with the responsibilities of the school, governing body (or other management group or proprietor)

- 3. Safer recruitment
  - This section sets out the ways in which schools should ensure that everyone working there should be appropriately vetted before they start.
  - The checks that the school should make with the Disclosure and Barring Service are detailed in this part.
  - This is an important section to become familiar with, since there is important clarification, for example, around the checks on volunteers.
- 4. Allegations of abuse made against teachers and other staff
  - This section sets out actions to be taken when allegations are raised
  - Low level concerns that do not meet the threshold for referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)
- 5. Child on child sexual violence and/or sexual harassment

Annexes detail:

- further information
- role of the designated safeguarding lead
- online safety
- residential facilities
- school exchange visits (homestays)
- information about 'regulated' activity
- Disclosure and Barring Checks

### **Creating a safeguarding ethos**

After a number of high-profile cases where serious safeguarding issues arose in school settings, there is an emphasis in 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' on developing an ethos in schools where safeguarding and child protection is discussed, and people understand its importance. Serious Case Reviews have increasingly reminded staff that they should 'think the unthinkable' and be aware that serious safeguarding issues could arise in any school or college.

'Keeping Children Safe in Education' encourages schools to develop a stronger culture of listening to children and make sure that what they say about safeguarding issues is taken seriously. The curriculum should be used to help children understand and manage the risks around keeping themselves safe.

## **Specific Issues**

Specific issues included in this document include child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and preventing radicalisation. The document also raises the importance of considering the additional vulnerabilities of Looked After Children and stresses that schools should ensure all staff understand the additional risks for this specific group of young people.

## **Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)**

It is statutory that the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) is someone from the school's senior leadership team. Whilst this is the case in many schools, some staff with this key role are not part of that group and schools should ensure that the link to SLT is established and effective.

## **Continuing Professional Development (CPD)**

Since 2015, Working Together to Safeguard Children and Young People no longer specifies different training levels of training, the timescales for refresher courses or the content of any training. Schools and colleges may choose training from either the local safeguarding partnership (where this is available) or other private or commercial providers.

Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) specifies that training for DSLs should be formally refreshed every two years, and updated 'at least annually'. Training for all other staff should be a part of their induction, which should include reading part one of 'Keeping Children Safe' (and Annex A where relevant), the child protection policy, the staff code of conduct, the behaviour policy and the school's procedures for children missing education.

Safeguarding training for all staff receive regular safeguarding and child protection updates (for example, via email, e-bulletins, staff meetings) at least annually.

The requirement for at least one person on every interview panel to have taken a 'Safer Recruitment' course remains in this guidance; schools are free to choose their own provider of this training. There is no statutory timescale to 'refresh' this training.

## **Safeguarding training for temporary staff, volunteers and contractors**

Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025), paragraph 100 says, 'Governing bodies and proprietors should take a proportionate risk-based approach to the level of information that is provided to temporary staff, volunteers and contractors'.



## **Safeguarding Training for governors and trustees**

Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025), paragraph 79 says, 'Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure that all governors and trustees receive appropriate safeguarding and child protection (including online) training at induction. This training should equip them with the knowledge to provide strategic challenge to test and assure themselves that the safeguarding policies and procedures in place in schools and colleges are effective and support the delivery of a robust whole school approach to safeguarding. Their training should be updated regularly.'

At least one governor should complete annual cybersecurity training.

## **School exchanges (referred to as home stays)**

Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) page 178, says that schools arranging care and accommodation for school exchange visits should be aware that the parents will fulfil the criteria for 'regulated activity', because they are caring for non-family members between 2am and 6am. This means that schools 'should also obtain a DBS enhanced certificate with barred list information' on each of the parents/carers. The school may also decide to request DBS checks on anyone over the age of sixteen who also live in the home.

## **Disclosure and Barring Service Checks**

The section about Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks attempts to clarify the various checks and eligibility criteria for each of them. Available checks are Standard, Enhanced and Enhanced with barred list information. Barred list checks must be made only for 'Regulated Activity'. This section must be read carefully and applied to the specific school and circumstances, but a simplified description is in the following table:

## Disclosure and Barring Service Checks

*(Note: This is a summary only and is not intended as legal advice)*

	Enhanced	Enhanced with barred list information
Paid staff with unsupervised access to children		Must be obtained
Unpaid staff (volunteers) with unsupervised access to children		Must be obtained
Unpaid staff (volunteers) with supervised* access to children	No legal requirement, but schools may obtain enhanced check	
Governors with unsupervised access to children		Must be obtained
Governors with supervised* access to children	Must be obtained	
Governors with no access to children	Must be obtained	
Contractors** with unsupervised access to children		Must be obtained
Contractors** with supervised access to children	No legal requirement, but schools may obtain enhanced check	
Contractors** with no access to children	No requirement	
Parents caring overnight for pupils on homestays		Must be obtained

\*Supervised means on a regular and day-to-day basis and does not reduce over time. The supervision must be 'reasonable in all the circumstance to ensure the protection of children'.

\*\*Contractors are often thought of as builders or other trades, however, this group may include after-school club leaders, enhanced curriculum providers, music teachers, sports' coaches, consultants and interim management staff. Where contractors are self-employed, schools should consider undertaking a DBS check for them as they are unable to make an application themselves.

### DBS Checks for existing staff

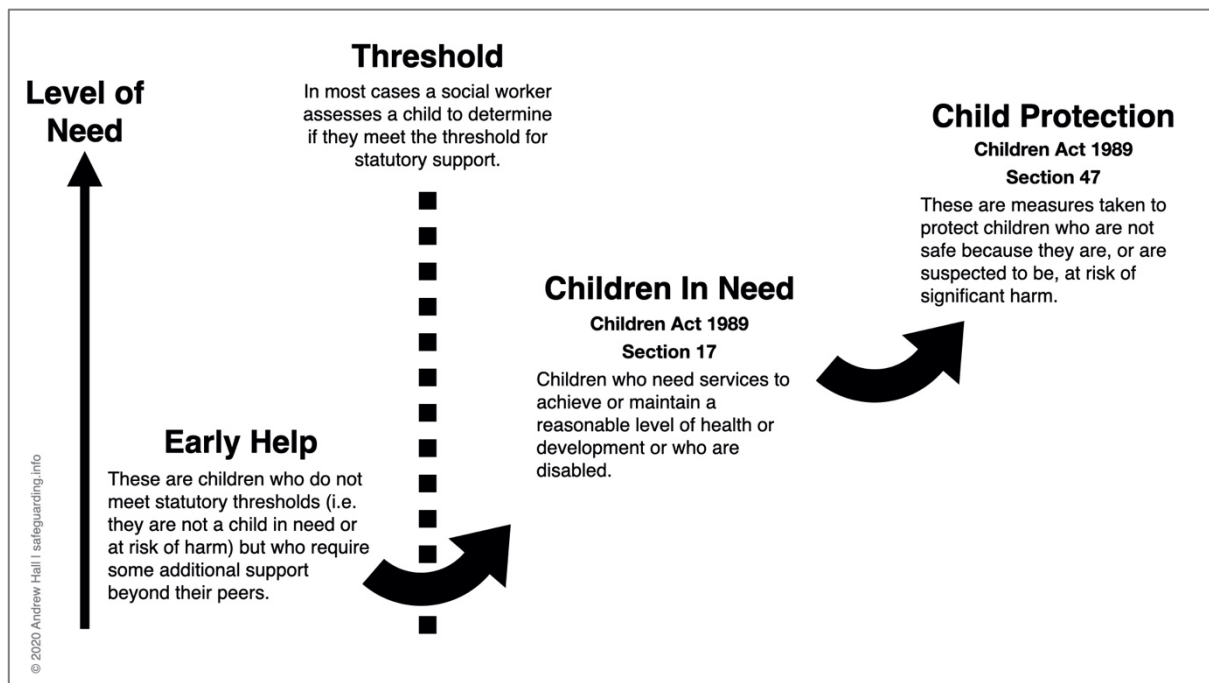
Schools should only apply for new checks for existing staff where there are concerns about individuals as they are 'not required' as a matter of course. Staff or volunteers who change their role should undertake the relevant checks for their new position.

### DBS Checks for Governors and Proprietors

Governors and proprietors in all types of schools must have Enhanced DBS Checks.

## Child Protection Procedures: an overview

### Considering the Criteria for Levels of Intervention



### Early Help

- part of a continuum of support to respond to the different levels of need of individual children and families

### Section 17 - Complex Support Needs – ‘Children In Need’

- under the Children Act 1989, local authorities are required to provide services for children in need
- impaired health or development without the provision of services
- those who are disabled

### Section 47 - Child Protection Needs - ‘Child Protection Plans’

#### Risk of Significant Harm

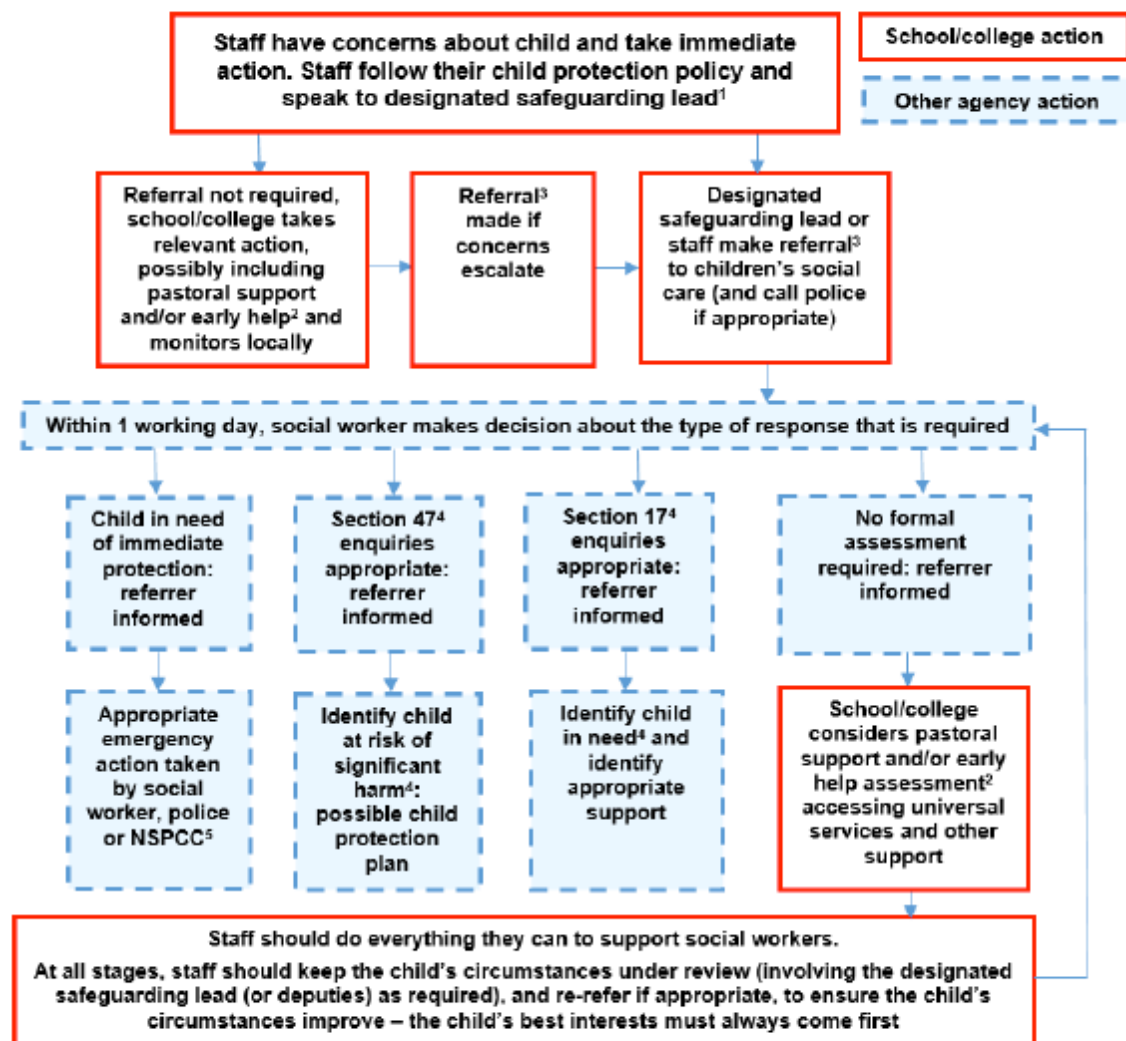
- no absolute criteria

- a single traumatic event may constitute significant harm
- a compilation of significant events, both acute and long-standing
- impaired health and development compared to peers
- degree and the extent of physical harm
- the duration and frequency
- the extent of premeditation
- the presence or degree of threat, coercion
- any sadistic, bizarre or unusual elements

### **Young Carers**

- assessment if the local authority believes the young person has support needs; or if the young person or parent requests one

## Actions where there are concerns about a child



<sup>1</sup> In cases which also involve a concern or an allegation of abuse against a staff member, see Part four of this guidance.

<sup>2</sup> Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges at any point in a child's life. Where a child would benefit from co-ordinated early help, an early help inter-agency assessment should be arranged. Chapter one of [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) provides detailed guidance on the early help process.

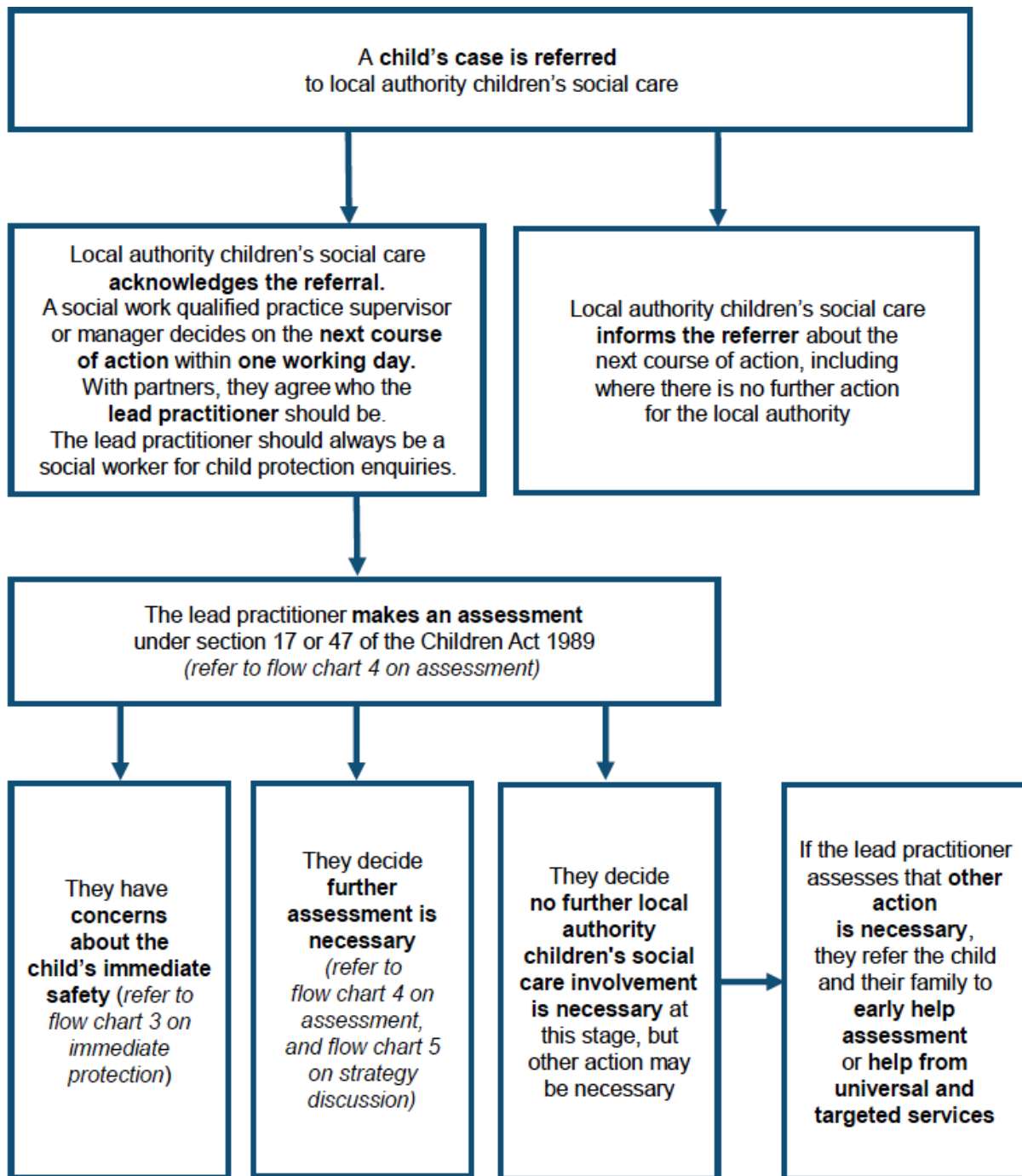
<sup>3</sup> Referrals should follow the process set out in the local threshold document and local protocol for assessment. Chapter one of [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#).

<sup>4</sup> Under the Children Act 1989, local authorities are required to provide services for children in need for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting their welfare. Children in need may be assessed under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. Under section 47 of the Children Act 1989, where a local authority has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, it has a duty to make enquiries to decide whether to take action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare. Full details are in Chapter one of [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#).

<sup>5</sup> This could include applying for an Emergency Protection Order (EPO).

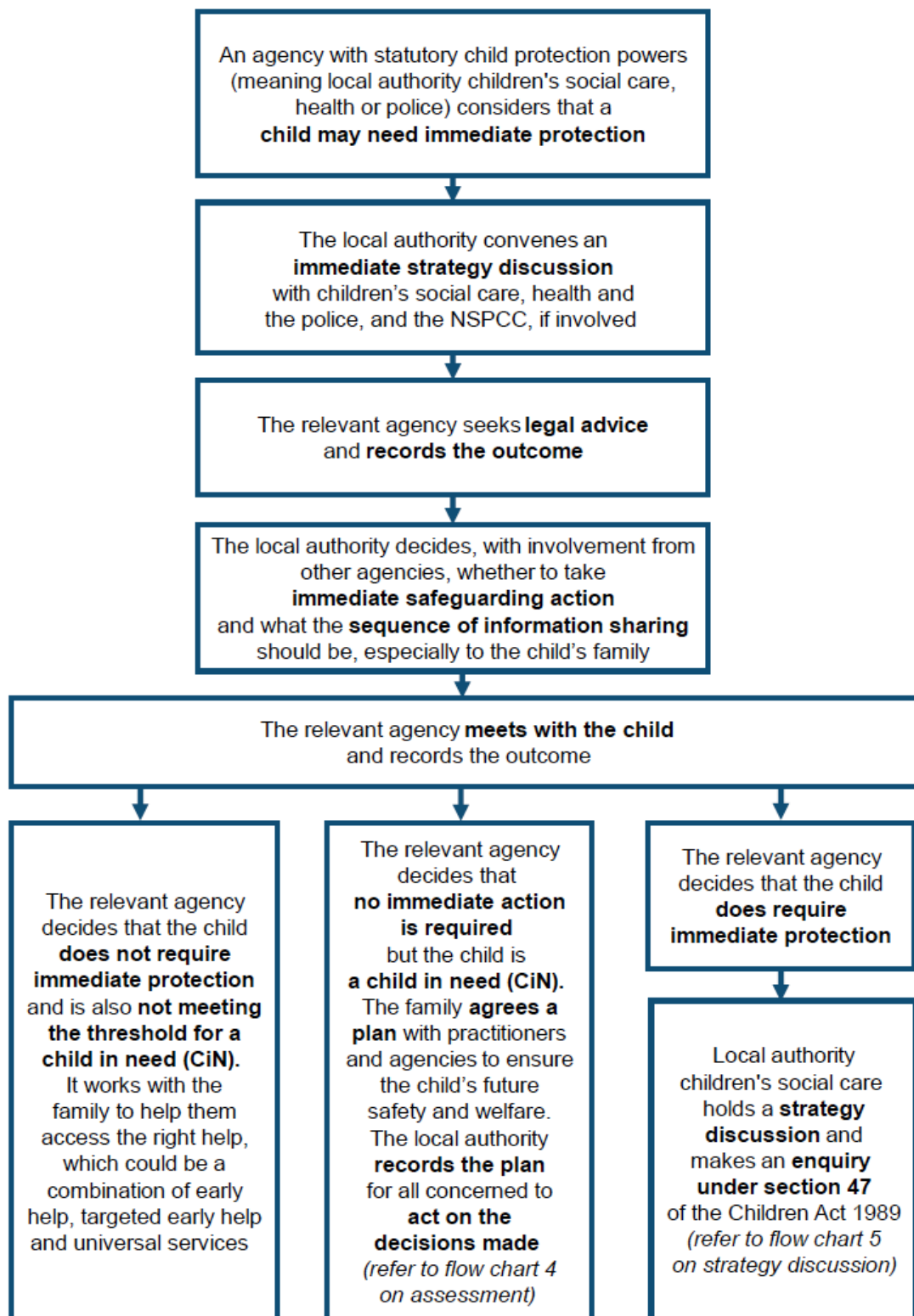
Source: Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025), page 24

**Flow chart 1: Action taken when a child is referred to local authority children's social care services**



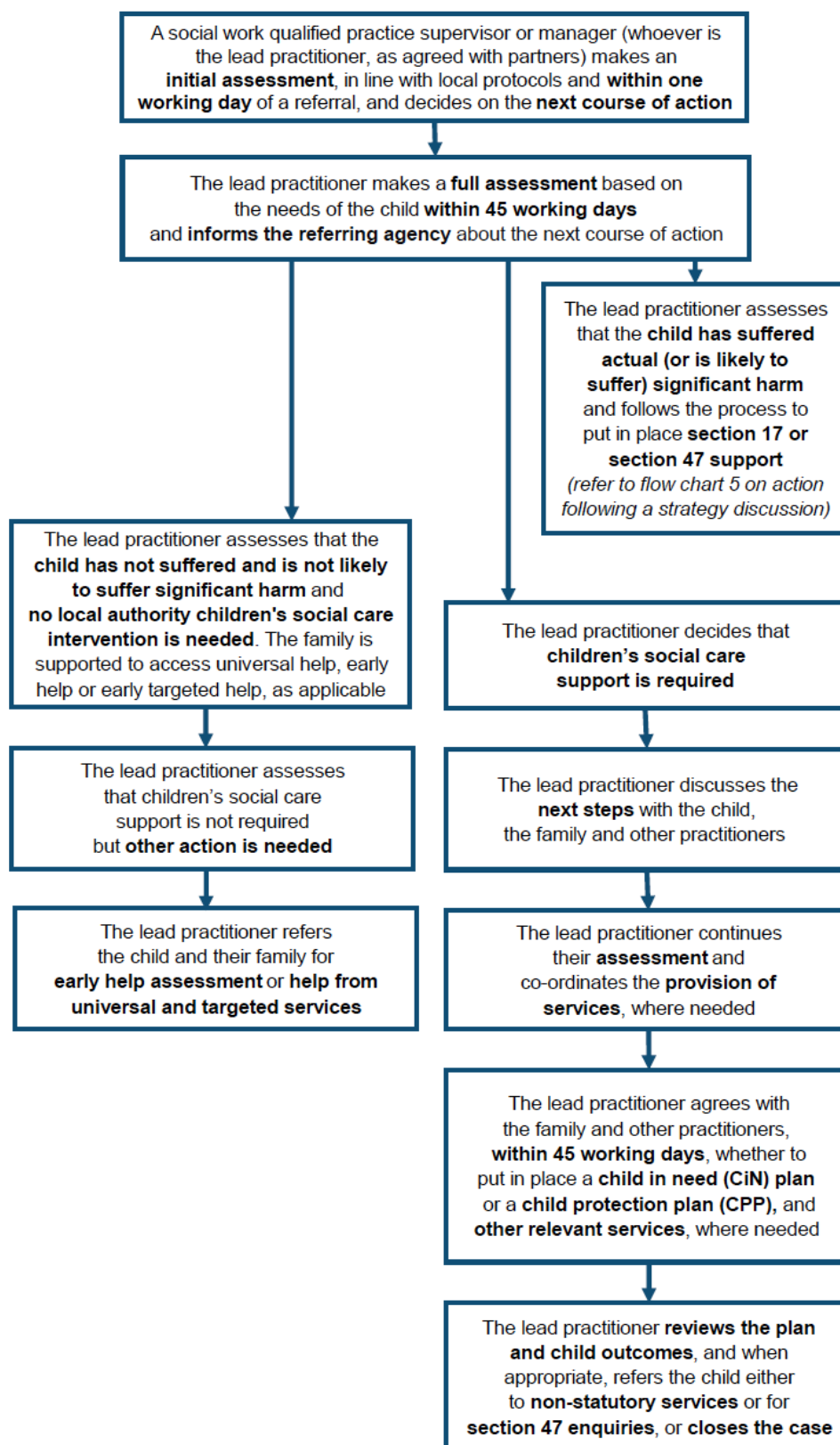
Source: Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023), page 76

## Flow chart 3: Immediate Protection



Source: Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023), page 102

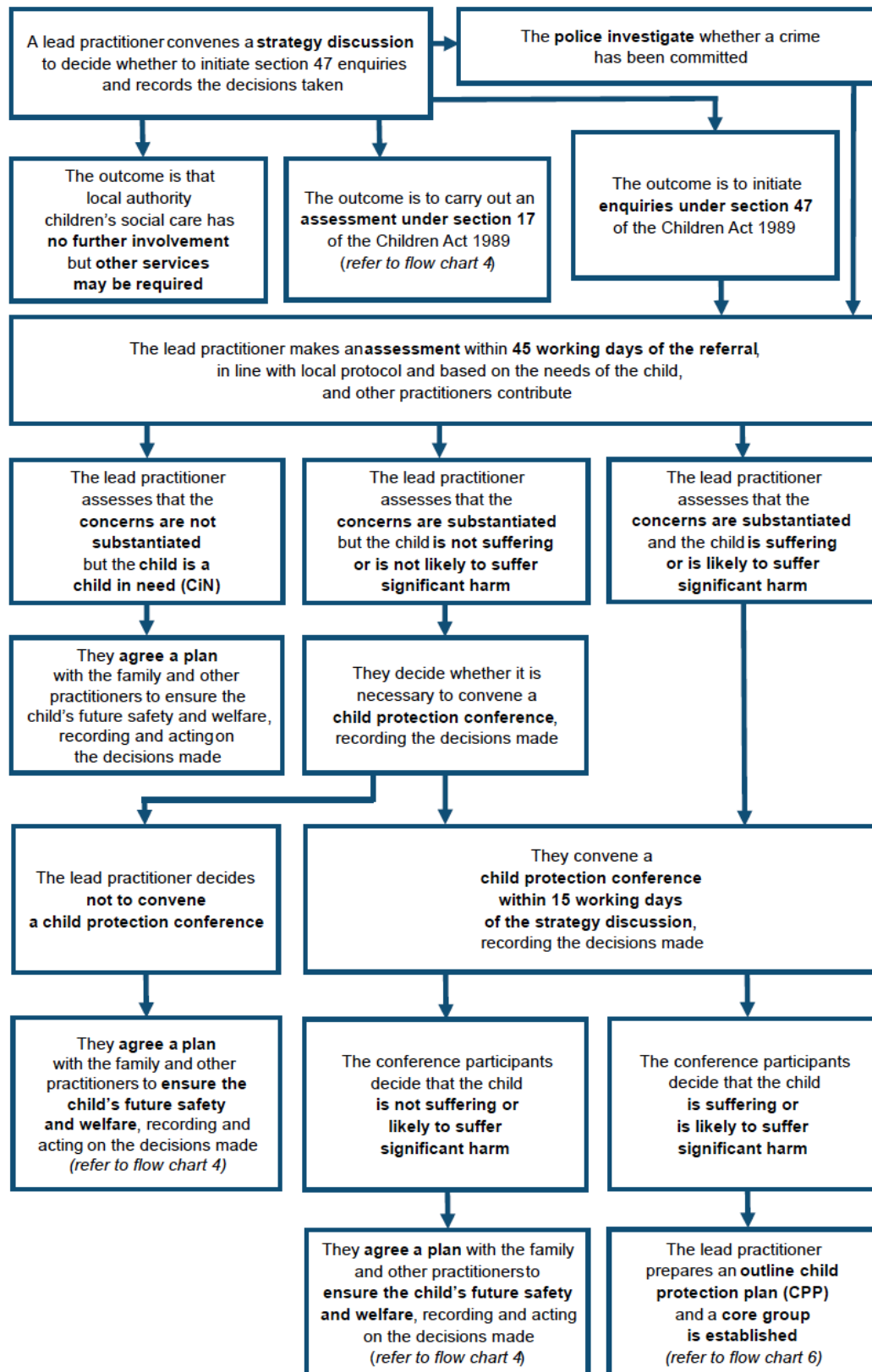
## Flow chart 4: Action taken for an assessment of a child under the Children Act 1989



Source: Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023), page 103

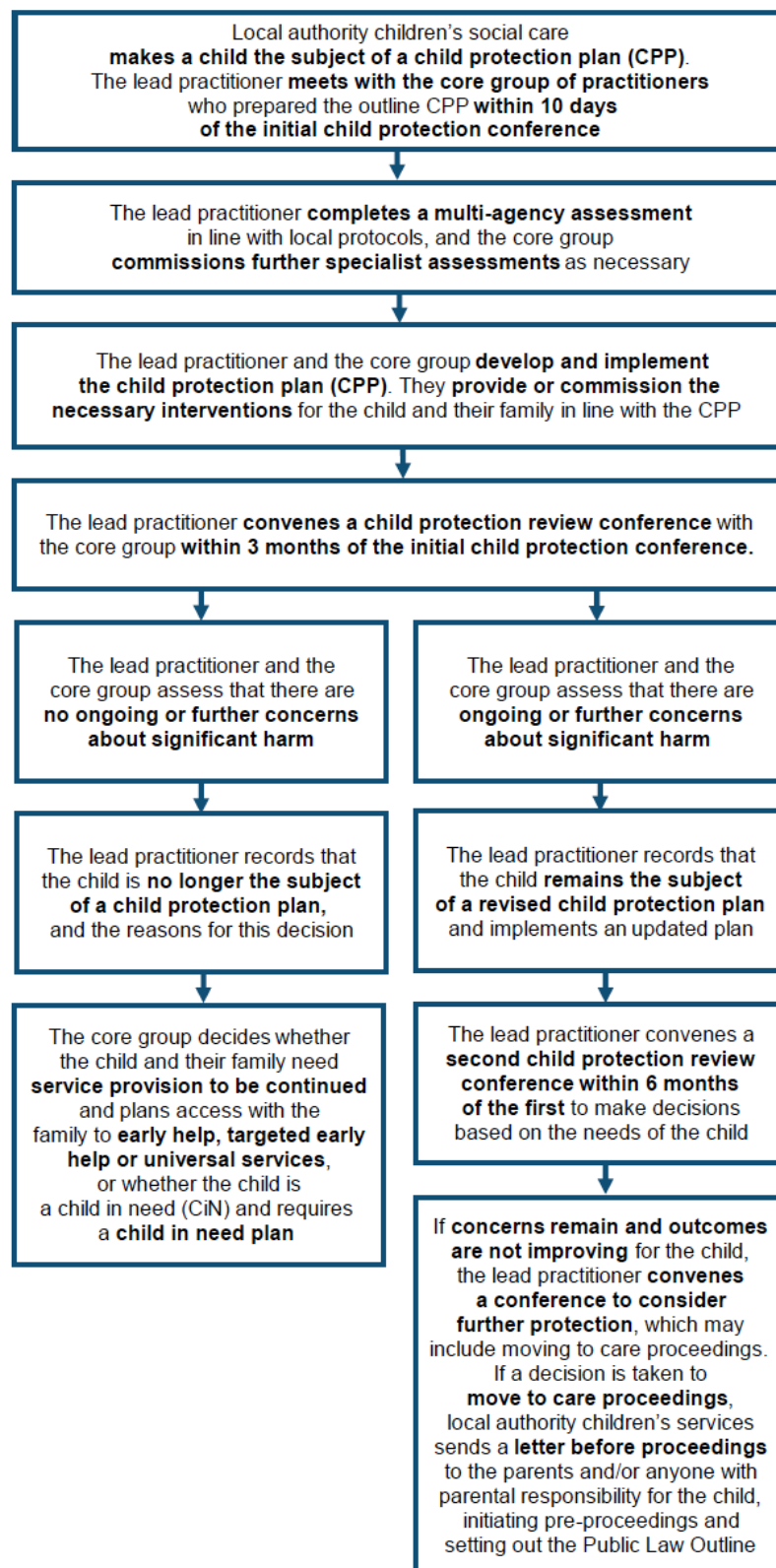


## Flow chart 5: Action following a strategy meeting



Source: Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023), page 104

## Flow chart 6: What happens after the child protection conference, including the review?



Source: Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023), page 105

## Creating a Safeguarding Policy

See also the 'Checklist for an effective safeguarding policy' in the following pages.

Key Aspects of the policy will include:

- Purpose of the policy
- Mission Statement
  - Positive ethos
  - Child feel safe, secure and listened to
  - Staff/volunteers encouraged to talk about concerns
  - Children who have been abused or are at risk of abuse are supported
  - Safeguarding issues are explored as part of the curriculum
- Reference to the Statutory Framework
  - Legal responsibilities and duties
  - Duty to share information
- Reference to the key statutory and non-statutory guidance
  - Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)
  - Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025)
  - Information Sharing (2024)
- Roles and Responsibilities
  - Headteacher
  - Governing Body, Trustees or Proprietors
    - inc. the name of the Chair and Governor for safeguarding
  - Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)
    - inc. the names of at least two DSLs
  - Staff
  - Pupils
- Practical Advice
  - Signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect
  - Information about Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
  - Information about Child Sexual Exploitation
  - Information about Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment
  - Information about preventing radicalisation
  - How to report concerns, including names and points of contact
  - Dealing with disclosures

- Highlight areas of particular risk in the school/college, for example:
  - Physical intervention
  - Personal/Intimate care
  - Changing for PE and swimming
  - 1:1 working
  - Overnight stays
  - Boarding schools
  - Host families
- Record-keeping
  - appropriate use of electronic systems
  - keep securely, away from other pupil files
  - transfer of records
    - securely
    - separately to other pupil files
    - receipt obtained from receiving school
- Confidentiality
- Procedure for dealing with complaints and allegations about staff, including low-level concerns
- Procedure for dealing with complaints and allegations about the headteacher or proprietor
- Procedures for dealing with safeguarding allegations about another pupil
- Safer Recruitment Procedures
  - key points only; a separate policy would allow for greater detail
- Disclosure and Barring Service checks
- Whistle-blowing

The Safeguarding and Child Protection policy must be available on the school's website.

### **Staff Code of Conduct**

In addition to the Safeguarding and Child Protection policy, schools must have a staff Code of Conduct that outlines an acceptable level of staff behaviour. During their induction training, new staff must be given and have read:

- Staff Code of Conduct (inc. use of social media, the Position of Trust Offence and information about low level harms)
- The school's Safeguarding and Child Protection policy
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) (Part One)
- Behaviour Policy
- Procedures for children missing education

## Safeguarding Policy Checklist (September 2025)

Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025), paragraph 98, describes what an effective child protection policy should include and this checklist should be used alongside that guidance.

*Very few changes were made to Keeping children Safe in Education (2025). The following points need reflecting in your policy:*

- *Add to the section on online harms, misinformation, disinformation and conspiracy theories (see KCSIE 2025, paragraph 135).*
- *Where schools make use of Alternative Provisions ensure that section of your policy (or related policies, like behaviour or attendance) references the following from KCSIE 2025, paragraphs 168 - 170: 'where a school places a pupil with an alternative provision provider, it continues to be responsible for the safeguarding of that pupil and should be satisfied that the placement meets the pupil's needs'. You might also wish to add how you specifically do that in your school.*

Question	Yes/No
When reviewing the policy make sure to update all references to Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) are changed to (2025) and any paragraph numbers referenced have been revised.	
Make sure that the correct definition of safeguarding is included in the policy from KCSIE (2025), paragraph 3.	
The policy should state the school's commitment to safeguarding and that it aims to create a culture of vigilance.  Children may not be ready to talk about their experiences See KCSIE (2025), paragraph 17	
The policy should be clear about how children are given opportunities to learn about safeguarding, including online.  See KCSIE (2025), paragraphs 128-133 for a list of issues that should be covered.	
The policy should refer to the importance of considering wider environmental factors in a child's life that may be a threat to their safety and/or welfare. (See KCSIE (2025), paragraph 21)	
Some policies may include the legislation that covers safeguarding in schools, in which case the list must be up to date.  <i>Any legislation listed must be 'fact-checked' at the time of publication, as legislation can change without notice and others become obsolete.</i>	
The policy should outline the definitions, signs and symptoms of the four kinds of abuse and neglect.  Types of Abuse and Neglect can be found in 'Keeping Children Safe in	

Education (2025)' (Part 1 and Annex B) Note also the child-on-child abuse in paragraphs 30 - 33	
<p>The policy should include the statutory definition of child sexual exploitation and published in February 2017.</p> <p>Where relevant reference could be made to the signs and symptoms.</p> <p>It is worth noting that CSE includes young people aged 16 and 17 who are over the age of sexual consent.</p> <p>See KCSIE (2025) paragraph 38-40.</p>	
The policy should include information about Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)	
<p>The policy should include information about 'County Lines'.</p> <p>See KCSIE (2025) page 151 and 152, which also includes relevant indicators of harm.</p>	
<p>The policy should include information about Domestic Abuse</p> <p>Note that the correct phrase to use is domestic <i>abuse</i>, not domestic <i>violence</i>. This is because there are other kinds of domestic abuse, not only violence.</p> <p>The National Domestic Abuse helpline can be called free of charge and in confidence, 24 hours a day on 0808 2000 247.</p> <p>(See KCSIE (2025) Part 1 paragraph 41 and Annex B pages 154 - 155)</p> <p><i>Operation Encompass</i> provides an advice and helpline service for all staff members from educational settings who may be concerned about children who have experienced domestic abuse. The helpline is available 8am to 1pm, Monday to Friday on 0204 513 9990 (charged at local rate).</p>	
<p>The policy should include the signs and symptoms of female genital mutilation (FGM); and information about what teachers (specifically) should do to report.</p> <p><b>Female Genital Mutilation reporting procedures</b></p> <p>Where there is a disclosure of FGM it is important that staff know what their statutory response should be. Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025), paragraph 42 says 'whilst <b>all</b> staff should speak to the designated safeguarding lead (or deputy) with regard to any concerns about female genital mutilation (FGM), there is a specific <b>legal duty on teachers</b>. If a teacher, in the course of their work in the profession, discovers that an act of FGM appears to have been carried out on a girl under the age of 18, the teacher must report this to the police'.</p> <p>Further information can be found in KCSIE (2025), pages 161 - 163.</p> <p>What is often less well-know is what a teacher should do next to make a</p>	

<p>report.</p> <p>Below is a <i>very short summary</i> and must be read in conjunction with the mandatory reporting guidance. (See <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mandatory-reporting-of-female-genital-mutilation-procedural-information">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mandatory-reporting-of-female-genital-mutilation-procedural-information</a>)</p> <p>The mandatory reporting procedures say:</p> <p>'It is recommended that you make a report orally by calling 101, the single non-emergency number.'</p> <p>'Where there is a risk to life or likelihood of serious immediate harm, professionals should report the case immediately to police, including dialling 999 if appropriate'.</p> <p>In most cases 'reports under the duty should be made as soon as possible after a case is discovered, and best practice is for reports to be made by the close of the next working day'.</p> <p>The procedures also set out what information is needed, in order to make a report.</p> <p>See here: <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mandatory-reporting-of-female-genital-mutilation-procedural-information/mandatory-reporting-of-female-genital-mutilation-procedural-information-accessible-version#reporting">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mandatory-reporting-of-female-genital-mutilation-procedural-information/mandatory-reporting-of-female-genital-mutilation-procedural-information-accessible-version#reporting</a></p>	
<p>The policy should include a section about mental health and possible links to safeguarding and child protection.</p> <p><i>If the school has a Senior Mental Health Lead, they should be named here, along with information about how they can be contacted.]</i></p>	
<p>The policy should include a reference to highlight that children who have a social worker, have a potentially greater risk of harm</p>	
<p>The policy should refer to so-called 'Honour-based' Abuse</p> <p>Note that the correct phrase to use is so-called 'Honour-based' <i>Abuse</i>, not 'Honour-based' <i>violence</i>. This is because there are other kinds of 'Honour-based' abuse, not only violence.</p>	

<p><b>Age of consent for marriage</b></p> <p>In February 2023, the age of consent for marriage in England changed to 18. The Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act 2022 means that 16 and 17 year olds may not marry or enter a civil partnership, even if they have parental consent.</p> <p>It is an offence, under the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act to cause a child under the age of 18 to enter a marriage in any circumstances, without the need to prove that a form of coercion was used. This includes non-legally binding 'traditional' ceremonies which would still be viewed as marriages by the parties and their families.</p> <p>Any concerns that students may be getting married should be referred to the DSL.</p>	
<p><b>Children who are absent from education</b></p> <p>The policy should set out the school's approach to tackling absence.</p> <p>The policy should explain what the school does when children have poor attendance or are regularly missing.</p> <p>The policy should say that parents should ensure that the school has at least two emergency contacts for their child.</p> <p><i>Further information can be found in 'Working together to improve school attendance'</i></p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance</a></p>	
<p><b>Filtering and Monitoring</b></p> <p>It is important to ensure that the safeguarding policy covers these issues and explains how filtering and monitoring has been included in the work of the school, so that children and young people are kept safe.</p> <p>Filtering and monitoring is not a standalone area of safeguarding and impacts on a number of areas, ensure that the policy reflects this.</p>	
<p><b>Out-of-school Providers</b></p> <p>Where schools host out-of-school providers on their premises, they should ensure that the provider meets the guidance in <a href="#">After-school clubs, community activities and tuition: safeguarding guidance for providers</a> (DfE, September 2023).</p> <p>Schools should follow their own safeguarding and child protection procedures where they have concerns about the out-of-school provider. This may include contacting the local authority designated officer in the case of concerns about adults.</p>	
<p>The policy should include the school's duties under the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (The 'Prevent Duty')</p>	



<p>Children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) or certain health conditions can face additional safeguarding challenges.</p> <p><i>(This should also link into the SEND policy)</i></p>	
<p><b>Ensure this section about child-on-child abuse is in line with the requirements set out in KCSIE (2025), paragraphs 30-33.</b></p> <p>Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure that their child protection policy includes processes, procedures and systems to minimise the risk of child-on-child abuse and to deal with it in a timely way when it does happen.</p> <p>All staff should be clear as to the school's or college's policy and procedures with regards to child-on-child abuse and the important role they have to play in preventing it and responding where they believe a child may be at risk from it.</p> <p>Reference should be made to the UK Council for Internet Safety (UKCIS) Guidance: Sharing nudes and semi-nudes (March 2024); and see also: Child sexual abuse material generated by artificial intelligence (June 2025) (NCA/CEOP/IWF).</p> <p>Any procedures for searching, deleting and confiscating devices should be included in the educational setting's safeguarding or child protection procedures.</p> <p><i>Remember that child-on-child abuse also needs to be referenced in the school's Behaviour Policy, and could be referenced in the Relationships...policy.</i></p> <p>Sexual violence and/or sexual harassment (see KCSIE (2025), Part Five, beginning on pages 105)</p> <p>Risk Assessments</p> <p>Report of sexual violence or sexual harassment should include the time and location of the incident. Subsequent risk assessments will include any actions required to make the location safer.</p> <p>Impact on any siblings</p> <p>It is important to understand intra-familial harms and identify any necessary support for siblings following incidents of sexual violence or sexual harassment.</p>	
<p>The policy should define 'Private Fostering' and note that there is a mandatory duty to inform the local authority of children in such arrangements.</p> <p>See KCSIE (2025) Paragraphs 340 - 343)</p>	
<p>The policy should set out the role of the Designated Safeguarding Lead</p> <p><i>*The Virtual Headteacher has responsibility to promote the education of</i></p>	

<i>children who have a social worker – the school policy ought to refer to that responsibility and how that is implemented in the school</i>	
The school has at least two Designated Safeguarding Leads and these are named in the policy, along with contact details.	
The school has a named governor for safeguarding who is identified in the policy, along with appropriate contact details. The policy should also name the person to whom concerns about the headteacher can be taken.	
The policy is clear that staff should promptly share their concerns in writing with the DSL and sets out the procedure for doing so.	
The policy should be clear that all verbal conversations should be promptly recorded in writing.	
There should be an identified single location for the delivery of concern forms and a clear method for alerting the DSL that a concern form has been raised.	
It should be clear in the policy what to do if the DSL is not available.	
<p>Low level concerns about staff behaviour</p> <p>The school or college policy should set out the procedure for responding to reports of low-level concerns.</p> <p>The policy should be clear that any concerns about the conduct of other adults in the school should be taken to the headteacher/principal; and concerns about the headteacher/ principal should go to the Chair of Governors.</p> <p>(Where the headteacher is also the sole proprietor of an independent school, or there is a situation where there is a conflict of interest in reporting the matter to the headteacher, this should be reported directly to the local authority designated officer(s) (LADOs)).</p> <p><b>NOTE THAT LOCAL PROCEDURES MAY DIFFER AND YOU MAY NEED TO REFER LOW LEVEL CONCERNS TO YOUR LADO.</b></p>	
In proprietor-led independent schools, concerns about the proprietor(s) should be taken directly to the local authority Designated Officer (LADO).	
<p>The policy should be clear about the steps the DSL should take in order to refer a concern outside the school, eg. a social services enquiry or to the local authority Designated Officer (LADO).</p> <p>An up-to-date list of relevant names and contacts details should be included in the policy.</p>	
The policy should set out the training opportunities for staff in different roles; and the type and frequency of training.	

<p>The policy should refer to Whistleblowing.</p> <p>The NSPCC runs a whistleblowing helpline on behalf of the government, the number is 0808 800 5000.</p>	
<p>The policy should be self-contained and not rely on other documents to understand it. (Any appendices should be kept as part of the whole document.)</p>	
<p>The policy should have a publication date and a review date (not later than one year from publication). Typically, these dates are put on the front cover.</p>	
<p>The policy should set out the other relevant documents all staff must have read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) [Part One]; and school leaders and staff that work directly with children should also read Annex B</li> <li>• Staff Code of Conduct</li> <li>• Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy</li> <li>• School's Behaviour Policy</li> <li>• School Policy for Children Missing Education</li> </ul>	
<p>The policy should refer to confidentiality and the school's information sharing policy, which should be based on the guidance document 'Information sharing: advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services' (DfE, May 2024)</p> <p>The document can be downloaded here:  <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-practitioners-information-sharing-advice">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-practitioners-information-sharing-advice</a></p> <p>The guidance is clear that information may be shared where there are safeguarding concerns. Whilst consent to share is not necessarily required, there must be a legal basis to share.</p> <p>It may be useful to quote the following statement from Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025), paragraph 119:</p> <p><i>'The Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR do not prevent the sharing of information for the purposes of keeping children safe. Fears about sharing information must not be allowed to stand in the way of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare and protect the safety of children.'</i></p> <p>It is recommended that the new guidance is read and discussed with the information sharing team, for example, the DSL and the Data Protection Officer, to ensure that the school's processes are compliant.</p>	
<p>Online safety and the school or college's approach to it should be reflected in the child protection policy.</p>	

<p>Note that guidance about online learning can be found in the 'Guidance for Safer Working Practices... (February 2022)' which can be found here: <a href="https://saferrecruitmentconsortium.org">https://saferrecruitmentconsortium.org</a></p> <p><i>Note that there is a requirement to 'regularly review' the effectiveness of the monitoring and filtering arrangements see KCSIE (2025), paragraph 145.</i></p>	
<p>"Where appropriate", [the child protection policy] reflects serious violence.</p> <p><i>See KCSIE (2025) paragraph 46</i></p>	
<p>Children who are lesbian, gay, bi, or transgender (LGBT)</p> <p><b>IMPORTANT NOTE</b> As at 1<sup>st</sup> September 2025, this section is under review by the government.</p>	
<p>The current safeguarding and child protection policy should be available on the school's website.</p> <p><i>It is always worth checking that this link actually works.</i></p>	

## **Creating an effective safeguarding system**

A key aspect of a school's role is to ensure that children are kept safe. The school must have clear systems and procedures in place so that when there are concerns staff know what to do and who to speak to.

There are five parts to an effective safeguarding system:

- Recognise
- Respond
- Refer
- Record
- Reflect

### **Recognise**

It is important that all adults working in, or who are connected with the school are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and how they carry them out. Developing this awareness is an important role of the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

There is so much information that people are expected to know, that the traditional single child protection session is no longer sufficient. There needs to be a clear programme of professional development in safeguarding, and one approach to this is to look at different aspects over, say, two years. A mixed approach using short-sessions, longer twilights and, occasionally full-days will be useful.

There is no statutory list of content for Continuing Professional Development, and so schools should make sure that as well as covering priority areas, they also look at areas of minimal risk too. In addition to a wide variety of topics, it is also useful to reflect on the safeguarding challenges for different groups of children, for example, young carers. Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) gives a list of topics that could be covered.

Whilst face-to-face sessions are most often used to help staff develop their understanding, online training is used too. Noticeboards, leaflets and posters can also keep the safeguarding message front-of-mind.

### **Respond and Refer**

An effective procedure makes it clear how staff should handle a disclosure by a pupil and what the process is for passing the information on. Although disclosures do occur, often the adult will be concerned by something they observe about the child or perhaps overhear. Referrals must be made in a timely way and record the key facts.

Whilst it is important that staff know what to do, children should also be aware of who they can talk to, whether they are worried about themselves, or another child.

## **Record-keeping**

The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) is the senior school leader responsible for the effectiveness of safeguarding. One aspect of the DSL's role is to ensure that there is effective record keeping, particularly when building up evidence over time.

Records must be kept securely in a central place, accessible only by those who have an authorised need. Electronic systems can be very effective in ensuring that there is easy access to records for the safeguarding team. Paper-based systems should be clearly organised using the five sections listed below is one way that this can be done.

- Admin and Chronology
- Internal Information
- External Information
- Meeting Notes and Reports
- Child Protection Plans and other legal documents

## **Reflect**

Safeguarding in schools is a complex business with lots of aspects to think about. The most important thing to remember is that no one person can do this alone. School do need to be compliant with the latest statutory guidance. However, a much bigger part of keeping children safe is in understanding whether the safeguarding system is having real impact.

Keeping Children Safe in Education tells us that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility and so a team approach is very much the key to success.

## **Supervision for Designated Safeguarding Leads**

Many DSLs feel that they are resilient and can look after themselves, but stress can sneak up on the most resilient people and suddenly the symptoms can take over. One way to deal with this, is to ensure that DSLs have supervision.

Supervision has been much more integrated in health and social care, than in education. There are a number of models of supervision, but one frequently adopted method is known as Morrison's 4x4x4 Model. This model has four functions:

### **Management**

- Focusing on interests of pupils and quality of practice

### **Development**

- Building professional capacity to carry out the role

### **Mediation**

- Focusing on role clarity and effective partnership working

#### Support

- Focusing on emotional impact of the role and any resulting stress

### Early Years' Staff Supervision

In the Early Years supervision is statutory. The EYFS framework, says that: 'Providers must put appropriate arrangements in place for the supervision of staff who have contact with children and families. (Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage (DfE, 2024) paragraph 3.22)



The Education Support Partnership is the UK's only charity providing mental health and wellbeing support services to all education staff and organisations.

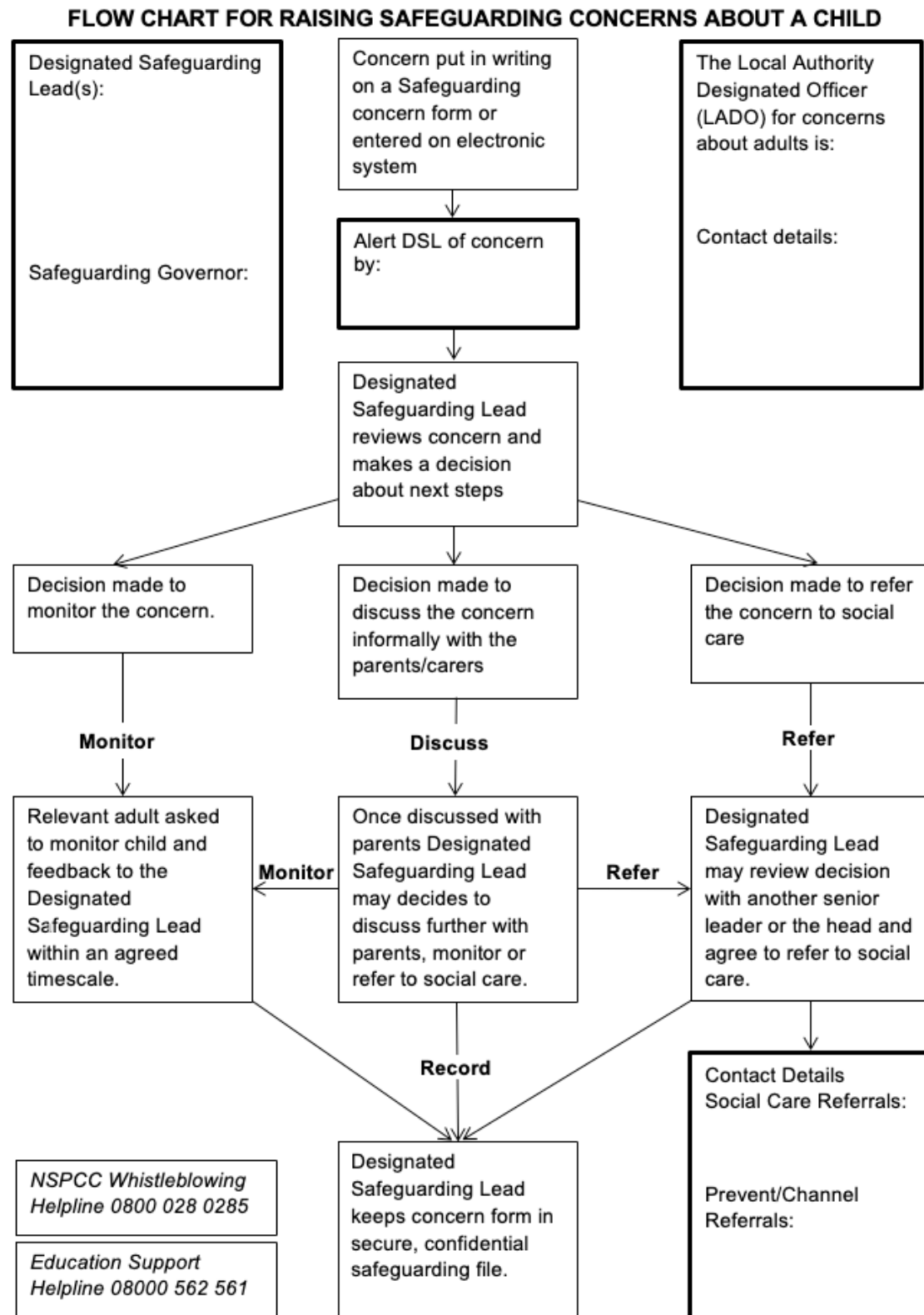
### Education Support Helpline

**08000 562 561**

(Every day, 24 hours a day)

You can also access online chat or email [support@edsupport.org.uk](mailto:support@edsupport.org.uk)

[www.educationsupport.org.uk](http://www.educationsupport.org.uk)



Safeguarding Flowchart v.3.91.docx [www.safeguardinginschools.co.uk](http://www.safeguardinginschools.co.uk)

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A flow chart like this one is a useful addition to the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy' and could be used on staff notice boards to raise awareness.



## Creating Recording Systems

An effective recording system is a vital part of the school's safeguarding procedures. The system provides a clear chronology of concerns, supports effective decision-making by the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), and ensures the school can evidence and report its actions for external agencies.

Most schools now use a secure digital safeguarding system (for example, CPOMS, MyConcern, or similar). These systems replace paper-based forms, provide automatic date and time stamping, and allow records to be linked, analysed, and shared securely. Schools may also keep other records that contribute additional information, such as incident logs, behaviour reports, or safeguarding meeting minutes.

### Recording a Concern

Recording a concern is the most important step in the safeguarding process, as it triggers the actions that follow. All staff must be confident in accessing and using the system, and it should be quick and straightforward to complete an entry. To enable the DSL to assess the significance of the concern, the following principles are particularly important:

- **Use the child's full name** (first name and surname).
- **Record the date and time** of the concern clearly.
- **Describe the concern in detail**, using the child's actual words where relevant.
- **Identify people clearly** – give roles and relationships, do not use initials or abbreviations.
- **Enter the concern promptly** – do not leave it until later or overnight.

Accurate, contemporaneous reporting enables better decision-making at the time of the concern. If a case later proceeds to a child protection investigation, professional meeting, court case, or inquest, the quality of these records will be of critical importance.

## Other important documents

In addition to concern records, there are several other safeguarding documents that form part of a school's safeguarding framework. Some are statutory, while others reflect good practice or provide additional support.

**Single Central Record:** This is a statutory safeguarding document. It must be maintained, reviewed, and audited regularly.

**Child Protection Register:** Children with a child protection plan must be recorded securely and confidentially. Key information from the plan must be shared with those who need to know, and its impact monitored.

**School Report Template:** To ensure consistency in reports shared with external agencies and presented at meetings, schools should use a common reporting format. Where social care provides a reporting template, schools should check that it covers all relevant educational aspects.

**CPD Tracker:** The DSL (often with the CPD lead) should maintain a record of staff safeguarding training, including the type (e.g. basic awareness, advanced, safer recruitment), dates, and renewal requirements.

**Staff Reminders:** Posters, cards, or similar prompts may be used to ensure staff know how to raise concerns. Some schools provide reminder cards to new staff, supply teachers, and volunteers. Schools may also consider ways of encouraging pupils to share concerns.

**Lists of External Organisations:** Many schools keep lists of external organisations and agencies that parents and pupils can be signposted to for additional support (see the appendix in this handbook).

**Contact Information:** A list of important safeguarding contacts — including names, email addresses, and telephone numbers — should be kept up to date and easily accessible.

## Guidance on recording concerns

Recording concerns accurately and promptly is a vital part of safeguarding practice. The record you make may be the first step in protecting a child, and it may later be used in multi-agency meetings, inspections, or even legal proceedings. They set out the essentials to ensure that every concern is logged clearly, securely, and in a way that supports swift and effective action by the safeguarding team.

**Record promptly:** enter the concern as soon as possible. Delays can put a child at further risk.

**Escalate urgent concerns immediately:** if a child is at immediate risk of harm, alert the safeguarding team or DSL in person or by phone straight away. Do not wait for the system notification to be picked up.

**Use the school's safeguarding system:** always record concerns in the official safeguarding system authorised by your school. Do not use email or informal notes as the main record.

**Use the child's own words:** where possible, record exactly what the child said. Avoid paraphrasing or interpreting.

**Keep it factual and professional:** record only what you saw or heard. Use neutral, professional language; avoid opinions, labels, or emotive descriptions.

**One child, one record:** if more than one child is involved, create separate entries so that each record is complete and clear.

**Do not record for others:** if another adult shares a concern with you, they must record it themselves.

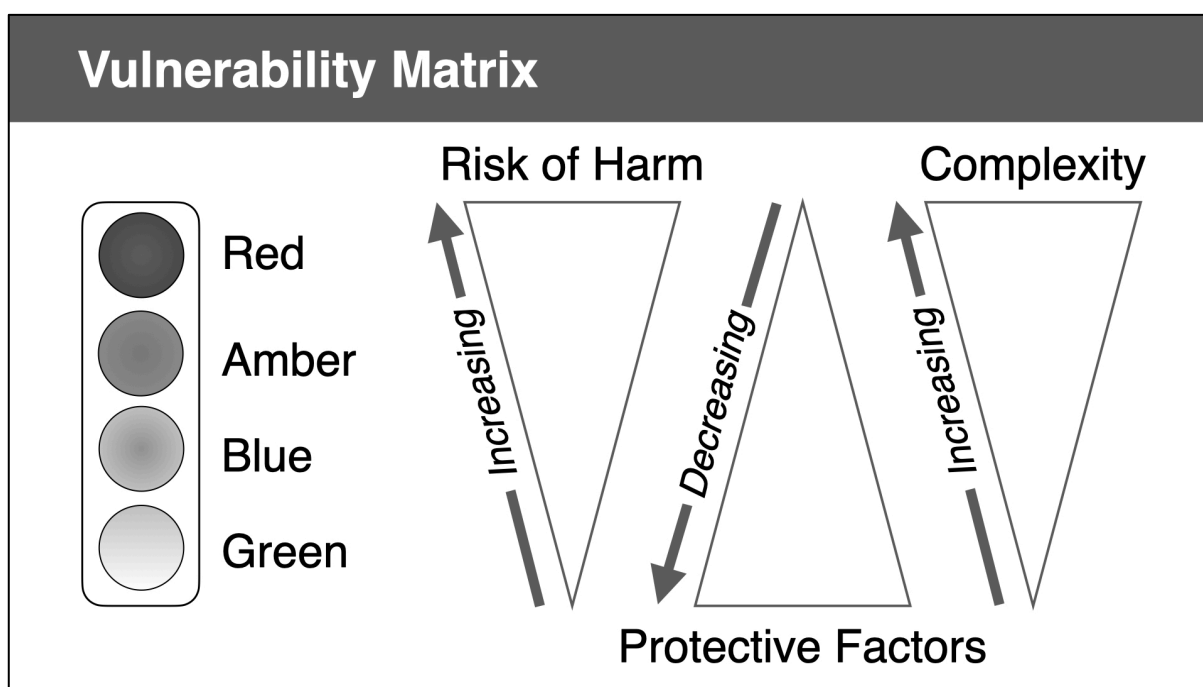
**Use handwritten notes only as a reference:** if you made notes during or immediately after a conversation, use them to create a full typed record in the system. You may also upload a copy for reference, but the digital entry must stand alone.

**Follow the contingency plan if the system is unavailable:** for example, complete a paper form or contact the DSL directly, then enter the record into the system as soon as it is restored.

**Remember the wider context:** safeguarding records may be used in child protection conferences, professional meetings, inspections, or legal proceedings. Ensure your record is accurate and complete.

## Developing a Vulnerability Matrix

When safeguarding all the children and young people in an organisation it is helpful to know which children are most at risk; and whether the risk for those children is reducing or increasing. It is important to monitor risk and the effectiveness of any support. One way to do this is by developing a vulnerability matrix. In its simplest form, this matrix can use an (adapted) traffic light system of rating risk: red, amber, blue and green. At the lowest rating (green) a child will have the least risk of harm, the lowest level of complexity to their life and the most effective protective factors.



Typically, most children in the school would be graded 'green' using this model. When concerns arise, this might lift the vulnerability level to 'blue', and later onto 'amber'. Children at most risk would have a red grade.

These levels are most effective when children's presentation and support needs are regularly monitored. Those with the highest risk should be monitored most frequently (probably weekly), whilst those with least risk of harm (blue), perhaps once a month. This is formal monitoring which might involve a meeting with other relevant staff on a weekly basis. Children at the 'green' level are being monitored every day, as this 'check-in' will be present in class time or with form tutors.

A review of concern does not need to wait until the next formal monitoring opportunity, and informal conversations will occur regularly, even several times a day in some cases.

An effective safeguarding system will have a graduated approach to respond to child with different levels of risk.

## Information Sharing: Child Protection

Information sharing is an important aspect of safeguarding children and vulnerable people. Serious Case Reviews often record that a failure to share information has been a key factor. It is important however that information is shared legally. What follows is offered as guidance and is not a substitute for legal advice.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023) says, 'The Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) do not prevent the sharing of information for the purposes of keeping children safe. Fears about sharing information must not be allowed to stand in the way of the need to promote the welfare and protect the safety of children.'

'It is not necessary to seek consent to share information for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of a child provided that there is a lawful basis to process any personal information required.' (see paragraph 27)

'It continues to be good practice to ensure transparency and to inform parent/ carers that you are sharing information for these purposes and seek to work cooperatively with them.'

When children are suffering or may be at risk of suffering significant harm, concerns must always be shared with children's social care or the police.

The DfE's Information Guidance document sets out the 'golden rules' for sharing information:

***The Seven golden rules for sharing information (including personal information):***

- 1. All children have a right to be protected from abuse and neglect. Protecting a child from such harm takes priority over protecting their privacy, or the privacy rights of the person(s) failing to protect them. The UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) provide a framework to support information sharing where practitioners have reason to believe failure to share information may result in the child being at risk of harm***
- 2. When you have a safeguarding concern, wherever it is practicable and safe to do so, engage with the child and/or their carer(s), and explain who you intend to share information with, what information you will be sharing and why. You are not***

*required to inform them, if you have reason to believe that doing so may put the child at increased risk of harm (e.g., because their carer(s) may harm the child, or react violently to anyone seeking to intervene, or because the child might withhold information or withdraw from services).*

3. ***You do not need consent to share personal information about a child and/or members of their family if a child is at risk or there is a perceived risk of harm.*** You need a lawful basis to share information under data protection law, but when you intend to share information as part of action to safeguard a child at possible risk of harm, consent may not be an appropriate basis for sharing. It is good practice to ensure transparency about your decisions and seek to work cooperatively with a child and their carer(s) wherever possible. This means you should consider any objection the child or their carers may have to proposed information sharing, but you should consider overriding their objections if you believe sharing the information is necessary to protect the child from harm.
4. ***Seek advice promptly whenever you are uncertain or do not fully understand how the legal framework supports information sharing in a particular case.*** Do not leave a child at risk of harm because you have concerns you might be criticised for sharing information. Instead, find out who in your organisation/agency can provide advice about what information to share and with whom. This may be your manager/supervisor, the designated safeguarding children professional, the data protection/information governance lead (e.g., Data Protection Officer), Caldicott Guardian, or relevant policy or legal team. If you work for a small charity or voluntary organisation, follow the NSPCC's safeguarding guidance.
5. ***When sharing information, ensure you and the person or agency/organisation that receives the information take steps to protect the identities of any individuals (e.g., the child, a carer, a neighbour, or a colleague) who might suffer harm if their details became known to an abuser or one of their associates.***
6. ***Only share relevant and accurate information with individuals or agencies/organisations that have a role in safeguarding the child and/or providing their family with support, and only share the information they need to support the provision of their services.*** Sharing information with a third party rarely requires you to share an entire record or case-file – you must only share

*information that is necessary, proportionate for the intended purpose, relevant, adequate and accurate.*

**7. Record the reasons for your information sharing decision, irrespective of whether or not you decide to share information.**

*When another practitioner or organisation requests information from you, and you decide not to share it, be prepared to explain why you chose not to do so. Be willing to reconsider your decision if the requestor shares new information that might cause you to regard information you hold in a new light. When recording any decision, clearly set out the rationale and be prepared to explain your reasons if you are asked*

Source: Information Sharing (DfE, 2024)

## **Sharing information with other schools**

Child Protection information must be transferred as soon as possible to the pupil's new school, but kept separately from the main pupil file. It is important to transfer this information to prevent harm to a child. Parental consent is not required to transfer this data, since it is held to prevent harm to a child. Where parents object, the fact should be recorded and the reasons to transfer should be noted.

Primary schools do not need to keep copies of any records in the pupil record except if there is an ongoing legal action when the pupil leaves the school. Custody of and responsibility for the records passes to the school the pupil transfers to.

Although it is the duty of the previous school to transfer the data as soon as possible to the new school, occasionally parents may not share the name of the new school. It is important, therefore, that when schools admit children, they should contact the previous school to check whether there are child protection records and to transfer them when they exist. The new school should send a letter to the previous school asking for written confirmation whether there are Child Protection records or not.

Where children go missing, government guidance set out in 'Children missing education' should be followed. (see also 'Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025))

## **Sharing child protection information securely by post**

- Confirm the name, department and address of the recipient.
- Seal the information in a double envelope, ensuring the packaging is sufficient to protect the contents during transit.

- Mark the inner envelope 'Private and Confidential – To be opened by Addressee Only'.
- Make sure that there is nothing on the outer envelope that would indicate that it contains personal information.
- Ensure a return address is included on both the outer and inner envelopes in case it has to be returned for some reason.
- When appropriate send the information by recorded delivery or by locally approved courier;
- Ask the recipient to confirm receipt. Enclose a form for them to sign and return.

### **Retention and Disposal of Child Protection Records**

There are no statutory requirements about retention of records, so schools should ensure that have an appropriate retention policy.

The Information Records Management Society (IRMS) has created an Information Management Toolkit for Schools. This guidance suggests that child protection records should be retained by the last school or college that the young person attends and should be kept until the person has their 26<sup>th</sup> birthday and then securely disposed of. *This document is for members of the IRMS only.*

<https://www.safeguardinghandbook.co.uk/recordsmanagement>

### **Subject Access Requests**

(Source: Information Commissioner's Office)

<https://ico.org.uk/for-the-public/schools/pupils-info/>

In maintained schools, parents have the right to access their child's educational record. In academies, free schools in England, or independent schools, there is no equivalent right of access and it is up to the school will make the decision to give access or not.

All schools can withhold an educational record where the information might cause serious harm to the physical or mental health of the pupil or another individual.

### **Sources**

Information sharing advice for safeguarding practitioners (DfE, 2024)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-practitioners-information-sharing-advice>



## Single Central Record

			Identity	Qualifications				DBS Checks				Prohibition from teaching	Management
Name	Role	Employment Start Date	Photo ID - Document Type Seen	QTS Required?	QTS/TRN number	Qualification Type	Date Qualification Seen	Enhanced DBS Check - Date Completed	Barred List Check - Date Completed	Date on the Enhanced DBS Certificate	Date Enhanced DBS Certificate Seen	Prohibition from teaching - Date of Check	s128 management check - Date of Check

Source: *Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) paragraphs 273-280*

The Single Central Record must show:

- all staff (including supply staff and teacher trainees on salaried routes) who work at the school: in colleges, this means those providing education to children;
- all others who work in regular contact with children in the school or college, including volunteers;
- in maintained schools and independent schools (including academies and free schools), all members of the governing body
- the proprietors in proprietor-led schools

The relevant checks to include are:

- an identity check;
- a barred list check;
- an enhanced DBS check;
- a prohibition from teaching check (see below)  
(NB This is **not** the same as a barred list check);
  - a prohibition check must be made for anyone undertaking 'teaching work' (with or without Qualified Teacher Status);
  - whilst not statutory, a prohibition from teaching check **may** be made for teaching assistants to ensure they are not a prohibited teacher
- although the UK can no longer access the EEA\* sanctions list, the column should remain to evidence any previous checks; (\*EEA includes all EU countries, plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway)
- further checks on people who have lived or worked outside the UK
- a check of professional qualifications;
- a check to establish the person's right to work in the United Kingdom; and
- in Independent schools (including academies and free schools), a section 128 prohibition check for people in management positions.

There is no requirement for multi-academy trusts (MATs) to have separate single central records, but schools should ensure the record is securely stored and easily accessible to those who need to see it, including Ofsted inspectors.

## **Retention of DBS Certificates**

To comply with the Data Protection Act, schools and colleges should not retain copies of DBS certificates for longer than six months. [However, copies of other documents may be retained, eg. passport, driving licence, right to work information, professional qualifications].

## **Repeat DBS Checks for existing staff**

There is no requirement to repeat DBS checks for existing staff, unless there are concerns about their conduct. The DBS Update service is a useful means to check a person DBS status without carrying out a new check. (See Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025), paragraphs 254 - 257.)

## **Agency Staff**

It is expected that the organisation supplying the worker has undertaken appropriate checks and sent written notification to the school. Schools must take steps to ensure that the worker coming into the school, is the person for whom the check has been made.

If the person has a DBS certificate which includes a disclosure, the agency must provide a copy of it to the school. (See Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025), paragraphs 291.)

## **Contractors**

Schools should clearly set out their safeguarding requirements in the contract between the organisation and the school. Schools are responsible for determining the appropriate level of supervision for contractors depending on the circumstances; ensure that they have been subject to the appropriate level of DBS check.

Contractors engaging in regulated activity relating to children will require an enhanced DBS check (including children's barred list information).

Contractors whose work provides them with an opportunity for regular contact with children require an enhanced DBS certificate (not including children's barred list information).

Under no circumstances should a contractor on whom no checks have been obtained be allowed to work unsupervised or engage in regulated activity relating to children.

Schools should always check the identity of contractors on arrival at the school or college. (See Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025), paragraph 294 – 299)

## **Student Teachers**

Where student teachers join the payroll of the school, the school must complete all checks. For all other student teachers, the initial teacher training provider must carry out the appropriate checks. (See Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025), paragraph 300 – 302)

### **Identity documents**

See guide at Direct Gov website ‘Providing identity documents for criminal record checks’ <https://www.gov.uk/criminal-record-check-documents>

Photo Id – Passport, valid Driving Licence (photo-card), biometric residence card, birth certificate, adoption certificate (UK, Channel Islands)

Proof of address - utility bill, mortgage or bank statement, issued within last 3 months. (No mobile phone bills)

Proof of Qualifications – original certificates

Proof of QTS – check with Teaching Regulation Agency

Teaching Regulation Agency (Telephone: 0207 593 5394)

Email: [qts.enquiries@education.gov.uk](mailto:qts.enquiries@education.gov.uk)

<https://www.regulated-professions.service.gov.uk/regulatory-authorities/teaching-regulation-agency>

Prohibition Order check - Employer Access Online Service

[www.safeguardinghandbook.co.uk/teacherservices](http://www.safeguardinghandbook.co.uk/teacherservices)

### **Overseas Checks**

Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025), paragraph 285 - 289, says that ‘schools and colleges must make any further checks they think appropriate so that any events the occurred outside the UK can be considered’. There is no statutory guidance for when overseas checks should be done, so the school must have a clear policy. Although there are many interpretations of the guidance, often checks will be completed for people who have lived/worked overseas for 3 months or more in the last 10 years. It is the individual’s responsibility to obtain a police check, often called a Certificate of Good Conduct.

See [www.safeguardinghandbook.co.uk/overseas](http://www.safeguardinghandbook.co.uk/overseas)

### **People who have taught in the EEA**

Since 1st January 2020, UK schools do not have access to the EEA’s sanctions list for teachers. Schools should ensure that they make any further checks they think are appropriate. However, the EEA check column should be kept on the single central record, so that previous checks can be verified.

## **UK Citizens working overseas**

For UK citizens working overseas, International Child Protection Certificates (UK) can be obtained. For more information, go to <https://www.acro.police.uk/s/acro-services/icp-certificates>

## **Other Resources**

Disclosure and Barring Service:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service>

The 'Public Register of Authentic Travel and Identity Documents Online' (PRADO) can be used to check the validity of documents from many countries of the world:

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/prado/en/prado-start-page.html>

Right to Work checklist: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/right-to-work-checklist>

Right to work evidence must be signed and dated. It should be kept for at least two years after the person has left and then destroyed.

Teacher Status Checks: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/check-a-teachers-record>

Overseas Criminal Records Checks:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criminal-records-checks-for-overseas-applicants>

## Single Central Record

### Single Central Record Checklist

(Tick)

Name of person	
Evidence of photographic ID	
Qualification(s) Required	
Qualification(s) Evidenced and Date Checked	
DBS Enhanced Check and Date Received (not statutory to record number)	
Barred List Check (only if in Regulated Activity) and Date Received	
Prohibition Check (Teachers/People with QTS/other relevant staff) Date Checked	
Right to Work in UK Date Checked	
Overseas Checks needed/undertaken. Type and Date.	
Sanctions check for people who have taught in EEA countries (Jan. 2016 – Dec. 2020)	
s128 Prohibition Check for management positions in Independent schools (Free Schools and Academies); and for Governors in maintained schools.	

### Useful to record

Start date	
------------	--

### Single Central Record (People to include) (In Excel, usually on a separate tab)

Teachers	
Support Staff	
Admin Staff	
Premises Staff	
Governors/Proprietors/Trustees	
Volunteers	
Agency Staff (working in the school for a 'reasonable' length of time)	
Contractors	
Student teachers (if on the school's payroll)	
Additional instructors/coaches/etc	

### Notes

Make sure there are no gaps. Enter 'Not applicable', or another relevant phrase.	
SCR must be current. Remove people who have left.	
SCR must include Enhanced Check/Barred List for people appointed after 2006.	
No need for Enhanced Check or Barred List for people appointed prior to March 2002.	
SCR should record what has been seen and when it was seen. (There is no requirement to record name of person who carried out check).	

### Some schools also record on the SCR (Not statutory)

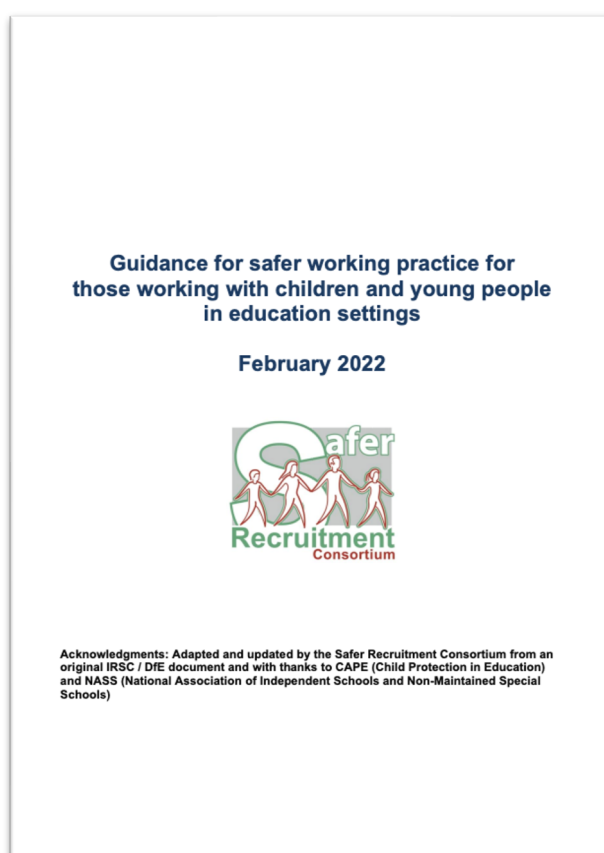
Volunteer risk assessments. Date completed.	
Safeguarding Training	
Safer Recruitment Training	
References (2) (Checked and Date Received)	

Checked by:

Date:

## Developing Safe Working Practices

- Safer Recruitment strategies in place
- Appropriate induction and training
- Open and transparent safeguarding ethos
- Professional code of conduct
- Regular briefing and discussion of safeguarding issues
- Ensuring that children are aware of safeguarding issues through the curriculum



In February 2023, the Safer Recruitment Consortium published an updated edition of 'Guidance for Safer Working Practice for adults who work with children and young people'. The document provides a good starting point for developing a staff code of conduct.

The school's code of conduct must include advice around the use of email, mobile phones, internet and social media; and expectations about professional relationships, including the Position of Trust offence.

Download: <https://www.saferrecruitmentconsortium.org>

## Establishing Good Practice: Minimising Vulnerability to Allegations

### Always:

- ✓ ...work in an open environment. Avoid private or out of sight locations and encourage open communication.
- ✓ ...speak clearly, without whispering, so that students do not need to come close to hear
- ✓ ...avoid spending time alone with individual students away from others
- ✓ ...treat all students, regardless of race, disability, religion or belief, gender, sexual orientation, equally and with respect and dignity.
- ✓ ...ensure the student's welfare comes first and record it.
- ✓ ...be aware of the impact of proxemics; maintain safe and appropriate distances; Know where and how to place your body.
- ✓ ...avoid touching students, but where **educationally necessary** staff should follow these guidelines:
  - ✓ try to demonstrate without touching first
  - ✓ ask permission; say what you intend to do first and explain why
  - ✓ if a pupil seems uncomfortable: stop
  - ✓ only touch hands, arms or shoulder nearest you (don't reach across the body)
  - ✓ be aware of overall proximity; maintain physical space; don't stand behind
  - ✓ inappropriate areas for touch include: chest, diaphragm, waist, thighs
  - ✓ move away as soon as the contact is no longer required
- ✓ ...maintain professional boundaries, perhaps using a specific mobile number or email address for work purposes, rather than sharing personal details
- ✓ ...present as an exemplary role model by not smoking or drinking alcohol, swearing, allowing suggestive conversations or jokes or wearing less than professional clothing when in the company of a student
- ✓ ...seek to be enthusiastic and constructive when giving feedback rather than making negative or critical remarks
- ✓ ...record any injury that occurs and seek attention from a qualified First Aider or parent.
- ✓ ...record any incident of concern involving student's welfare.

### **Never:**

- ✗ ...allow allegations made by a child to go unchallenged, unrecorded or not acted upon (this applies to any form of abuse or bullying);
- ✗ ...lock doors, cover windows or use 'Do Not Disturb' signs;
- ✗ ...impose humiliating or power-based punishments on a student or reduce a child to tears;
- ✗ ...engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games, including horseplay;
- ✗ ...allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching;
- ✗ ...share a bedroom with a child;
- ✗ ...allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged;
- ✗ ...make sexually suggestive comments or 'jokes' to a child, even in fun;
- ✗ ...engage in any form of relationship, sexual or otherwise, with a young person you work with even if they are over the age of consent, but under 18 (older with vulnerable adults);
- ✗ ...do things of a personal or intimate nature for children or disabled young people that they can do for themselves;
- ✗ ...invite or allow children to stay with you at your home unsupervised;
- ✗ ...make contact with a child on their social media
- ✗ ...take photographs or videos of children unless written/signed consent has been obtained from a parent/carers; this includes the use of phones.
- ✗ ...seek physical contact. Try to gently discourage contact, rather than reject students. Model appropriate contact, eg. shaking hands or patting the shoulder. Never allow physical contact when you are alone.
- ✗ ...take a child in your car, but where this is unavoidable:
  - ◆ ensure that a manager has agreed in advance
  - ◆ prepare a risk assessment
  - ◆ ensure the vehicle is roadworthy and insurance covers business use
  - ◆ obtain parental permission, preferably in writing
  - ◆ take more than one person
  - ◆ sit child in the back
  - ◆ travel directly to the destination
  - ◆ keep conversation professional



## Staff and Social Media Use

### Introduction

Social media and online platforms are part of everyday life. They offer schools and colleges powerful ways to celebrate success, share information with families, and strengthen community links. For teachers and support staff, they can also provide opportunities for networking, professional development, and access to new resources.

Alongside these benefits, however, there are clear risks. Poorly managed online activity can blur professional boundaries, expose staff to reputational harm, and, in the most serious cases, create safeguarding concerns. This guidance sets out how staff can use social media responsibly while keeping children safe and maintaining public trust.

### 1. Professional Boundaries and Safeguarding Risks

- **No personal contact:** Staff must not share personal phone numbers, email addresses, or social media accounts with pupils. Communication should only take place through official school systems.
- **No “friending” or following:** Accepting friend requests or following pupils on personal accounts is not appropriate. It undermines professional distance and has been linked in disciplinary hearings to boundary-crossing behaviour.
- **Transparency:** Any professional online communication with children should be open, visible to others, and in line with school policies. Staff should never send private or hidden messages to pupils.
- **Responding to contact:** If a pupil finds a personal profile and attempts to get in touch, the member of staff must not reply. The incident should be reported to a manager or safeguarding lead and the pupil politely informed that this is not acceptable.

### 2. Staff Responsibilities Online

- **Protect your professional reputation:** Review personal accounts and privacy settings regularly. Consider what pupils, parents, or employers would see if they searched for you.
- **Separate personal and professional spaces:** Use different platforms, or set up distinct professional accounts if you need to share teaching ideas or resources publicly.

- **Consent before sharing:** Images or videos of pupils should only be published if explicit parental consent has been obtained, and for older pupils, their own consent too. Share only what is necessary and avoid including personal details.
- **Confidentiality:** Never post or discuss information about pupils, parents, or colleagues in social media groups or on personal accounts.
- **Use of devices:** Staff should use school-provided equipment (such as cameras or mobile phones) when taking photos or videos for school purposes. Personal devices should only be used if the school's acceptable use policy explicitly allows it.
- **Think before you post:** Content that could bring the school or college into disrepute, such as offensive comments, inappropriate images, or partisan political views, can damage both personal and institutional reputation.

### 3. Sharing Images and Information About Pupils

- **Consent first:** Do not post photographs, videos, or recordings of children without explicit, written parental consent. For older pupils, especially post-16, seek their consent as well.
- **No names:** Never include children's full names with images, and avoid other identifying details such as age, class, or location.
- **Appropriate context and dress:** Images of pupils in swimwear, changing areas, inappropriately dressed, or in any setting that could be misinterpreted must never be taken.
- **School equipment only:** Always use school devices to capture and store images, unless the school's acceptable use policy specifically permits another arrangement.
- **Consent records:** Schools should keep clear records of consent and ensure images are only used for the purposes agreed.

### 4. Finding the Balance

There is increasing debate about whether schools should stop posting children's faces online altogether. Privacy advocates highlight the risks of image theft, biometric data scraping, and AI misuse.

At the same time, many children and families enjoy seeing their achievements recognised in newsletters, websites, and even local newspapers. Public celebration can build confidence and a sense of pride in school life.

To strike a balance, schools should:

- Only share images with clear parental (and, where appropriate, pupil) consent.
- Never include full names or personal details alongside images.
- Prefer group shots rather than close-ups of individual children, so recognition is shared but no single child is highlighted.
- Consider alternatives such as showing pupils from behind, photographing work instead of faces, or using staged images with staff or volunteers.
- Regularly review whether the benefits outweigh the risks in each case.

This approach reduces risks while still giving children the joy of being celebrated as part of their school community.

## 5. School and College Responsibilities

- **Provide the right tools:** Where possible, schools should supply staff with devices for work-related photography, communication, or remote learning, so staff are not pressured into using personal accounts or equipment.
- **Clear policies and training:** Every setting should have an up-to-date acceptable use policy, online safety guidance, and regular training for staff on managing digital boundaries.
- **Safe use of official accounts:** School-managed social media pages can be excellent for celebrating achievements, but must have multiple administrators, clear moderation, and transparent posting rules.
- **Support routes:** Schools should make sure staff know how to raise concerns, whether about safeguarding issues, inappropriate use by colleagues, or reputational risks.

## 6. Emerging Technologies and AI

The digital landscape changes rapidly, and safeguarding principles apply to new tools as much as to established platforms. Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly built into social media and communication services. Potential risks include:

- **Deepfakes or manipulated images** of staff or pupils that could harm reputations.
- **Unmonitored contact through AI chat services** linked to social platforms.

- **Accidental sharing of confidential data** with external AI systems.

Staff should apply the same professional standards with AI as with any other technology: maintain boundaries, protect privacy, and report any concerns promptly. Schools should keep policies under review to ensure staff are supported in responding to emerging risks.

## 7. Reporting and Support

- **Trust your instincts:** If something feels wrong online, report it. It is always better to raise a concern early than to stay silent.
- **Internal routes:** Professionalism concerns should be raised with line managers. Safeguarding concerns must be reported immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).
- **External support:** The Professionals Online Safety Helpline, run by SWGfL, offers free expert advice for school staff dealing with online safety concerns.

## 8. When Parents or Pupils Post Negatively Online

Social media can sometimes be used by parents or pupils to express frustration with a school or individual members of staff. This can feel upsetting and personal, but teachers should not be left to face these situations on their own.

### 1. Don't Engage Directly

- Teachers should not reply to negative comments online, even if they feel unfair or untrue. Engaging personally can escalate the situation and blur professional boundaries.
- Any response should come from the school through official communication channels, not from individual staff.

### 2. Report Concerns Internally

- Staff should screenshot and record the comment or post (without engaging with it) and share it with their line manager or the senior leadership team.
- If the post contains threats, harassment, or safeguarding concerns, it must be referred immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or headteacher.

### **3. Protect Your Wellbeing**

- Negative online comments can feel very personal. Staff should be reassured that they are not expected to deal with this alone.
- Teachers should be encouraged to talk it through with a trusted colleague, union representative, or line manager, rather than carrying the stress privately.
- Schools should remind staff that professional support routes exist, including HR, unions, and, in serious cases, legal advice.

### **4. School Leadership Responsibilities**

- Schools should have a clear online reputation management policy that outlines how complaints raised on social media will be handled.
- Leadership should take ownership of responding to parents, for example, arranging a private meeting rather than allowing matters to play out publicly online.
- Where online abuse crosses into harassment or defamation, the school should be prepared to escalate to the platform or, if necessary, the police.

### **5. Encourage a Culture of Respect**

- Proactive communication with parents, clear complaints procedures, regular newsletters, and open dialogue can reduce the likelihood of issues spilling onto social media.
- Schools can also remind families that concerns should be raised directly with staff in line with school policy, not posted online.

### **Further Information**

Staff are not expected to manage social media and online safety concerns alone. The following resources provide additional guidance, support, and practical tools:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE, latest version)
- Guidance for Safer Working Practice for Adults who Work with Children and Young People in Education Settings (Safer Recruitment Consortium, 2022)
- SWGfL: Social Media Checklists and Professionals Online Safety Helpline
- UK Safer Internet Centre

- DfE Filtering and Monitoring Standards (2023)
- Defend Digital Me
- Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)
- Unions and Professional Associations

## **Conclusion**

Used wisely, social media can strengthen schools, build professional communities, and celebrate the achievements of children and young people. But safe use relies on clear boundaries, consistent policies, and staff awareness of the risks. By combining good practice with up-to-date guidance on emerging technologies, schools can ensure that social media remains a positive and safe tool for education.

## Safer Recruitment

*See Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) Part Three*

Schools and colleges must create a culture of safe recruitment and, as part of that, adopt recruitment procedures that help deter, reject or identify people who might harm children.

At least one person on every interview panel must have completed 'Safer Recruitment' training. However, other people are involved in the recruitment process and consideration should be given to training these people too.

Safer Recruitment training is overseen by the Safer Recruitment Consortium and is available online and face-to-face by accredited trainers. In the past, safer recruitment training had to be refreshed every 5 years, but this is no longer the case. However, it is sensible to revisit this training as legislation changes and serious cases continually develop our knowledge of how adults in schools harm children or groom them for abuse.

Further information: [www.saferrecruitmentconsortium.org](http://www.saferrecruitmentconsortium.org)  
<https://www.stopitnow.org.uk/>

### Before you advertise

- Ensure that you have an up to date written recruitment and selection policy that describes the process and roles before you begin
- Ensure that your organisation has a safeguarding policy and that a statement about the organisation's commitment to safeguarding is included in all recruitment and selection materials
- Ensure that you have an up to date job description and person specification for the role(s) you wish to recruit to, that have been agreed with the recruiting manager
- Ensure that advertisement includes all necessary information about the role, timetable for recruitment and your commitment to safeguarding
- Ensure that you have compiled a suitable candidate information pack containing all the required information about the organisation, role, recruitment timetable, safeguarding policy/statement and application form

### Before you interview

- Ensure that each application received is scrutinised in a systematic way by the shortlisting panel in order to agree your shortlist before sending invitations to interview

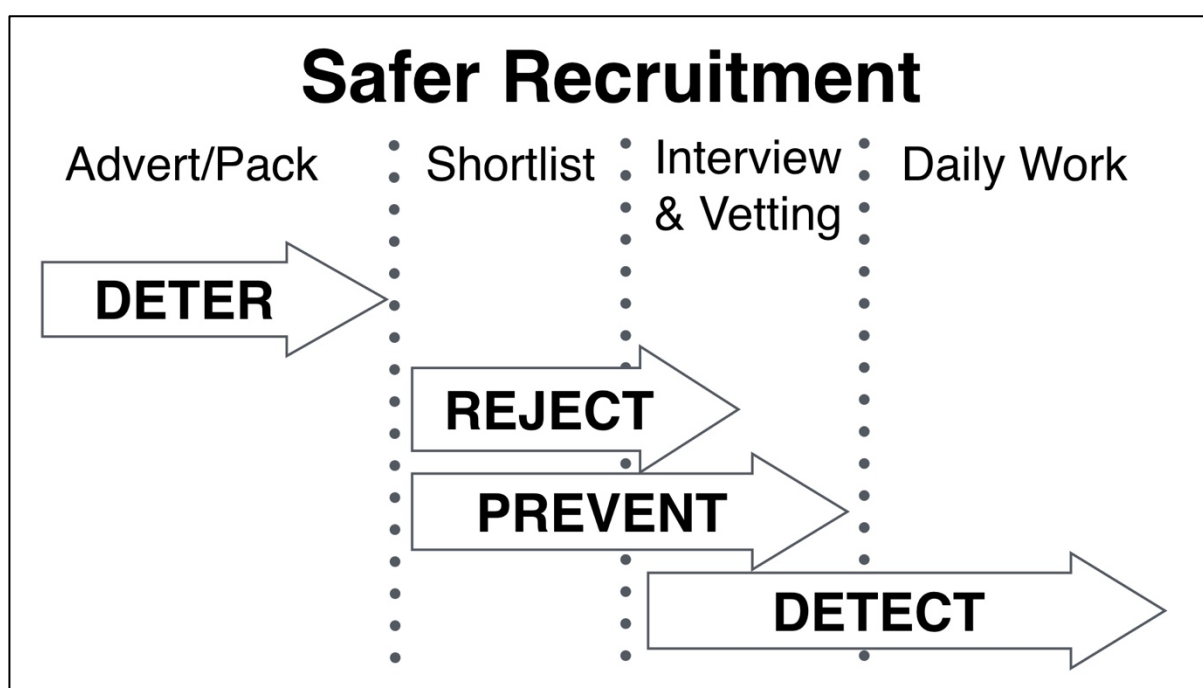
- Ensure that all appropriate checks have been undertaken on your shortlisted candidates, including identification, qualifications, references and, where possible, existing DBS checks
- Ensure that all shortlisted candidates receive the same letter of invitation to interview, supplying them with all necessary information

### Before you select your preferred candidate

- Ensure that a face-to-face interview is conducted for ALL shortlisted candidates based on an objective assessment of the candidate's ability to meet the person specification and job description
- Ensure that the interview panel consists of at least two people and that at least one person has completed a 'Safer Recruitment' training course.
- Ensure that all specific questions designed to gain required information about each candidate's suitability have been asked, including those needed to address any gaps in information supplied in the application form

### Before you formally appoint

- Ensure that you are able to make a confident selection of a preferred candidate based upon their demonstration of suitability for the role
- Ensure that your preferred candidate is informed that the offer of employment (including volunteer positions) is conditional on receiving satisfactory information from all necessary checks



*Key aspects of Safer Recruitment*



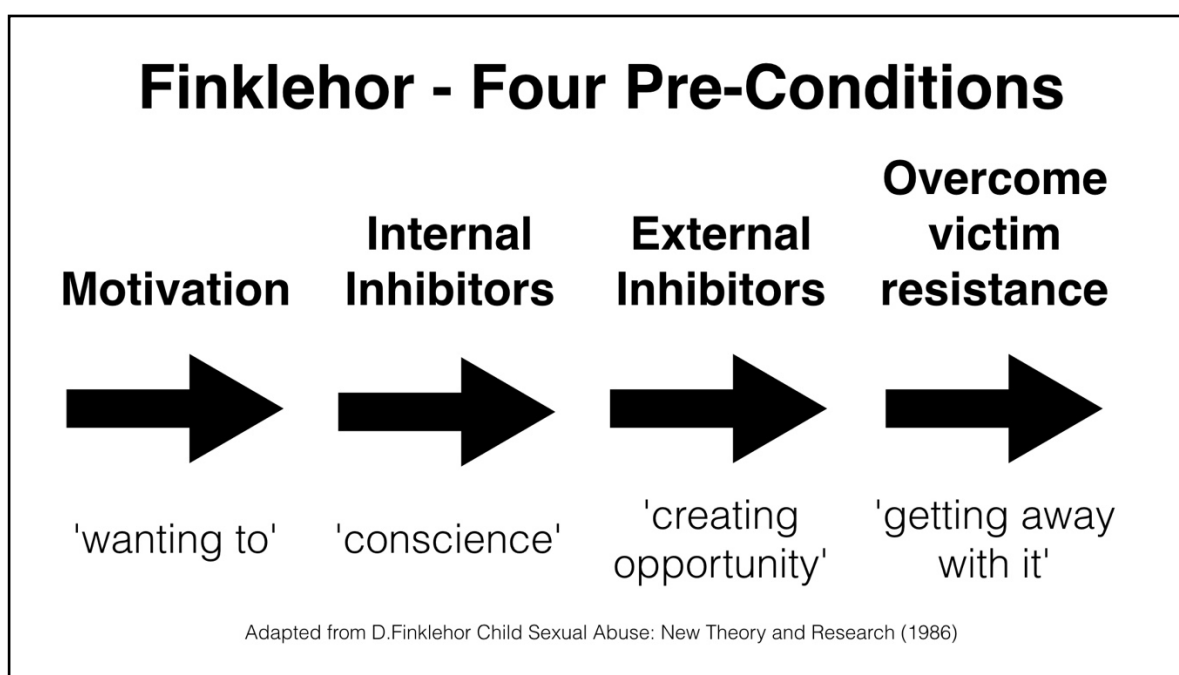
## Grooming of children for sexual abuse

Safer recruitment procedures are aimed at preventing people who have harmed children, or may harm children, from working in schools, either as a member of staff or a volunteer. However, we must also be aware that once people are working in school they may go on to abuse children.

Following a case where a teacher had been able to abuse over 50 boys on residential visits, the serious case review recommended that *'the Department for Education should be asked to revise the training requirements [for staff]...to include training on the modus operandi of sex offenders'*. Although this does form part of the Safer Recruitment training, most school staff do not receive any training on recognising grooming.

### The Finklehor Model

David Finklehor is a well-respected researcher in understanding child sexual abuse, in particular how adults groom children for abuse. Finklehor's research sets out four pre-conditions of abuse. It is the model of abuse that forms the foundation of Safer Recruitment procedures. Grooming is a gradual process and can take place over a long period of time.



### Stage 1 - Motivation

The person recognises that they have a sexual interest in children and that they are motivated to act on those feelings. This thinking is reinforced by fantasies.

## Stage 2 - Internal Inhibitors

The majority of perpetrators recognise that sexual offences against children are wrong, but they are able to rationalise this wrong-doing in some way so that they can override their conscience. The justification of their behaviour may include blaming the victim, denying their abusive conduct, minimising responsibility for their actions, or minimising the harm to the victim.

## Stage 3 - External Inhibitors

The opportunity for an offence to occur must be created by the perpetrator. These are not random acts. Potential offenders must place themselves in an environment where they can meet children. Some offenders have chosen to work in schools, so that they can abuse young people. Within the school context, people who go on to harm children will find opportunities during both school time, and out-of-hours.

Reducing the opportunity to offend in schools and protect children from harm is an important part of a safeguarding policies, including an effective staff code of conduct and creating environmental protections, such as windows in doors.

A significant external inhibitor in schools is the presence of other adults, systems and procedures, so it is important for the potential offender to groom staff (and/or parents) to ensure that they can circumvent any protections around the child, whilst appearing plausible. Many offenders in schools are well-regarded. This increases the likelihood that any children reporting issues will not be believed, and thus there is a greater freedom to create opportunities to groom or offend.

## Stage 4 - Overcome Victim Resistance

This is the 'offending stage'. There has often been a slow process of developing a trusting relationship. Typically, vulnerable children will be targeted. The offender will often create a 'special' relationship involving greater (social) contact, rewards and/or threats, bribes, or 'trickery' to behave in increasingly inappropriate ways. The offender will usually aim to maintain the relationship and so continue to harm the child. Offenders may come across as kind to the children, but also show glimpses of anger that serve to intimidate or threaten.

*'Grooming' is not a specific form of child sexual exploitation but should be seen as a way in which perpetrators target children and manipulate their environments. It is an approach to exploitation and may be the beginning of a complex process adopted by abusers. Grooming can be defined as developing the trust of a young person or his or her family in order to engage in illegal sexual activity or for others to engage in illegal sexual activity with that child or young person.*

Crown Prosecution Service

## Who is at most risk?

Those at most risk include:

- Children with disabilities
- Children previously, or currently, abused or maltreated
- Children or families under stress, or with financial pressures, including poverty
- Children who are isolated, perhaps away from home, or socially excluded
- Children whose backgrounds are chaotic or dysfunctional



Although the signs in the diagram above, may be seen in the grooming process, there are legitimate reasons for some of them and so they are only intended as a guide. Transparency in all actions is important.

Whilst there is no reason for children to be 'following' staff on their private social media accounts, schools do use email between staff and students, and sometimes have school social media accounts. In these cases, schools need very clear policies on professional social media use; and should, for example, have more than one administrator for the account.

In many cases of the sexual abuse of children in schools by staff the work with, other staff have often been distracted by the person's often charismatic or imposing personality. Such offenders typically grooming the family too, by getting to know them, stepping over professional boundaries and by making frequent home visits. To counter this possibility, schools should be clear about the purpose of such visits, limit them to relevant staff members and have a professional protocol about behaviour, relationships and recognise the need to record such visits.

## **Reducing the risk of grooming and abuse by staff**

The risk of grooming and sexual abuse of staff can be minimised by creating a strong safeguarding culture and by raising awareness of the potential for harm in the school itself. An open culture, where staff feel that they can ask questions about the conduct of other adults and speak to relevant school leaders, including the designated safeguarding lead, headteachers or governors.

Safer Recruitment processes must be as effective as possible, and ensure that, as far as possible, the background and motivations of potential employees is checked out. A robust code of professional conduct can make it easier for people to raise concerns and for leaders to take action. Staff who realise that they have inadvertently breached the code, should report the incident to the head or deputy head, or ask for permission if the breach is planned.

*For further information on 'Concerns or allegations that do not meet the harm threshold (low level concerns), see KCSIE (2025), page 107.*

## **Managing Allegations against staff**

Allegations and complaints against staff can be minimised by having:

- Safer Recruitment strategies in place
- Appropriate induction and training
- Open and transparent safeguarding ethos
- Professional code of conduct
- Regular briefing and discussion of safeguarding issues
- Ensuring that children are aware of safeguarding issues through the curriculum, eg. PSHE

An allegation is any information which indicates that a member of staff/volunteer may have:

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child or may have harmed a child;
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or
- behaved towards a child or children in such a way that indicates he or she would pose a risk of harm if they worked regularly or closely with a child
- behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children (incident does not necessarily involve a child, for example, domestic abuse)

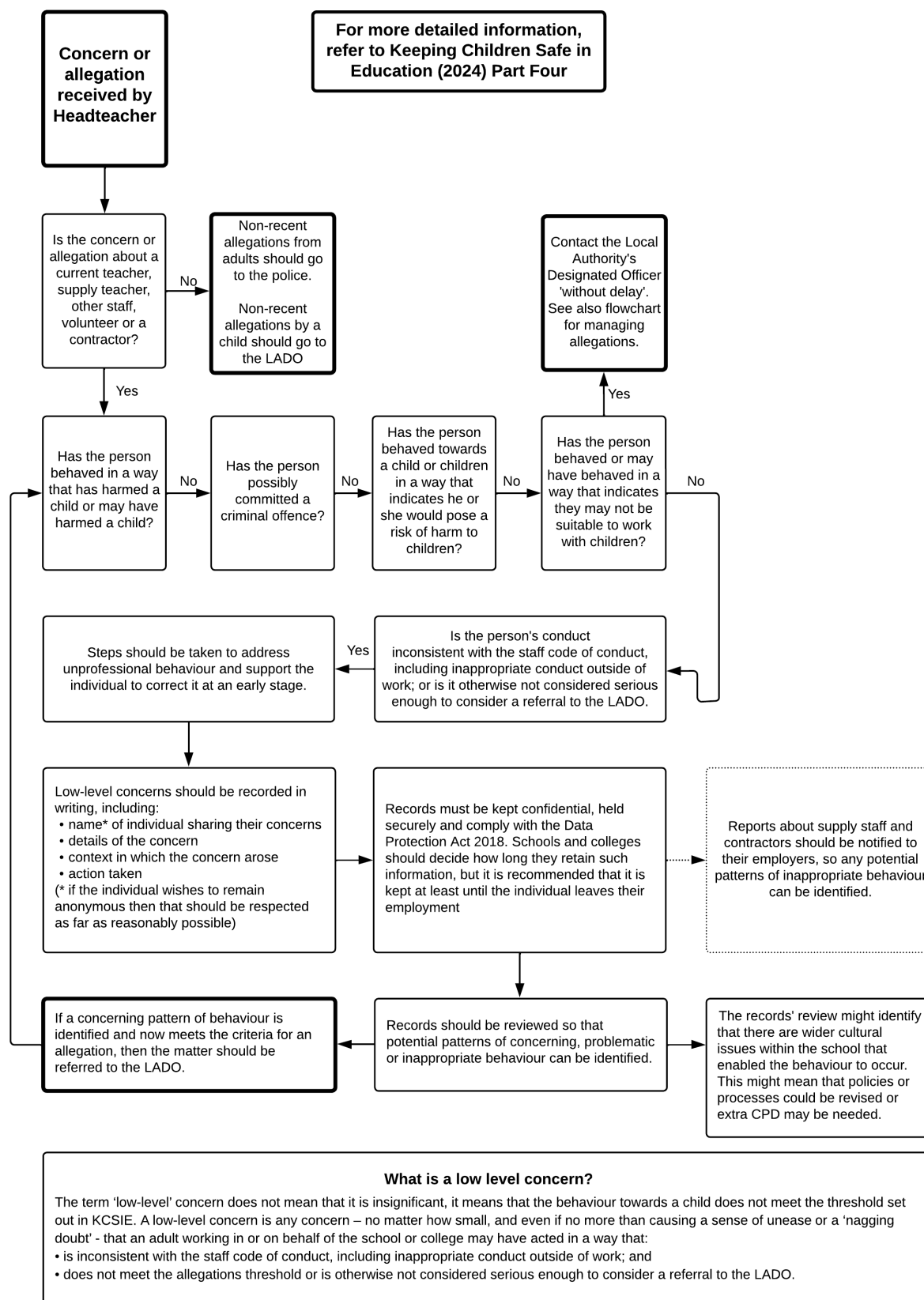
This applies to any child the member of staff/volunteer has contact with in their personal, professional or community life.

When an allegation is received:

- Take the matter seriously and keep an open mind.
- Do not investigate
- Do not promise confidentiality to the informant
- Make a written record of the allegation using the informant's words (including time, date and place where the alleged incident took place, what was said and anyone else present; sign and date)
- If the concerns are about the Headteacher, then the Chair of Governors or the Vice Chair should be contacted, in the absence of the Chair.
- The Designated Safeguarding Officer or Headteacher must immediately contact the Local Authority Designated Officer(s) (DO)
- Decisions must not be made without a discussion with the LADO
- Make a written record of discussions with LADO and others
- Make sure LADO has full details of the person against whom a concern has been raised and the person who is the subject of the concern

## Flowchart for the initial management of allegations about staff or volunteers

Managing low level concerns raised in relation to teachers, including supply teachers, other staff, volunteers and contractors



## Dealing with Allegations of Abuse against Teachers and Other Staff

(See 'Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025)' Part Four)

**NB** *The summary below gives an overview of the processes involved in dealing with allegations. Managers in such situations must consult LSCB procedures and the latest DfE guidance in 'Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025)' Part Four.*

All schools must have a policy for dealing with allegations against staff. The DfE Guidance on managing such allegations is statutory and must, therefore, be taken into account, as should any local procedures. The DfE guidance covers all staff working with children and young people, either paid or voluntary, permanent staff or temporary. The policy must include contact details for the Local Authority Designated Officer(s) (Often known as the LADO).

All staff should be aware of who they should take their concern to.

Safeguarding or child protection allegations about members of staff must be reported immediately to the headteacher.

Allegations against the headteacher should be taken to the Chair of Governors.

These concerns must be discussed immediately with the LADO.

Employers have a duty of care to their employees. They should ensure they provide effective support for anyone facing an allegation and provide the employee with a named contact if they are suspended

### Key issues to note:

- Priority should be given to resolving the matter as soon as possible (usually within one month)
- Staff should not be automatically suspended
- Allegations found to be unfounded or malicious should be removed from personnel records
- Pupils making malicious allegations should face appropriate sanctions
- Schools should also ensure that they liaise with the LADO about any allegations about supply teachers. Schools should not simply cease using the person without ensuring that they have established all the facts.

To be considered under these guidelines, the allegation must meet the following criteria.

The person must have:

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child or may have harmed a child;
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or

- behaved towards a child or children in such a way that indicates he or she would pose a risk of harm if they worked regularly or closely with a child.
- behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.

Cases which do not meet the above criteria should be dealt with using 'local arrangements'.

### **Initial Considerations**

Where the concern meets the criteria, the designated person should immediately contact the Local Authority Designated Officer(s) (LADO). The LADO is responsible for the oversight of allegations against adults working in the local authority, liaising with a range of agencies and ensuring such matters are dealt with consistently and in a timely fashion.

The initial discussion with the LADO will consider the nature of allegation and the course of action.

### **Actions to be agreed:**

- What further information is required?
- Whether any immediate action needs to be taken to protect pupils
- When and what should the parents be told
- What should be said to the adult facing the allegation?
- Whether suspending the member of staff is required
- Suspension should not be an automatic response
- Suspension should only be considered where:
  - children are at risk of serious harm
  - where the concern is so serious that it would result in immediate dismissal
  - The reason for suspension must be communicated to the person in writing within one day.
  - Alternatives to suspension might include alternative work, the deployment of another adult to work alongside the accused person, moving the children or reallocating the classes involved.



## Outcome of Allegations

The outcome of allegation investigations should be identified as one of the following:

Outcome Type	Definition	Action after investigation	Recording
Substantiated	There is sufficient evidence to prove the allegation.	Discussion with HR and/or other professionals, about referral to DBS and/or NCTL for Disciplinary Hearing	There should be a clear and comprehensive summary of the allegation, details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, and a note of any action taken and decisions reached. This should be kept in the confidential personnel file of the accused, and a copy provided to the person concerned  The record should be retained at least until the accused has reached normal pension age or for a period of 10 years from the date of the allegation if that is longer.
False	There is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation.	Where the allegation is found to be false, unsubstantiated, or malicious, the information should not be included in any reference.	
Unsubstantiated	This is not the same as a false allegation. It means that there is insufficient evidence to prove or disprove the allegation. The term, therefore, does not imply guilt or innocence.		
Malicious	There is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation and there has been a deliberate act to deceive.		Details of allegations that are found to have been malicious should be removed from personnel records.

In addition, there is a further outcome type (unfounded) which schools may wish to use, after liaison with their HR/legal advisors.

**\*Unfounded:** there is no evidence or proper basis which supports the allegation being made. It might also indicate that the person making the allegation misinterpreted the incident or was mistaken about what they saw. Alternatively, they may not have been aware of all the circumstances.

## Low level concerns about staff

Guidance about 'low level' concerns about staff, volunteers and other adults that might work in the school, including contractors and supply staff can be found in Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) page 106. Low level concerns are not insignificant: these are concerns about a person's behaviour which might not meet the threshold for an 'allegation' which would need to be referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). Although Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) says that the headteacher/principal should be the ultimate decision maker in respect of all low-level concerns, some local authority guidance says that heads must contact the LADO about allegations and low level concerns. Schools should follow their local guidance.

Low level concerns include behaviours or working practices that are inconsistent with the staff code of conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work. These behaviours might include:

- being over friendly with children;
- having favourites;
- taking photographs of children on their mobile phone;
- engaging with a child on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or behind a closed door; or,
- using inappropriate sexualised, intimidating or offensive language.

It is important then that the staff code of conduct is clear and that there is effective induction into the school, so that all staff understand the expectations. Where there are breaches of the code of conduct, the behaviour policy or safeguarding policy appropriate action should be taken in a timely manner. This should also prompt a review of the policy which may need strengthening or clarifying.

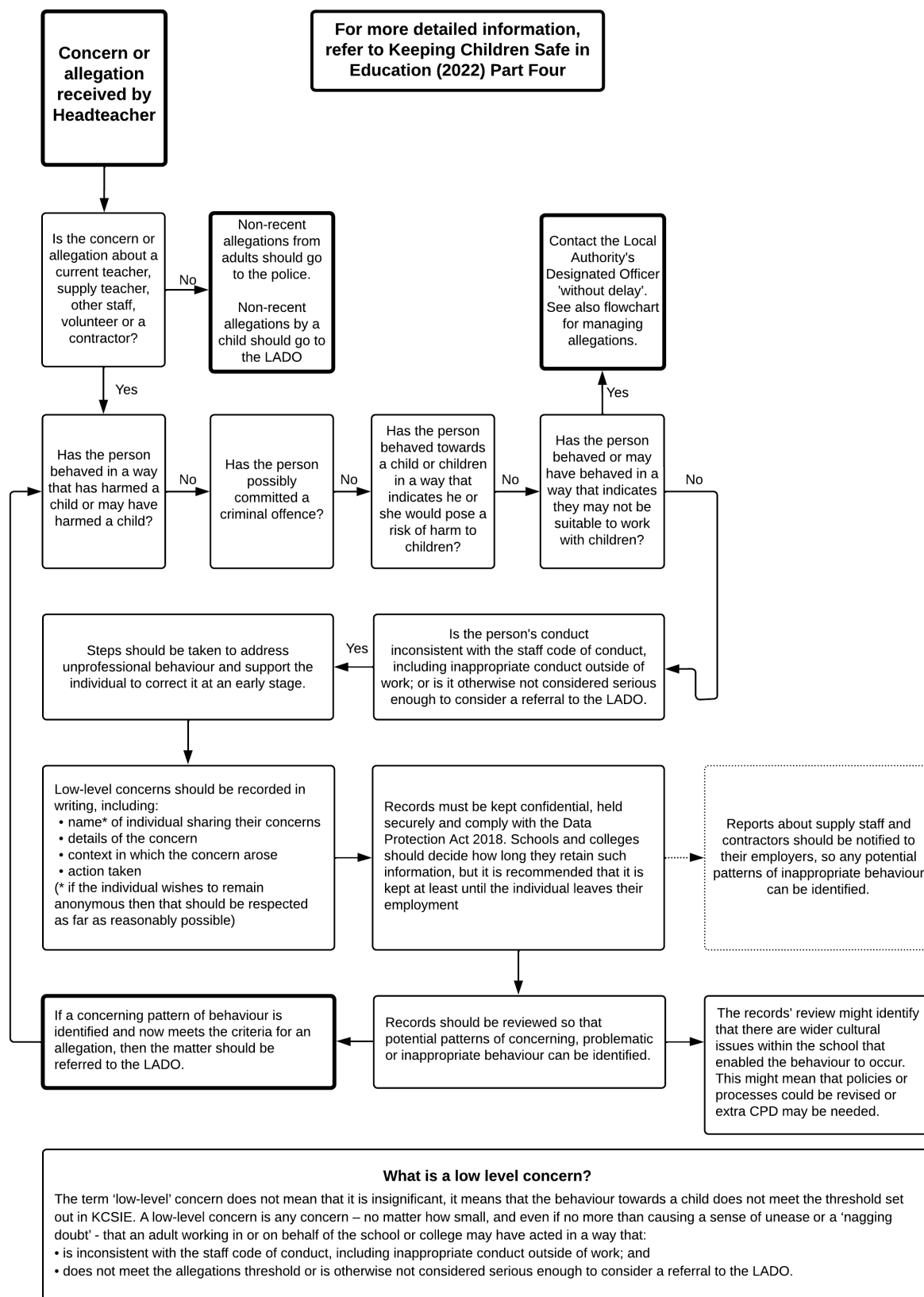
School leaders should endeavour to create a school culture of 'openness, trust and transparency', so that staff are empowered to identify concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour.

Managing low level concerns is important, not least because people who groom children for abuse often push boundaries and may not feel bound by the code of conduct. Early discussions with staff about their behaviour will keep children safer and reduce risk of harm.

### Further information

[Developing and implementing a low-level concerns policy: A guide for organisations which work with children \(Farrer & Co.\)](#)

### Managing low level concerns raised in relation to teachers, including supply teachers, other staff, volunteers and contractors



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## **The Role of the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)**

(Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) Annex C)

All schools must appoint a member of staff from the senior leadership team to the role of designated safeguarding lead. Where there are deputy DSLs, these people should be trained the same standard as the DSL, and the role should be detailed in their job description. Although the activities of the DSL can be delegated, the ultimate responsibility remains with them.

In proprietor-led schools, it is not appropriate for the proprietor to be the DSL. Proprietors should consider the provision of independent, external advice for the DSL. The DSL's job description should refer to the need to contact the LADO in matters that cannot be appropriately dealt with in the school, including low level concerns or allegations about the proprietor (or their family).

The DSL should have the appropriate authority and be given the time, funding, training, resources and support to provide advice and support to other staff on child welfare and child protection matters, to take part in strategy discussions and inter-agency meetings – and/or support other staff to do so – and to contribute to the assessment of children.

Any deputy DSLs should be trained to the same standard as the designated safeguarding lead and the role should be explicit in their job description.

### **Availability**

During term time the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) should always be available (during school or college hours) for staff in the school or college to discuss any safeguarding concerns. Whilst generally speaking the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) would be expected to be available in person, it is a matter for individual schools and colleges, working with the designated safeguarding lead, to define what “available” means and whether in exceptional circumstances availability via phone and or Skype or other such media is acceptable. It is a matter for individual schools and colleges and the designated safeguarding lead to arrange adequate and appropriate cover arrangements for any out of hours/out of term activities.

### **Managing referrals**

The designated safeguarding lead is expected to refer cases:

- of suspected abuse and neglect to the local authority children's social care as required and support staff who make referrals to local authority children's social care
- to the Channel programme where there is a radicalisation concern as required

and support staff who make referrals to the Channel programme

- where a person is dismissed or left due to risk/harm to a child to the Disclosure and Barring Service as required, and
- where a crime may have been committed to the Police as required. NPCC - [When to call the police](#) should help understand when to consider calling the police and what to expect when working with the police. Find

### **Working with others**

The designated safeguarding lead is expected to:

- act as a source of support, advice and expertise for all staff
- act as a point of contact with the safeguarding partners
- liaise with the headteacher or principal to inform him or her of issues- especially ongoing enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 and police investigations. This should include being aware of the requirement for children to have an Appropriate Adult. Further information can be found in the Statutory guidance - PACE Code C 2019.
- as required, liaise with the “case manager” (as per Part four) and the local authority designated officer(s) (LADO) for child protection concerns in cases which concern a staff member
- liaise with staff (especially teachers, pastoral support staff, school nurses, IT technicians, senior mental health leads and special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCO's), or the named person with oversight for SEND in a college and senior mental health leads) on matters of safety and safeguarding and welfare (including online and digital safety) and when deciding whether to make a referral by liaising with relevant agencies so that children's needs are considered holistically
- liaise with the senior mental health lead and, where available, the mental health support team, where safeguarding concerns are linked to mental health
- promote supportive engagement with parents and/or carers in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, including where families may be facing challenging circumstances
- work with the headteacher and relevant strategic leads, taking lead responsibility for promoting educational outcomes by knowing the welfare, safeguarding and child protection issues that children in need are experiencing, or have experienced, and identifying the impact that these

issues might be having on children's attendance, engagement and achievement at school or college. This includes:

- ensuring that the school or college knows who its cohort of children who have or have had a social worker are, understanding their academic progress and attainment, and maintaining a culture of high aspirations for this cohort, and
- supporting teaching staff to provide additional academic support or reasonable adjustments to help children who have or have had a social worker reach their potential, recognising that even when statutory social care intervention has ended, there is still a lasting impact on children's educational outcomes.

### **Information sharing and managing the child protection file**

The designated safeguarding lead is responsible for ensuring that child protection files are kept up to date.

Information should be kept confidential and stored securely. It is good practice to keep concerns and referrals in a separate child protection file for each child.

Records should include:

- a clear and comprehensive summary of the concern
- details of how the concern was followed up and resolved
- a note of any action taken, decisions reached and the outcome.

They should ensure the file is only accessed by those who need to see it and where the file or content within it is shared, this happens in line with information sharing advice as set out in Part one and Part two of this guidance.

Where children leave the school or college (including in year transfers) the designated safeguarding lead should ensure their child protection file is transferred to the new school or college as soon as possible, and within 5 days for an in-year transfer or within the first 5 days of the start of a new term. This should be transferred separately from the main pupil file, ensuring secure transit, and confirmation of receipt should be obtained. Receiving schools and colleges should ensure key staff such as designated safeguarding leads and special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCO's) or the named person with oversight for SEND in colleges, are aware as required.

Lack of information about their circumstances can impact on the child's safety, welfare and educational outcomes. In addition to the child protection file, the

designated safeguarding lead should also consider if it would be appropriate to share any additional information with the new school or college in advance of a child leaving to help them put in place the right support to safeguard this child and to help the child thrive in the school or college. For example, information that would allow the new school or college to continue supporting children who have had a social worker and been victims of abuse and have that support in place for when the child arrives.

### **Raising awareness**

The designated safeguarding lead should:

- ensure each member of staff has access to, and understands, the school's or college's child protection policy and procedures, especially new and part-time staff
- ensure the school's or college's child protection policy is reviewed annually (as a minimum) and the procedures and implementation are updated and reviewed regularly, and work with governing bodies or proprietors regarding this
- ensure the child protection policy is available publicly and parents know that referrals about suspected abuse or neglect may be made and the role of the school or college in this
- link with the safeguarding partner arrangements to make sure staff are aware of any training opportunities and the latest local policies on local safeguarding arrangements, and
- help promote educational outcomes by sharing the information about the welfare, safeguarding and child protection issues that children who have or have had a social worker are experiencing with teachers and school and college leadership staff

### **Training, knowledge and skills**

The designated safeguarding lead (and any deputies) should undergo training to provide them with the knowledge and skills required to carry out the role. This training should be updated at least every two years. The designated safeguarding lead (and any deputies) should also undertake Prevent awareness training. Training should provide designated safeguarding leads with a good understanding of their own role, how to identify, understand and respond to specific needs that can increase the vulnerability of children, as well as specific harms that can put children at risk, and the processes, procedures and responsibilities of other agencies, particularly local authority children's social care, so they:

- understand the assessment process for providing early help and statutory intervention, including local criteria for action and local authority children's social care referral arrangements<sup>156</sup>
- have a working knowledge of how local authorities conduct a child protection case conference and a child protection review conference and be able to attend and contribute to these effectively when required to do so
- understand the importance of the role the designated safeguarding lead has in providing information and support to local authority children social care in order to safeguard and promote the welfare of children
- understand the lasting impact that adversity and trauma can have, including on children's behaviour, mental health and wellbeing, and what is needed in responding to this in promoting educational outcomes
- are alert to the specific needs of children in need, those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), those with relevant health conditions and young carers<sup>157</sup>
- understand the importance of information sharing, both within the school and college, and with the safeguarding partners, other agencies, organisations and practitioners
- understand and support the school or college with regards to the requirements of the Prevent duty and are able to provide advice and support to staff on protecting children from the risk of radicalisation
- are able to understand the unique risks associated with online safety and be confident that they have the relevant knowledge and up to date capability required to keep children safe whilst they are online at school or college
- can recognise the additional risks that children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) face online, for example, from bullying, grooming and radicalisation and are confident they have the capability to support children with SEND to stay safe online
- obtain access to resources and attend any relevant or refresher training courses, and
- encourage a culture of listening to children and taking account of their wishes and feelings, among all staff, in any measures the school or college may put in place to protect them.

In addition to the formal training set out above, their knowledge and skills should be refreshed (this might be via e-bulletins, meeting other designated safeguarding



leads, or simply taking time to read and digest safeguarding developments) at regular intervals, as required, and at least annually, to allow them to understand and keep up with any developments relevant to their role.

### **Providing support to staff**

Training should support the designated safeguarding lead in developing expertise, so they can support and advise staff and help them feel confident on welfare, safeguarding and child protection matters. This includes specifically to:

- ensure that staff are supported during the referrals processes, and
- support staff to consider how safeguarding, welfare and educational outcomes are linked, including to inform the provision of academic and pastoral support.

### **Understanding the views of children**

It is important that all children feel heard and understood. Therefore, designated safeguarding leads (and deputies) should be supported in developing knowledge and skills to:

- encourage a culture of listening to children and taking account of their wishes and feelings, among all staff, and in any measures the school or college may put in place to protect them, and,
- understand the difficulties that children may have in approaching staff about their circumstances and consider how to build trusted relationships which facilitate communication.

### **Holding and sharing information**

The critical importance of recording, holding, using and sharing information effectively is set out in Parts one, two and five of this document, and therefore the designated safeguarding lead should be equipped to:

- understand the importance of information sharing, both within the school and college, and with other schools and colleges on transfer including in-year and between primary and secondary education, and with the safeguarding partners, other agencies, organisations and practitioners
- understand relevant data protection legislation and regulations, especially the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and
- be able to keep detailed, accurate, secure written records of concerns and referrals and understand the purpose of this record-keeping.

## **Safeguarding Learning and Development**

The onus on schools is to take their safeguarding duties seriously and ensure that the steps they take are effective in protecting children and young people. Ensuring the school has a knowledgeable staff who are aware of the risk to young people is the essence of good training.

Schools are free to use any training provider they choose. It should also be noted that there is no national accreditation for safeguarding or child protection training.

### **Induction Training**

When staff and volunteers start working in the school, they should be immediately aware of how to report any concerns they may have about children and young people in the school. In the first instance, they should be told to speak to their line manager.

Designated Safeguarding staff are responsible for ensuring that all staff are inducted into the school's safeguarding procedures ideally within two weeks of starting work in the school.

During this induction training, new staff should have read:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education, Part One;
- the staff Code of Conduct, including information about low-level concerns;
- the behaviour policy; and
- the school's procedures for children missing education

The Induction training should provide sufficient information for staff and volunteers to be able to answer the following questions with confidence:

- What is your role and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people?
- Who is the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and alternates in your school?
- What are the categories, signs and indicators of abuse?
- What is the procedure in your school for disclosures and how do you record these in your school?
- Where would you find the school's safeguarding policy?

- Who is the named Safeguarding Governor or Chair of Governors and how would you contact them
- Who would you speak to if you have concerns about a member of staff?
- Who would you speak to if you have concerns about the Headteacher?
- What are the professional standards of conduct in this school?

## **All Staff Training**

Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) says that, 'All staff should receive appropriate safeguarding and child protection training which is regularly updated. In addition, all staff should receive safeguarding and child protection updates (for example, via email, e-bulletins and staff meetings), as required, and at least annually, to provide them with relevant skills and knowledge to safeguard children effectively.'

Schools will need to consider how frequently they should offer training given their context and the local risk factors.

In the Designated Safeguarding Lead's safeguarding report to governors, a statement should be made which refers to the training opportunities and the effectiveness of the training.

## **Prevent Duty**

All staff should have training to help them understand the duties on schools from the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015.

## **Designated Safeguarding Lead**

The DSL training should include a clear understanding of all aspects of their role, including strategic overview, child protection procedures, supporting other staff and the need to work with partner agencies. DSLs must refresh their training every two years, and keep their knowledge up to date in the meantime.

Principal elements of specific training are likely to include the following:

- identification of the signs and symptoms of abuse
- relevant legislation and guidance
- national and locally agreed procedures
- managing disclosures
- confidentiality
- recording and keeping safe records: transfer of information

- how local statutory services are configured and referral processes
- thresholds for referral
- making referrals
- contact with parents
- initial and core assessments, child protection conferences, review conferences, and child protection plans
- training and supporting staff
- writing a policy, procedures and guidance for staff.

### **Safer Recruitment**

Schools and colleges must create a culture of safe recruitment and, as part of that, adopt recruitment procedures that help deter, reject or identify people who might harm children. Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) sets out important aspects of Safer Recruitment in Part 3.

School Staffing (England) Regulations (2009) state that at least one member of every recruitment panel must have undertaken safer recruitment training. Schools may choose their own provider of this training. There is no statutory requirement to refresh this training.

### **Governors**

The responsibilities of the governing body are set out in legislation and statutory guidance. It is best practice for all governors to understand their role and how the school carries out its safeguarding and child protection responsibilities.

Since Keeping Children Safe in Education was published in September 2023, governing bodies and proprietors should ensure that all governors and trustees receive appropriate safeguarding and child protection (including online) training at induction. This training should equip them with the knowledge to provide strategic challenge to test and assure themselves that the safeguarding policies and procedures in place in schools and colleges are effective and support the delivery of a robust whole school approach to safeguarding. Their training should be regularly updated.

### **CPD Matrix**

A matrix showing the knowledge that staff are expected to have can be found in Appendix A of this handbook.

## The Role of the Governing Body

The Governing Body has a duty to ensure that the school meets its statutory responsibilities and ensure that the children and young people attending the school are safe. This applies equally to all school settings, including maintained schools, academies and free schools.

*Section 175 of the Education Act 2002, and regulations under section 157 relating to safeguarding pupils in Independent Schools (including academies), place a duty on the governing bodies of maintained schools, and academy trusts, to have arrangements in place to ensure that they:*

- *carry out their functions with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children; and*
- *have regard to the statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State in considering what arrangements they need to make for the purpose of that section.*

The statutory guidance, Keeping Children Safe in Education, places statutory requirements on all governing bodies.

*Boards must ensure their schools have effective safeguarding policies and procedures in place that take into account local risks, any statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State, any LA guidance and locally agreed inter-agency procedures.*

Governing Bodies will decide for themselves how they organise their strategic and monitoring functions. Keeping Children Safe in Education and Working Together to Safeguard Children both set out that an individual on the governing body should take leadership responsibility for the organisation's wider safeguarding arrangements, which include the Prevent duty.

The Competency Framework for Governance says that 'everyone on the board should understand the duties relating to safeguarding, including the Prevent Duty.

To make sure governors have the knowledge and information they need to perform their functions and understand their responsibilities, everyone on the board has training about safeguarding.

### Attendance

In addition to the statutory responsibility to record the attendance of pupils, it is important that Governors ensure that they understand the follow up processes for

absence. An important risk factor in abuse and neglect is poor school attendance and tackling that is a key aspect of managing student safety.

## **School Security**

Governing bodies are responsible for ensuring that the school is a safe place. Managing the school perimeter and access to buildings is a significant aspect of security, as is the management of staff and visitors to the school. It is good practice for schools to aim for one entrance where reception staff can manage visitors. At this single point of entry, staff should be able to prevent access to the school to visitors without satisfactory identification and a reason for their visit. It is helpful if visitors to the school can be readily identified and visitor badges should be worn. In this way anyone with a badge can be politely challenged. Many schools now use ID badges for all staff, particularly in higher risk situations, including inner city areas, large sites and special schools. Some schools also issue badges for pupils, particularly to sixth form students who may not be wearing school uniform.

## **Safer Recruitment**

A key aspect of safeguarding is the vetting of applicants and prospective volunteers working with children to make sure they are not unsuitable. Guidance about this is in Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) (Part Three); and is part of the Safer Recruitment training.

Governing bodies must be clear about the checking and vetting processes, before shortlisting, during the interviews and afterwards. They should be assured there are effective processes in place for arranging checks, including DBS, identity, right to work in the UK and any required overseas police checks, often called a 'Certificate of Good Conduct'.

The governing body or academy trust must reassure itself that all appropriate suitability checks have been undertaken and that the school keeps a single central record, detailing the range of checks it has carried out on its staff.

When making appointments, governing bodies and academy trusts will need to reassure themselves that mechanisms are in place within the school to check that any person employed to teach has the required teaching qualifications and has successfully completed any statutory induction required.

## **Allegations against staff and volunteers**

Governing bodies must have a clear policy and procedures for managing allegations against staff. Chairs of governing bodies are expected to work with the headteacher (unless the allegation concerns the headteacher) and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) to confirm the facts about individual cases. They are also expected to reach a joint decision on the way forward in each case.

In cases that involve the headteacher, the Chair of Governors is the key person to deal with the allegation.

### **Referring cases to the Teaching Regulation Agency and the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)**

Allegations of serious misconduct against a teacher may be referred to the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA) when they have dismissed a teacher for misconduct, or would have dismissed them had they not resigned first.

A referral to the DBS must be made if someone has harmed, or poses a risk of harm to a child and who has been removed from working (paid or unpaid) in regulated activity, or would have been removed had they not left. Referrals should be made to both the DBS and the TRA in cases where there is alleged serious teacher misconduct as well as harm or risk of harm to a child.

DBS Referrals: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-barring-referrals-to-the-dbs>

TRA Referrals: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/teacher-misconduct-referral-form](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teacher-misconduct-referral-form)

### **Allegations of abuse made against other children**

Governing bodies should recognise that children are capable of abusing their peers and ensure their child protection policy includes procedures to minimise the risk of child-on-child abuse and sets out how allegations of child-on-child abuse will be investigated and dealt with.

### **Prevent Duty**

Since the July 2015 all schools must have “due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism” under section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015. This duty is known as the Prevent duty.

### **Promoting the welfare of pupils**

All governing bodies (including those in maintained schools, academies, free schools and independent schools) need to ensure that pupils at the school are being adequately being cared for and protected from harm while in school.

‘Wellbeing’ as defined in the Children Act 2004 includes:

- physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing; and
- protection from harm and neglect;

**Statutory Responsibilities with regard to Safeguarding**

	Maintained Schools	Academies	Independent Schools	Published on website
School Behaviour Policy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sex Education Policy	Yes	Yes		
Special Educational Needs and Disability Report	Yes	Yes		Yes
Single Central Record of Recruitment And Vetting Checks	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Register of Pupil Attendance	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Staff Discipline, Conduct and Grievance Policy	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Child Protection Policy and Procedures	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Statement of Procedures for dealing with allegations of abuse against staff	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Statement of procedures for dealing with allegations of abuse made against other children	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Safeguarding report to Governing Body	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Prevent Duty	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Duty to promote wellbeing of pupils	Yes	Yes	Yes	



## **Mental Health**

Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure they have clear systems and processes in place for identifying possible mental health problems, including routes to escalate and clear referral and accountability systems. (See: *Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025)*, paragraph 183)

All staff should be aware that mental health problems can, in some cases, be an indicator that a child has suffered or is at risk of suffering abuse, neglect or exploitation.

Where children have suffered abuse and neglect, or other potentially traumatic adverse childhood experiences, this can have a lasting impact throughout childhood, adolescence and into adulthood. It is key that staff are aware of how these children's experiences, can impact on their mental health, behaviour, and education.

## **Cyber Security**

School security plans should also 'include an assessment of cyber security risk. A cyber security incident can result in a data breach where sensitive personal information on pupils, parents and staff is accessed without permission. This can have implications for safeguarding and can also result in serious disruption to the running of the school.'

## **Safeguarding Report to Governors**

The Safeguarding Report to Governors is a Statutory Duty arising out of the Education Act 2002 (Section 157). This Duty applies to maintained schools, academies and independent schools. The report, often undertaken annually, ensures that governors can monitor the school's compliance, highlight issues and plan for improvements. After tabling the report to the Governing Body, a copy should be filed with the minutes of the meeting.

The safeguarding report also provides information to the Local Authority, so that they can fulfil their statutory duty under section 14B of the Children Act 2004. This Act states that schools and colleges must supply information to the Local Safeguarding Children Board (Children Act 2004 section 11) in order to perform its functions and for monitoring the compliance of schools to safeguarding children and young people (regardless of the school's status).

The report is an opportunity for governors to discuss safeguarding and child protection at a strategic level. It is not a place for the discussion of individual cases and anonymity must be preserved. Having said that, many DSLs and governors find it useful to discuss redacted case studies to help understand local issues, strengths and areas for development,

The report should be prepared by the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

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## **Key points to include in a Safeguarding Report to Governors**

- Period Covered
- Name of report author and date presented to governors
- Names of Designated Safeguarding Lead(s)
- CPD Record (of staff at all levels), and the effectiveness of training
- Audit of relevant policies and review dates
- Number of initial referrals made, separated into physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, child sexual exploitation; any Prevent/Channel referrals; FGM referrals; and children missing education
- Number of Meetings Attended by type:
  - Initial Child Protection Conference
  - Professionals' Strategy meeting
  - Child Protection Review Conference
  - Core Group Meeting
  - Common Assessment Framework – CAF
- Number of pupils subject to a Child Protection Plan
- Number of Children in Public Care ('Looked After Children')
- Number of allegations made against staff
- Other comments on safeguarding issues or concerns
- Comparison information from previous year
- Trends and impact of any new legislation or guidance
- Any deficiencies in the safeguarding procedures and actions required to rectify them
- Progress towards outcomes set in the safeguarding development plan
- Observations and any action from learning walks or other monitoring events
- Pupil viewpoints

The safeguarding report is often a standing item on many full governing body agendas and sometimes governors may have a specific sub-committee where this is discussed. Although the statutory requirement is for an annual report, many schools and academies receive reports more frequently.

## Contextual Safeguarding

(Also referred to as Extra-familial Harms – see KCSIE (2025) paragraph 21)

Contextual Safeguarding is a conceptual framework for understanding, assessing, and reducing the risk of harm from outside the family home.

Contextual Safeguarding is based on research and extensive trials in multi-agency safeguarding hubs, led by Dr Carlene Firmin, Principal Research Fellow, University of Bedfordshire. Information about the research and its practical application can be found at the Contextual Safeguarding network ([www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk](http://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk)). Membership of the network is free and a wealth of resources is available.

Contextual Safeguarding seeks to understand child protection risks from beyond the family. This becomes of increasing importance for adolescents who naturally begin to spend more time out of their home and under the influence of their peers. In the neighbourhood, young people can be negatively affected by a range of risks as they spend more and more time in retail areas, open spaces, and on public transport. Those seeking to safeguard young people therefore need to assess and intervene in these places.

Research shows us that teenagers are influenced more by their peers and wider relationships than their parents and the pervading attitudes and social norms of their social group may be positive or negative. A safe, supportive, and effective peer group will engender positive relationships, whilst negative experiences may lead to violent, coercive, and harmful behaviours.

Contextual Safeguarding extends the capacity to safeguard from the home to the neighbourhood, and other places where teenagers spend their time, including schools and colleges. Contextual Safeguarding theory considers the dynamic 'interplay' between the child, family, peers, school, and neighbourhood; and the 'weight of influence' presented by the attitude of their peers.

For example, while parents, carers, and teachers may emphasise the harm from smoking cannabis, the peer group may endemically play down the dangers and illegality, and may even imply that members of the group should smoke the drug to be accepted. The influence of the group is greater than that of parents.

Firmin and her colleagues identified four domains that need to be present for Contextual Safeguarding to be effective:

1. Target: prevent, identify, assess, and intervene with the social conditions of abuse

- |                      |                                                                                      |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2. Legislation:      | incorporate extra-familial contexts into child protection frameworks                 |
| 3. Partnerships:     | with sectors/individuals responsible for the nature extra-familial contexts          |
| 4. Outcome measures: | monitor outcomes for success in relation to contextual, as well as individual change |

The Contextual Safeguarding system aims to disrupt or limit harmful extra-familial contexts, to reduce the risk of harm. For example, a park as a source of sexual exploitation may have extra lighting installed, bushes cut back, and increased police or council patrols. There is an emphasis on everyone working in the neighbourhood to play their part, including street cleaners, bus drivers, and retailers. This contributes to a wider understanding of how the neighbourhood is used in antisocial or unsafe ways.

*"Children's social care assessments should consider where children are being harmed in contexts outside the home, so it is important that schools and colleges provide as much information as possible as part of the referral process. This will allow any assessment to consider all the available evidence and enable a contextual approach to address such harm."*

Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025), paragraph 58

When schools have concerns about teenagers in particular, they should always consider the wider context and sources of influence on the young person.

### **Further Information**

Contextual Safeguarding website  
[www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk](http://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk)

Contextual Safeguarding: System Review Toolkit  
<https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/toolkits/>

Beyond Referrals Toolkit (Harmful Sexual Behaviour)  
<https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/toolkits/>

## Child Sexual Exploitation

*For detailed guidance see*

Child sexual exploitation: definition and guide for practitioners (DfE) (2017)  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-sexual-exploitation-definition-and-guide-for-practitioners>

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse affecting boys and girls. Sexual abuse may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside clothing. It may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in the production of sexual images, forcing children to look at sexual images or watch sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet).

Child sexual exploitation may occur without the child being aware of events, or understanding that these constitute abuse.

**Child sexual exploitation is never the victim's fault**, even if there is some form of exchange: all children and young people under the age of 18 have a right to be safe and should be protected from harm.

### Definition:

*Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.*

Child sexual exploitation: definition and guide for practitioners (DfE)  
February 2017

### Child Sexual Exploitation:

- can affect any child or young person (male or female) under the age of 18 years, including 16 and 17 year olds who can legally consent to have sex; can still be abuse even if the sexual activity appears consensual;

- can include both contact (penetrative and non-penetrative acts) and non-contact sexual activity;
- can take place in person or via technology, or a combination of both;
- can involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and may, or may not, be accompanied by violence or threats of violence;
- may occur without the child or young person's immediate knowledge (through others copying videos or images they have created and posting on social media, for example);
- can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, and children or adults. The abuse can be a one-off occurrence or a series of incidents over time, and range from opportunistic to complex organised abuse; and
- is typified by some form of power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the abuse. Whilst age may be the most obvious, this power imbalance can also be due to a range of other factors including gender, sexual identity, cognitive ability, physical strength, status, and access to economic or other resources.

## **Consent**

Even where a young person is old enough to legally consent to sexual activity, the law states that consent is only valid where they make a choice and have the freedom and capacity to make that choice. If a child feels they have no other meaningful choice, are under the influence of harmful substances or fearful of what might happen if they don't comply (all of which are common features in cases of child sexual exploitation) consent cannot legally be given whatever the age of the child.

## **Key factor in Child Sexual Exploitation**

Child sexual exploitation involves some form of exchange (sexual activity in return for something) between the victim and/or perpetrator or facilitator. Where there is no such exchange, for example, where the gain for the perpetrator is sexual gratification (or the exercise of power or control), this is described as sexual abuse (and not exploitation).

The exchange can include both tangible (such as money, drugs or alcohol) and intangible rewards (such as status, protection or perceived receipt of love or affection). The receipt of something by a child/young person does not make them any less of a victim.

It is also important to note that the prevention of something negative can also fulfil the definition of exchange, for example a child who engages in sexual activity to stop someone carrying out a threat to harm his/her family.

## Links to other kinds of crime

- Child trafficking;
- Domestic abuse;
- Sexual violence in intimate relationships;
- Grooming (including online grooming);
- Abusive images of children and their distribution;
- Drugs-related offences;
- Gang-related activity;
- Immigration-related offences; and
- Domestic servitude.

## Potential Vulnerabilities

Although the following vulnerabilities increase the risk of child sexual exploitation, it must be remembered that not all children with these indicators will be exploited. Child sexual exploitation can occur without any of these issues.

- Having a prior experience of neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse;
- Lack of a safe/stable home environment, now or in the past (domestic violence or parental substance misuse, mental health issues or criminality, for example);
- Recent bereavement or loss;
- Social isolation or social difficulties;
- Absence of a safe environment to explore sexuality;
- Economic vulnerability;
- Homelessness or insecure accommodation status;
- Connections with other children and young people who are being sexually exploited;
- Family members or other connections involved in adult sex work;
- Having a physical or learning disability;
- Being in care (particularly those in residential care and those with interrupted care histories); and
- Sexual identity.

## Possible indicators of child sexual exploitation

- Acquisition of money, clothes, mobile phones, etc. without plausible explanation;
- Gang-association and/or isolation from peers/social networks;
- Exclusion or unexplained absences from school, college or work;
- Leaving home/care without explanation and persistently going missing or returning late;
- Excessive receipt of texts/phone calls;

- Returning home under the influence of drugs/alcohol;
- Inappropriate sexualised behaviour for age/sexually transmitted infections;
- Evidence of/suspicious of physical or sexual assault;
- Relationships with controlling or significantly older individuals or groups;
- Multiple callers (unknown adults or peers);
- Frequenting areas known for sex work;
- Concerning use of internet or other social media;
- Increasing secretiveness around behaviours; and
- Self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being.

## **Online Exploitation**

All young people are at risk from online exploitation, and be unaware that this is happening. Online exploitation includes the exchange of sexual communication or images and can be particularly challenging to identify and respond to. Children, young people and perpetrators are frequently more familiar with, and spend more time in, these environments than their parents and carers.

Online child sexual exploitation allows perpetrators to initiate contact with multiple potential victims and offers a perception of anonymity. Where exploitation does occur online, the transfer of images can be quickly and easily shared with others which makes it difficult to contain the potential for further abuse.

## **Children may be perpetrators of abuse**

It must be recognised that children may also be perpetrators of abuse, sometimes at the same time as being abused themselves. (see Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment)

## **Further information:**

Child sexual exploitation: definition and guide for practitioners (DfE 2017)  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-sexual-exploitation-definition-and-guide-for-practitioners>



## Safeguarding and Mental Health

*“Mental health problems can, in some cases, be an indicator that a child has suffered or is at risk of suffering abuse, neglect or exploitation. Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure they have clear systems and processes in place for identifying possible mental health problems, including routes to escalate and clear referral and accountability systems.”*

Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025), paragraph 183

The Department for Education (DfE) is encouraging schools to appoint Senior Mental Health Leads (SMHL). This role is not mandatory and may well look different in different schools. The aim is to develop a coordinated approach to tackling the growing challenge of poor mental ill-health in children and young people. The DfE expects that the SMHL will be a member of, or supported by, the senior leadership team, and could be the pastoral lead, SENCO, or designated safeguarding lead.

The legacy of traumatic events is often reflected in a life-long impact on mental health and potential barriers to learning, both academic and social. Poor mental health as a result of trauma can often manifest in a young person’s behaviour, both outward and inward.

Trauma can arise from abuse, exploitation and neglect, even when there is no obvious cause. When considering behaviour, particularly that which some staff may regard as ‘challenging’, consideration should be given to a potential safeguarding issue, either currently or in the past.

Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) says that schools should ‘ensure they have clear systems and processes in place for identifying possible mental health problems, including routes to escalate and clear referral and accountability systems.’

It is not the role of school staff to provide a diagnosis, only appropriately trained specialists are able to do so. Staff who know their pupils well will be able to make observations that can support colleagues in diagnosing what may be happening.

It is useful to think about a graduated approach towards mental health and well-being:

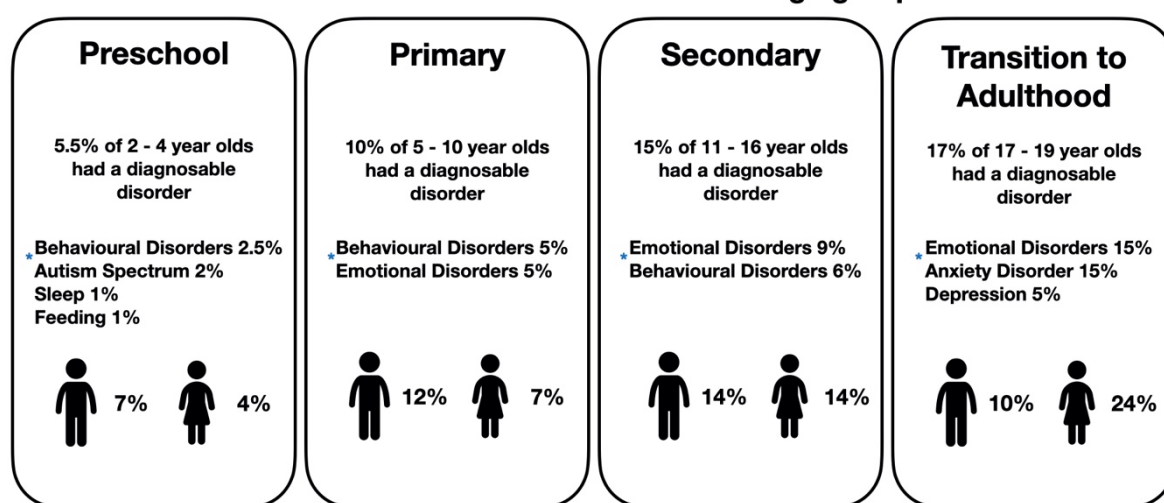
- Good mental health for all pupils
- Support for vulnerable pupils (on a short, medium or long-term basis)
- Specialist response for more serious impacts on mental health

The government training module 'Mental wellbeing teacher training module (DfE, 2020) talks about the 'mental wellbeing spectrum':

Healthy → Coping → Struggling → Unwell

Many schools have developed the Senior Mental Health Lead role who will be instrumental in creating policy, curriculum and practice in this area. Some school staff will have had 'Mental Health First Aid' training, and others will have become 'trauma-informed'.

### Rates of mental disorder in different age groups



\* Percentages may not total 100, as some young people had more than one disorder.

Source: Mental Health of Children and Young People in England (NHS Digital, 2017)

## Identifying potential symptoms of mental ill-health in children and young people

Mental ill-health can be complex and difficult to identify as there are often several symptoms which worsen slowly over time. School staff are sometimes able to identify greater change than parents, for example, seeing a child after a school holiday seemingly 'changed' in some way.

Childhood, and particularly adolescence, is a time of immense change and these natural changes can camouflage underlying issues, and also exacerbate them. This means that the signs of more serious emotional distress can be missed.

In general, as a sense of positive well-being declines, more serious mental health disorders disrupt the enjoyment of everyday life and impact on an ability to function well. Some apparent disorders are perfectly normal in some circumstances, for example, bereavement will lead to a period of sadness and anger.

Although the perceived stigma of mental health is lessening as time goes on, it can still discourage children and young people, and their parents, to seek support.

Warnings of a period of mental ill-health include:

- Persistent sadness
- Withdrawing from or avoiding social interactions
- Self-harming
- Talking about death or suicide
- Outbursts or extreme irritability
- Out-of-control behaviour that can be harmful
- Drastic changes in mood, behaviour or personality
- Changes in eating habits
- Loss of weight
- Difficulty sleeping
- Frequent headaches or stomach aches
- Difficulty concentrating
- Changes in academic performance
- Avoiding or missing school

## **Common disorders in childhood and adolescence**

### **Anxiety**

Anxiety disorders include persistent fears and worries that prevent young people taking part in everyday activities, such as playing with friends, going to school or leaving the house. Anxiety may involve panic attacks.

Diagnoses include attachment, anxiety, generalised anxiety or obsessive-compulsive disorders.

### **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**

Children with ADHD have difficulty with a mixture of attention, impulsive behaviours and hyperactivity. ADHD can be seen without hyperactivity and is known as ADD.

### **Autism Spectrum Disorder**

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a lifelong developmental condition which affects how people communicate and interact with the world. The autistic spectrum is broad and it impacts people in many different ways.

## **Conduct Disorders**

Conduct disorders loosely includes an ongoing pattern of behaviour which violates the rights of others or social norms. Typical behaviours include aggression and violence, a refusal to respond to reasonable requests, damage to property and difficulty with peer relationships. In younger children it is more often referred to as 'oppositional defiant disorder'.

Complicating issues could include a co-existing mental health disorder, a neuro-developmental condition, a learning disability or substance misuse.

Depression and other mood disorders

Although, it is sometimes normal to feel 'down', especially in response to certain typical life events, depression is identified by a persistent sadness and loss of interest in activities or interactions with others.

## **Eating Disorders**

Young people with eating disorders have a preoccupation with body image, disordered thinking about weight loss and show unsafe eating and dieting habits. Eating disorders can be life-threatening and include anorexia and bulimia.

## **Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

Traumatic events, whether specific or taking place over a period, can leave children with PTSD. Symptoms may include fearfulness, hyper-vigilance, clinginess or a lack of concentration. Sleeplessness, nightmares and bed-wetting may also occur. PTSD might show as anger and violence towards others.

## **Resources**

Teaching about mental wellbeing (DfE, 2020)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-about-mental-wellbeing>

Make it Count: Guide for teachers

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/publications/make-it-count-guide-teachers>

Mental Health First Aid England

<https://mhfaengland.org/>

Beacon House

<https://beaconhouse.org.uk/resources/>

Promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges (DfE)  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-and-wellbeing-support-in-schools-and-colleges>

Senior Mental Health Lead training (Success In Schools)  
[www.smhl.pro](http://www.smhl.pro)

## Child-on-Child Abuse

The government guidance Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) makes it clear that schools should have procedures in place to manage allegations of abuse by pupils. This is known as child-on-child abuse, and may include:

- Bullying, including cyber bullying
- Physical abuse
- Sexual violence and sexual harassment
- Sexual exploitation
- Sharing nudes and semi-nudes
- 'Initiation ceremonies' or other rituals
- Emotional abuse
- Financial abuse

Specific instances may not be abusive in themselves, but they may be indicative of power or coercive control. In areas where gangs are prevalent students may attempt to recruit other pupils using any of the above methods. Peer abuse may be used within and between gangs as weapons. Some children affected by sexual exploitation may be forced to recruit other children under the threat of blackmail or violence.

Child-on-child abuse should never be dismissed as 'banter' or even an inevitable part of growing up. It can have a lifelong impact and may even lead to young people ending their own life. Staff in the school should understand how to recognise child-on-child abuse, what the procedures are to report it and how such concerns are investigated. Gender is an important aspect of child-on-child abuse, with girls more often affected than boys. Children with SEN and Disabilities are also more frequently abused by their peers.

Tackling child-on-child abuse, as with other issues, needs to include an understanding of the ways that it is seen in the school (and local area). Strategies to respond to child-on-child abuse include understanding the levels and type of risk, approaches to minimise the risks, and how sanctions and any further referrals are made. Support needs for those abusing and the abused should also be identified.

Young people who are affected by child-on-child abuse may show physical injuries, stop attending school, have poor mental health, show physical manifestations like

headaches and stomach pains, drink alcohol, smoke, or start using street drugs. Young people affected may begin to abuse others.

In young people, it is simplistic to see the abuser as solely a perpetrator, as they may be affected by abuse themselves. While sanctions for behaviour is important, policies should also reflect on how those children abusing their peers are to be supported, and this may also mean referring them to external agencies. Complex issues cannot be solved by one agency alone.

When looking at the risk of child-on-child abuse in the school, it is vitally important to seek the views of the whole school community, including young people themselves, across all age groups, and those more at risk: girls, children with SEN and young people identifying as LGBT.

Risk can be identified from looking back at what has happened in the past and learning from those incidents. It is important to look back at previous issues and to know the school's data on child-on-child abuse. Does the information show that particular kinds of abuse are widespread, diminishing, or indicating an upward trend? One useful technique is to look with young people at different areas in the school or the local community where incidents are higher, or more often to occur. Creating a map of safe and unsafe areas can be very enlightening.

Other aspects to consider are identifying the cultural norms in the school, how parents are engaged in the process, and importantly what protective factors there are. Once the risk of child-on-child abuse has been assessed, strategies for minimising the risk should be identified. Such strategies should include the broader aspects such as an effective programme of healthy relationships education, creating a school culture of respect, and tackling gender inequality, bias and expectations.

Individual children and young people may need specific risk assessments. Whilst understanding the school's context for child-on-child relationships and abuse, the broader context is important too. One approach that can be used is Contextual Safeguarding.

## **Child-on-Child Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment**

(See Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) Part Five)

Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) Part Five covers sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges.

The guidance covers:

- what sexual violence and sexual harassment is,
- what the schools' and colleges' legal responsibilities are,
- creating a whole school or college approach to safeguarding and child protection; and
- how to respond to reports of sexual violence and sexual harassment.

The document starts off with relevant definitions to develop a shared understanding. Sexual Violence refers to criminal acts: rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault, as defined by the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Sexual harassment is described as 'unwanted conduct of a sexual nature'. Importantly, the definition of consent is stated and will help pupils begin to understand it more clearly.

There is an emphasis in the guidance to see sexual violence and sexual harassment in the context of developing a whole-school safeguarding culture, where sexual misconduct is seen as unacceptable, and not 'banter' or an inevitable part of growing up. It should be recognised that these issues are likely to occur, and so school leaders should know the extent and nature of the issue in their own school, and should have plans and procedures in place to deal with them. Groups at particular risk include girls, students who identify as LGB, or are perceived by their peers to be LGB, pupils who may be gender-questioning and pupils with SEND.

The guidance is clear that victims and alleged perpetrators may be kept apart in classrooms and other shared spaces, and that consideration should be given about travel to and from school. The emphasis should be on ensuring that the victim can continue their normal routines. Schools can consider the conduct of the alleged perpetrator as part of their behaviour policy on the 'balance of probabilities' and apply appropriate and proportional consequences. However, in cases that the police are handling, schools should ensure that they do not jeopardise the investigation.

It is important that schools record incidents across the whole spectrum of sexual violence and sexual harassment, so that they can understand the scale of the problem in their own schools and make appropriate plans to reduce it.



## Definitions

<b>Victim</b>	although not everyone affected by sexual violence or harassment considers themselves in this way, the guidance refers to this person as the victim throughout
<b>Alleged Perpetrator</b>	refers to the young person(s) responsible for the violence or harassment; the alleged child perpetrator must also be considered as someone in need of support, and may be a victim of abuse themselves.
<b>Sexual Violence</b>	<p>Offences defined below under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (<i>paraphrased for brevity</i>):</p> <p><b>Rape:</b> intentional penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth of another person, using the penis, without consent</p> <p><b>Assault by penetration:</b> intentional penetration of the vagina or anus of another person using a body part (other than the penis), or other object, without consent</p> <p><b>Sexual assault:</b> intentionally touching another person sexually, without consent</p>
<b>Sexual Harassment</b>	is unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, including sexual comments, 'jokes' or taunts; physical behaviour; or online sexual harassment.
<b>Consent</b>	to agree to vaginal, anal or oral penetration with free will and the capacity to do so; consent is not all-encompassing, may cover only certain sexual activities, may be given with conditions, may be withdrawn at anytime; and consent is needed every time sexual activity takes place.
<b>Harmful Sexual Behaviours</b>	Children's sexual behaviours exist on a wide continuum across different ages and stages of development. However, abusive and violent sexual behaviours are inappropriate. Harmful sexual behaviours are often found in children who have been, or are being, abused themselves. Children showing signs of harmful sexual behaviours are in need of appropriate support themselves.

## Legal Responsibilities

Schools have a legal responsibility to understand and minimise the risk of sexual violence and sexual harassment as a result of the:

- statutory safeguarding duty;
- school's own child protection policy and a behaviour policy which includes its procedures to prevent and tackle bullying;
- need to teach Sex and Relationships Education (in maintained, secondary schools);
- Human Rights Act (1998);
- Equality Act (2010); and
- Public Sector Equality Duty

## Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Sexualised behaviours in children and young people exist along a continuum. It is vital that professionals are able to distinguish normal from abnormal behaviours. A child's sexual behaviour should be considered abnormal if it:

- occurs at a frequency greater than would be developmentally expected
- interferes with the child's development
- occurs with coercion, intimidation, or force
- is associated with emotional distress
- occurs between children of divergent ages or developmental abilities
- repeatedly recurs in secrecy after intervention by caregivers

Source: Adults, Adolescents and Children Who Sexually Abuse Children:  
A developmental perspective (Chaffin, M., et al 2002)

Perhaps the best known resource to help professionals consider normal or abnormal sexual behaviour in children is the 'Sexual Behaviours Traffic Light Tool' from Brook, the sexual health charity. This tool has been updated recently and only the recent version should be used.

The theoretical background to harmful sexual behaviours in children and young people can be found in the NSPCC's Harmful Sexual Behaviour Framework, in particular the continuum model developed by Simon Hackett, University of Durham.

## School response to pupil behaviours

The guidance cannot provide specific responses to particular behaviour, as there are so many different circumstances to take into account. Schools should look at the behaviours that they most often see and develop relevant responses to them.

## **The Importance of school culture**

Keeping Children safe in Education says, 'Not tackling child-on-child abuse can lead to an unsafe environment, a culture that normalises abuse leading to children accepting it as normal and not coming forward to report it.'

*"Not recognising, acknowledging or understanding the scale of harassment and abuse and/or downplaying some behaviours can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviour"*

## **Whole school approach**

Reducing the risk of sexual violence and sexual harassment should be seen in the context of developing a whole school culture of safeguarding. The procedures to deal with sexual violence and sexual harassment should be transparent, and easy to understand for pupils, staff and parents. Staff need to understand how these safeguarding risks manifest in their school and local context. All staff must know how to raise a concern they may have about a pupil, or another adult.

Schools need to develop effective programmes of personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and sex and relationships education (SRE). Pupils should be helped to understand safeguarding issues, how to raise a concern they may have about themselves, or a friend or peer; and learn to recognise and develop healthy and respectful relationships, avoiding stereotypes and promoting equality. Pupils should be taught that sexual violence and sexual harassment is always wrong.

Schools should consider how they might use the expertise of external, specialist organisations to train staff or support groups of young people.

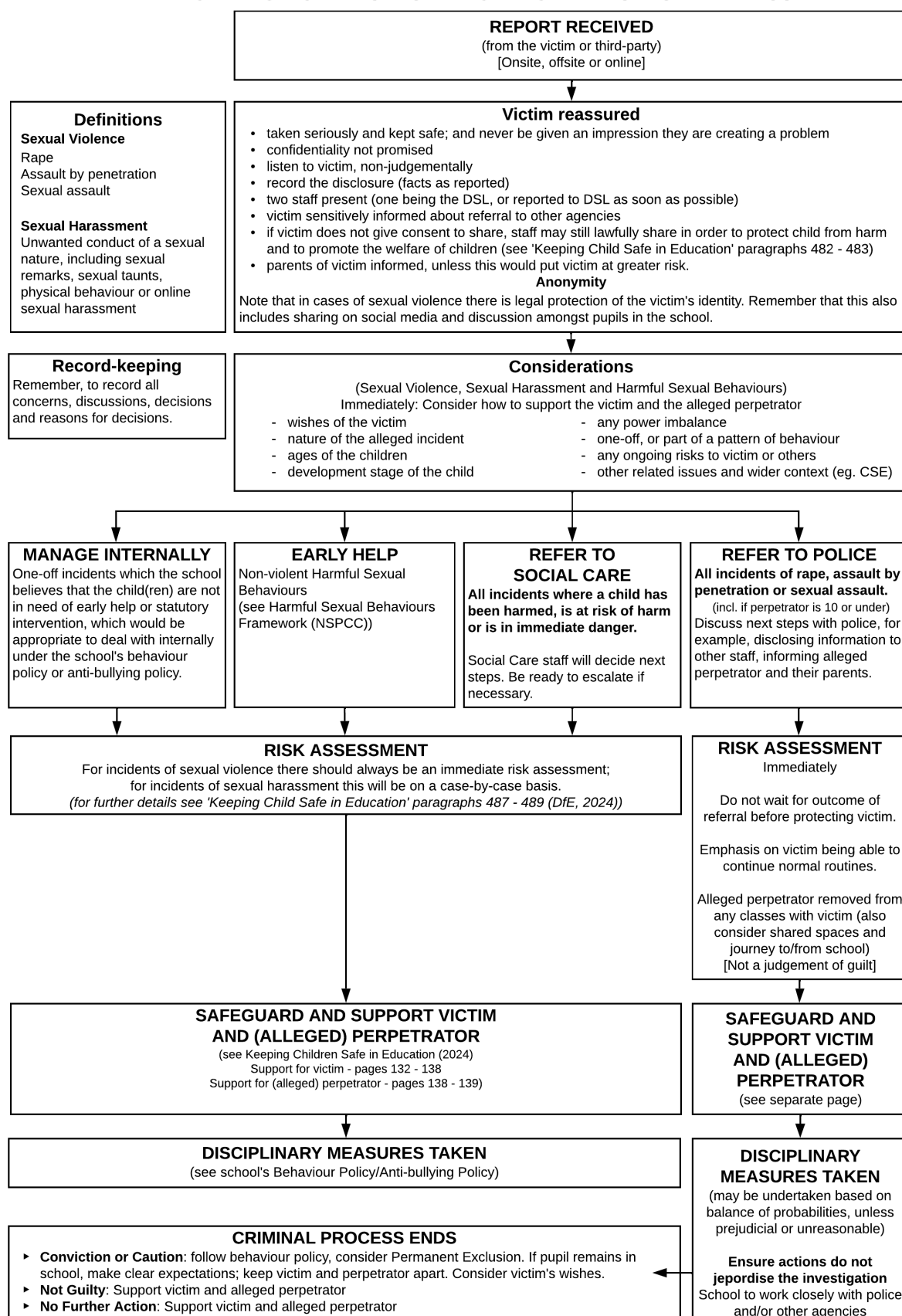
## **Beyond Referrals: levers for addressing harmful sexual behaviour in schools (Contextual Safeguarding Network)**

In my opinion this is the go-to guide for helping you look carefully at harmful sexual behaviour in your school. This toolkit includes a range of school self-assessment methods:

- Student Survey
- Staff Survey
- Parents' Survey
- Reviewing Policies and Procedures
- Reviewing Safeguarding and Behaviour Logs in Schools
- Hotspot Mapping Guidance

Download the toolkit here:

<https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/resources/toolkit-overview/beyond-referrals-harmful-sexual-behaviour>

**\*PART FIVE: CHILD-ON-CHILD SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

Source:

\*Keeping Children Safe in Education September 2024 (DfE, 2024)

2024SVSH Flowchart

## Safeguarding and supporting victims and alleged perpetrators

Victim	Alleged Perpetrator	Other children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• needs and wishes of victim are paramount</li> <li>• not made to feel they are the problem</li> <li>• consider proportionality of response</li> <li>• aim for victim to carry out normal routine</li> <li>• recognise that they may struggle in class and may need time out (if they wish)</li> <li>• be aware that they may not disclose the whole picture immediately</li> <li>• prepare for support over a long period and consider who is involved (internal and external)</li> <li>• if victim moves school, the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) informs the new school of the need for continued support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• possible tension between discipline and support (these are not mutually exclusive)</li> <li>• consider age/ developmental stage/any SEND</li> <li>• proportionate response</li> <li>• consider unmet needs (for example, harmful sexual behaviours (HSB) in younger children may be a sign or abuse or trauma)</li> <li>• if (alleged) perpetrator moves school, the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) informs the new school of the issues and transfers the child protection file</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• witnesses may need support (especially in cases of sexual violence)</li> <li>• avoid allowing pupils to 'take sides'</li> <li>• minimise potential for bullying or victimisation in school and on school transport</li> <li>• be aware of any social media use and inappropriate or even illegal posts (especially in cases of criminal investigation where anonymity is legally guaranteed)</li> <li>• develop safeguarding culture</li> <li>• constantly review reporting procedures and responses</li> <li>• consider potential for systematic and environmental weaknesses</li> </ul>

## Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment – Implementation Checklist

### Staff Learning and Development

- Senior Leadership Team
- Governing Body
- Designated Safeguarding Leads
- Pastoral Leads
- PSHE/SRE Leads
- All staff

Consider how specialist, external organisations could support the development of staff knowledge and understanding in this area.

### Pupil Curriculum

- Developing healthy, respectful relationships
- What is consent?
- What is sexual violence/sexual harassment?
- Content in SRE/PSHE, other curriculum areas?

- Pupils know how to report concerns about themselves, friends or other pupils

Consider how specialist, external organisations could support the development of staff knowledge and understanding in this area.

### **Policy and Procedures for incidents of sexual violence and sexual harassment**

- Have clear and easily understood policy and procedures
- Ensure sexual violence and sexual harassment is covered in:
  - Child Protection policy
  - Behaviour policy
  - Preventing and tackling bullying policy
- Prepare risk assessment pro-forma (ensure regular review is emphasised)
- Ensure local support services and contact details are documented and easily available
- Identify particular groups at risk, eg. girls, LGBT students, pupils with SEND

### **Understand the local context**

- Collate data about different types of sexual violence/sexual harassment incidents
- Identify who might be at greater risk
- Know the impact of the school's work in this area

### **Further Links**

Harmful Sexual Behaviour Framework (NSPCC)

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/harmful-sexual-behaviour-hsb-framework-audit>

Sexual Behaviours Traffic Light Tool (Brook)

(identifying typical and atypical sexual behaviours)

<https://www.brook.org.uk/education/sexual-behaviours-traffic-light-tool/>

## Sharing nudes and semi-nudes (formerly 'sexting')

Until the publication of the guidance document from the UK Council for Internet Safety (UKCIS) in December 2020, sharing nudes and semi-nudes of children under 18, by young people under 18 was known as 'sexting'. However, 'sexting' can be confused by some to mean sending text messages about sexual matters. Sharing nudes and semi-nudes can also be referred to as 'youth-produced imagery'. The legal term is 'indecent imagery', and 'image-based sexual abuse' is used to describe the non-consensual sharing of nudes and semi-nudes.

The latest version of Sharing nudes and Semi-nudes was published in 2024 to include the impact of images created by Artificial Intelligence (AI). Where these images depict under 18s, they are just as illegal as 'real' images.

Nude and semi-nude images can be sent in a myriad of different ways including social media, gaming platforms, texting or 'off-the-air' methods, for example, airdrop on Apple devices. The images may be sent privately or publicly, with and without consent. The images could be still pictures, video or live-streamed. The content may include one person or several.

Whilst 'indecent' is not defined in law, the following examples are likely to meet the criteria:

- nude or semi-nude sexual posing e.g. displaying genitals and/or breasts or overtly sexual images of young people in their underwear
- someone nude or semi-nude touching themselves in a sexual way
- any sexual activity involving a child
- someone hurting someone else sexually
- sexual activity that includes animals

Creating and sharing nude or semi-nude images of under-18s is illegal, even if consensual or of themselves, and this makes dealing with incidents complex. The intention of the law is to safeguard children and young people and not to criminalise them. The laws preventing the abuse of children were written before the widespread use of the internet, high-quality cameras in mobile phones and social media.

Although, sharing nudes and semi-nudes of under-18s is illegal, it can be a part of some young people's sexual development and their exploration of relationships. For this reason, such images may not be inherently harmful to all young people. Some nude images may not be sexually motivated. However, the impact can lead to a risk of harm. In many situations, the response should be one of education and support. Guidance from the UKCIS and the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) is

primarily one of safeguarding and, in certain, circumstances, education settings may be able to deal with the situation without reporting the matter to the police.

How schools should manage of incidents where nude or semi-nude images have been shared is set out in 'Sharing nudes and semi-nudes' (UKCIS). Designated Safeguarding Leads should ensure that they are familiar with the guidance.

The UKCIS guidance only applies to the sharing of nudes and semi-nudes by and between under-18s. It does not cover the sharing of adult pornography between young people; or the sending of written sexual texts without images. Where adults are sharing images of under-18s, the police should be informed without delay.

In schools, staff who learn of incidents where nude or semi-nude images have been shared must immediately report them to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). The UKCIS has a one-page overview which outlines to staff what they should and shouldn't do prior to informing the DSL:

- Never view, copy, print, share, store or save the imagery yourself, or ask a child to share or download – this is illegal.
- If you have already viewed the imagery by accident (e.g. if a young person has showed it to you before you could ask them not to), report this to the DSL (or equivalent) and seek support.
- Do not delete the imagery or ask the young person to delete it.
- Do not ask the child/children or young person(s) who are involved in the incident to disclose information regarding the imagery. This is the responsibility of the DSL (or equivalent).
- Do not share information about the incident with other members of staff, the young person(s) it involves or their, or other, parents and/or carers.
- Do not say or do anything to blame or shame any young people involved.
- Do explain to them that you need to report it and reassure them that they will receive support and help from the DSL (or equivalent).

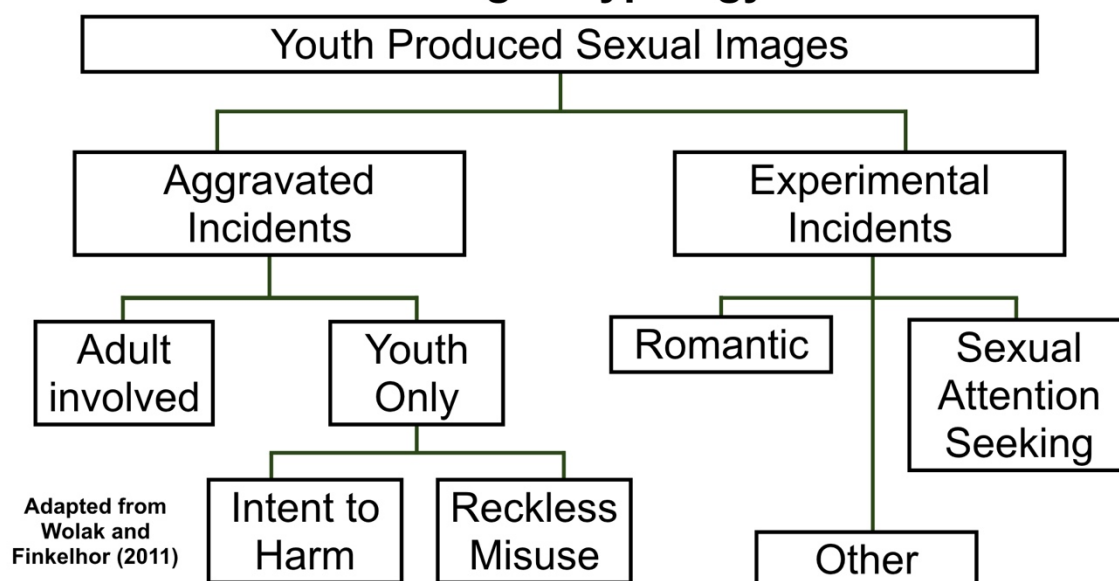
### **Considering the motivation of 'sexting' images**

When analysing the seriousness of a sexting incident and whether to refer the matter to police or social care, it is important to consider the possible motivation of the young person producing the sexual imagery.

The UKCIS guidance references a 2011 research paper by David Finklehor and Janis Wolak from the Crimes against Children Research Center, at the University of New Hampshire, US. The paper, 'Sexting: A Typology' looked at over 500 incidents and identified six different types, which helps to identify the level of risk. (See 'Sexting: A Typology overleaf)



## Sexting: a Typology



**Aggravated incidents** involve criminal or abusive elements beyond the creation, sending or possession of youth-produced sexual images

**Adult offenders** attempt to develop relationships by grooming teenagers, in criminal sex offences even without the added element of youth-produced images. Victims may be family friends, relatives, community members or contacted via the Internet. The youth-produced sexual images may be solicited by adult offenders.

**Youth Only: Intent to Harm** cases that arise from interpersonal conflict such as break-ups and fights among friends; involve criminal or abusive conduct such as blackmail, threats or deception; or involve sexual abuse or exploitation by young people.

**Youth Only: Reckless Misuse** No intent to harm but images are taken or sent without the knowing or willing participation of the young person who is pictured. In these cases, pictures are taken or sent thoughtlessly or recklessly and a victim may have been harmed as a result.

**Experimental incidents** involve the creation and sending of youth-produced sexual images, with no adult involvement, no apparent intent to harm or reckless misuse.

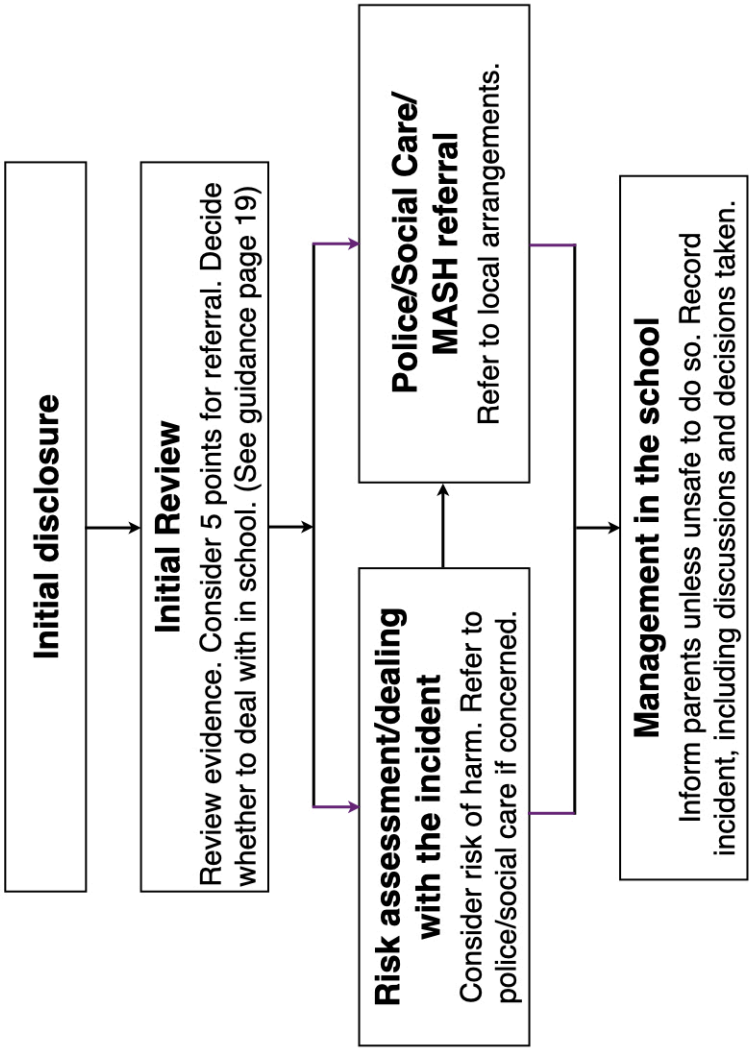
**Romantic episodes** in which young people in ongoing relationships make images for themselves or each other, and images were not intended to be distributed beyond the pair.

**Sexual Attention Seeking** in which images are made and sent between or among young people who were not known to be romantic partners, or where one young person takes pictures and sends them to many others or posts them online.

**Other** Cases that do not appear to have aggravating elements, like adult involvement, malicious motives or reckless misuse, but also do not fit into the Romantic or Attention Seeking sub-types. These involve either young people who take pictures of themselves for themselves (no evidence of any sending or sharing or intent to do so) or pre-adolescent children (age 9 or younger) who did not appear to have sexual motives.

[Source: Sharing nudes and semi-nudes (UKCIS)]

# What safeguarding staff should do



## Immediate referral to police or children's social care

1. The incident involves an adult.
2. There is reason to believe that a child or young person has been coerced, blackmailed or groomed, or there are concerns about their capacity to consent.
3. What you know about the images or videos suggests the content depicts sexual acts which are unusual for the young person's developmental stage; or are violent.
4. The images involves sexual acts and any pupil in the images or videos is under 13.
5. You have reason to believe a child or young person is at immediate risk of harm owing to the sharing of nudes and semi-nudes, for example, they are presenting as suicidal or self-harming.

**Source:** Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: Responding to incidents (UKCIS, 2020)

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## Guidance for all staff working in England

### Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: how to respond to an incident

An overview for all staff working in education settings in England

UK Council for  
Internet Safety

This document provides a brief overview for frontline staff of how to respond to incidents where nudes and semi-nudes have been shared.

**All** such incidents should be immediately reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or equivalent and managed in line with your setting's child protection policies.

The DSL or equivalent should refer to the full 2024 guidance from the UK Council for Internet Safety (UKCIS), [Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people](#), for managing incidents.

#### What do we mean by sharing nudes and semi-nudes?

In the latest advice for education settings (UKCIS, 2024), this is defined as the sending or posting of nude or semi-nude images, videos or live streams online by young people under the age of 18. Nudes and semi-nudes can be shared online via social media, gaming platforms, chat apps, forums, or involve sharing between devices using offline services. Alternative terms used by children and young people may include 'dick pics' or 'pics'. The motivations for taking and sharing nude and semi-nudes are not always sexually or criminally motivated.

This advice does not apply to adults sharing nudes or semi-nudes of under 18-year olds. This is a form of child sexual abuse and must be referred to the police as a matter of urgency.

#### What to do if an incident comes to your attention

**Report it to your Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or equivalent immediately. Your setting's child protection policy should outline codes of practice to be followed.**

- **Never** view, copy, print, share, store or save the imagery yourself, or ask a child to share or download – **this is illegal**.<sup>1</sup>
- If you have already viewed the imagery by accident (e.g. if someone has shown it to you before you could stop them), report this to the DSL (or equivalent) and seek support.
- **Do not** delete the imagery or ask the young person to delete it.
- **Do not** ask the child/children or young person(s) who are involved in the incident to disclose information regarding the imagery. This is the responsibility of the DSL (or equivalent).
- **Do not** share information about the incident with other members of staff, the young person(s) it involves or their, or other, parents and/or carers.
- **Do not** say or do anything to blame or shame any young people involved.
- **Do** explain you need to report it and reassure them that they will receive support and help from the DSL (or equivalent).

<sup>1</sup> In exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary for the DSL (or equivalent) only to view the image to safeguard the child or young person. That decision should be based on the professional judgement of the DSL (or equivalent).

Source: [Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: how to respond to an incident \(UKCIS, 2024\)](#)

## **Important Considerations**

### **Should DSLs view the nude or semi-nude image?**

DSLs must not intentionally view any nudes and semi-nude images unless there is good and clear reason to do so. This needs delegated authority from headteacher. The decision and reasons for viewing the image(s) must be recorded; as should the names of the people present. (For information about how viewing should be carried out, see 'Sharing nudes and semi-nudes' (UKCIS 2024, page 30.)

#### **The image(s) should only be viewed:**

- To establish facts because it is not possible to do so from young person.
- To report to a website, app or suitable reporting agency (such as the IWF) to have it taken down, or to support the child or young person or parent or carer in making a report.
- is unavoidable because a child or young person has presented it directly to a staff member or nudes or semi-nudes have been found on an education setting's device or network

#### **Questions to think about when reviewing the incident**

- How old is the young person or young people involved?
- Do you have any concerns about the young person's vulnerability?
- Does the young person understand the possible implications of sharing the nudes and semi-nudes?
- Why were the nudes and semi-nudes shared? Was the young person put under pressure or coerced or was consent freely given?
- Have the nudes and semi-nudes been shared beyond its intended recipient?
- Did the young person send nudes and semi-nudes to more than one person?
- Was the image shared without the consent of the young person who produced the images?
- Have the nude and semi-nudes been shared on social media or anywhere else online? If so, what steps have been taken to contain the spread of the images?
- Are there additional concerns if the parents or carers are informed?

Source: Sharing nudes and semi-nudes (UKCIS, 2024)

## **Further Information**

[Sharing nudes and semi-nudes \(UKCIS, 2024\)](#)

[Remove a nude image shared online \(IWF/Childline\)](#)

[So You Got Naked Online \(SWGfL\)](#)

[Look At Me – Teens, Sexting and Risks Report \(Internet Matters/Youthworks\)](#)

## **County Lines**

(Also known as 'Criminal Exploitation of Children')

### **What are County Lines?**

County lines is the organised criminal distribution of drugs from larger cities into towns, rural areas, and coastal communities. It relies on the exploitation of children, young people, and vulnerable adults.

The name comes from the dedicated phone lines used to advertise and take orders for drugs. While the term once also referenced county boundaries, it is now firmly understood as a system of exploitation and trafficking.

County lines is recognised as a form of modern slavery under the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Any child involved is a victim of trafficking and exploitation, not an offender. The National Crime Agency (NCA, 2024) describes county lines as the most common form of coerced criminality identified in the UK, reinforcing that it should be seen first and foremost as a safeguarding and modern slavery issue.

### **Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)**

County lines sits within the wider category of child criminal exploitation (CCE). CCE occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate, or deceive a child under 18 into criminal activity.

The exploitation may appear consensual but the child cannot consent to their own exploitation. CCE can occur with or without physical contact, online or offline, and often overlaps with other forms of harm, such as sexual exploitation.

### **Drugs and Methods**

Although cannabis is still linked to some networks, the main profits come from heroin and crack cocaine, synthetic opioids such as nitazenes, and other synthetic drugs and benzodiazepines, often sold alongside.

Criminal groups operate like businesses. They establish a brand, advertise via social media and messaging apps, and compete by offering discounts or "loyalty deals." The supply chain is maintained through coercion, violence, and grooming.

## Geography and Scale

County lines is a national problem. The National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC) reports that groups based in London, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, and Reading continue to supply drugs to smaller towns across the UK.

The scale of county lines has become clearer in recent years. In 2023–24, approximately 6,644 active lines were recorded, a significant increase from 4,007 in 2022–23. This rise reflects improved detection and reporting, rather than a sudden surge in activity, but underlines the widespread nature of the threat.

Recent data also shows a shift in how lines operate. While cross-boundary county lines have fallen by 12 per cent, there has been a 232 per cent increase in “internal” lines within single police force areas. Exploitation is now just as likely to occur locally as across county borders (National Police Chiefs’ Council [NPCC] and NCLCC, County Lines Strategic Threat Risk Assessment, 2024).

During COVID-19, gangs shifted from trains to taxis, hire cars, and private vehicles, though rail travel is still widely used. Increasingly, short-term rentals such as Airbnbs, hotels, and B&Bs are exploited as operating bases.

## Recruitment and Exploitation

Children are recruited through a mix of in-person contact and online approaches. Social media platforms such as Snapchat, TikTok, and Instagram, gaming sites, and even online marketplaces are common entry points. Some children are targeted through false job adverts that appear legitimate.

Tactics include:

- Promises of money, gifts, or belonging
- Grooming through friendship or romantic relationships
- Intimidation or violent initiation
- Debt bondage, through fabricated debts that cannot be repaid
- Sexual exploitation, experienced by all genders
- Trauma bonding, where victims feel dependent on their abuser
- Blackmail, forcing victims to commit a crime so it can be held over them

## Roles and Hierarchy

In the past, slang terms like “Soldiers,” “Youngers,” and “Wannabes” were often used to explain how children and young people were drawn into different roles

within county lines operations. Whilst these may have been useful labels, they oversimplify the exploitation and risk glamourising involvement in gang structures.

Current practice, led by the NCA, the Home Office and The Children's Society, uses safeguarding language:

- Line holders or controllers – manage the phone line and direct operations, often at a distance
- Runners or couriers – children and young people transporting drugs, money, or weapons
- Local exploiters – individuals who secure and control accommodation, including cuckooed homes, trap houses, or short-term rentals
- Victims of associated exploitation – those subjected to violence, debt bondage, or sexual exploitation within the network

This framing emphasises that any child involved at any stage is a victim of criminal exploitation and modern slavery.

### **Forms and Methods of Exploitation**

County lines exploitation can be unsophisticated or highly organised, but it always involves a power imbalance. Methods include:

- Carrying drugs in exchange for money, gifts, protection, or affection
- Physical violence or threats of violence, often with weapons
- Abduction or enforced absence from home
- Psychological control and coercion
- Sexual abuse and exploitation
- “Plugging” (coerced internal concealment), forcing victims to carry drugs or SIM cards internally, creating serious medical risks
- Financial exploitation or money muling, where victims' bank or crypto accounts are used for laundering
- Cuckooing, the forced use of homes, rental properties, student or care accommodation

### **Violence and Rivalry**

Violence is a defining feature of county lines. Organised crime groups (OCGs) frequently compete for control of lucrative lines and customer bases. Rivalries can involve assaults, kidnappings, stabbings, acid attacks, and, in some cases, firearms.



Children and young people are often placed on the frontline of this violence. If drugs or money are stolen by a rival group, the exploited child is held responsible and forced into debt bondage. Violence is also used to intimidate victims, enforce compliance, and deter others from leaving the network.

The NCA (2024) and the County Lines Policing Strategy 2024–2027 highlight that disputes between OCGs over territory and deal lines remain a key driver of knife crime and serious violence in towns and rural areas. Communities experience the wider harm through rising fear, antisocial behaviour, and cycles of retaliation.

### **Vulnerability Factors**

Any child, young person, or vulnerable adult can be targeted, but risks are higher for those with:

- Care experience or insecure accommodation
- Exclusion or attendance issues at school
- Mental health difficulties
- Learning disabilities or neurodivergence
- Substance misuse problems
- Poverty or economic stress
- Family members with existing drug debts
- Insecure immigration status

Exploiters also deliberately target “clean skins,” children with no previous record or service involvement, as they draw less attention.

The 2024 County Lines Strategic Threat Risk Assessment highlights that while children remain a core group, there is a growing pattern of adult exploitation, and that victims from Black and mixed ethnic backgrounds are disproportionately represented compared with regional populations.

### **Cuckooing and Community Impact**

A common method is cuckooing, taking over the home of a vulnerable adult such as someone with mental health issues, addiction, or disability. These properties are used to store drugs, weapons, and money, or as bases for sexual exploitation.

Increasingly, gangs also exploit short-term lets and hotels to reduce the risk of detection.

Victims are controlled through threats, violence, and fabricated debts. Communities suffer the wider impact of increased violence, antisocial behaviour, and exploitation in their midst.

## **Signs and Indicators**

Children most at risk include those with histories of exclusion, poor attendance, or care experience, those with previous offending, and those with unmet mental health needs or chaotic home lives.

Warning signs may include:

- Being found in areas far from home
- Unexplained possessions such as clothes, phones, or money
- Frequent taxi or train use, hotel stays, or multiple travel tickets
- Association with older peers or adults
- Sudden changes in behaviour, mood, or school engagement
- Disclosures or rumours of sexual exploitation

Exploitation may also leave physical signs such as minor injuries, fatigue, or self-neglect, or digital indicators such as unusual online activity, secretive messaging, or excessive new contacts.

## **Safeguarding Practice and Learning**

County lines exploitation has a devastating impact on victims, families, and communities, yet is often not recognised by those best placed to spot it. It is not the responsibility of police and social care alone. Teachers, health workers, housing officers, probation staff, and voluntary organisations may all be the first to notice the signs. Families and carers can also play a crucial role and should be treated as safeguarding partners.

Key principles include:

- Children cannot consent to exploitation
- Victims must be treated as victims first, not criminals
- Safeguarding responses should be trauma-informed
- Referrals to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) should be made where modern slavery is suspected
- Multi-agency working is essential. Information sharing and contextual safeguarding make disruption and protection more effective

The County Lines Policing Strategy 2024–2027, published by the NPCC, places equal emphasis on prevention, safeguarding, community resilience, and the relentless pursuit of perpetrators. This shows that effective protection and disruption must go hand in hand.

### Further Reading

- Home Office (2023): County Lines Exploitation Guidance (Practitioner Pack)
- The Children’s Society: County lines and criminal exploitation toolkit
- Joint Targeted Area Inspections (2022): Criminal Exploitation of Children
- National Crime Agency (2024): National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime
- National Police Chiefs’ Council / National County Lines Coordination Centre (2024): County Lines Strategic Threat Risk Assessment
- Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2022–2025): Selected reviews

### Some Key Terms

- **CCE** – *Child Criminal Exploitation*: the coercion, control, manipulation, or deception of a child into criminal activity.
- **NCA** – *National Crime Agency*: the UK’s lead agency for tackling serious and organised crime.
- **NCLCC** – *National County Lines Coordination Centre*: national unit coordinating police forces’ response to county lines.
- **NPCC** – *National Police Chiefs’ Council*: organisation that brings police leaders together to set direction and strategy.
- **NRM** – *National Referral Mechanism*: the framework for identifying and supporting potential victims of modern slavery and human trafficking.
- **OCG** – *Organised Crime Group*: a structured group engaged in serious criminal activity, including county lines operations.

## Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is the non-medical, partial or total removal of the external female genital organs. This procedure is typically carried out on young girls, although it can happen later. FGM is illegal in the UK and particularly affects girls and women from Africa.

Since 1985 it has been a serious criminal offence under the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act to perform FGM or to assist a girl to perform FGM on herself. The Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 tightened this law to criminalise FGM being carried out on UK citizens overseas. Anyone found guilty of the offence faces a maximum penalty of 14 years in prison.

The Serious Crime Act 2015 strengthened further the legislation on FGM and now includes:

- the right to anonymity for victims
- the offence of failing to protect a girl aged under 16 from the risk of FGM
- the provision of Female Genital Mutilation Protection Orders (FGMPO); and
- the duty on professionals (including teachers) to notify police when they discover that FGM appears to have been carried out on a girl under 18.
  - NB For school staff this will occur from a disclosure and not a physical examination

Since the implementation of the Serious Crime Act in July 2015 and June 2023, 764 Female Genital Mutilation Protection Orders have been made. The first UK conviction for FGM took place on 1 February 2019 and the perpetrator was sentenced to 11 years in prison. To date no other prosecutions have taken place. (Source: [Ministry of Justice](#))

**Professionals should note that girls at risk of FGM may not yet be aware of the practice or that it may be conducted on them, so sensitivity should always be shown when approaching the subject.**

FGM is practised predominantly in north African countries, the Middle East and Asia. Schools should be particularly alert in London, Cardiff, Manchester, Sheffield, Northampton, Birmingham, Oxford, Crawley, Reading, Slough and Milton Keynes where there are large communities of people from these countries. However, FGM can occur anywhere in the UK.

It should be remembered that whilst there are higher risk communities, not everyone in the community supports FGM.

The most significant countries for FGM risk are:

Burkina Faso	Djibouti	Egypt	Eritrea	Ethiopia
The Gambia	Guinea	Liberia	Mali	Mauritania
Sierra Leone	Somalia	Sudan		

Although FGM takes place between birth and around 15 years old; it is believed that the majority of cases happen between the ages of 5 and 8.

Risk factors for FGM include:

- low level of integration into UK society
- mother or a sister who has undergone FGM
- girls who are withdrawn from PSHE
- visiting female elder from the country of origin
- being taken on a long holiday to the country of origin
- talk about a 'special' procedure to become a woman

### **Further information:**

Female Genital Mutilation: Guidance for schools (2023)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/female-genital-mutilation-resource-pack/female-genital-mutilation-resource-pack>

Fact Sheet: FGM (Serious Crime Act 2015) Ministry of Justice/Home Office

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fact-sheet-on-mandatory-reporting-of-female-genital-mutilation>

Female Genital Mutilation Multi-agency Guidelines

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/multi-agency-statutory-guidance-on-female-genital-mutilation>

NSPCC FGM Helpline: 0800 028 3550 Email: [fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk)

FORWARD UK

<https://www.forwarduk.org.uk/violence-against-women-and-girls/female-genital-mutilation/>

Daughters of Eve

<https://www.daughtersofeve.online/>

Online FGM Course (Home Office) (free)

<https://www.virtual-college.co.uk/resources/free-courses/recognising-and-preventing-fgm>

## Duty to Prevent Terrorism

### Definitions

**Extremism** is the vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. This also includes calling for the death of members of the armed forces.

**Radicalisation** refers to the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups.

**Terrorism** is an action that endangers or causes serious violence to a person/people; causes serious damage to property; or seriously interferes or disrupts an electronic system. The use or threat must be designed to influence the government or to intimidate the public and is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause.

*(Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025))*

In response to the Prevent duty on schools set out in the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015, the DfE have published guidance to help schools implement the duty.

### Commentary

The guidance is clear that extremism and radicalisation are safeguarding concerns and should be dealt with using the school's existing safeguarding procedures. The DfE says that the Prevent duty should not be 'burdensome'.

There are challenges in the implementation of this Prevent duty guidance, not least the possible tension between the rights of parents to withdraw their child from the teaching of RE, and the need for schools to ensure that children understand the 'diverse...religious and ethnic identities in the UK'.

There are some interesting comments in this guidance document. For example, 'the Prevent duty does not require teachers...to carry out *unnecessary* intrusion into family life' (my italics). Whilst school staff may make referrals to the (voluntary) Channel programme, it is not clear what part parents play in such referrals.

This guidance says that local safeguarding partnerships should include radicalisation and extremism into their threshold documents.

This departmental advice on the Prevent duty offers useful support to schools, but it is not a comprehensive toolkit. This is a sensitive topic and teachers do need support to tackle extremism with confidence.

## KEY POINTS

### Themes

There are four themes within the Prevent duty:

Risk assessment

Working in partnership

Staff training

IT policies

### Identifying 'at risk' pupils

see also [National Risk Register of Civil Emergencies 2023 \(Cabinet Office\)](#)

Local authorities and police will have contextual information

No single way to identify a young person who is at risk.

Small changes in behaviour might indicate there are concerns about their wellbeing.

Even very young children might show signs of radicalisation

Schools should act 'proportionately': the prevent duty does not require teachers to 'carry out unnecessary intrusion into family life'.

### Ofsted

The Schools Inspection Framework makes explicit reference to the duty to prevent radicalisation and extremism.

*It is, of course, important to remember that Ofsted will be looking at impact, not just at what the school is doing.*

### Policy and procedures

Schools need clear policies and procedures to address concerns about radicalisation, although it is not necessary to have a distinct policy.

### Referrals

Schools should know how to make a referral to either the Prevent team or the child protection assessment team (as appropriate) when there are concerns about a child

Schools should know how to make a referral to the voluntary 'Channel' programme

Online training about Channel can be found here:

[www.elearning.prevent.homeoffice.gov.uk/edu/screen1.html](http://www.elearning.prevent.homeoffice.gov.uk/edu/screen1.html)

*Schools should find out their local referral route, before they need it. If there is a quick contact sheet or flowchart, the extremism contact should be added there.*

## **Working in Partnership**

- Local safeguarding partnerships co-ordinate local agencies responses to safeguarding children from extremism or radicalisation.
- Local safeguarding partnerships refer to radicalisation or extremism concerns in their threshold guidance
- The Home Office has funded Prevent co-ordinators to work in the community, including with schools.
- Effective partnerships with parents to signpost them towards sources of support.

## **Training**

- Home Office has developed a training package called WRAP – Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent
- Individual schools should decide their own training needs
- As a minimum, Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) should undertake Prevent awareness training
- DSLs should be able to offer advice and support to other staff

## **IT**

- IT filtering prevents extremist material being accessed in schools (be aware of pupils using community languages to circumvent filtering)
- Internet safety
- Develop an awareness of online risks and how extremists use social media to engage with young people
- Every teacher needs to be aware of the online activity of extremist and terrorist groups

## **Building resilience to radicalisation**

Schools should offer a 'safe environment' to explore sensitive or controversial topics and should 'satisfy themselves' that any resources they use are suitable for pupils.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC)

- British values

Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE)

- Time to consider sensitive or controversial topics
- Give pupils skills and knowledge to understand and manage difficult situations



- Learn to recognise and manage risk
- Learn to make safer choices
- Deal with peer pressure when it threatens their personal safety or well-being

#### Citizenship

- Understand political and social issues
- Learn about democracy, government and how laws are made
- Learn about diversity and the wide-range of ethnic identities in the UK
- Learn about the need for mutual respect and understanding

### **What to do if you have a concern about individual pupils**

Identify concern

Inform Designated Safeguarding Lead in the usual way

The DSL will refer to Social Care or the local Prevent lead according to local protocols

For non-urgent concerns, the local police can be called on 101.

### **Department for Education Helpline**

Dedicated telephone helpline for extremism to help school staff and governors to raise concerns relating to extremism directly and in confidence. The helpline is not intended for use in emergency situations.

Telephone: 020 7340 7264

Email: [counter.extremism@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:counter.extremism@education.gsi.gov.uk)

### **Documents**

Prevent duty guidance for England and Wales (Home Office, 2015)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance>

The use of social media for online radicalisation (Home Office/DfE, 2015)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-use-of-social-media-for-online-radicalisation>

The Prevent duty: safeguarding learners vulnerable to radicalisation (DfE, 2023)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-prevent-duty-safeguarding-learners-vulnerable-to-radicalisation>

## Safeguarding Pupils who are Vulnerable to Extremism

Extremism and radicalisation is another part of safeguarding children and young people. As with any other concern, the risk of harm is raised when young people are vulnerable and is often noticed when students change their behaviour, clothing or attitudes.

Ofsted look carefully at how schools are safeguarding children from extremism and radicalisation. This is important for all schools, not just urban school with large Muslim populations, for example, a catholic school in Suffolk was challenged by Ofsted about how it was tackling extremism and teaching children about life in modern Britain.

One aspect of safeguarding children and young people from radicalisation is set out in 'Promoting fundamental British values as part of SMSC in schools'. This guidance set out British values as:

- Democracy
- The rule of law
- Individual liberty
- Mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs

### Government 'Prevent' Strategy

The government approach to reducing the risk of terrorism is called 'CONTEST' and has four parts to it:

**Protect** - to strengthen protection against a terrorist attack;

**Prepare** - to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack;

**Pursue** - to stop terrorist attacks;

**Prevent** - to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.

Extremism takes many forms and all ideologies are included in this area of safeguarding:

- Islamic extremism
- Left-wing extremism
- Right-wing extremism

- Animal rights extremism

### **Indicators of vulnerability include:**

#### **Identity**

- the student/pupil is distanced from their cultural /religious heritage and experiences;
- discomfort about their place in society;
- personal crisis – the student/pupil may be experiencing family tensions;
- a sense of isolation;
- low self-esteem;
- they may have dissociated from their existing friendship group and become involved with a new and different group of friends;
- they may be searching for answers to questions about identity, faith and belonging.

#### **Personal Circumstances**

- migration;
- local community tensions; and
- events affecting the student/pupil's country or region of origin may contribute to a sense of grievance that is triggered by personal experience of racism or discrimination or aspects of Government policy

#### **Unmet Aspirations**

- the student/pupil may have perceptions of injustice;
- a feeling of failure;
- rejection of civic life;

#### **Experiences of Criminality**

- involvement with criminal groups
- imprisonment; and
- poor resettlement/reintegration on release

### Special Educational Needs

- social interaction
- empathy with others
- understanding the consequences of their actions; and awareness of the motivations of others

More critical risk factors could include:

- being in contact with extremist recruiters;
- accessing violent extremist websites, especially those with a social networking element;
- possessing or accessing violent extremist literature;
- using extremist narratives and a global ideology to explain personal disadvantage;
- justifying the use of violence to solve societal issues;
- joining or seeking to join extremist organisations; and
- significant changes to appearance and/or behaviour;
- experiencing a high level of social isolation, resulting in issues of identity crisis and/or personal crisis.

### De-radicalisation

- All inclusive ethos
- Create doubt or disillusionment
- Question ideas
- Safe discussions
- Range of views

## Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is one of the most significant safeguarding risks children may face. It affects children directly, whether in the home environment, through their own intimate relationships, through abusive dynamics with parents, or via the restrictions placed by legal orders.

This handbook section brings together four closely connected areas of safeguarding practice:

- **Domestic Abuse:** the overarching framework, recognising children as victims in their own right when they see, hear, or experience the effects of abuse. It includes a wide range of behaviours, often overlapping and co-occurring, with serious and lasting impacts on children's wellbeing and education
- **Teenage Relationship Abuse:** a form of child-on-child abuse, highlighting that harmful and controlling patterns can emerge in adolescent relationships and must be addressed through safeguarding procedures, even if they fall outside the statutory definition for under-16s.
- **Child-to-Parent Abuse:** an increasingly recognised form of domestic abuse where children use violence, threats, or coercion against parents or carers. Both parents and children may need safeguarding support.
- **Non-Molestation Orders (NMOs):** one of the legal tools that may be in place around families experiencing domestic abuse. Schools need to understand what an NMO does, its limits, and how it affects safeguarding decisions.

Together, these strands give schools the statutory grounding, practical indicators, and clear actions needed to identify risks, support children, and work effectively with other agencies.

### Statutory Definitions (KCSIE 2025)

*“Domestic abuse can encompass a wide range of behaviours and may be a single incident or a pattern of incidents. That abuse can be, but is not limited to, psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional. Children can be victims of domestic abuse. They may see, hear, or experience the effects of abuse at home and/or suffer domestic abuse in their own intimate relationships (teenage relationship abuse). All of which can have a detrimental and long-term impact on their health, well-being, development, and ability to learn.”*

(Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025, para. 41)

*“The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 introduced the first statutory definition of domestic abuse and recognises the impact on children, as victims in their own right, if they see, hear or experience the effects of abuse. The definition captures a range of*

*abusive behaviours, including physical, emotional and economic abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour. Both parties must be aged 16 or over and personally connected. Types of domestic abuse include intimate partner violence, abuse by family members, teenage relationship abuse and child-to-parent abuse. Anyone can be a victim, regardless of identity or background, and abuse can occur inside or outside the home.”* (KCSIE 2025, pages 154–156 extract)

### **Who is Considered ‘Personally Connected’?**

Under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, the people involved must be personally connected. This includes where they:

- are married to each other
- are civil partners of each other
- have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
- have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
- are or have been in an intimate personal relationship with each other
- have, or have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child
- are relatives

### **Why It Matters for Safeguarding**

- In the year ending March 2020, an estimated 2.3 million adults experienced domestic abuse (ONS)
- Two women a week are killed by a current or former partner (NPCC)
- Domestic abuse is one of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) most strongly linked to long-term harm, including mental health difficulties, exploitation, and risk-taking behaviour
- Exposure to domestic abuse can have a serious and long-lasting impact on children’s health, development, relationships, and learning
- Children are not passive observers: seeing, hearing, or experiencing abuse makes them victims in their own right

### **Forms of Domestic Abuse (Often Co-Occurring)**

- Physical Abuse: hitting, slapping, choking, restraining, or use of weapons. Injuries may be visible, but harm can occur without physical marks
- Sexual Abuse: coercion into sexual activity, rape within relationships, reproductive control, or pressure to perform sexual acts
- Psychological or Emotional Abuse: humiliation, intimidation, gaslighting, threats, undermining confidence or self-worth

- Controlling or Coercive Behaviour: isolation, surveillance, restricting independence, controlling who someone sees, where they go, or how they live
- Economic Abuse: restricting access to money, taking wages or benefits, preventing employment or financial independence
- Threatening Behaviour: explicit threats of violence, intimidation, or creating a climate of fear

Note: These forms are not separate categories. They are most often co-occurring, with coercive control holding them together as a sustained pattern of abuse.

### **Indicators in Children**

- Behavioural changes such as anxiety, aggression, withdrawal, hypervigilance
- Attendance issues such as frequent lateness, absences, reluctance to go home
- Physical signs such as injuries, neglect indicators, or unexplained health issues
- Developmental impact such as poor concentration, speech or learning delays
- Emotional impact such as guilt, fear of separation, low self-esteem
- Parental context such as a parent who appears fearful, isolated, or unable to engage with school independently

### **Key Safeguarding Considerations**

- Children must always be recorded as victims, not “witnesses only”
- Absence of disclosure does not mean absence of risk. Abuse is often hidden and normalised within families
- Coercive control may leave no physical evidence but has severe, long-term consequences
- Teenage Relationship Abuse is recognised as a form of child-on-child abuse and must be responded to under safeguarding procedures, regardless of whether the statutory definition applies (for under-16s)
- Child-to-parent abuse and abuse by family members are also forms of domestic abuse and must be taken seriously
- Multi-agency collaboration with social care, police, MARAC, and health is essential

### **Operation Encompass**

- All police forces in England now use Operation Encompass
- When police attend a domestic abuse incident and children are present, they will notify the key adult in school (usually the DSL) before the next school day
- This ensures schools can provide immediate emotional and practical support

- Operation Encompass does not replace safeguarding procedures. Where necessary, schools and police must still refer to local authority children's social care
- An advice line for school staff is available Monday to Friday, 08:00 to 13:00, on 0204 513 9990

### **Actions for Schools**

- Record concerns and patterns in safeguarding files
- Capture and respect the voice of the child in all assessments
- Share information promptly with social care or police where thresholds are met
- Ensure staff are trained to recognise all forms of domestic abuse, including hidden harms such as coercive control and economic abuse
- Provide safe disclosure routes for children and parents
- Offer pastoral support. School stability can provide a sense of safety for affected children
- Liaise with specialist services such as IDVAs and domestic abuse charities where appropriate

### **Further Guidance and Resources**

- Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021: Factsheet
- Home Office: Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Statutory Guidance
- NSPCC: Domestic Abuse and Children
- Operation Encompass
- National Domestic Abuse Helpline (0808 2000 247, Refuge)

## **Teenage Relationship Abuse (TRA) and Safeguarding**

### **Statutory Context (KCSIE 2025)**

“Young people can also experience domestic abuse within their own intimate relationships. This form of child-on-child abuse is sometimes referred to as ‘teenage relationship abuse’. Depending on the age of the young people, this may not be recognised in law under the statutory definition of ‘domestic abuse’ (if one or both parties are under 16). However, as with any child under 18, where there are concerns about safety or welfare, child safeguarding procedures should be followed and both young victims and young perpetrators should be offered support.”  
(Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025, pages 154 - 156 extract)



## What is Teenage Relationship Abuse?

Teenage Relationship Abuse (TRA) is a form of child-on-child abuse that occurs within adolescent intimate relationships. It can involve harmful, controlling, or abusive behaviours between young people.

- The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 applies from age 16 upwards
- For under-16s, abusive behaviours are classed as child abuse and must be addressed through safeguarding processes
- TRA can occur in heterosexual or LGBTQ+ relationships, and it can take place in person, online, or through technology

## Why It Matters for Safeguarding

- TRA is sometimes minimised as jealousy or “teenage drama” but it carries the same risks as adult domestic abuse
- It is closely linked to child sexual exploitation (CSE), harmful sexual behaviour, and online abuse
- Early abusive experiences can cause trauma, normalise unhealthy dynamics, and increase risk of future victimisation

## Forms of Teenage Relationship Abuse (Often Co-Occurring)

- Physical Abuse: hitting, slapping, pushing, grabbing, restraining
- Sexual Abuse: coercion into sexual activity, pressure to send images, threats to share nudes, reproductive control, sexual assault
- Psychological or Emotional Abuse: humiliation, manipulation, gaslighting, threats of self-harm if the relationship ends
- Controlling or Coercive Behaviour: isolating from friends, constant messaging, monitoring devices, demanding passwords
- Economic Abuse: taking possessions, controlling money, demanding gifts, exploiting wages or benefits (more common in older teens)
- Threatening Behaviour: threats of violence, reputational harm, or exposure such as sharing intimate images

## Indicators in Young People

- Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Rapid changes in confidence, behaviour, or appearance
- Over-dependence on or fear of a partner
- Reluctance to put phones down, distress linked to online contact
- Unexplained injuries or frequent distress
- Decline in attendance, concentration, or attainment

## Key Safeguarding Considerations

- Teenage relationship abuse is child-on-child abuse and must be addressed under safeguarding procedures
- Apparent consent may reflect coercion, imbalance of power, or exploitation
- TRA may overlap with child sexual exploitation (CSE) or harmful sexual behaviour and staff should apply both frameworks
- Responses must align with Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) on child-on-child abuse
- Schools may be the only safe environment where patterns are observed or disclosures are made

## Actions for Schools

- Record concerns and monitor for patterns over time
- Capture the voice of the child and avoid minimising disclosures
- Share concerns with social care if risk of significant harm is identified
- Involve the police for criminal offences such as assault, sexual offences, or coercion
- Provide safe and confidential disclosure opportunities
- Train staff to recognise child-on-child abuse in relationships, including digital coercion
- Engage with specialist youth domestic abuse or exploitation services where available

## Further Guidance and Resources

- Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)
- NSPCC: Teenage Relationship Abuse
- Home Office: Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Statutory Guidance
- SafeLives: Young People and Domestic Abuse

## Child-to-Parent Abuse (CPA)

### What is Child-to-Parent Abuse?

Child-to-parent abuse is a form of domestic abuse where a child or young person uses violence, threats, or controlling behaviour towards their parent(s) or carer(s). It can be physical, verbal, emotional, financial, or coercive.

### Why It Matters for Safeguarding

- CPA is sometimes dismissed as “challenging behaviour” but it can cause significant harm and distress in families

- It is increasingly recognised in safeguarding and is included in the statutory definition of domestic abuse for young people aged 16 and over
- For under-16s, abusive behaviour towards parents still requires a safeguarding response, as it often signals wider needs or vulnerabilities
- Parents may be reluctant to disclose due to stigma, fear of judgment, or worry about consequences for their child
- Children displaying CPA may themselves be experiencing trauma, neglect, exploitation, or mental health difficulties

### **Forms of Child-to-Parent Abuse**

- Physical: hitting, kicking, throwing objects, damaging property
- Emotional: intimidation, humiliation, constant verbal abuse
- Financial: stealing money, coercing parents into debt, controlling benefits
- Coercive or controlling: restricting parent's movements, making threats, isolating them

### **Indicators for Schools**

- Parents expressing fear or avoidance of their child
- Signs of repeated family crisis or frequent police involvement
- A child displaying significant aggression in school that may also occur at home
- Parents appearing withdrawn, anxious, or reluctant to engage with school
- Reports of damaged property or unexplained injuries in the home

### **Safeguarding Considerations**

- CPA is classed as domestic abuse under the law when the child is 16 or older and personally connected to the parent
- For children under 16, concerns should be managed through child protection and family safeguarding frameworks
- Responses should avoid blame and focus on both parent and child safety and wellbeing
- CPA often requires a multi-agency approach involving children's services, youth offending, health, and specialist domestic abuse services

### **Actions for Schools**

- Record and monitor concerns in safeguarding files
- Listen to and record parents' perspectives sensitively and without judgment
- Share concerns with children's social care where risk of harm is identified
- Provide pastoral support to the child, recognising that underlying causes may include unmet needs, trauma, or exploitation

- Signpost parents to specialist services where available, acknowledging their right to protection and support

### **Further Guidance and Resources**

- Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025)
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021: Factsheet
- SafeLives: Child to Parent Abuse
- Respect: Child to Parent Violence Programme

## **Non-Molestation Orders (NMO) and Safeguarding**

### **What is a Non-Molestation Order?**

A Non-Molestation Order (NMO) is a civil injunction under the Family Law Act 1996 designed to protect individuals from harassment, threats, or violence. Breaching an NMO is a criminal offence.

### **What Can an NMO Do?**

- Prevent an abuser from using or threatening violence
- Prohibit direct or indirect contact with the victim
- Restrict approach to the victim's home, workplace, or children's school

### **Interim and Full NMOs**

- Interim NMO: granted quickly, often without the other party present, and temporary until a hearing
- Full NMO: issued after a court hearing, usually lasting 6–12 months, and extendable

### **How NMOs Affect Schools**

- Schools are not always automatically informed of NMOs
- Parents may notify schools themselves and expect restrictions to be enforced
- If an NMO prohibits a parent from contact with a child or approaching the school, the school must comply

### **Safeguarding Considerations**

- Record and verify any order before enforcing restrictions
- Update safeguarding files and ensure relevant staff are informed
- Do not act on verbal claims alone; seek written confirmation where possible
- Prioritise the child's needs and welfare rather than relying solely on the existence of an order

- Liaise with social care or legal services if the order raises safeguarding concerns

### **Actions for Schools**

- Request a copy of the NMO for clarity on restrictions
- Record discussions and monitor safeguarding concerns
- Ensure front-office staff are briefed if a parent is prohibited from attending school
- Balance safeguarding duties with legal compliance

### **Further Guidance and Resources**

- Apply for a Non-Molestation or Occupation Order ([gov.uk](http://gov.uk))
- Judiciary Practice Guidance on NMOs ([judiciary.uk](http://judiciary.uk))
- NSPCC: Domestic Abuse and Children

## Private Fostering

In January 2014, Ofsted published a report called 'Private fostering: better information, better understanding'. From a safeguarding perspective, the report's findings gave much cause for concern. Many private fostering arrangements are 'hidden' and, it appears, are rarely brought to the attention of local authorities, even though there it is an offence not to inform them. The penalty for non-reporting is a maximum £5,000 fine, but it seems that convictions are extremely rare.

The legislation governing private fostering is the 'Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005' and came into force following the death of Victoria Climbié in 2000. Victoria was privately fostered by her great aunt.

Given the 'hidden' nature of much private fostering, local authorities have a duty to raise awareness of the need to notify the local Children's Services department.

### What is private fostering?

A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately (without the involvement of a local authority) for the care of a child under the age of 16 years (under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative, in their own home, with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. (\*Close family relative is defined as a 'grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt' and includes half-siblings and step-parents; it does not include great-aunts or uncles, great grandparents or cousins.)

### Why are children in private foster care?

Most frequently, young people are in private foster care for the following reasons:

- children from other countries sent to live in the UK with extended family
- host families for language schools
- parental ill-health
- where parents who have moved away, but the child stays behind (eg. to stay at the same school to finish exams)
- teenagers estranged from their families

The Ofsted report into Private Fostering also refers to these reasons:

- children brought from outside the UK with a view to adoption
- children at independent boarding schools who do not return home for holidays and are placed with host families
- trafficked children

## **The Duty to refer to the Local Authority**

Each party involved in the private fostering arrangement has a legal duty to inform the relevant local authority at least six weeks before the arrangement is due to start. Not to do so is a criminal offence.

Once the notification has been made to the authority, Children's Services have a duty to visit and speak to the child, the parent and the foster carer; and everyone in the foster carers' household. Children's services will then undertake a range of suitability checks including DBS checks on everyone in the household over the age of 16.

Other professionals, for example GPs surgeries and schools, also have a duty to report to the local authority where they are aware or suspect that a child is subject to a private fostering arrangement.

Note that although schools have a duty to inform the local authority, there is no duty for anyone, including the private foster carer or social workers to inform the school. However, it should be clear who has parental responsibility.

## **Are children in private foster care defined as 'Looked After Children'?**

No. The term 'Looked After Children' means children who are looked after by the local authority. Privately fostered children are outside the care of the local authority.

Schools should not therefore code children in private foster care as 'LAC'.

## **How do local authorities monitor the welfare of children in private fostering?**

The local authority must visit each privately fostered child at least every six weeks in the first year of the arrangement; and at least every twelve weeks in the second and subsequent year. In some areas schools are visited as part of this process to discuss the child with teachers.

The private foster carer has a duty to inform the local authority of any substantive changes to the arrangement or within the household.

## **Should schools be told about a private fostering arrangement?**

There is no duty for schools to be given information about a child who is privately fostered by the family, carer or the local authority. There is however a duty on schools to inform children's services where they become aware of such an arrangement.

## Further Information

Private fostering: better information, better understanding (Ofsted)

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7f87c740f0b623026900c3/Private\\_fostering\\_better\\_information\\_better\\_understanding.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7f87c740f0b623026900c3/Private_fostering_better_information_better_understanding.pdf)

Private fostering (CoramBAAF)

<https://corambaaf.org.uk/practice-areas/kinship-care/private-fostering>

The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/1533/contents>



## Online Safety

Online safety concerns the safe use of technology, most notably the internet and social media. Many adults are less familiar with IT than children and young people and it is partly this knowledge gap that can place pupils at risk.

### Teaching online safety in school (DfE, 2023)

To help schools consider the breadth of safeguarding concerns the government published a guidance document 'Teaching online safety in school (DfE, 2023)'. It outlines to schools the importance of helping children and young people not only use the internet safely, but also give them opportunities to learn how to behave online. Throughout, the guidance emphasises the importance of teaching that is always age and developmentally appropriate.

The guidance is non-statutory and applies to all local authority maintained schools, academies and free schools. The advice may also be helpful to nurseries and FE colleges.

Teaching online safety in school can be read in conjunction with Education for a Connected World Framework (UKCIS, 2020) which offers 'age specific advice about the online knowledge and skills that pupils should have the opportunity to develop at different stages of their lives.'

#### **Education for a Connected World Framework (UKCIS, 2020)**

Teaching online safety in school should be read in conjunction with Education for a Connected World Framework (UKCIS, 2020) which offers 'age specific advice about the online knowledge and skills that pupils should have the opportunity to develop at different stages of their lives.

The Framework focuses on eight aspects of online education:

- Self-image and Identity
- Online relationships
- Online reputation
- Online bullying
- Managing online information
- Health, wellbeing and lifestyle
- Privacy and security
- Copyright and ownership

Although the Teaching online safety in school guidance says that it does not imply additional content or teaching requirements, schools should review their curriculum to ensure that all aspects are covered; and to find out whether staff are confidently understanding the risks too.

The document says that there are many areas in the curriculum where the topics could be taught. In these curriculum areas, pupils will be taught what positive, healthy and respectful online relationships look like.

The guidance includes the following underpinning knowledge and behaviours:

- How to evaluate what they see online
- How to recognise techniques used for persuasion
- Online behaviour
- How to identify online risks
- How and when to seek support

Although the nature of online harms has been considered some time, it is not until we look through the comprehensive risks listed in this document that they together they reflect how harmful the internet might be. It is easy to see the potential harms, but it important that we communicate them in a safe and beneficial way, so that pupils remain respectfully cautious and not fearful.

Potential Harms covered in the guidance includes:

- Age restrictions
- Content: How it can be used and shared
- Disinformation, misinformation and hoaxes
- Fake websites and scam emails
- Fraud (online)
- Password phishing
- Personal data
- Persuasive design which keeps 'users online for longer than they might have planned or desired'
- Privacy settings
- Targeting of online content
- Abuse (online)

- Challenges [to do something and post about it]
- Content which incites...hate, violence
- Fake profiles
- Grooming
- Live streaming
- Pornography
- Unsafe communication
- Impact on confidence (including body confidence)
- Impact on quality of life, physical and mental health and relationships
- Online vs. offline behaviours
- Reputational damage
- Suicide, self-harm and eating disorders

In an important section, the Teaching online safety in school guidance, reminds schools that when teaching about these safeguarding topics (and others), staff should be mindful that there may be a child or young person in the lesson who is or has been affected by these harms. During or after a lesson, a pupil may be prompted to disclose about something that may have happened online.

The guidance says that it is good practice to consult the Designated safeguarding Lead 'when considering and planning any safeguarding related lessons or activities (including online) as they will be best placed to reflect and advise on any known safeguarding cases, and how to support any pupils who may be especially impacted by a lesson'.

The Teaching online safety in school guidance emphasises the need for a whole school approach so that it is embedded in everything the school does including:

- Creating a culture that incorporates the principles of online safety across all elements of school life
- Proactively engaging staff, pupils and parents/carers
- Reviewing and maintaining the online safety principles
- Embedding the online safety principles
- Modelling the online safety principles consistently






## Sextortion

Incidents of sextortion are increasing all the time, whilst both boys and girls can be affected, it is teenage boys that are most at risk. This is a crime that may well be sexually-motivated and is financially significant too. Sextortion is often linked to organised criminal gangs in Russia, South-east Asia, Somalia and Nigeria.

In sextortion an abuser attempts to intimidate a victim by threatening to send sexually explicit images or videos to friends, family and those people listed in the contacts. Other threats may include posting online and some of the videos may end up on pornographic websites or shared amongst groups of people.

There are several methods that the criminal gangs might use, shown in the graphic below:

**Sextortion**  
**5 Ways abusers blackmail victims**

				
<b>Acting Young</b>  Pretend to be a child or young person, send a nude picture (not of themselves) to generate trust.	<b>Fake Hacker</b>  Pretend to have hacked a device; say they have found nude images.	<b>Click Bait</b>  Pretend to have seen victim in a video, and send link to access login details.	<b>Fake Model Agent</b>  A stranger links up with promise of modelling work and needs pictures for portfolio.	<b>Promising Gifts</b>  Sends a link to free products or services. Bad link downloads malicious software.

## Self-generated sexual images of children

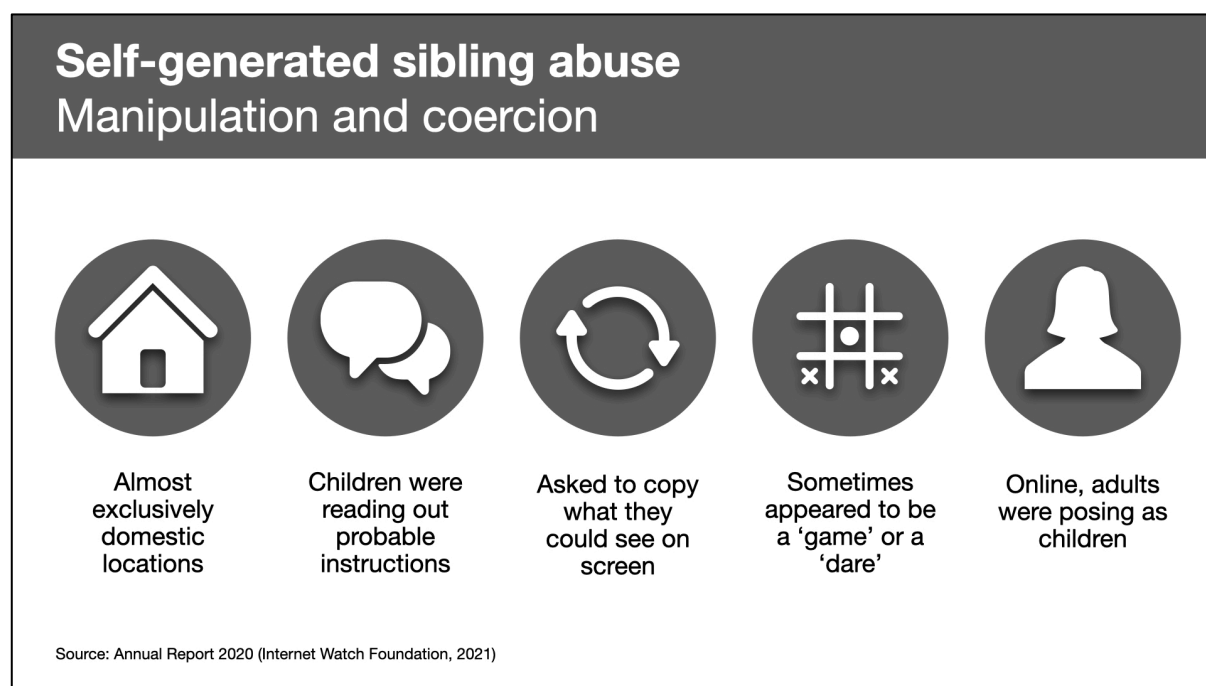
Research by the Internet Watch Foundation's (IWF) analysts has found that a very large proportion of sexual images of children have been created by children themselves having been groomed online.

In 2020, the IWF said that 41% of sexual images online were self-generated, in their report for 2024, this figure is now 92%. Almost of these images, still photographs and videos, are of girls and many aged 7 – 10 years old.

The children do not know they are connected to an adult, as offenders typically pretend to be a similarly-aged child themselves.

The IWF found that not only were predators sexually abusing the child that they had initially identified, they were encourage those victims to draw younger children in the abuse too.

Images that analysts identified were a result of manipulation and coercion and almost exclusively featured domestic locations, like bedrooms and bathrooms, children following instructions given by someone online, often framed as a game or a dare.



## Documents

'Teaching online safety in schools' (DfE, 2023)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-online-safety-in-schools/teaching-online-safety-in-schools>

Education for a Connected World (UKCIS, 2020)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-for-a-connected-world>

## Useful websites for online safety include:

UK Council for Internet Safety (UKCIS)..... [www.education.gov.uk/ukccis](http://www.education.gov.uk/ukccis)

Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) ..... [www.ceop.police.uk/](http://www.ceop.police.uk/)

CEOP Education Resources ..... [www.thinkuknow.co.uk/](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/)

UK Safer Internet Centre ..... [www.saferinternet.org.uk/](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/)

SWGfL (South West Grid for Learning) ..... [www.swgfl.org.uk/](http://www.swgfl.org.uk/)

London Grid for Learning ..... <https://lgfl.net/safeguarding>

Internet Watch Foundation ..... <https://www.iwf.org.uk/>

The UK Safer Internet Centre runs a helpline for professionals working with children and young people.

### **The Professionals Online Safety Helpline**

Email [helpline@saferinternet.org.uk](mailto:helpline@saferinternet.org.uk) or call 0844 3814772 (10 am - 4 pm).

## **Safeguarding concerns**

### **Responding to an online safety incident**

#### 1. Preserve the evidence

NB If the incident involves the discovery of indecent images or videos of children, the police should always be contacted immediately for advice.

If the incident involves unacceptable, inappropriate or potentially illegal use of a computer, mobile phone or camera, make no-one else comes into contact with the device. Do not shut down a computer, but do turn off the monitor instead. Where possible lock the equipment away.

Seek technical advice

#### 2. Consider the impact of the online safety incident

If the incident is solely against the school's Acceptable Use Policy, consider applying the consequences indicated in that policy or the over-arching behaviour policy.

If the incident is of a potentially criminal nature, the police should be contacted.

**If the incident involves an adult, the Local Authority Designated Officer(s) (LADO) must be contacted for further advice (see section on 'Managing allegations against staff').**

## The Manosphere and Incel Culture

### Understanding the Manosphere

The 'manosphere' refers to a cluster of online communities that promote highly stereotyped, adversarial, or misogynistic views about gender roles. These communities range from seemingly innocuous spaces discussing men's issues to more extreme forums that advocate hostility or even violence toward women. Adolescents—especially boys—are increasingly encountering this content through social media algorithms, gaming platforms, and influencers.

The manosphere includes a range of groups and influencers, including:

**Incels (Involuntary Celibates):** Men who believe they are unable to form relationships with women and blame women or feminism for their situation.

**Red Pill:** A belief system that claims to expose the 'truth' that society is stacked against men and that women are manipulative by nature.

**Black Pill:** A nihilistic offshoot of the red pill ideology, believing that nothing can change their status and that some men are destined to fail.

**MGTOW (Men Going Their Own Way):** Men who disengage entirely from relationships with women, claiming women are not worth the effort or risk.

**PUAs (Pick-Up Artists):** Those promoting coercive or manipulative techniques to gain sexual access, often teaching men to view women as targets to be conquered.

**Tradwife and Influencer Culture:** Some content created by women reinforces regressive gender roles and promotes submission under the guise of traditional values.

On the surface, manosphere content may look like fitness advice, financial tips, or 'masculine motivation'—but much of it quickly leads to hostile beliefs about women, relationships, and social power.

### Where Is This Content Found?

Much of the manosphere exists outside mainstream social media, using platforms with low moderation and minimal oversight, such as:

- Reddit, Discord, Telegram, YouTube, TikTok, and fringe sites
- Private forums and closed communities

- Algorithmic recommendations that feed increasingly extreme content

Some young people find this material through direct searches. Others stumble into it while looking for things like:

- Gym workouts and fitness advice
- Financial tips and entrepreneurship content
- Dating or relationship guidance
- Role models or self-improvement channels
- Gaming communities and discussions

This is one of the key challenges: young people often start with genuine interests in fitness or self-improvement, but can be gradually exposed to more harmful content.

### **Why Are Teenage Boys Especially at Risk?**

Adolescents are at a developmental stage where the brain is primed for:

- Identity formation and questioning
- Social status seeking and peer comparison
- Risk-taking and novelty seeking
- Peer approval and belonging needs
- Simplified narratives and strong emotional responses

This makes them more vulnerable to black-and-white thinking, and to charismatic voices offering clarity, power, and belonging. Add in feelings of rejection, social awkwardness, or loneliness and the appeal of the manosphere can be strong.

Young people may be drawn to these communities for reasons that include:

- Feeling overlooked or powerless in their daily lives
- Frustration with romantic rejection or social awkwardness
- Searching for meaning, purpose, or belonging
- Exposure to peer group norms that celebrate dominance
- A genuine desire for self-improvement in fitness, money, or confidence



## **Research Evidence: Understanding the Mental Health Connection**

Dr Joe Whittaker and colleagues (University of Swansea, 2025) conducted an extensive analysis of online incel communities, including over 600 adult men in their study "The Dual Pathways Hypothesis of Incel Harm" (Costello, Whittaker, and Thomas, 2025). Key findings included:

- 39% showed signs of clinical depression
- 43% had significant anxiety
- 21% reported suicidal thoughts
- 80% had experienced suicidal ideation in the previous two weeks

These figures suggest that while misogynistic beliefs are part of the picture, many individuals are primarily experiencing mental health distress, loneliness, and identity confusion.

## **Two Pathways into Harmful Ideology**

Whittaker's research identifies two broad routes:

### **The Entitlement Pathway**

- Belief in male superiority and natural dominance
- Hostility toward women and feminist ideologies
- A desire to dominate, control, or punish women

### **The Vulnerability Pathway**

- Experiences of trauma, bullying, or social rejection
- Feelings of worthlessness, isolation, or inadequacy
- Searching for meaning, purpose, or emotional support

Understanding the function of this content for the young person is vital. The same online video could reinforce dangerous thinking for one boy while offering a sense of relief and recognition for another.

## **Signs to Watch For (Without Jumping to Conclusions)**

- Obsessive focus on being an "alpha male" or "high value man"

- Hostile or dismissive attitudes toward girls or women
- Secrecy or intensity in online activity, especially on less familiar platforms
- Dramatic shifts in language, humour, or views about gender roles
- Rejection of feminism or gender equality as a form of 'wokeness'
- Preoccupation with physical appearance, gym culture, or "looksmaxxing"
- Social withdrawal or increasing isolation from mixed-gender activities

These signs do not confirm radicalisation. They may reflect exploration, confusion, or borrowed language from peers. The key is to stay curious, not confrontational.

### **Why It Matters for Safeguarding**

Manosphere content is not just an ideological threat—it's a safeguarding risk. Boys drawn into these spaces may:

- Adopt attitudes that normalise control, coercion, or hostility in relationships
- Experience mental health issues, including anxiety, low self-worth, and social withdrawal
- Isolate themselves or become entrenched in online subcultures that reinforce harmful beliefs
- Perceive violence or dominance as acceptable responses to frustration or rejection
- Develop unhealthy obsessions with physical appearance or social status

Safeguarding professionals must be equipped to recognise the signs, understand the pathways into these spaces, and offer credible, supportive alternatives.

### **How to Respond in Schools: A Developmental Safeguarding Approach**

The goal is not to police ideas or punish opinions, but to build insight, critical thinking, and emotional safety. Consider this a safeguarding issue, not a culture war.

#### **1. Stay Curious, Not Alarmed**

Ask open questions:

- "What's that content helping you with?"

- "What makes this person's message appealing?"
- "How do you feel after watching their videos?"

Listen without judgement. Avoid reacting to shock value statements—most are testing reactions, not expressing fixed beliefs.

## **2. Understand the Function of the Behaviour**

Just like other safeguarding concerns, ask: "What is this behaviour doing for the young person?" Are they seeking control? Recognition? Validation? Protection? Once you understand the emotional need, you can find safer ways to meet it.

## **3. Support Identity Development**

Give boys space to explore what masculinity means—beyond dominance and power. Use PHSE, mentorship, or pastoral time to:

- Promote emotional literacy and expression
- Challenge limiting gender stereotypes
- Encourage respectful relationships and consent education

## **4. Model and Offer Positive Role Models**

Invite male mentors who model healthy masculinity—strength with empathy, confidence without cruelty, success without dominance.

## **5. Use Adjacent Interests as Entry Points**

If a student is into fitness, video editing, coding, or entrepreneurship, help them find credible voices and positive communities that don't push toxic ideologies.

## **6. Shift the Environment, Not Just the Individual**

Preventative safeguarding includes creating a culture where:

- Emotional safety is prioritised for all students
- Misogynistic or exclusionary humour is challenged consistently
- Peer status isn't tied to dominance or aggression
- Vulnerability and help-seeking are normalised

This is a whole-school responsibility.

## **Checklist for DSLs and Pastoral Teams**

- Track identity and belonging needs, not just online activity
- Create space to talk about masculinity, power, and emotional expression
- Watch for feelings of isolation or invisibility
- Challenge language and ideas without shaming the young person
- Work with families—especially fathers and male carers
- Connect boys to constructive interests and wider communities
- Build relational safety before crisis occurs

## **Connecting to Wider Safeguarding Themes**

Understanding and responding to the manosphere should not be siloed. The beliefs, behaviours, and vulnerabilities associated with it overlap with several key safeguarding responsibilities. Recognising these connections helps DSLs build coherent, integrated responses across policy, training, and culture.

## **Core Safeguarding Intersections**

### **Online Radicalisation and Extremism (Prevent Duty)**

Misogynistic ideologies can overlap with or feed into extremist narratives, including far-right and incel-related ideologies. While not all manosphere content meets the threshold for referral, it often uses the same mechanisms of grievance, identity, and 'us vs. them' framing.

### **Key Considerations:**

- Schools have a duty under the Prevent strategy to assess risk, educate pupils, and act proportionately
- The same vulnerable young people who are drawn to extremist content may be susceptible to manosphere ideologies
- Both involve identity crisis, social isolation, and simplified narratives about complex social issues
- Escalation pathways from misogynistic content to more extreme ideologies are well-documented

**Practical Response:**

- Include manosphere awareness in Prevent training for staff
- Monitor online activity patterns that suggest increasing extremism
- Consider Channel referrals where appropriate, particularly when content becomes fixated on violence or revenge

**Gender-Based Harassment in Schools (Ofsted / KCSIE)**

The 2021 Ofsted review found sexual harassment and gendered language to be widespread in schools. Manosphere content may normalise disrespect, coercion, or entitlement in relationships, leading to harmful attitudes and behaviour in school.

**Key Considerations:**

- DSLs and school leaders must ensure that responding to sexist language and behaviour is embedded in daily safeguarding practice, not treated as low-level disruption
- Language learned online quickly transfers to school environments
- Peer group dynamics can amplify and normalise harmful attitudes
- Staff may dismiss concerning behaviour as "typical teenage boy" conduct

**Practical Response:**

- Train all staff to recognise and challenge misogynistic language consistently
- Develop clear policies linking online influence to in-school behaviour
- Create reporting mechanisms that capture patterns of gendered harassment
- Ensure sanctions are educational, not just punitive

**Sexual Violence and Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB)**

Some manosphere narratives promote hostility, conquest, or dehumanisation of women, directly contributing to sexually harmful attitudes. A preventative, whole-school approach to HSB should include challenging myths, supporting healthy relationships education, and promoting mutual respect.

**Key Considerations:**

- Manosphere content often promotes coercive sexual strategies

- "Pick-up artist" techniques taught online can constitute sexual harassment
- Dehumanising language about women creates psychological distance that enables harmful behaviour
- Early intervention is crucial before attitudes become entrenched

**Practical Response:**

- Include manosphere content in HSB risk assessments
- Develop age-appropriate education about consent, respect, and healthy relationships
- Challenge victim-blaming narratives and entitlement beliefs
- Work with families to address concerning online influences

**Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing**

Many boys drawn into the manosphere are struggling with low self-worth, loneliness, or confusion about identity. Engagement with extreme content is sometimes a coping mechanism or an outlet for distress.

**Key Considerations:**

- Safeguarding teams should view this as a mental health concern, not just a behaviour issue
- Depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation are common in manosphere communities
- Social isolation and rejection sensitivity increase vulnerability
- Traditional masculine norms may prevent boys from seeking help

**Practical Response:**

- Screen for underlying mental health needs when manosphere engagement is identified
- Provide safe spaces for boys to discuss identity, relationships, and emotional struggles
- Connect vulnerable young people with appropriate therapeutic support
- Address social isolation through meaningful peer connections

## School Culture and Equality Duty

The Equality Act 2010 requires schools to foster good relations between people, eliminate discrimination, and advance equality of opportunity. A school culture that tolerates sexist 'banter', dominance-based peer hierarchies, or dismisses emotional expression in boys may accidentally enable harmful ideologies to take root.

### Key Considerations:

- Promoting inclusive values, emotional safety, and respectful challenge is everyone's role
- Unconscious bias in staff responses may reinforce harmful gender stereotypes
- School policies must be reviewed through a gender equality lens
- Leadership must model respectful relationships and challenge discriminatory attitudes

### Practical Response:

- Audit school culture for gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices
- Provide equality and diversity training for all staff
- Create inclusive policies that challenge traditional gender roles
- Establish clear consequences for discriminatory behaviour

## Emerging Concerns: Looksmaxxing and Body Image

### Understanding Looksmaxxing and Overgrooming

While concerns about body image have historically focused on girls, a growing number of boys are engaging with online trends that promote extreme appearance enhancement, often known as:

- **Looksmaxxing** – the pursuit of maximising attractiveness, often linked to pseudoscientific or toxic masculinity ideals
- **Overgrooming** – obsessive attention to appearance, muscle gain, skincare, and fashion, often accompanied by anxiety, shame, or rigid perfectionism

## Why It Matters for Safeguarding

The looksmaxxing trend is often rooted in manosphere content, particularly ideas that equate physical dominance and attractiveness with social worth, status, or entitlement. This creates several safeguarding risks:

- Boys may be encouraged to fix perceived flaws via expensive or unsafe methods (e.g., jaw exercises, supplements, unlicensed cosmetic treatments)
- Failure to meet these ideals is framed as a personal failure, contributing to mental health problems, low self-esteem, or social withdrawal
- The pursuit becomes compulsive and interferes with education, relationships, and wellbeing
- Links to incel ideologies create additional risks around entitlement and resentment

## Signs to Look Out For

### Physical and Behavioural Changes:

- Sudden or extreme changes in grooming, gym routines, dieting, or supplement use
- Obsessive mirror checking, photograph analysis, or appearance-focused anxiety
- Dramatic weight loss or gain, or evidence of unsafe dietary practices
- Spending excessive money on appearance products, treatments, or gym memberships

### Language and Attitude Indicators:

- Obsession with "Alpha Male" status, height, facial symmetry, or dating app success
- Rejection of emotional vulnerability or non-masculine traits
- Use of phrases like "blackpill," "Chad," "gymcel," or "SMV" (sexual market value) — often linked to incel subcultures
- Derogatory comments about other boys' or men's appearance



## **Social and Emotional Signs:**

- Social withdrawal or reluctance to participate in activities
- Increased anxiety around social situations or being photographed
- Mood changes linked to appearance or perceived rejection
- Comparison with unrealistic male beauty standards

## **Safeguarding Considerations**

### **Recognise the Deeper Issues:**

- These trends are not just about vanity — they reflect deep identity struggles and vulnerability to online influence
- School policies on appearance (e.g., haircuts, grooming) should be reviewed with sensitivity, ensuring they don't inadvertently shame or exacerbate anxiety in boys struggling with body image or identity
- Pastoral staff should approach the issue with empathy, recognising the overlap with anxiety, perfectionism, and online harm

### **Practical Responses:**

- Train staff to recognise signs of appearance-related distress in boys
- Review uniform and appearance policies for potential negative impacts
- Provide education about media literacy and unrealistic beauty standards
- Create safe spaces for boys to discuss body image and identity concerns
- Work with families to address concerning online influences and spending patterns

## **Building Integrated Responses**

### **Cross-Team Collaboration**

Effective responses require coordination across:

- Safeguarding teams for risk assessment and intervention
- Pastoral care for daily support and relationship building

- SEND teams for young people with additional vulnerabilities
- Mental health leads for therapeutic support
- Senior leadership for policy development and culture change

## **Training and Development**

All staff need awareness of:

- How manosphere content intersects with existing safeguarding concerns
- Recognition of concerning language, attitudes, and behaviours
- De-escalation techniques for challenging conversations
- Referral pathways and threshold decisions
- The importance of maintaining relationships while challenging ideas

## **Policy Integration**

Review existing policies to ensure they address:

- Online safety and digital citizenship
- Anti-bullying and harassment procedures
- Equality and inclusion commitments
- Mental health and wellbeing support
- Relationship and sex education content

## **Conclusion: Connection Is the Protective Factor**

The manosphere thrives in emotional disconnection. As safeguarding professionals, our counter to this must be proactive and relational. This means fostering strong, supportive relationships with young people, building a culture of respectful challenge, and embedding emotional literacy across the curriculum.

When we help pupils feel seen, heard, and valued, we reduce the pull of harmful online spaces and ideologies. The manosphere offers certainty, identity, and answers—however damaging they may be. Our job is to offer something better: relationship, respect, challenge, and care.

Rather than fear these online spaces, we can equip young people to navigate them safely, question what they see, and choose values rooted in empathy, dignity, and equality.

By understanding how manosphere influence connects to wider safeguarding themes, we can build comprehensive approaches that address root causes rather than just symptoms. Understanding the connections between manosphere influence and wider safeguarding themes enables schools to respond more effectively. Rather than treating these as separate issues, integrated approaches recognise that vulnerable young people often face multiple, interconnected challenges.

The goal is not to eliminate all risk, but to build resilience, critical thinking, and positive relationships that protect young people from harm while supporting their healthy development into respectful, emotionally literate adults.

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## References

Costello, M., Whittaker, J., & Thomas, L. (2025). The Dual Pathways Hypothesis of Incel Harm. *Journal of Online Extremism Research*, University of Swansea.

## Artificial Intelligence and Safeguarding

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is one of the most significant technological developments of recent years. It offers genuine opportunities for education, from reducing administrative workload to supporting creative learning. Many schools are already exploring how AI can be used positively.

The role of the Designated Safeguarding Lead and senior leaders is not to evaluate every potential benefit of AI, but to identify and respond to risks where children and young people may come to harm. By concentrating on safeguarding challenges, this section complements rather than contradicts broader discussions of AI's educational value.

### The AI Safeguarding Progression

Schools move through four stages of AI safeguarding readiness:

**Developing Awareness:** recognising AI as a safeguarding issue.

**Understanding Risks:** identifying and naming AI-related harms (e.g. deepfakes, sextortion).

**Integration:** embedding AI safeguarding into policies, training, and procedures.

**Leadership:** shaping culture, influencing others, and modelling AI-literate safeguarding.

Each article in this chapter, and the scenarios in the appendix, link to these stages to help DSLs identify where their school currently sits and what steps to take next.

### Understanding Generative AI and Current Guidance

#### What We Mean by Generative AI

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to computer systems that can create new content such as text, images, audio, or video. Unlike traditional software, which follows fixed rules, generative AI produces outputs based on patterns learned from vast datasets. Tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, and image generators like DALL·E are common examples.

For safeguarding leaders, the key point is that generative AI is non-deterministic: the same input may lead to different results. In other words, if you ask the same question twice, you might get two different answers - unlike a calculator which always gives

the same result. This variability is intentional - it's what allows AI to be creative, offer different perspectives, and avoid repetitive responses. However, this same flexibility also creates new safeguarding challenges.

Understanding that AI can give different answers helps explain why:

- Risk assessment needs to be ongoing rather than one-off
- Staff can't predict exactly what pupils might encounter
- Monitoring and supervision remain essential even with "safe" AI tools
- Policies need to be flexible rather than prescriptive about specific outputs

## Government Guidance

In June 2025, the Department for Education (DfE) published initial guidance on AI in schools. While this represents an important step, the guidance leaves several gaps:

- No clarity on age restrictions or platform terms of service.
- No list of recommended or unsuitable tools.
- No practical safeguarding procedures for staff and pupils.
- No policy templates or Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) examples.

**A particular concern is that many popular AI tools explicitly prohibit use by children in their terms and conditions.** For example, ChatGPT requires users to be 13+ (18+ in some regions), Claude requires users to be 18+, and many image generation tools have similar restrictions. Schools using these tools with younger pupils may be breaching terms of service, potentially voiding safeguards and raising liability questions.

Schools are therefore expected to conduct their own due diligence, provide interim guidance, and update policies accordingly.

## Ofsted's Position

In June 2025, Ofsted clarified how AI will be considered during inspection. AI use is not judged in isolation, but only when it affects outcomes or safety. Inspectors will expect to see:

- **Leadership scrutiny:** thoughtful, documented decision-making about AI.
- **Clear staff and pupil policies:** with responsive action on misuse.

- **Risk management:** AI risks integrated into existing safeguarding frameworks.
- **Transparency:** schools being open with staff, pupils, and parents about AI use.

## Keeping Pace with Change

AI technology evolves at unprecedented speed. New tools, capabilities, and risks emerge monthly rather than annually. Schools should therefore:

- Review AI safeguarding policies each term
- Monitor pupil use of new AI tools through regular surveys or focus groups
- Subscribe to updates from organisations like the NSPCC, Childline, and Internet Watch Foundation
- Build flexibility into policies rather than naming specific tools that may become obsolete

**The key principle: safeguarding frameworks must be as adaptable as the technology they seek to govern.**

## Key Safeguarding Takeaway

National frameworks are incomplete. Schools must take proactive steps — updating policies, training staff, and building awareness — to ensure AI use supports, rather than undermines, safeguarding.

**Schools should consider establishing an AI development group that includes the DSL alongside other key stakeholders** such as a governor, pedagogy lead, IT team member, and senior leader. This ensures safeguarding considerations are embedded in all AI decisions from the outset, rather than being addressed as an afterthought.

## AI and Safeguarding Risks in Practice

### Why AI Matters for Safeguarding Practice

Children are often among the earliest adopters of new technology. This means safeguarding practice must adapt quickly, because risks emerge before regulation or guidance is fully in place.

Research shows:

- 79% of UK 13–17-year-olds already use AI.

- 18% of Key Stage 2 pupils report using AI outside school.
- This compares with 31% of adults.

This rapid uptake means schools cannot assume AI is only relevant to older students.

## Key Risks for Children

According to the NSPCC (2025), AI raises significant risks for children, including:

- Sexual grooming
- Sexual harassment
- Bullying
- Sextortion (sexual extortion)
- Child sexual abuse and exploitation
- Harmful content
- Harmful advertising and recommendations

Case studies from Childline illustrate how these risks play out in reality:

- A 16-year-old boy tricked into sending money after threats to share AI-generated sexual images.
- A 14-year-old girl distressed by fake nude images of herself circulated in group chats.
- A 14-year-old boy blackmailed after his face was placed on an AI-generated sexual image.

## Wider Harms

Other concerns linked to AI include:

- **Enhanced cybercrime and fraud:** AI-generated phishing emails, fake voice calls from "senior leaders," fraudulent communications, and identity theft attempts that are increasingly difficult to detect.
- **Disinformation and reputational damage:** Fake social media posts, manipulated images of school incidents, or false stories that could damage school reputation or cause community alarm.

- Privacy risks where data is misused.
- Lack of regulation and ethical framework for emerging AI technologies.

## **Key Safeguarding Takeaway**

DSLs and school leaders must anticipate that AI can be misused for grooming, bullying, harassment, extortion, and misinformation. Policies, training, and digital literacy education should prepare staff and pupils for these emerging risks.

## **Synthetic Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)**

### **What We Mean by "Synthetic"**

When we talk about synthetic CSAM, we mean child sexual abuse material that has been created using artificial intelligence or other digital tools, rather than recorded directly with a camera. Synthetic CSAM can still be based on real photographs of children, or trained on existing abuse images, and so it causes real harm even if no child was directly present in its creation.

### **Why We Don't Use the Term "Child Pornography"**

The term "child pornography" is misleading and minimises harm. It suggests a connection to consensual adult pornography, which risks trivialising abuse and even shifting blame onto victims. The correct term is child sexual abuse material (CSAM). This phrasing accurately reflects that such material is abusive, illegal, and fundamentally about the exploitation of children.

### **The Rise of AI-Generated Imagery**

Artificial intelligence has rapidly developed the ability to generate images and videos that are almost indistinguishable from genuine photographs. While this has creative and professional uses, the same tools are exploited to create abusive material.

### **How Synthetic CSAM Is Created**

AI can generate CSAM in several ways:

- **Manipulated images** – everyday photographs of children digitally transformed into indecent images.
- **Clothing removal or "nudify" apps** – software that digitally strips clothing to create sexualised images from ordinary photos.
- **Fully generated content** – AI models trained on real abuse material to produce new images or videos.



Synthetic CSAM is not "victimless." Models are trained on real abuse material, re-exploiting victims. Even cartoon-style images may originate from real photographs of children.

### The Scale of the Problem

- Reports of AI-generated CSAM videos detected by law enforcement and child protection agencies rose from 2 (Jan–June 2024) to 1,286 (Jan–June 2025).
- Over 1,000 of these were Category A – the most extreme content.
- The IWF warns it is inevitable that full-length synthetic CSAM films will be produced as technology advances.
- Video quality is now indistinguishable from genuine footage, with extreme content dominating.
- More than 25% of child protection professionals remain unaware AI-generated CSAM is illegal.
- Contacts to the Lucy Faithfull Foundation from adults concerned about their own use of CSAM, or the behaviour of someone they know, have doubled in relation to AI-generated material, showing significant and growing concern.

### Legal Position

- All AI-generated CSAM is illegal in the UK, regardless of how it is created.
- This includes photorealistic, cartoon, animated, or illustrated content.
- Section 62 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 criminalises non-photorealistic indecent images.
- CPS guidance confirms high-quality AI-generated indecent images can be prosecuted as pseudo-photographs.

### Safeguarding Implications for Schools

- **Awareness:** Pupils may create AI sexual images of peers as "jokes" without understanding the seriousness.
- **Policy:** Online safety and safeguarding policies must explicitly reference synthetic imagery.
- **Prevention:** Staff and parents should be cautious about sharing children's images publicly.

- **Reporting:** Staff should focus on whether an image has or could cause harm to a child, rather than trying to determine if it's real, AI-generated, or technically illegal. Any sexualised image of a child—regardless of how it was created—should be reported through normal safeguarding protocols.

### Staff Use of AI Tools

Staff are increasingly using AI for lesson planning, marking, and administrative tasks. Schools should ensure:

- **Policy compliance:** Staff check school AI policies before using any tools professionally.
- **Data protection:** Staff avoid inputting confidential pupil or school information into AI systems.
- **Modelling behaviour:** Staff demonstrate responsible AI use, showing pupils how to use tools appropriately and transparently.

### Communicating with Parents

Parents need clear, practical information about AI safeguarding without unnecessary alarm:

- **Explaining risks:** Focus on specific actions parents can take rather than abstract dangers.
- **Home use guidance:** Share age-appropriate recommendations for AI tools and supervision.
- **Incident involvement:** Involve parents when AI-related safeguarding concerns affect their child, explaining both the technology and the response.

### Support Services

- **Teenagers worried about sexual behaviour:** [www.shorespace.org.uk](http://www.shorespace.org.uk) (Lucy Faithfull Foundation)
- **Adults seeking support:** [www.stopitnow.org.uk](http://www.stopitnow.org.uk) (Lucy Faithfull Foundation)
- **Victims under 18:** [www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/report-remove/](http://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/report-remove/) (Childline Report Remove Service)
- **Adults affected by non-consensual intimate image sharing:** [www.revengepornhelpline.org.uk](http://www.revengepornhelpline.org.uk)

Artificial Intelligence has the potential to be a positive force in education, offering new tools for teaching, learning, and efficiency. Yet safeguarding must always be the starting point.

### **Be aware of evolving risks**

Unlike traditional safeguarding risks that evolve slowly, AI presents new challenges with each technological advancement. Schools should treat their AI safeguarding policies as living documents, reviewed termly and updated as new tools and risks emerge.

By identifying the risks of AI and responding to them with clear policies, training, and vigilance, schools can ensure that the benefits of AI are realised without compromising the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

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## **Appendix: Scenarios for Discussion**

### **How to Use These Scenarios**

These fictional case studies are designed for DSLs and safeguarding leaders to use in staff training, team reflection, or policy review. They illustrate how AI intersects with safeguarding at different levels of readiness.

Each scenario includes:

- A narrative of what happened.
- Decision points — what staff did or did not do.
- Safeguarding implications — the potential risks or gaps.
- A reflection prompt for discussion.
- An action to take next.

You can photocopy or print these pages for training sessions.

### **The Progression Pathway**

Schools move through four stages of AI safeguarding readiness:

- **Developing Awareness:** recognising AI as a safeguarding issue.
- **Understanding Risks:** identifying and naming AI-related harms.

- **Integration:** embedding AI safeguarding into policies, training, and procedures.
- **Leadership:** shaping culture, influencing others, and modelling AI-literate safeguarding.

These scenarios follow the same pathway:

- **Scenario A** → Developing Awareness
- **Scenario B** → Understanding Risks
- **Scenario C** → Integration
- **Scenario D** → Leadership

The purpose is not to "score" your school, but to help you recognise where you are now and plan the next step forward.

### **Scenario A: Developing Awareness**

#### **Narrative**

A parent emails the headteacher, worried that their child is using AI chatbots at home to get homework answers. The head dismisses the concern, saying "We've always had Google — this is no different." The school's safeguarding policy has no reference to AI, and staff training has not covered it.

#### **Decision Points**

- Leadership chose not to treat AI as a new safeguarding issue.
- No policy review or risk assessment was initiated.

#### **Safeguarding Implications**

- Missed opportunity to build awareness of risks such as grooming, sextortion, or harmful misinformation through AI.
- Staff and pupils remain unprepared for AI-specific incidents.

#### **Reflection Prompt**

How can schools raise awareness of AI without overcomplicating safeguarding policy?

**Action**

Hold a safeguarding team discussion on how AI is already being used by pupils in and out of school. Add AI to the agenda for your next policy review.

**Scenario B: Understanding Risks****Narrative**

During lunch, Year 9 pupils share a deepfake image that makes it appear a girl in their class is in a sexual situation. A teacher reports it, and the safeguarding lead logs it as "cyberbullying." The student is supported, but there is no recognition that the image may constitute synthetic CSAM. Parents are told it is "just online teasing."

**Decision Points**

- Staff identified the harm but treated it as a generic cyber issue.
- No escalation to DSL-level discussion of legality or reporting.

**Safeguarding Implications**

- Failing to recognise synthetic CSAM leaves children vulnerable and undermines statutory duties.
- Parents and pupils are given the impression this was less serious than it truly was.

**Reflection Prompt**

How should schools ensure staff can distinguish between cyberbullying and AI-generated abuse?

**Action**

Update staff training so all colleagues can recognise when an incident involves AI-generated material (e.g. deepfakes, nudify apps). Clarify reporting lines to the DSL for these cases.

**Scenario C: Integration****Narrative**

A safeguarding team introduces monthly "digital landscape briefings." Staff share examples of AI tools pupils are using and discuss risks. Policies are updated with

clear references to AI, and an AI-related safeguarding concern is used in training. The school begins piloting an AI detection tool for safeguarding reports.

### **Decision Points**

- Leaders chose to integrate AI into existing safeguarding structures rather than create a separate system.
- Safeguarding training was refreshed to include AI-specific scenarios.

### **Safeguarding Implications**

- Staff confidence in handling AI-related issues increases.
- Pupils and parents receive clearer messages about what is safe and unsafe.

### **Reflection Prompt**

What simple steps could your school take to begin integrating AI into safeguarding systems this term?

### **Action**

Audit your current safeguarding policies and procedures to check whether they explicitly reference AI-related risks. Update them, and include AI examples in the next round of staff training.

## **Scenario D: Leadership**

### **Narrative**

The DSL sets up a pupil "AI Ethics Council" to advise on responsible use of technology. The school contributes to a local authority working group on AI safeguarding and shares updated policies with neighbouring schools. Governors receive termly updates on AI risks.

### **Decision Points**

- The DSL went beyond compliance, actively shaping practice and policy.
- Leadership invested time in involving pupils and governors.

### **Safeguarding Implications**

- AI safeguarding is embedded as part of whole-school culture.

- The school models good practice for other settings.

## Reflection Prompt

What would leadership in AI safeguarding look like in your school's context?

## Action

Develop a forward-looking plan that involves pupils, governors, and external partners (e.g. local authorities, tech organisations) in shaping responsible AI use. Share your learning with other schools or networks.

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## References

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## Cyber Security

As the world becomes more and more reliant on technology and the links between data, finance and ourselves become intertwined, there has been a growth in cybercrime. Schools are not immune from these issues and taking cyber security seriously is important.

The government's Cyber Security Breaches Survey 2024 found that cyber attacks were increasing on schools and secondary schools were more likely to be attacked than businesses. School tend to be attacked more compared to businesses as they tend to use older computer systems, lack security expertise and have a lack of technical capacity to maintain and improve systems. This is especially true of primary schools. Smaller schools might be seen by criminals as a 'stepping stone' to a bigger organisation. For example, a primary school might be used to get access to the education authority's systems and on into the council servers.

Type of Attack	Primary	Secondary
Phishing	92%	89%
Others impersonating the organisation	29%	58%
Viruses, spyware, or malware	14%	21%
Unauthorised access of files or networks by staff	4%	19%
Hacking or attempted hacking of online bank accounts	5%	8%
Ransomware	3%	2%
Denial of service attacks	3%	14%

**Source:** Cyber Security Breaches Survey 2024 Educational institutions findings annex (Home Office/Dept. For Science, Innovation and Technology)

Schools are guardians of many kinds of data, personal, financial and some special category data. Accessing this data can be lucrative for criminals. Sometimes criminals might attack a school's systems with ransomware which prevents the school using the data until a ransom fee is paid.

### Ransomware

In one attack in 2021, that affected one of the largest academy chains in England, a ransom of \$4million was sought. The attack left the multi-academy trust without fully working systems for several months. All systems were affected not just computers:



door access, whiteboards, CCTV and email systems were brought down. Many of these attacks take place on Friday evenings, to give the criminals time to work.

Advice from the DfE and the Education Funding Agency is that schools should not pay any ransom demanded. Not only does that encourage further attacks, but often the criminals are not able to restore the data they have attacked – even if they were interested in reinstatement.

Other attacks include email server attacks where the criminals use the server credentials and processing power to send out their own spam emails. This is often done without the school knowing.

Financial attacks can take many forms. One example used an independent school's email system to send out a legitimate looking email to inform parents that the school's bank details had changed, replacing the school account with the criminal's.

### **Phishing emails**

Cybercrime often uses phishing emails to send out unwanted links that will communicate with their servers to download malicious software. This code might gain access to the email server, 'lock' data from legitimate access or steal valuable information, like bank details. Emails lists are themselves valuable for resale to other cybercriminals. Sending targeted emails to a specific person is known as 'spear phishing' and may use emails found on an organisation's website.

Phishing emails often look legitimate or enticing in some way. Perhaps it says that you have won a prize, others come from an organisation that many people use, like TV licensing, and look like a payment reminder. The criminal just wants you to click on their malicious link. Immediately deleting emails from someone you don't know or with an unusual looking email address should raise red flags.

In addition to phishing and spear-phishing, other attacks include smishing (sms or text messages to mobile phones), vishing (a scam voice call to a telephone or mobile) and quishing.

In a quishing attack, criminals create a QR code containing a link to a website or malicious computer code. This QR code is then stuck over a legitimate code, for example, on a menu or payment poster. Once such attack sent carpark users to a fake payment website where drivers paid the criminals, not the legitimate owner. It was a double blow as drivers only realised when fines for non-payment of carparking came through.

Whilst cyber attacks may come from outside the school, people inside it could be a risk too. One risk occurs when students or staff leave the school and access to the organisation's systems hasn't expired. This can allow unauthorised users continued

access. Closing this loophole is always important, but can be vital as in the case of disgruntled employees who may have been dismissed.

## **Passwords and Passphrases**

Perhaps the most important step in keeping safe from cyber crime is ensuring that we use strong passphrases. These are longer the passwords and make them much more secure. A passphrase is easy to remember, but long enough to take time for the software that criminals use to attack your login screen.

Although many people do, it is important not to use the same password for more than one account. Strong, unique passphrases are important especially for banking or shopping. One way to strengthen the passphrase is to add the name of the store.

Other way to secure passwords are to use a password safe app of some kind like LastPass or 1Password. Many phones, tablets and computer browser can keep passwords safe too.

Two factor authentication has started to become common place in order to protect our systems and data. Often known as 2FA or sometimes MFA (multifactor authentication), these security enhancements use facial or fingerprint recognition, a separate verification app on a smartphone or an email to a specific email address known only to the user.

Government guidance 'Meeting digital and technology standards in schools and colleges' updated in 2024 says that all staff, including at least one governor, should attend annual cyber security training.

## **Further information**

Meeting digital and technology standards in schools and colleges (DfE, 2024)

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/meeting-digital-and-technology-standards-in-schools-and-colleges>

Cyber security standards for schools and colleges (DfE, 2024)

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/meeting-digital-and-technology-standards-in-schools-and-colleges/cyber-security-standards-for-schools-and-colleges>

## Disclosure and Barring Service

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service>

*This information should be read in conjunction with the safer recruitment section in part three of Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025).*

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) (Formally the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB)) vets people who work with children and vulnerable adults. There are three levels of checks depending on the nature of the work that a person undertakes:

- Standard
  - a check of the Police National Computer (PNC) records of convictions, cautions, reprimands and warnings;
- Enhanced
  - a check of the PNC records as above
    - plus other information that is considered relevant by the police
- Enhanced with barred list information
  - only legal for people working in regulated activity with children
    - adds DBS' Children's Barred List checks

### Applicant Only Certificates

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) only issue certificates to the applicant themselves; the employer will not be sent a copy. It is essential therefore that schools have procedures in place to monitor this and ensure that they see the DBS Certificate as soon as it is available. Appropriate steps must be taken to safeguard children prior to seeing the DBS certificate by completing a risk assessment.

If all the following conditions are met, employers may be able to request copies of DBS certificates:

- The individual is subscribed to the Update Service; and
- The employer has carried out a Status check which revealed a change to the DBS Certificate; and as a result:
  - The individual has applied for a new criminal record check; and
  - The DBS issued the new DBS Certificate to the applicant more than 28 days ago; and
  - The applicant has not shown the employer their new DBS Certificate.

## DBS Update Service

The DBS Update service is an online service that allows applicants to keep their DBS certificate up to date and employers can check the validity of a DBS certificate.

Applicants receiving a new DBS certificate are able to subscribe to the DBS Update Service on application, or within 30 days of the certificate being issued. A subscription to the update service lasts a year and costs £13 (volunteers pay no fee). Using the Update service is free for employers. *[Price correct August 2019]*

When accepting a new job in regulated employment, where the prospective worker is registered with the DBS Update Service and gives their consent, the new employer can easily check online whether the applicant's DBS certificate is current or not. If the DBS certificate is not current, a new application must be made. If a certificate is 'not current', it may mean that the subscription has expired or the certificate has been updated with new information, eg. a warning, caution or conviction. Certificates that are not current are removed from the database.

If the information on a DBS record changes, it is the responsibility of the employee to inform their employer. An update is not sent to either the employee or employer.

The DBS Update Service can only be used within the same workforce group as the DBS Certificate:

- Child Workforce
- Adult Workforce

***Staff can only subscribe to the DBS Update Service within 30 days of receiving their DBS certificate and must renew their registration annually.***

For many people, subscribing to the update service will be unnecessary. However, for those who move from school to school regularly, eg. consultants, agency staff, or adults who undertake voluntary work, eg. teachers who coach a football team out-of-school, it may be beneficial to sign up, but not until after they have obtained a new check.

There is no obligation for either employers or employees to use the DBS Updating Service.

## Status Check Outcomes

The outcome of a check using the DBS Update Service will be one of the following:

***This Certificate did not reveal any information and remains current as no further information has been identified since its issue***

This means that the individual's Certificate contains no criminality or barring information and no new information is available.

***This Certificate remains current as no further information has been identified since its issue***

This means that the individual's Certificate did contain criminality or barring information and no new information is available.

***This Certificate is no longer current. Please apply for a new DBS check to get the most up to date information.***

This means that the individual's Certificate should not be relied upon as new information is now available and you should request a new DBS check.

## Updating CRB Certificates obtained before June 2013

There is no legislation that requires schools to undertake repeat DBS checks on staff whose CRB certificates date back before June 2013, in fact if there has been no change in employment since May 2006 there is no requirement to check at all. However the older the check is, the less reliable it is.

*Whilst there is no 'requirement' to do so, schools may undertake checks if they wish.*

Schools should consider their own situation and assess the risk to their pupils of staff who have not been subject to vetting checks for a number of years. Governing bodies should ensure that the safeguarding risks to students in the school have been identified and mitigated. New DBS certificates should always be obtained when there has been a break in service of three months or more.

## Renewals of DBS checks

There is no 'requirement' to renew DBS checks for existing staff unless there are concerns about their suitability to work with children. Although this is the statutory requirement, it is the policy of many schools and local authorities to undertake new DBS checks from time to time.

## Referrals to the DBS

Schools and colleges have a legal duty to refer to the DBS anyone who has harmed, or poses a risk of harm, to a child. The DBS will consider whether to bar the person. Referrals should be made as soon as possible after the resignation or removal of the individual.

Further details can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/dbs-referrals-guidance--2>

## Positions that require a DBS check:

Anyone undertaking a regulated activity with children or vulnerable adults.

The checklist for positions requiring a DBS Check can be found at the link below: <https://www.gov.uk/find-out-dbs-check>

## The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012

The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 made a number of changes to the government requirements and reduced the scope of the definition of regulated activity.

- There is no requirement to routinely carry out DBS checks on all volunteers, even where they regularly work with children, however:
  - Schools must complete a written risk assessment for every volunteer who wishes to work in the school, and one outcome of the risk assessment may be that a DBS check should be carried out (Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025 (see paragraph 313)).

## Changes to the Criminal Records System – November 2020

Important legal changes came into force on the 28th November 2020 to take into account a judgement by the Supreme Court. These changes are:

- Cautions given to under 18s are no longer legally disclosed
- The multiple conviction rule has been removed so that each offence should be considered individually
- Applicants must be told how to get independent, confidential advice on which cautions or convictions they must disclose and be given time to obtain advice

Enhanced DBS certificates will always include the following records no matter when they were received:

- All convictions for specified offences
- Adult cautions for specified offences
- All convictions that resulted in a custodial sentence

These changes mean schools should review their safer recruitment procedures so that:

- The wording on the application form regarding criminal records is legally compliant with the Supreme Court judgement.
- The DBS suggests that the following questions are used as a template for recruitment processes:

*Do you have any unspent conditional cautions or convictions under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 [yes/no]*

*Do you have any adult cautions [simple or conditional] or spent convictions that are not protected as defined by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 [exceptions] Order 1975 [amendment] [England and Wales] Order 2020 [yes/no]*

- The DBS also encourages employers to include the paragraphs below in standard application forms.

*The amendments to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 [exceptions] Order 1975 [2013 and 2020] provides that when applying for certain jobs and activities certain convictions and cautions are considered "protected." This means that they do not need to be disclosed to employers and, if they are disclosed, employers cannot take them into account. Guidance about whether a conviction or caution should be disclosed can be found on the Ministry of Justice Website and on the websites of charities NACRO and UNLOCK.*

- Applicants must be given information on where to obtain advice, for example, NACRO or UNLOCK.
- Applicants must be given time to access this advice so the request for the self-declaration of any criminal cautions or convictions should be made only to shortlisted candidates and before the interview itself.
- Applicants should not be asked verbally in the interview whether they have any criminal cautions or convictions that would prevent them working for children, as they will not have access to the advice they may need about what should be disclosed.
- Should any protected cautions or convictions be inadvertently disclosed, it is unlawful to take that information into account in suitability decisions.
- Information used to make interview and suitability decisions should be kept in case a legal challenge is made to the decision.
  - Retained information should include:
    - Copies of Enhanced DBS certificates, self-declarations, interview notes, and risk assessments.
    - The retention of this information must be specified in the organisation's data privacy notices and the data protection policy.

- Information for successful candidates should be kept for the duration of employment; for unsuccessful candidates, a retention period of six months should be sufficient.
- Although Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) states that photocopies of DBS certificates should not be kept for more than six months, the DBS and the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) agree that copies of certificates may be kept for this purpose.

### **DBS Update Service**

Enhanced DBS certificates will not be reissued unless a new application is made. This means that when schools are shown original enhanced DBS certificates prior to checking with the DBS Update Service, the original certificate may show cautions or convictions that would have been filtered from 28th November 2020. These offences must not be used in any suitability decisions.

### **Further Information**

DBS Filtering Rules – What should be disclosed?

See Flowchart overleaf

Guidance on the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and the Exceptions Order 1974

(Ministry of Justice)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-guidance-on-the-rehabilitation-of-offenders-act-1974>

New filtering rules for DBS certificates (from 28th November 2020 onwards) (Disclosure and Barring Service)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/filtering-rules-for-criminal-record-check-certificates/new-filtering-rules-for-dbs-certificates-from-28-november-2020-onwards>

DBS filtering guide (Disclosure and Barring Service/ Ministry of Justice) *(from 28 Oct 2023)*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dbs-filtering-guidance/dbs-filtering-guide>

Filtering process flowchart, DBS vetting (NACRO)

<https://www.nacro.org.uk/nacro-services/criminal-record-support/advice-for-individuals/what-is-filtering/>

What will be filtered by the DBS (UNLOCK)

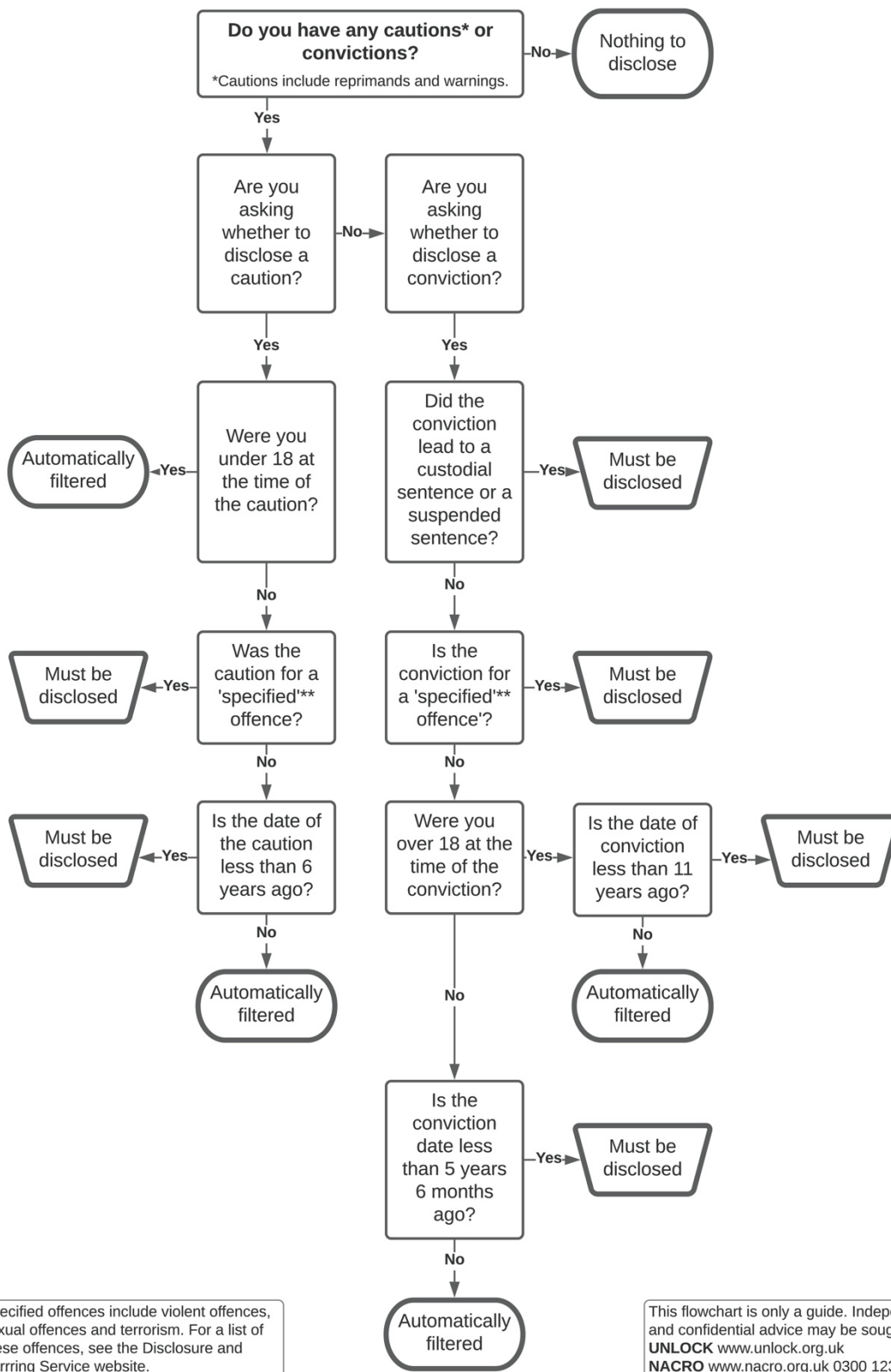
<https://unlock.org.uk/advice/what-will-be-filtered-by-dbs/>

List of offences that will never be filtered from a DBS certificate (Disclosure and Barring Service/Home Office)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dbs-filtering-guidance/dbs-filtering-guide>



### DBS Filtering Rules Flowchart - What should be disclosed?



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Source: Disclosure and Barring Service/Ministry of Justice

November 2020

## **Disqualification under the Childcare Act (2006) (as amended 2018)**

In the summer of 2018, the government published the outcome of the 'Disqualification by Association' consultation. The guidance was updated on 31st August 2018 and came into force on 3rd September 2018. A change in the law now means that Disqualification by Association only applies on domestic premises. However, Disqualification under the Childcare Act 2006, still applies to staff themselves.

Schools must no longer ask about the cautions or convictions of someone living or working in their household. (It should be noted that other statutory guidance may be relevant where the third-party lives on the school premises, such as in boarding schools.)

### **Main Points**

Disqualification by Association only applies in domestic settings, not schools.

Disqualification under the Child Care Act still applies to staff themselves who work in a childcare capacity, whether paid, volunteer or are on work placements.

Relevant staff are those working in childcare, or in a management role because they are: working with reception age children at any time; or working with children older than reception until age eight, outside school hours.

Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025) page 75 also refers to disqualification: "Childcare disqualification arrangements apply to staff working with young children in childcare settings, including primary schools, nurseries and other registered settings, such as childcare provision on college sites...employers need to ensure that appropriate checks are carried out to ensure that individuals are not disqualified under the Child Care Disqualification Regulations 2018.'

Schools are free to decide how to bring these requirements to the attention of their staff. As a means of making staff aware of their duty to provide such information, they may, for example, choose to include a section in the school's safeguarding policy, or another policy document, or by means of an addition to new staff members' contracts of employment. Schools should draw this guidance to the attention of their staff and the information provided by Ofsted referenced in this guidance.

Schools will need to review any historic data collected and destroy any information which is no longer required.

Ofsted and the Independent School Inspectorates will check the management of Disqualification under the Childcare Act as part of their routine school inspection process.

### **What should schools do**

- Inform staff of the changes and record the date that they were informed; a letter, or email might be best.
- Ensure that this information is included in the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy; and in the Safer Recruitment Policy
- Identify and record which staff are covered by Disqualification under the Childcare Act 2006 (including volunteers and people on work placements).
- Ask relevant staff to self-declare that they are not Disqualified under the Childcare Act 2006. (A form is not necessary). [An Enhanced DBS Certificate will confirm this for new staff; for existing employees, schools could consider using the DBS Update Service to supplement any employee self-declaration.]
- Remind all staff (regardless of the age of pupils they work with) about the expectation to inform the school where their 'relationships and associations', both within and outside of the workplace (including online), may have implications for the safeguarding of children in the school.
- Remind all staff that if their circumstances change they must inform the school.
- Decide whether these self-declarations will be kept on the Single Central Register, or elsewhere.
- Review any historic data collected and destroy any information which is no longer required.

The government guidance can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disqualification-under-the-childcare-act-2006/disqualification-under-the-childcare-act-2006>

## Appendix 1

### CPD Matrix for staff learning

Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, September 2024)	Included in Staff CPD Programme
Safeguarding training for staff, including online safety training, should be integrated, aligned and considered as part of the whole school or college safeguarding approach and wider staff training and curriculum planning.	
Know that safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility.	
All staff who work directly with children, should have read at least Part One of Keeping Children Safe in Education; and be aware of the safeguarding issues set out in Annex B.	
Staff should understand the guidance on Child-on-child sexual violence and sexual harassment, set out in Keeping Children Safe in Education (2024), Part Five.	
All teachers, including headteachers, should know that the Teachers' Standards 2012 state that they should safeguard children's wellbeing and maintain public trust in the teaching profession as part of their professional duties	
Know that safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility	
Know that that professionals should always consider what is in the best interests of the child.	
Know that everyone who comes into contact with them has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action	
Know the most up to date definition of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children (paragraph 3)	
Know that children refers to everyone under the age of 18.	
Know that all school and college staff have a responsibility to provide a safe environment in which children can learn.	
Know that all schools and colleges should have a designated safeguarding lead who will provide support to staff members to carry out their safeguarding duties	
Know that all school and college staff should be prepared to identify children who may benefit from early help	

Filename: Safeguarding Handbook for Schools September 2025 v.16.1 FINAL.docx

Know that in the first instance, staff should discuss early help requirements with the designated safeguarding lead.	
Know that all staff may be required to support social workers and other agencies following any referral	
Know that all teachers, including headteachers, should safeguard children's wellbeing and maintain public trust in the teaching profession	
Be aware of the contents of the school's child protection policy	
Be aware of the contents of the school's staff behaviour policy (code of conduct)	
Be aware of the role of the designated safeguarding lead	
All staff members should be aware that they must take part in safeguarding and child protection training which is regularly updated, at least annually	
All staff should be aware of the early help process, and understand their role in it.	
All staff should be aware of the process for making referrals to children's social care and for statutory assessments under the Children Act 1989	
All staff should know what to do if a child tells them he/she is being abused or neglected	
All staff should know how to manage the requirement to maintain an appropriate level of confidentiality	
All staff must know that they should never promise a child that they will not tell anyone about an allegation	
All staff should understand the definition of abuse	
All staff should understand the signs and symptoms of physical abuse	
All staff should understand the signs and symptoms of emotional abuse	
All staff should understand the signs and symptoms of sexual abuse	
All staff should understand the signs and symptoms of neglect	
All staff should understand the impact and indicators of child sexual exploitation (CSE)	
All staff should be aware of the impact of drug taking	
All staff should be aware of the impact of alcohol abuse	

All staff should be aware that technology is a significant component in many safeguarding and wellbeing issues. Staff should be aware of online risks.	
All staff should be aware of the dangers of sharing nude and semi-nude images, including videos and the use of Artificial Intelligence to create child sexual abuse material	
All staff should understand how they should act when a child tells them they have had a nude or semi-nude image of a child shared with them.	
It is important that all staff recognise the indicators and signs of child-on-child abuse and know how to identify it and respond to reports.	
All staff should understand, that even if there are no reports in their schools or colleges it does not mean child-on-child abuse is not happening, it may be the case that it is just not being reported.	
It is essential that all staff understand the importance of challenging inappropriate behaviours between children...that are actually abusive in nature.	
Staff should be able to recognise the signs of child-on-child abuse and how to report their concerns.	
All staff should be able to reassure victims [of child-on-child sexual abuse] that they are being taken seriously and that they will be supported and kept safe.	
All staff should be aware of the dangers of children going deliberately missing from school, home or care	
Staff should be aware of the definition of domestic abuse. (Note: The definition of Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (Part 1) applies to children if they see or hear, or experience the effects of, the abuse; and they are related to the abusive person. Children are victims of domestic abuse.)	
All staff should be aware of the impact of domestic abuse	
All staff should be aware of the role of Operation Encompass	
All staff should be aware of fabricated or induced illness	
All staff should have an awareness of faith abuse	
All staff should consider whether children are at risk of abuse or exploitation in situations outside their families. [This is known as Extra-familial harm or sometimes Contextual Safeguarding]	
All staff should be aware of impact of the court system	

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All staff should be aware of impact of family members in prison	
All staff should be aware of the impact of 'County Lines'	
All staff should be aware of the impact of child criminal exploitation (CCE)	
All staff should be aware of the impact of homelessness on the safety of children and young people	
All staff should be aware of female genital mutilation (FGM)	
All teachers should be aware of their duty to report a disclosure of FGM to the police; and the process involved in making a report	
All staff should have an awareness of forced marriage	
All staff should be aware that the minimum age for marriage is 18 years old	
All staff should be aware of the indicators, which may signal children are at risk from, or are involved with serious violent crime.	
All staff should be aware of the impact of gangs and youth violence	
All should have an understanding of so-called 'Honour-based Abuse'	
All staff should have an awareness of gender-based violence against women and its difference forms	
All staff should have an awareness of hate crime	
All staff should understand that there are groups of children who are more vulnerable to abuse and harm, including those children who are, or have been, in the looked after system, children with additional needs and those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or gender questioning.	
Note that the section of Keeping Children Safe in Education (2024) dealing with gender questioning children remains under review following the final publication of government guidance.	
All staff should be aware of the impact of poor mental health on safeguarding	
All staff should be aware that mental health problems can, in some cases, be an indicator that a child has suffered or is at risk of suffering abuse, neglect or exploitation.	
All staff should have an awareness of private fostering and the duty on schools to report such arrangements	

All staff should have an awareness of relationship abuse	
All staff should have an awareness of trafficking and modern day slavery	
Note that changes have been made to the definition of extremism in March 2024. This means that this section of Keeping Children Safe in Education (2024) remains under review.	
All staff should understand the school's duty to prevent radicalisation	
All staff should understand the signs to looking for when considering the risk of radicalisation	
All staff should know that if a child is in immediate danger, or at risk of harm a referral should be made to children's social care or the police	
All staff should know that all concerns, discussions and decisions should be made in writing; and know what good practice looks like when writing reports	
All staff should aware of the impact of poor safeguarding practice	
All staff should understand the school's whistleblowing policy	
All staff should be aware of how to raise a concern outside the school or college	
All staff should know that they are able to make a referral to children's social care themselves	
All staff should understand the impact of technology on safeguarding	
All staff working with under-8s, should understand what is meant by 'Disqualification by Association'	
All staff should understand the definition of 'upskirting'	
All staff should be aware of meaning of 'Position of Trust' in the Sexual Offences Act 2003	
All staff should be aware that untrained staff should not make a mental health diagnosis, but can make observations	
All staff should be aware that traumatic experiences can have a life-long impact on mental health, behaviour and education	
All staff should be aware that when a child has a social worker, it is an indicator that the child is more at risk than most pupils.	



Schools and colleges should ensure that staff understand how to recognise and report concerns about other adults in the school, including low-level concerns policy by ensuring their staff are clear about what appropriate behaviour is, and are confident in distinguishing expected and appropriate behaviour from concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour, in themselves and others.	
<b>Prevent Duty (DfE 2015)</b>	
All staff should understand what the Prevent duty means for schools	
All staff should understand what to do to demonstrate compliance with the duty	
All staff should understand where to find further information, advice and support	
All staff should be able to identify children who may be vulnerable to radicalisation, and know what to do when they are identified	
All staff should understand the school's arrangements to promote pupils' welfare and prevent radicalisation and extremism	
All staff should be able to identify children who may be vulnerable to radicalisation, and know what to do when they are identified	
All staff should be able to demonstrate a general understanding of the risks affecting children and young people in the area	
All staff should be able to demonstrate a specific understanding of how to identify individual children who may be at risk of radicalisation	
All staff should understand the online risks of radicalisation	
All staff should understand how to refer concerns to the school's designated safeguarding lead	
All school staff should understand when it is appropriate to make a referral to the Channel programme	
<b>Child Sexual Exploitation - definition and guide for Practitioners (DfE 2017)</b>	
All staff should be aware of the guidance set out in section A of 'Child Sexual Exploitation' (DfE 2017)	
All staff should understand the definition of child sexual exploitation	
All staff should understand which children are especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation	
All staff should understand how sexual exploitation can have links to other kinds of crime	
All staff should understand the possible indicators of child sexual exploitation	
All staff should understand issues around sexual violence and sexual harassment between children	

All staff should understand the school's approach to managing incidents of sexual violence and sexual harassment	
All staff should be aware that safeguarding incidents and/or behaviours can be associated with factors outside the school or college and/or can occur between children outside of these environments.	
<b>Guidance for safer working practices (Safer Recruitment Consortium, 2022)</b>	
All staff should understand how to work with children so that they protect children from harm	
All staff should understand how to work with children in an open and transparent way	
All staff should understand how to behave in a professional way.	
<b>Meeting digital and technology standards in schools and colleges (DfE, 2023)</b>	
Are staff aware that they should make a report when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• they witness or suspect unsuitable material has been accessed</li> <li>• they can access unsuitable material</li> <li>• they are teaching topics which could create unusual activity on the filtering logs</li> <li>• there is failure in the software or abuse of the system</li> <li>• there are perceived unreasonable restrictions that affect teaching and learning or administrative tasks</li> <li>• they notice abbreviations or misspellings that allow access to restricted material</li> </ul>	
Have all staff who use the school's IT Network had annual Basic Cyber Security Training (including at least one governor)?	
<b>Information Sharing Guidance (DfE, May 2024)</b>	
Note that the information Sharing guidance was updated in May 2024	
Staff should know that information sharing in a safeguarding context means the appropriate and secure exchange of personal information, between practitioners and other individuals with a responsibility for children, in order to keep them safe from harm.	
Staff should be aware that data protection legislation (the Data Protection Act 2018 (the DPA 2018) and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)) does not prevent the sharing of information for the purposes of safeguarding children, when it is necessary, proportionate and justified to do so.	

<b>School procedures</b>	
All staff should know how to report concerns about a child	
All staff should know how to report allegations about an adult that may meet the harm threshold	
All staff should know how to report concerns or allegations about an adult that do not meet the harm threshold (so-called 'low level concerns')	
All staff should know how to report concerns about the headteacher	
All staff should know how to report concerns about the proprietor (where relevant)	

## APPENDIX 2

## HELPLINES' DIRECTORY

**Addiction**

Children of Addicted Parents and People (COAP)..... via website only  
 National Association for Children of Alcoholics ..... 0800 358 3456  
 Young People and Gambling ..... 0808 8020 133

**Bereavement**

Child Bereavement Network ..... via website only  
 Child Death Helpline ..... 0800 282 986  
 Childhood Bereavement Network ..... 020 7843 6309  
 Cruse Bereavement Care ..... 0808 808 1677  
 Grief Encounter ..... via website only  
 Hope Again ..... 0808 808 1677  
 Winston's Wish..... 08088 020 021

**Bullying**

Anti-bullying alliance ..... via website only  
 Bullying UK..... via website only  
 Ditch The Label ..... via website only

**Cancer**

Macmillan Cancer Support ..... 0808 808 00 00

**Children of Prisoners**

National Information Centre on Children of Offenders ..... via website only  
 National Prisoners' Families Helpline..... 0808 808 2003

**Children Missing**

Runaway Helpline ..... 116 000

**Children's Charities**

Action for Children..... via website only  
 Barnardos..... via website only  
 Childline ..... 0800 1111  
 Children's Society ..... via website only  
 NSPCC ..... 0808 800 5000

**Counselling**

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy ..... via website only

**Crime**

Crime Stoppers ..... 0800 555 111

Fearless (Crime Stoppers for Young People) ..... via website only

### **Domestic Abuse**

National Domestic Violence Helpline ..... 0808 2000 247

Refuge ..... 0808 2000 247

### **Drugs**

Talk to Frank ..... via website only

### **Faith**

Muslim Youth Helpline ..... 0808 808 2008

### **FGM**

Africans Unite Against Child Abuse ..... via website only

Daughters of Eve ..... via website only

Forward UK ..... 0208 960 4000

NSPCC FGM Helpline ..... 0800 028 3550

### **Forced Marriage**

Karma Nirvana ..... 0800 5999 247

### **Housing**

Shelter ..... 0808 800 4444

### **Looked After Young People**

Coram Voice ..... 0808 800 5792

The Care Advice Line ..... 020 7017 8901

### **Mental Health**

Anna Freud National Centre for Children & Families ..... via website only

Anxiety UK ..... 03444 775 774

B-eat eating disorders ..... 0808 801 0711

Bipolar UK ..... 0333 323 3880

CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably) ..... 0800 58 58 58

Charlie Waller Memorial Trust ..... via website only

HeadMeds ..... via website only

Heads Together ..... via website only

Kooth ..... via website only

Mentally Healthy Schools ..... via website only

MindEd for Families ..... via website only

National Self Harm Network ..... via website only

OCD Action ..... 0845 390 6232

OCD-UK ..... via website only

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Papyrus (Suicide support) .....	via website only
Rethink Mental Illness .....	via website only
Samaritans .....	116 123
Sane .....	0300 304 7000
Selfharm UK .....	via website only
The Mix .....	0808 808 4994
The Royal College of Psychiatrists .....	via website only
Young Minds .....	via website only
Young Minds Parents Helpline .....	0808 802 554

### **Migrant Children**

Migrant Children's Project .....	0207 636 8505
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### **Online Safety**

Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre .....	via website only
National Professionals Online Safety Helpline .....	0344 381 4772
Safer Internet .....	via website only
Think U Know .....	via website only

### **Parent Support**

Parent Line Plus .....	0808 800 2222
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### **Self-Harm**

Harmless .....	via website only
National Self Harm Network .....	via website only
Self-injury support (Girls) .....	0808 800 8088

### **Sexual Abuse**

MOSAC (Mothers of Sexually Abused Children) .....	0800 980 1958
Stop It Now .....	0808 1000 900
The Lucy Faithfull Foundation .....	01527 591922

### **Sexual Health**

Check Your Bits (Chlamydia Testing) .....	via website only
Getting It On .....	via website only
Sexual Health Helpline .....	0300 123 7123
Brook .....	via website only

### **Staff Support**

Education Support Partnership .....	08000 562 561
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### **Whistleblowing**

NSPCC Whistleblowing Helpline .....	0800 028 0285
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**Andrew Hall**  
Specialist Safeguarding Consultant

## How Andrew Hall can help:

After I left full-time school headship, it had become clear that the safeguarding agenda was broadening to absolutely encompass supporting all children and young people to stay safe. No-one can do that alone, and having been one, I know how busy DSLs are and how they struggle to fit everything in. So I set out to make their job easier and by doing so, reduce risk and better protect all children.

## What people say

*"I just wanted to say that I would never have continued to volunteer being the safeguarding governor at our school, had it not been for your fantastic safeguarding briefings! They are what allows me to do my role well and makes me believe I can somehow stay up to date with the vast amount of information that is being published."*

## Safeguarding Reviews

Safeguarding audits often tell you what's wrong, but not how to build stronger, more effective safeguarding systems. Inviting Andrew to review safeguarding in your school is a collaborative opportunity that headteachers and DSLs find incredibly beneficial.

## Safeguarding CPD

Andrew offers a wide-range of learning events for people of all roles, including whole staff training, DSL workshops, governor knowledge sessions and safer recruitment.

## Free Safeguarding Briefing

A free weekly safeguarding briefing for anyone interested in a broad-range of safeguarding issues.

To get your copy, go to:

**[www.safeguardingbriefing.co.uk](http://www.safeguardingbriefing.co.uk)**

## Safeguarding.Pro

Our paid members-only site Safeguarding.Pro is dedicated to helping Designated Safeguarding Leads save time with an ever increasing range of exclusive resources and downloads.

To join, go to: **[www.safeguarding.pro](http://www.safeguarding.pro)**

## Andrew Hall

Andrew Hall has extensive experience working with vulnerable students as a teacher and headteacher. Starting as a primary school teacher, Andrew's career spans mainstream schools, special schools, pupil referral units and the headship of a school in a child and adolescent psychiatric hospital.

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