



UK Government

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026

**A guide to multi-agency working
to help, protect and promote the welfare
of children**

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Introduction

Nothing is more important than children's welfare. Every child deserves to grow up in a safe, stable, and loving home. Children who need help and protection deserve high quality and effective support. This requires individuals, agencies, and organisations to be clear about their own and each other's roles and responsibilities, and how they work together.

In this guidance, a child is defined as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'babies, children and young people' throughout. Some parts of this guidance also apply to unborn children recognising their vulnerabilities and the need for early, pre-birth assessment and planning, while remaining consistent with the legal position that rights begin at birth. The term practitioner is used in the guidance to refer to individuals who work with children and their families in any capacity, including a range of professionals, such as qualified social workers, those who work in children's residential care and those who work for statutory safeguarding partners and in early education and childcare settings, schools, colleges and other education providers. Where the term 'social work qualified supervisor or team manager' is used, this refers specifically to those qualified in social work, reflecting the need for social work input, expertise and oversight to help, support and protect children and their families. This guidance applies to all children, living in any circumstances, including at home with their birth parents or other family members, in kinship arrangements including special guardianship, children who are adopted and looked after children who may live with foster carers or in residential settings.

Whilst it is parents and carers who have primary care for their children, local authorities, working with partner organisations and agencies, have specific duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area. The Children Act 1989¹ sets out specific duties to provide services to children in their area if they are in need and to undertake enquiries if they believe a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm. The Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children's Services in local authorities are the key points of professional and political accountability, with responsibility for the effective delivery of these functions. The Children Act 2004² placed a duty on the local authority to promote co-operation with partners and other agencies in order to improve the wellbeing of children in their area. It also placed duties on a range of organisations and individuals to ensure they too give sufficient regard to children in need of help and safeguarding.

Amendments made by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 to the Children Act 2004 strengthened this already important relationship by placing new duties on the police, integrated care boards (ICBs)³ and the local authority, as statutory safeguarding partners.

¹ [Children Act 1989](#)

² [Children Act 2004](#)

³ [Statutory guidance for integrated care boards on executive lead roles](#)

Safeguarding partners are under a duty to make arrangements to work together, and with other partners locally including early education and childcare settings, schools, colleges and other education providers, to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area.

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 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
- promoting the upbringing of children with their birth parents, or otherwise their family network⁴ through a kinship care arrangement, whenever possible and where this is in the best interests of the children
- taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes in line with the outcomes set out in the Children's Social Care National Framework^{5,6}
 - Outcome 1: Children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need
 - Outcome 2: Children and young people are safe in and outside their homes
 - Outcome 3: Children and young people are supported by their family network
 - Outcome 4: Children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes

Child protection is part of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and is defined for the purpose of this guidance as activity that is undertaken to protect specific children who are suspected to be suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm. This includes harm that occurs inside or outside the home, including in foster care and residential care, as well as online. Effective safeguarding is anti-discriminatory and anti-racist. Practitioners should understand and be sensitive to factors, including economic and social circumstances, ethnicity and disability, which can impact children and families' lives.

⁴ A family network can be a blood-relative, or a non-related connected person, such as a family friend or neighbour.

⁵ [Children's Social Care National Framework](#)

⁶ These children's social care specific outcomes support and align with the Keeping Children Safe priority outcome in the Local Outcomes Framework that sets out key priority outcomes that are delivered at the local level and driven by councils as local leaders of place.

About this guidance

1. This guidance covers:
 - the legislative requirements that apply to individuals, organisations and agencies
 - a framework for the three local safeguarding partners (the local authority, an ICB for an area, any part of which falls within the local authority area, and the Chief Constable for police for a police area, any part of which falls within the local authority area) 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 any ICB for an area, any part of which falls within the local authority area) 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
2. This document replaces Working together to safeguard children (2023). Links to relevant supplementary guidance that practitioners should consider alongside this guidance can be found at Appendix B.

What is the status of this guidance?

3. This guidance applies to all organisations and agencies in England who have functions relating to children. Specifically, this guidance applies to all local authorities, ICBs, police and all other organisations and agencies as set out in chapter 4.
4. It applies, in its entirety, to all early education and childcare settings, schools, colleges and other education providers.
5. It applies to all children up to the age of 18 years whether living with their families, in state care, or living independently. Some parts of this guidance also apply to unborn children, recognising their vulnerabilities and the need for early, pre-birth assessment and planning, while remaining consistent with the legal position that rights begin at birth.
6. This document should be complied with unless exceptional circumstances arise.
7. The guidance is issued under:
 - section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, which requires local authorities in their social services functions to act under the general guidance of the Secretary of State
 - section 10(8) of the Children Act 2004, which requires each person or organisation to which the section 10 duty applies to have regard to any guidance given to them by the Secretary of State
 - section 11(4) of the Children Act 2004 which requires each person or organisation

to which the section 11 duty applies to have regard to any guidance given to them by the Secretary of State

- section 16B(7) of the Children Act 2004, as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017, which states that the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel must have regard to any guidance given by the Secretary of State in connection with its functions
- section 16C(2) of the Children Act 2004, as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017, which states that local authorities must have regard to any guidance given by the Secretary of State in connection with their functions relating to notifications
- section 16K of the Children Act 2004, as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017, which states that safeguarding partners and relevant agencies for a local authority area in England must have regard to any guidance given by the Secretary of State in connection with their functions under sections 16E to 16J of the Act
- section 16Q of the Children Act 2004, as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017, which states that the child death review partners for a local authority area in outcome o must have regard to any guidance given by the Secretary of State in connection with their functions under sections 16M to 16P of the Act
- section 175(4) of the Education Act 2002, which states that governing bodies of maintained schools (including maintained nursery schools), further education institutions and management committees of pupil referral units must have regard to any guidance given by the Secretary of State
- paragraph 7(b) of the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, made under sections 94(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, which states that the arrangements to safeguard or promote the welfare of pupils made by the proprietors of independent schools (including academies or free schools) or alternative provision academies must have regard to any guidance given by the Secretary of State
- paragraph 3 of the Schedule to the Non-Maintained Special Schools (England) Regulations 2015, made under section 342 of the Education Act 1996, which requires arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the health, safety, and welfare of pupils in non-maintained special schools to have regard to any guidance published on such issues
- Section 20 of the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 which introduced a new provision into Part 3 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, section 49A, titled 'Arrangements to notify schools', placing a statutory duty on all 43 territorial police forces across England and Wales to implement the Operation Encompass information-sharing scheme

- Article 17 of the UK GDPR⁷ which sets out when individuals can request the erasure of their personal data. The Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 introduced a new ground under Article 17(1)(g) allowing victims of stalking and harassment to request erasure of their personal data when that data has been processed as a result of an unfounded allegation made by a malicious person

Who is this guidance for?

8. This statutory guidance sets out key roles for individuals, organisations and agencies to deliver effective arrangements for help, support, safeguarding, and protection. It should be read and followed by leaders, managers and frontline practitioners of all organisations and agencies as set out in chapter 4.

9. It is essential that these arrangements are strongly led and promoted at a local level, specifically by elected local area leaders, including Lead Members of Children's Services, Mayors, Police and Crime Commissioners and through the commitment of chief officers in all organisations and agencies, particularly those representing the three safeguarding partners. These are local authority Chief Executives, Chief Constables of police and Chief Executives of ICBs. Other senior leaders within organisations and agencies that commission and provide services for children and families, and early education and childcare settings schools, colleges and other education providers also have a key role to play in providing help, support, and safeguarding children in their local area. Members of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel should also read and follow this guidance.

⁷ Article 17(1)(g) of the UK GDPR will come into force on 31 March 2026.

Chapter 1: A shared responsibility

10. Successful outcomes for children depend on strong partnership working between parents/carers and the practitioners working with them. Practitioners should take a child-centred approach to meeting the needs of the whole family.

11. As set out in the Children's Social Care National Framework, the following principles apply here too:

- children's welfare is paramount
- children's wishes and feelings are sought, heard, and responded to
- children's social care works in partnership with whole families
- children are raised by their families, with their family networks or in family environments wherever possible
- local authorities work with other agencies to effectively identify and meet the needs of children, young people, and families
- local authorities consider the economic and social circumstances impacting children, young people, and families and actively seek to address discrimination and inequality experienced by families

A child-centred approach within a whole family focus

12. A child-centred approach is fundamental to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of every child. All practitioners should follow the principles of the Children Act 1989 and 2004. These Acts make clear that the welfare of children is paramount and that they are best looked after within their families, with their parents playing a full part in their lives, unless compulsory intervention in family life is necessary.

13. Children are clear about what they want from an effective safeguarding system:

Children have said that they need:

- **vigilance:** to have adults notice when things are troubling them
- **understanding and action:** to understand what is happening; to be heard and understood; and to have that understanding acted upon
- **stability:** to be able to develop an ongoing stable relationship of trust with those helping them
- **respect:** to be treated with the expectation that they are competent rather than not
- **information and engagement:** to be informed about, and involved in procedures, decisions, concerns and plans
- **explanation:** to be informed of the outcome of assessments, and decisions and reasons when their views have not met with a positive response
- **support:** to be provided with support in their own right as well as a member of their family
- **advocacy:** to be provided with advocacy to assist them in putting forward their views
- **protection:** to be protected against all forms of abuse, exploitation, and discrimination, and the right to special protection and help if a refugee

14. Anyone working with children should see and speak to the child, listen to what they say, observe their behaviour, take their views seriously, and work with them and their families and the people who know them well when deciding how to support their needs. Practitioners should also be aware that children may find it difficult to always speak about what they need, what is happening to them, or what has happened to them. Legal duties under the Equality Act 2010⁸ must be complied with, including putting special provision in place to support dialogue with children who may not be able to convey their wishes and feelings as they may want to. This might include, for example, those who have communication difficulties, unaccompanied children, refugees, those children who are victims of modern slavery and/or human trafficking and those who do not speak English or for whom English is not their first language.

15. Practitioners must maintain a child-centred approach for babies, recognising their specific vulnerabilities and ensuring that their needs and experiences are actively considered and represented. This includes, but is not limited to, interpreting non-verbal and pre-verbal cues, observing interactions, and remaining professionally curious, particularly when relying on parent or carer accounts. The needs of unborn children

⁸ [Equality Act 2010](#)

28. Multi-agency expectations for **direct practice** are as follows:

- **Collaborate:** practitioners working with the same child and family share information to get a complete picture of what life is like for the child. Collectively, they ensure the child's voice is at the centre and the right support is provided. They work in partnership with parents and carers, who are often experts on the children they care for and involve them in decisions wherever possible
- **Learn:** practitioners learn together by drawing on the best available evidence from their individual fields and sharing their diverse perspectives during regular shared reflection on a child's development, experiences, and outcomes
- **Resource:** practitioners build strong relationships across agencies and disciplines to ensure they support and protect the children with whom they work
- **Include:** practitioners recognise the differences between, and are confident to respond to, circumstances where children experience adversity due to economic and social circumstances and acute family stress, and situations where children face harm due to parental abuse and neglect
- **Mutual challenge:** practitioners challenge themselves and each other, question each other's assumptions, and seek to resolve differences of opinion in a restorative and respectful way. This includes providing feedback, advice, and strategies to challenge racism and discrimination, and modelling constructive and effective strategies to respond

Information sharing

29. No single practitioner can have a full picture of a child's needs and circumstances so effective sharing of information between practitioners, local organisations and agencies is essential for early identification of need, assessment, and service provision to keep children safe. Rapid reviews and child safeguarding practice reviews have highlighted that missed opportunities to record, understand the significance of, and share information in a timely manner can have severe consequences for children¹³.

30. Practitioners should be proactive in sharing information as early as possible to help identify, assess, and respond to risks or concerns about the safety and welfare of children. This may be when problems are first emerging (for example, persistent school absences, going missing, or receiving unexplained gifts or new possessions) or where a child is already known to local authority children's social care or the police. Sharing information about any adults with whom that child has contact, which may impact the child's safety or welfare, is also critical. Operation Encompass¹⁴ places a duty on police forces in England and Wales to notify educational settings, and, where relevant, local authorities, if they have reasonable grounds to believe a child may be a victim of

¹³ [Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel 2021: annual report](#)

¹⁴ [Information sharing duty: Operation Encompass - GOV.UK](#)

domestic abuse.

31. Information sharing is also essential for the identification of patterns of behaviour, such as when a child is at risk of going missing or has gone missing, (including being missing from education, or when a looked after child goes missing from residential or foster care) or when there is a concern that a child may be a victim of or be drawn into crime. When multiple children appear associated to the same context or locations of risk, or in relation to children in the secure estate where there may be multiple local authorities involved in a child's care, it will be for local safeguarding partners to consider how they build relationships and share relevant information in a timely and proportionate way with each other, other local organisations, and other safeguarding partnerships.

32. The Data Protection Act 2018¹⁵ and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) supports the sharing of relevant information for the purposes of keeping children safe. Fears about sharing information must not be allowed to stand in the way of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. To ensure effective safeguarding arrangements:

- all organisations and agencies should have arrangements in place that set out clearly the processes and the principles for sharing information. The arrangements should cover how information will be shared with their own organisation/agency and with others who may be involved in a child's life
- practitioners should not assume that someone else will pass on information that they think may be critical to keep a child safe. If a practitioner has concerns about a child's welfare or safety, then they should share the information with local authority children's social care and/or the police. All practitioners should be particularly alert to the importance of sharing information when a child moves from one local authority into another, due to the risk that knowledge pertinent to keeping a child safe could be lost
- UK GDPR provides a number of bases for sharing personal information. 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. The legal bases that may be appropriate for sharing data in these circumstances could be "legal obligation" or "public task", which includes the performance of a task in the public interest or the exercise of official authority. Each of the lawful bases under UK GDPR has different requirements¹⁶. In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to obtain consent to share data, but it is important to note that UK GDPR sets a high standard for consent which is specific, time limited and can be withdrawn (in which case the information would have to be deleted)

¹⁵ [Data Protection Act 2018](#)

¹⁶ [Lawful basis for processing: Information Commissioner's Office](#)

Section 1: Universal services and community-based early help

126. Universal services and community-based early help is support for children of all ages that improves a family's resilience and outcomes or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse. It is not an individual service, but a system of support delivered by local authorities and their partners working together and taking collective responsibility to provide the right provision in their area. This level of early help is provided through "universal services"⁵⁰ - such as education, health – and other community-based services. It is distinct from targeted early help delivered through Family Help teams, which are more formal arrangements coordinated by local authorities, where a plan is in place and a lead practitioner appointed.

127. Specific universal and community-based early help services can include support delivered through Best Start Family Hubs, youth services, youth offending teams, after school clubs and housing provision. Best Start Family Hubs bring together practitioners from multi-agency partners, with a strong emphasis on health and education - particularly during the early years - creating a clear local parent pathway from pregnancy through to the age of 19 (or 25 for young people with SEND), connecting families to services across the full spectrum of need. Hubs work closely with other local children's services to safeguard children and help families facing complex problems, in particular those who are supported in Family Help, such as families where domestic abuse is a factor. For families who no longer require the support of targeted and specialist services, Hubs offer an ongoing, local support network.

The role of early education and childcare settings, schools, colleges and other education providers

128. All children aged 5 to 16 are legally entitled to a full-time education, suitable to any special educational need. Education is essential for children's progress, wellbeing and wider development and being in school is a protective factor against wider harms, including exploitation. Where children are not receiving education, either because they are persistently missing school, or are not registered at a school and not receiving a suitable education otherwise, this could be a possible indicator of neglect, abuse or exploitation or could in itself constitute neglect in severe and sustained cases.

129. Young people aged 16 and 17, including those with special and educational needs and disabilities, are required to participate in education or training until they reach their 18th birthday. They are entitled to an offer of a suitable place in education or training under the September guarantee⁵¹. Local authorities are therefore expected to identify and pay particular attention to young people who are not in education, employment or training or whose current activity is not known.

⁵⁰ Universal services are available to all children and families. They are provided by a range of agencies such as health and education. GPs, health visitors and school nurses are some examples of this type of service provision.

⁵¹ [September guarantee: education and training for young people](#)

130. Local authorities also have a statutory duty to secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people aged 16 to 19 and for those up to age 25 with a learning difficulty assessment or, EHC plan, in their area⁵². They should make available to young people aged 13 to 19 and to those up to the age of 25 with a learning difficulty assessment or EHC plan, support that will encourage, enable or assist them to participate in education or training⁵³.

131. As early education and childcare settings, schools, colleges and other education providers have daily contact with most children and families, they are uniquely placed to identify concerns and, with partners as appropriate, address them early. Safeguarding professionals, including safeguarding partners and their delegates, should work closely with education and childcare settings to ensure information about children is shared effectively, risks of harm are correctly identified and understood, and children and families receive the services they need. This includes, but is not limited to, information, such as increased absence or mental health problems, which may be indicators that a child has suffered or is at risk of suffering neglect, abuse, and exploitation.

132. Those that work in these settings need to be aware of how children's experiences can impact on their mental health, behaviour, attendance and progress at nursery, school, or college. Where children have suffered abuse, neglect and exploitation, or other potentially traumatic adverse childhood experiences, this can have a lasting impact throughout childhood, adolescence and into adulthood⁵⁴. This should include understanding the impact of domestic abuse on children as victims in their own right.

133. It is important that relevant information where children are home educated is shared between local authorities, schools, colleges, and other relevant partners. This includes police forces making Operation Encompass notifications, as they would for other educational settings, to the local authority in which the child who is being home educated lives. Parents have a right to educate their children at home providing the education is suitable⁵⁵. Most parents who take up the weighty responsibility of home education work hard to provide their child with a suitable education. However, the local authority has a duty to intervene where a home educated child is not being suitably educated, or is not safe, and in such cases the local authority must act to remedy the situation. When a child of school age is not a registered pupil at a school and is not receiving suitable education at home, this could be an indicator of neglect, abuse, or exploitation. Schools must notify the

⁵² Education Act 1996 [Sections 15ZA](#) and [18A](#) as inserted by the [Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009](#), and amended by the [Children and Families Act 2014](#)

⁵³ [Education and Skills Act \(ESA\) 2008 Section 68](#)

⁵⁴ An example of where schools and local police forces work together successfully to better support and safeguard children after experiencing domestic abuse, is through the Operation Encompass notification scheme. Operation Encompass works by directly connecting the police with schools. When officers have attended a domestic abuse incident, police share the information with a school's trained Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) before the start of the next school day, so that school staff can provide appropriate emotional and practical support at the earliest opportunity to children affected by domestic abuse

⁵⁵ The Education Act 1996, Section 7, sets out the duty on parents to ensure that the child receives an efficient full time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude and any special educational needs, either by attendance at school or otherwise. Further detail on what constitutes a suitable home education can be found in DfE's Elective Home Education guidance (2019) <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/436A> defines "suitable education" as efficient full-time education suitable to age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs

local authority of a child's removal from the school roll⁵⁶ at a non-standard transition point, and they should also share information on a child's circumstances, especially if already known to children's social care or if they have an EHC plan⁵⁷.

Section 2: Family Help – targeted early help, safeguarding, and promoting the welfare of children

134. Targeted early help services delivered through Family Help, are coordinated by a local authority and/or their partners to address specific concerns within a family. Examples of these include parenting support, mental health support, domestic abuse services, youth services, youth offending teams and housing and employment services. Targeted early help should be provided for children and families who have multiple and/or complex needs, or whose circumstances might make them more vulnerable. This could include where a child is living with wider family members under a kinship arrangement. Targeted early help might also be appropriate to support a pregnant person to provide safe and effective care for their unborn child.

135. Family Help is a voluntary approach, requiring the family's consent to receive support and services.

136. The Families First Partnership programme guide⁵⁸ provides a toolkit to assist safeguarding partners to set up effective Family Help services. Effective provision relies upon local organisations and agencies working together to:

- identify children and families who would benefit from Family Help, with clear referral routes between universal and community-based early help and targeted support. This may include pre-birth support where risk factors are known
- undertake a Family Help assessment which considers the needs of all members of the family
- ensure good ongoing communication, for example, through regular meetings between multi-disciplinary practitioners who are working with the family
- co-ordinate and/or provide support as part of a Family Help plan to improve outcomes. This Family Help plan will be designed together with the child and family and updated as the child and family needs change, including if other support or intervention under section 17 or section 47 of the Children Act 1989 is needed

⁵⁶ [Regulation 13 - The School Attendance \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2024](#)

⁵⁷ Education, health and care (EHC) plans identify educational, health and social needs and set out the additional support to meet those needs. Further guidance on EHC plans can be found at <https://www.GOV.UK/children-with-special-educational-needs>

⁵⁸ [The Families First Partnership \(FFP\) Programme Guide](#)

- engage effectively with families and their family network, making use of family group decision-making, such as family group conferences⁵⁹, to help meet the needs of the child⁶⁰
- manage transitions between non-statutory and statutory (delivered under section 17 of the Children Act 1989) Family Help, maintaining consistent practitioner relationships, and building on the Family Help plan

137. Lead Practitioners should co-ordinate support and services, ensure the assessment and the Family Help plan responds to identified needs, and support the family to co-produce the plan. Practitioners should consider whether to include the family network. Where appropriate, local authorities should engage families, including children, to have a say in who their lead practitioner is, and have a process in place to collate feedback on their relationship.

138. The lead practitioner role can be held by a range of people, including social workers and other local authority employed staff (including those who work in a Best Start Family Hub), as well as those based in partner organisations. Decisions about who holds the role of lead practitioner should consider capacity and capability. Practitioners who begin working with families at the targeted early help stage can continue to lead work with families if the child is later assessed to be a child in need as defined by Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. The Families First Partnership programme guide provides operational details on lead practitioner roles and responsibilities, and expectations for coordinating a multi-disciplinary team around the family.

Identifying children and families who would benefit from help

139. Local organisations and agencies should have in place effective ways to identify emerging problems and potential unmet needs of individual children and families. Local authorities should work with organisations and agencies to develop joined up community-based early help, which can be delivered through a Best Start Family Hub, and Family Help services, based on a clear understanding of local needs. Local authorities should use the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)⁶¹ to inform the offer.

140. Multi-agency and multi-disciplinary training will be important in supporting this collective understanding of the demographics and needs of the local community, the local practice framework, and the services available to support children of all ages. All

⁵⁹ Family group decision-making is an umbrella term for voluntary, family-led decision-making forums in which a child's family network has all the resources, adequate preparation, relevant information and a safe and appropriate environment to make a plan in response to concerns about a child's safety and wellbeing, working alongside skilled professionals.

These can take different forms; family group conferences are one model of family group decision-making, which have been shown to be highly effective in supporting families, improving decision-making processes and diverting children from care. The Department for Education does not prescribe a specific model. There is further information in the glossary.

⁶⁰ The [statutory guidance on court orders and pre-proceedings for local authorities \(2014\)](#) highlights that family group decision making, such as family group conferences, is an important means of involving the family early to avoid the creation of barriers between the local authority and the family.

⁶¹ [Joint strategic needs assessment and joint health and wellbeing strategies explained](#)

practitioners working with children and families, including those in universal services and those providing services to adults with children, need to understand their role in identifying emerging problems. They need appropriate training so that they:

- know when to share information with other practitioners and what action to take to support early identification and assessment
- are aware of and able to identify where a pregnant person might need help or support to provide safe and suitable care for their unborn child
- are able to identify and recognise all forms of abuse, neglect, and exploitation
- have an understanding of domestic and sexual abuse⁶², including controlling and coercive behaviour, teenage relationship abuse, 'honour', faith- or belief-based abuse, as well as parental conflict that is frequent, intense and unresolved
- understand the complexity of kinship families and are aware that they may need to support both parents and kinship carers at the same time
 - have an understanding of threats, including online harm, grooming, sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, radicalisation, and the overlap that can occur between online harm and harm experienced in person
 - are aware of new and emerging technologies (such as artificial intelligence) and the role that online platforms, including gaming and social media platforms, can play in grooming children and facilitating and/or causing harm
- are aware that a child and their family may be experiencing multiple needs at the same time
- recognise how trauma, racism, discrimination, and past experiences with services affect relationships and adapt practice accordingly, respecting the importance of different cultural models of parenting and family life.

141. Practitioners should be alert to the potential need for Family Help for a child who:

- is unborn
- is disabled
- has special educational needs (whether or not they have a statutory education, health and care (EHC) plan)
- is a young carer
- is bereaved
- is showing signs of being drawn into anti-social or criminal behaviour, including being affected by gangs and county lines and organised crime groups and/or serious violence, including knife crime

⁶² See Appendix A: Glossary for the statutory definition of domestic abuse set out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021

- is frequently missing/goes missing from care or from home⁶³
- is at risk of modern slavery⁶⁴, human trafficking, sexual and/or criminal exploitation
- is at risk of being radicalised⁶⁵
- is viewing problematic and/or inappropriate online content (for example, linked to violence), or developing inappropriate relationships online
- is in a family circumstance presenting challenges for the child, such as drug and alcohol misuse, adult mental health issues and domestic abuse⁶⁶
- is misusing drugs or alcohol themselves
- is suffering from mental ill health
- has returned home to their family from care
- is a privately fostered child⁶⁷
- has a parent or carer in custody⁶⁸
- is missing education⁶⁹, or persistently absent from school, or not in receipt of full-time education
- has experienced multiple suspensions and is at risk of, or has been permanently excluded

142. Practitioners should also consider the needs of parents who no longer have children in their care. Offering support to parents who have had a child removed can help prevent future removals and support effective and stable reunification.

143. Practitioners should also consider the impact of domestic abuse on a child. Section 20 of the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 introduced a new provision into Part 3 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 under Section 49A. The information sharing scheme known as ‘Operation Encompass’⁷⁰ placed a statutory duty on police forces across England and Wales to notify a child’s educational setting, and, where relevant, local authorities, if they have reasonable grounds to believe a child may be a victim of domestic abuse. This

⁶³ [Children who run away or go missing from home or care \(2014\)](#)

⁶⁴ [Modern Slavery: statutory guidance for England and Wales \(under s49 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015\) and non-statutory guidance for Scotland and Northern Ireland \(accessible version\) - GOV.UK](#)

⁶⁵ Further information on requirements for those working with children who have concerns about radicalisation is set out in the statutory [Prevent Duty guidance](#) and via [Managing risk of radicalisation in your education setting](#)

⁶⁶ [The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Section 3](#) recognises children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right when they see, hear or experience domestic abuse perpetrated by a parent, those with parental responsibility, or a relative.

⁶⁷ Private fostering occurs when a child under the age of 16 (or under 18, if disabled) is provided with care and accommodation by a person who is not a parent, person with parental responsibility for them or a relative in their own home. A child is not privately fostered if the person caring for and accommodating them has done so for less than 28 days and does not intend to do so for longer. This term is also used in Championing Kinship Care: The National Kinship Care Strategy, capturing private fostering arrangements as a type of kinship care. It holds the same meaning, but applies only to individuals, excluding organisations or bodies.

⁶⁸ [Farmer review for women \(2019\)](#) found that children impacted by maternal imprisonment are more likely to leave their family home and be separated from their primary carer, resulting in significant disruption to their lives.

⁶⁹ [Children missing education: statutory guidance for local authorities](#)

⁷⁰ Statutory guidance: [Duty on police forces in England and Wales to notify education establishments of domestic abuse incidents: Operation Encompass \(accessible\) - GOV.UK](#)

includes all children connected to a household where police have attended a domestic abuse incident; children who are physically present at the incident, children not physically present during the incident and situations where a child might reside in another household temporarily or permanently. The duty supports educational settings to provide timely, informed support to children affected by domestic abuse and to ensure the school has up to date information about the child's circumstances. Further guidance for police forces can be found in 'Duty on police forces in England and Wales to notify education establishments of domestic abuse incidents: Operation Encompass'.

Effective assessment of the need for Family Help

144. Where a child and family would benefit from targeted support because of multiple and/or complex needs, there should be a multi-disciplinary Family Help assessment. Families should not need to repeat their story if their circumstances change. Safeguarding partners should have a single Family Help assessment, which can be adapted depending on the child's needs. This assessment should:

- be undertaken with the agreement of the child and their parents or carers, involving the child and family as well as the practitioners who are working with them
- include pre-birth assessment where needed
- take account of the child's wishes and feelings wherever possible which could include providing advocacy support where this is needed to enable a child to share their views, for example, if the child has communication difficulties due to a disability
- take account of the child's age, family circumstances and extra-familial contexts⁷¹ and whether these factors are contributing to or preventing good outcomes
- take account of the needs of all members of the family as individuals and consider how their needs impact on one another which includes considering needs relating to education, early years development, mental health and physical health, substance misuse, financial stability, housing, family relationships, domestic abuse and crime Practitioners should be aware of situations where there has been a breakdown in relationship between the child and their family and engaging the whole family may not be appropriate
- cover both presenting needs and any underlying issues with the understanding that a family's needs can change overtime, for example, when a child moves up to secondary school
- be based on facts, and explore and build on strengths
- be clear about the action to be taken and services to be provided
- identify what help the child and family require to prevent needs escalating

⁷¹ See Appendix A: glossary

- provide the basis for any future assessments if they are needed, for example, under sections 17 and 47 of the Children Act 1989

145. Practitioners should have consideration for specific needs, including, but not exclusive to, family members who may have learning difficulties/disabilities, are imprisoned or those whose first language is not English, parents, carers and children who may be at risk from hidden harms such as coercive and controlling behaviour, child sexual abuse and 'honour' or faith- or belief-based abuse, are care experienced, young parents⁷², birth parents who have had children removed from their care, fathers or male carers, and parents who identify as LGBTQIA. This should also include where children may not view themselves as victims of abuse, such as teenage relationship abuse and child sexual exploitation.

146. If a family does not consent to a Family Help assessment, practitioners should seek to understand why this is the case, so that they can provide reassurance to the family about their concerns. They should ensure the family has understood the consensual nature of support, and range of services available to meet their needs. The practitioner should consider how the needs of the child could otherwise be met, for example, through provision by universal services that the family already engages with. Practitioners should still inform individuals that their data will be recorded and shared, and the purpose of this explained to them. If a family has chosen not to engage with support in the past, this should not act as a barrier to them accessing support in the future. If there are concerns that the child has suffered significant harm or is likely to do so, a referral should be made immediately to local authority children's social care. The lead practitioner for section 47 enquiries should be a social worker.

Provision of effective services to help families

147. Local areas should have a comprehensive range of effective services. They should reflect any local assessment of need, including the JSNA and the latest evidence of the effectiveness of Family Support programmes⁷³. Good practice should also ensure effective join-up between targeted family support and universal services to ensure families can seamlessly transition from universal or other community-based services to more specialist support should a specific need be identified. There should be an explicit link to the local area's offer of short breaks for disabled children, as well as suitably adjusted services to support parents. Evidence should be collated to show their impact, including on those with a particular protected characteristic.

148. Family Help services typically include family and parenting programmes, assistance with school attendance, assistance with health issues including mental health, enabling financial stability, supporting secure housing, responses to emerging concerns in

⁷² [Our young parents project - The Lullaby Trust](#) describes a young parent as someone under the age of 25

⁷³ [What Works Centre for Children & Families \(Foundations\)](#). See [Home | EIF Guidebook](#) and [Interventions with established evidence of preventing, stopping or reducing the impact of child abuse and neglect and related risks](#)

extra-familial contexts including grooming and exploitation, responding to a parent, sibling or other family member in custody, and help for emerging problems relating to domestic abuse including economic abuse, coercive and controlling behaviour, 'honour' and faith- or belief-based abuse, teenage relationship abuse, or drug or alcohol misuse. Local approaches to delivering these services will vary but could include using a Best Start Family Hub model.

149. Family Help services may also focus on improving family functioning and building the family's own capability to establish positive routines and solve problems. This should be done within a structured, evidence-based practice framework, which is shared across the partnership and involves regular review to ensure that real progress is being made. Where family networks are supporting the child and parents, it might be appropriate to use family group decision-making to support work with the family. Some of these services may be delivered directly to parents but should always be evaluated to demonstrate the impact they are having on the outcomes for the child.

150. The Families First Partnership programme guide provides operational guidance for the delivery of multi-disciplinary Family Help teams. These teams should be embedded in communities to provide non-stigmatising access to a range of agencies and services that respond to different needs. The exact make up of these teams will vary, but local areas may want to co-locate teams in community settings such as their Best Start Family Hubs and networks.

Section 3: Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children

151. Local authorities have statutory duties to support certain groups of children in their area. Under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, local authorities are under a general duty to provide support for children who are unlikely to reach or maintain a satisfactory level of health or development, or their health or development will be significantly impaired without the provision of services, or the child is disabled. Where there is reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, local authorities must make enquiries and decide if any action must be taken under section 47 of the Children Act 1989. Section 22(3) of the Children Act 1989 sets out the general duty of the local authority looking after a child to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. This duty underpins all activity by the local authority in relation to looked after children.

152. Where requested to do so by local authority children's social care, health organisations, other local authorities and other parts of the local authority, such as housing, have a duty to co-operate under section 27 of the Children Act 1989⁷⁴ by assisting the local authority in carrying out its children's social care functions, provided that this is compatible with their own duties and obligations and does not interfere with the performance of their own functions. Any cooperation from health bodies should be in line with their professional regulations and standards on competence. Local authorities can

⁷⁴ [Children Act 1989 Section 27 \(2\)](#): an authority whose help is so requested shall comply with the request if it is compatible with their own statutory or other duties and obligations and does not unduly prejudice the discharge of any of their functions.

also ask other agencies to assist in the delivery of support and services under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, but those agencies are under no obligation to do so.

153. Whilst the duty to deliver support and services under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 is with the local authority, other safeguarding partners may play a critical role in the delivery of services for children and their families. Local safeguarding partners are responsible for setting the strategic direction, vision, and culture of the local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, including agreeing and reviewing shared priorities, and the resources required to deliver services effectively. More information can be found under 'Strategic leadership and accountability' and 'Delivering multi-agency safeguarding arrangements' in chapter 2.