

Key provisions introduced in Working together to safeguard children 2023

Statutory guidance on multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children

December 2023

Introduction

This Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance sets out what organisations and agencies who have functions relating to children must and should do to help, protect and promote the welfare of all children and young people under the age of 18 in England. The 2023 edition replaces Working together to safeguard children 2018, which underwent a limited factual update in 2020.

This new edition of Working together is central to delivering on the strategy set out in [Stable homes, built on love](#) (2023), which outlines the Government's commitment to support every child to grow up in a safe, stable and loving home.

Alongside the Working together statutory guidance, the Government published:

- an updated Working together **statutory framework (PDF)**, which sets out the legislation relevant to safeguarding
- the **Children's social care national framework**, which sets out expectations for senior leaders, practice supervisors and practitioners in local authorities
- guidance on **Improving practice with children, young people and families**, which provides advice for local areas on embedding the Working together guidance and the Children's social care national framework in practice.

This briefing highlights the key updates introduced in **Working together to safeguard children 2023: a guide to multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children**, including around: multi-agency expectations for all practitioners, working with parents and families, the roles and responsibilities of safeguarding partners, the role of education and childcare providers, multi-agency practice standards, support for disabled children, and tackling harm outside the home.

Key additions to Working together guidance

A shared responsibility

This new chapter in the guidance highlights how positive outcomes for children depend on strong multi-agency working.

Multi-agency expectations for all practitioners

The guidance introduces a set of multi-agency expectations for all practitioners involved in safeguarding and child protection. These expectations aim to ensure that practitioners:

- share the same goals

- learn with and from each other
- have what they need to help families
- acknowledge and appreciate difference
- challenge each other.

They are structured across three levels:

- strategic leaders (such as chief executives)
- senior and middle managers (such as heads of services, team managers, head teachers)
- direct practice (such as frontline social workers, police constables, teachers).

Working with parents and carers

The updated guidance sets out four principles that professionals should follow when working with parents and carers:

- effective partnership and the importance of building strong, positive, trusting and co-operative relationships
- respectful, non-blaming, clear and inclusive verbal and non-verbal communication that is adapted to the needs of parents and carers
- empowering parents and carers to participate in decision making by equipping them with information, keeping them updated and directing them to further resources
- involving parents and carers in the design of processes and services that affect them.

Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements

The updated guidance outlines new roles and responsibilities relating to the three safeguarding partners (the local authority, the police and the health service). The head of each statutory safeguarding partner will be referred to as the 'lead safeguarding partner' (LSP), who will in turn appoint a 'delegated safeguarding partner' (DSP).

Lead safeguarding partner (LSP)

- The LSP is the head of each statutory safeguarding partner agency. For local authorities, for example, the LSP should be the Head of Paid Service, also known as the Chief Executive.
- The LSP is responsible for holding their own organisation or agency to account, speaking and making decisions on behalf of their agency, and meeting the statutory and legislative duties of their agency.
- LSPs from different agencies are jointly responsible for the proper involvement of all relevant agencies, and should work as a team, as opposed to as a voice for their own organisation.

Delegated safeguarding partner (DSP) and partnership chair

- The LSP of each partner agency should appoint a delegated safeguarding partner (DSP) responsible for operational delivery.
- One DSP within the partnership should be appointed partnership chair for multi-agency arrangements. This role can be rotated between the DSPs if deemed appropriate by the LSPs.
- The partnership chair should facilitate partner discussions, provide greater continuity, and act as a single point of contact for the partnership.
- The role of partnership chair should not replace existing formal complaints procedures and does not provide independent scrutiny.

- This arrangement removes the need for a local area to maintain another chair or independent chair.

Schools, colleges and education providers

- It is recommended that LSPs have a representative from the education sector present at strategic discussions.
- It is expected that all local education and childcare providers working with children up to the age of 18 will be included in local arrangements.
- LSPs should consider including voluntary, charity, social enterprise (VCSE) organisations, childcare settings, and sports clubs in their arrangements.

Providing help, support and protection

This section is split into three sections: Early help, Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, and Child protection.

Section 1: Early help

Considering family needs in the context of early help

- Assessments for early help should consider how the needs of different family members impact each other. This includes needs relating to education, mental and physical health, financial stability, housing, substance use and crime.
- Specific needs should be considered such as disabilities, those whose first language isn't English, fathers or male carers, and parents who identify as LGBTQ.
- Early help services may focus on improving family functioning and developing the family's capacity to establish positive routines and solve problems. Where family networks are supporting the child and parents, services may take an

approach that enables family group decision making, such as family group conferences.

The role of education and childcare settings

- Safeguarding professionals should work closely with education and childcare settings to share information, identify and understand risks of harm, and ensure children and families receive timely support.

Section 2: Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children

Children's social care assessments

- Assessments should consider the parenting capacity of both resident or non-resident parents and carers, as well as any other adult living in the household that can respond to the child's needs.
- Assessments should also consider the influence of the child's family network and any other adults living in the household, as well as the impact of the wider community and environment.

Lead practitioners

- A lead practitioner will be allocated by the local authority and their partners once a referral has been accepted.
- The lead practitioner role can be held by a range of people, including social workers. For child protection enquiries, the lead practitioner should always be a social worker.
- The lead practitioner will have the appropriate skills, knowledge and capacity to carry out assessments, undertake direct work with families and co-ordinate services.

Supporting disabled children and their carers

- Assessments of disabled children should focus on the specific needs of the child and family, be strengths-based and gather effective information to support the best outcome for the child and family.
- Local authorities should implement a Designated Social Care Officer (DCSO) role to improve links between the social care services and the special educational needs and disability (SEND) system.

Harm outside the home

- Practitioners should consider the needs, experiences and vulnerabilities of the individuals or groups who are experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing, harm outside the home – including from criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation or serious violence.
- Practitioners should work with relevant partner agencies to consider the influence of groups or individuals perpetrating the harm.
- Professionals should assess whether a child who is experiencing, or is at risk of experiencing, harm outside the home is in need under section 17 or 47 of the [Children Act 1989](#).

Section 3: Child protection

National multi-agency practice standards

The updated guidance introduces new multi-agency practice standards for all practitioners working in services and settings that come into contact with children who may be suffering or have suffered significant harm within or outside the home.

Operational responsibilities

The guidance introduces changes that emphasise the advantages of prison and probation services exchanging information with children's social care and other agencies.

Learning from serious child safeguarding incidents

Although not a statutory requirement, the guidance notes how local authorities should "notify the Secretary of State for Education and OFSTED of the death of a care leaver up to and including the age of 24." If local partners think there may be learning to be gained from the death of a looked after child or care leaver even if the criteria for a serious incident are not met, they may wish to conduct a local safeguarding practice review.

Child death reviews

Factual updates have been made to reflect the latest legislation and guidance.

References

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<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-practice-with-children-young-people-and-families>>

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