

Changes to statutory guidance: Working Together to Safeguard Children

Government consultation

Launch date: 21 June 2023

Respond by: 6 September 2023

[Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 - consultation document \(education.gov.uk\)](#)

[Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023: draft for consultation \(education.gov.uk\)](#)

Proposed changes strengthen the guidance in five key areas:

1

A **shared endeavour** introduces expectations for effective multi-agency working and practice principles for working with parents and carers.

2

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements clarifies roles and responsibilities, introduces a partnership chair and deepens accountability and transparency.

3

Help and support for children and their families includes stronger expectations on Early Help and family networks, clarifies permissions on working with children under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and emphasises support for disabled children.

4

Decisive multi-agency child protection introduces new national multi-agency child protection standards for practitioners and approaches to harm outside the home.

5

Learning from serious child safeguarding incidents.

There are 28 questions across the five consultation areas, 1 on impact assessment and 6 questions about person completing survey.

Section 1: A shared endeavour

This section includes propositions on:

- Renaming the statutory guidance to reflect the help and support that is provided to families.
Working Together to Safeguard Children: a guide to multi-agency working to help, safeguard, protect and promote the welfare of children
- [Introducing practice principles for working with parents and carers.](#)
- [Introducing expectations for effective multi-agency working at a strategic, management and direct practice level.](#)

Principles for working with parents and carers

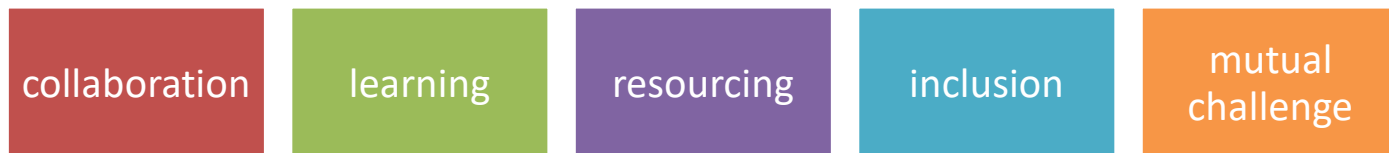
The four principles for working with parents are:

- Effective partnership working with parents and carers happens when practitioners build positive, trusting and co-operative relationships.

2. Language should be respectful, clear and not punitive.
3. Practitioners enable parents and carers to participate in decision-making.
4. Practitioners involve parents, families and local communities in designing processes that affect them.

Expectations for multi-agency working

Developed expectations to underpin multi-agency working in the following areas:



- Applies to all agencies and practitioners involved in safeguarding and protecting children. Specifically, these include police, local authorities, health services, probation, youth offending service, education and childcare settings, and voluntary and third sector organisations.
- The term practitioners used refers to all those working in these services and settings.
- They are structured at three levels: strategic leaders, senior and middle managers and direct practice.

Strategic leaders may include	Senior and middle managers may include	Those in direct practice may include
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Executives of local authorities or the integrated care board; • Chief Constables and Police and Crime Commissioners; • Heads of Trusts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heads of services and team managers in LAs • named professionals (GP, nurse, doctor, midwife) in health; • Chief Superintendent and Chief Inspector (and equivalents) in police; • nursery managers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frontline social workers, • health visitors, • police constables, • teachers • those working in the voluntary and community sector.

Decision-making structures will differ by area, and local areas should consider how best to apply these standards to match their local approach.

Multi-agency practice principles for **strategic leaders** are:

- **Collaborate:** Leaders develop a shared vision for how their services work together to deliver shared goals
- **Learn:** Leaders use evidence from direct practice in their area so that they know and can evaluate what is and isn't working well for children and families
- **Resource:** Leaders are ambitious about protecting children in their area and jointly prioritise and share resources accordingly
- **Include:** Leaders create an inclusive culture where diversity is understood, and multi-agency and multi-disciplinary working is celebrated
- **Mutual challenge:** Leaders hold each other and their teams to account and are held to account by their teams for the quality of the partnership-working

Multi-agency practice principles for **senior and middle managers** are:

- **Collaborate:** Decisions are based on a shared practice approach and constructive debate and analysis of information from all services
- **Learn:** Managers ensure their teams have time to engage in peer-learning and knowledge-exchange, peer-audit, group supervision and observation
- **Resource:** Managers ensure children receive the holistic support they need, drawing in expertise from a wide range of agencies
- **Include:** Managers support staff to identify and challenge bias, discrimination, inequality and negative stereotypes
- **Mutual challenge:** Constructive challenge within and across agencies and disciplines is actively encouraged. Independent judgements are valued and given space alongside collective decision-making to avoid confirmation bias and groupthink

Multi-agency practice principles for **direct practice** are:

- **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 right support is provided
- **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 poverty 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

Section 2: Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements

This section includes propositions on:

- [clarifying roles and responsibilities, including distinguishing between lead safeguarding partners and their delegates](#)
- [introducing a partnership chair](#)
- [role of relevant agencies and education providers](#)
- [role of voluntary, charity, social enterprise \(VCSE\) organisations and sports clubs](#)
- [accountability and transparency](#)

Proposing the following changes:

- providing **greater clarity on the expectations on safeguarding partners** including distinguishing between those responsible for setting the vision and priorities (Lead Safeguarding Partners) and those leading delivery of arrangements (Delegate Safeguarding Partners) and outlining the joint functions as strategic leaders for the first time. How this is done is to be agreed locally.
- introducing the role of **partnership chair** from amongst the delegated safeguarding partner group, to be agreed by all three agencies. It is envisaged that this individual will replace the need for an independent chair (which is still held in some areas) and allow a single point of escalation for risks and issues to the lead safeguarding partners.

- changing wording to **emphasise the role of education** in safeguarding arrangements, reflecting the importance they play in children's lives and the value in involving them in strategic decision-making. Strengthening Working Together is the first step before exploring whether further legislative changes are needed.
- providing more detail on key functions such **as independent scrutiny, funding arrangements, dispute resolution and reporting**; introducing for the first time a set date by which local areas should submit their yearly reports to encourage greater transparency and compliance.

Clarifying roles and responsibilities of lead and delegated safeguarding partners

Joint functions of lead safeguarding partners

1. Set the strategic direction, vision, and culture of the local safeguarding arrangements, including agreeing and reviewing shared priorities and the resource required.
2. Lead their organisation's individual contribution to the shared priorities,
3. ensuring strong governance, accountability and reporting mechanisms to hold their delegates to account for the delivery of agency commitments.
4. Review and sign off key partnership documents: published multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, including plans for independent scrutiny; shared annual budget; yearly report; and local threshold document.
5. Provide shared oversight of learning from serious incidents, ensuring recommendations are implemented and have a demonstrable impact on practice (as set out in the yearly report).
6. Ensure multi-agency arrangements have the necessary level of business support, including intelligence and analytical functions, such as an agreed data set providing oversight and a robust understanding of practice.

Joint functions of delegated safeguarding partners

1. Delivery and monitoring of multi-agency priorities and procedures to protect and safeguard children in the local area, in compliance with published arrangements and thresholds.
2. The implementation of effective information-sharing arrangements between agencies, including data sharing that facilitates joint analysis between partner agencies.
3. Delivery of high-quality and timely Rapid Reviews and local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, with the impact of learning from local and national reviews clearly evidenced in yearly reports.
4. The provision of appropriate multi-agency safeguarding professional development and training.
5. Seeking of, and responding to, feedback from children and families about their experiences of services and co-designing services to ensure children from different communities and groups can access the help and protection they need.
6. Close partnership working and engagement with education and other relevant agencies, allowing better identification of and response to harm.

Introducing a partnership chair

To support delivery of these functions, LSPs should appoint one of the DSPs as the partnership chair for the multi-agency arrangements. The purpose of the partnership chair will be to provide greater consistency across local areas and act as the conduit between the DSPs and LSPs, providing feedback and escalating collective risk and issues to LSPs as necessary.

The DSPs (including the partnership chair) should ensure that, with the support of, the business office and independent scrutiny function the following activity and assurance will be delivered:

- oversee and be responsible for the analysis, intelligence, and timely collection of data to support functions, such as:
 - getting an accurate local picture of how effectively services are being delivered through regular communication across relevant agencies
 - advising the statutory safeguarding partners of the key challenges and emerging priorities
 - coordinating the joint multi-agency strategic plan, ensuring that statutory safeguarding partners and their delegates feed into and own the plan in the local area
 - overseeing the quality of practice and local outcomes for children and families
- review and promote consistent understanding and application of referral and intervention thresholds across agencies so that the right children receive the right support at the right time
- coordinate the views of children, and families about the services they receive and feed key learning, issues, and good practice to the lead safeguarding partners
- support effective engagement with relevant agencies in their local area so that they understand their roles and responsibilities. This is to include strengthening the input from education providers
- use learning from previous incidents to prompt reflection and analysis of where improvements need to be secured and action taken
- strengthen system conditions for effective multi-agency child protection work.
- chair, attend or be reported to on regular multi-agency operational meetings and subgroups, to ensure common threads across the arrangements. Partnerships should decide the regularity of meetings at both a LSP and DSP level

Role of relevant agencies and education providers

- Changes to the sections on relevant agencies and education providers to clarify their roles and responsibilities in local safeguarding arrangements.
- The wording is intended to outline this expectation and encourage safeguarding partners to think innovatively about how they bring education to strategic discussions.
- There will be consultation on how we can give education a more formal role as the fourth partner and welcome suggestions from local areas.

Role of voluntary, charity, social enterprise (VCSE) organisations and sports clubs

- Changes to the section on relevant agencies to highlight the importance of considering naming and engaging these organisations in published local arrangements (if they are not already) to improve local oversight and engagement and help drive consistent safeguarding practice.
- The non-statutory guidance [Keeping children safe in out-of-school settings](#) sets out the safeguarding arrangements that these providers should have in place, including expectations on how to manage safeguarding concerns.

Accountability and transparency

- Strengthens wording on accountability by clarifying expectations around information sharing, independent scrutiny, funding and reporting.
- Clarifies what is needed in published strategic plans and yearly reports, and sets a date by for yearly reports to be submitted to encourage greater consistency and transparency across local areas.
- Gives some examples of the types of costs that exist in multi-agency arrangements and places greater emphasis on the review and reporting of finances.

Safeguarding partners should have an agreement in place which outlines how information is shared safely and effectively between themselves and other relevant agencies.

Annual reports to be submitted by the end of September every year, starting from 2024, and should be reflective of work undertaken the previous year.

Funding should be sufficient to support the delivery of arrangements, including the costs of core functions, such as local child safeguarding practice reviews, multi-agency training and learning events, resourcing agreed initiatives and priorities, independent scrutiny and analytical and business support.

Section 3: Help and support for children and their families

This section includes propositions on:

- [Early Help](#)
- [Family Networks](#)
- [Working with children under section 17 of the Children Act 1989](#)
- [Support for disabled children and families](#)
- [Support for children in mother and baby units](#)
- [Protecting children from prisoners who present an ongoing risk from within custody or whilst on probation](#)

Early Help

The Families First for Children Pathfinder will test new approaches to delivering Family Help before revising the statutory guidance to set out the expectations for moving from the current system of early help to Family Help. The proposed changes are intended to lay the foundations for this future system.

- Emphasised the focus on families for improving the outcomes of children.
- Practitioners should consider the needs of all members of the family as individuals and how their needs impact on one another.
- Expanded on definitions and examples of whole family working, ensuring they align with other key guidance including the [Early Help System Guide](#).
- Extended the range of risk factors that practitioners should be particularly aware of in the Identifying children and families who would benefit from help section.
- Greater emphasis on the contribution and support of education and childcare settings.
- Includes dedicated section on the role of education and childcare settings which draws together key considerations when identifying a child who may need early help support such as attendance, behaviour and mental health.

Family Networks

- Updates intended to help everyone who works with children and families to have a renewed focus on family-led solutions from within their 'family network' first, prioritising a child's right to family life wherever this is possible.
- Clarifying that a family network can be a blood-relative, or a non-related connected person, such as a family friend or neighbour.
- More specific about how and when family networks should be involved and supported throughout a family's involvement with children's social care.
- Replaced the term "wider family" with "family network" to reflect that someone's 'family' can include people who are not related to them.

- encouraging practitioners to consider engaging the family network at every stage, ensuring that families feel involved in the decisions made about safety and wellbeing of the child.
- Propose local authorities consider the family network for S17 financial support where this could help to overcome barriers.
- Family Group Conferences – provided links to relevant guidance and legislation with more information about how to run family group conferences, emphasising that engaging families is important at every stage of offering help, support and protection.
- Outlined the core components of FGC: that they are a family-led forum, where a family network has all the resources, adequate preparation, relevant information, a safe and appropriate environment, and ‘private family time’ to make a plan to respond to concerns about a child’s safety or wellbeing.

Support under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (Child in Need)

- Bringing together support provided in “targeted early help” with support provided under section 17 to form a new single offer of **Family Help**.
- Re-clarifying that the primary [legislation](#) permits a range of practitioners to be the lead practitioner for the family and that children and families supported under Section 17 should be along a continuum with a gradient of needs.
- Clarifying that a broader range of practitioners can lead the direct work with children under section 17, with social worker qualified practice supervisors and managers providing support and oversight for key decisions and activity.
- Want to ensure the right people, with the right knowledge, skills and relationships, provide families with support at the right time – range of practitioners who already work with these children including family support workers, drug and alcohol practitioners, domestic abuse workers, youth workers and others.
- Propose replacing references to social workers in section 17 assessment, planning and review with the term ‘lead practitioner’.
- Not proposing any changes where concerns are raised about a child experiencing actual or likely significant harm. Where enquiries are made under section 47 of the Children Act 1989, and a child protection plan is put in place, the lead practitioner should always be a social worker.
- LAs who do not want to pursue using a wider range of practitioners working on Section 17 cases do not need to – this just gives those areas permission to use non-social worker practitioners where they have the knowledge, skills and capacity commensurate with the level of need.

Support for disabled children

A stronger focus on support and protection for disabled children. Want to support practitioners to consistently recognise there will be times when parents and carers need some practical, non-judgemental help and support for caring for their disabled child.

Proposing changes that aim to:

- clarify the role of children’s social care in relation to disabled children and their families by stating that the role of children’s services is to provide non-stigmatising help and support when needed
- strengthen the section on the assessment of disabled children and their carers by emphasising that the assessment should focus on achieving the best possible outcomes for the child, providing practical support and recognising any additional pressures facing the whole family
- make sure that disabled children are included and referenced where relevant and appropriate throughout the Working Together, for example where specific groups are listed as being eligible for support, so that their needs are fully recognised

- strengthening the language around the role of the Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO) to align with wider reforms to the [SEND system](#)

Mother and baby units

- Propose updating Working Together in response to the recommendations from the [Chief Social Worker's review](#) to clarify the role of children's social care in supporting babies to stay with their mothers, where the mother is serving a custodial sentence.
- Working Together will make clear that MBUs within the prison estate provide an opportunity for babies to remain with their mother in a safe setting, giving the chance for mother and child to bond and maintain a secure relationship.

Prison and Probation Services

- Aligning the guidance on child safeguarding enquires and the child contact risk assessment process undertaken by prison and probation service staff with other existing guidance to ensure that all practitioners in children's social care understand the information they must provide and how to approach safeguarding for these children in partnership with others.
- Included guidance on information sharing between agencies for the purposes of robust risk assessment, risk management and safe sentencing.

Section 4: Decisive multi-agency child protection

This section includes propositions on:

- [A sharp focus on child protection including introducing multi-agency child protection practitioner standards.](#)
- [Strengthening approaches to harm outside the home.](#)

A sharp focus on child protection including new national multi-agency practice standards for child protection

- Proposing a new section in chapter 3 that includes new national multi-agency practice standards for child protection for all practitioners who come into contact with children who may be suffering or have suffered significant harm; and more information about the types of harm children face from both inside and outside the home.
- Seeking to place more emphasis on the skills, experience, and expertise that multi-agency practitioners need when working in child protection and more clarity about the actions all practitioners should take where there are concerns about actual or likely significant harm to a child.
- Outlined the critical elements for effective child protection at a system level which include effective practitioner supervision, promoting the conditions for effective challenge and critical thinking, and setting out clearly how practitioners can escalate concerns.
- Strengthened references to multi-agency engagement throughout the process descriptor tables, emphasising multi-agency discussion and consensus at key stages including in strategy discussions and in the child protection conference, and where decisions are made about child protection planning.
- Proposing to include new national multi-agency practice standards for child protection for all practitioners involved in child protection work ([paragraphs 203 – 205 and standards table](#)).
- These standards set out the actions, considerations and behaviours that should lead to improved child protection practice and better outcomes for children.
- The standards are based on best practice evidence including from the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel.

Harm outside the home

- Clarifies that both section 17 and section 47 of the Children Act 1989 should be used to help and protect children that are or could experience harm in extra-familial contexts.
- The changes draw on what many local authorities already do well in their day-to-day work to keep children safe from harm.
- Proposed changes to clarify that the multi-agency safeguarding response applies to all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation, including online.
- Proposed changes outline the key considerations for practitioners including working with children and partners to understand the extra-familial context in which harm is occurring, the role of partners in keeping children safe and providing support, and working with parents as partners to create safety for their child.
- Included references to extrafamilial harm in the process descriptors for child protection.

Section 5: Learning from serious child safeguarding incidents

Death of Care Leavers

- Proposing that local authorities should notify the Secretary of State and Ofsted of the death of a care leaver aged 18-25, where they are aware of their care leaver status.
- Reporting care leaver deaths will help link data on deaths with DHSC and DLUHC data on health and housing to build a greater picture on care leaver outcomes.
- For LAs, this would not yet be a legislative requirement, but encourage reporting the death of a care leaver, regardless of whether abuse or neglect is known or suspected, reflecting how the deaths of looked after children are currently reported.
- **Safeguarding Partners would not be required to carry out a rapid review.** However, if it's felt that learning could be gained from the death of a care leaver, they may choose to undertake a review for their own purposes.
- Local authorities would be expected to make notifications through the Child Safeguarding Incident Notification System in the same way as serious incidents are currently reported for children under the age of 18.

Technical clarifications and amendments

The table below includes other drafting changes expected to be made, but not seeking views as part of this consultation. Propose to amend 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018' as follows:

Clarification/Update	Reason for change
Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)	Updated to reflect existing statutory MAPPA guidance.
Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel	Clarity on the panel to carry out thematic reviews, Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review process and signposting to panel guidance for further clarity on serious safeguarding cases

Clarification/Update	Reason for change
Information on pre-proceedings	Updated to reflect other existing guidance
Replace links of out-of-date guidance on forced marriage. Add links to new resource packs on female genital mutilation and forced marriage.	Updated to reflect new guidance
Update to the information on Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan with reference to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice 0-25 (2015)	Updated to reflect changes to legislation
Additions throughout the document to reflect the change to legislation and Domestic Abuse Act 2021	Updated to reflect changes in legislation
Replacement of the Armed Services section to update and reflect MOD responsibilities and changes to internal structures and processes.	Updated to reflect changes to policy
Addition of reference to young carers now recorded in school census.	Updated to reflect changes to policy
Adding and updating glossary to reflect new definitions, legislation and policies	Updated to reflect new definitions, legislation and policies
Deletion of references to Clinical Commissioning Groups and replace with Integrated Care Boards.	Updated to reflect changes in legislation
Removing reference to secure colleges and referencing secure children's homes and secure schools	Updated to reflect changes in naming
Deletion of references to Public Health England	Updated to reflect closure of Public Health England
Information Sharing	Updated to correct factual inaccuracies
Child death review partners must share child death data with the National Child Mortality Database	To strengthen and clarify existing processes to improve accuracy of data and learning
Replace links of out-of-date guidance on Child Death Review Statutory and Operational Guidance.	Updated to reflect new guidance
Child death review partners to model their structures and processes in the Child Death review Statutory and Operational Guidance (2018) and remove reference and footnote to the previous guidance Child Death Overview Panel	Updated to reflect new legislation

Clarification/Update	Reason for change
Update to reflect the designated doctor for child deaths should be a senior doctor and remove previous reference of senior paediatrician	To strengthen and clarify the process of who can take a lead role in the child death review process
Update to reflect coroner's duty to include post- mortem reports with relevant child death review partners	Updated to reflect new guidance
Remove independent review by child death review partners and replace with child death overview panel	Updated to reflect change of name