

# Protecting children in education settings



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Schools and colleges and their staff are an important part of the wider safeguarding system for children.... 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 professionals 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.... If children and families are to receive the right help at the right time, everyone who comes into contact with them has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action.... School and college staff are particularly important as they are in a position to identify concerns early, provide help for children, and prevent concerns from escalating.... All staff have a responsibility to provide a safe environment in which children can learn.... Schools and colleges should work with social care, the police, health services and other services to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm.

(Keeping children safe in education, Department for Education Guide)



### **What is abuse and neglect?**

Abuse is a form of maltreatment of a child under the age of 18. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by others (e.g. via the internet). They may be abused by an adult or adults or by another child or children. The abuse may be physical, emotional or sexual.

### **Why are staff working in education settings involved?**

Members of staff in all schools whether maintained, non-maintained or independent schools (including academies, free schools and alternative provision academies), maintained nursery schools, pupil referral units, further education colleges and sixth-form colleges have a duty to safeguard children from all social and ethnic backgrounds and to promote their welfare. This means protecting children from maltreatment, preventing impairment of children's health or development, ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care and taking action to enable all children have the best outcomes. They do this by ensuring that:

- schools and other services run by schools are safe places for children
- staff can identify children who may be in need of extra help or who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm and take appropriate action, working with other services, as needed.
- allegations against staff are dealt with properly.

Each school and college has a designated safeguarding lead who provides support to staff to carry out their safeguarding duties and who liaises closely with other services such as children's social care.

### **What are child protection procedures?**

These are rules that people working with children must follow. Southwark follows the same procedures as all London boroughs. All schools in Southwark should ensure that their safeguarding arrangements take into account the procedures and practice of the local authority as part of the inter-agency safeguarding procedures. Staff must report any concerns, which may include:



- any injuries or marks that cannot be explained or are not consistent with the explanation given
- any unusual behaviour
- physical punishment that is not reasonable or not appropriate
- worrying things said by or about the child, including those in social media.

### **What can parents and carers do to help?**

Children get the best from education services when staff, parents and carers are working together and there is good communication.

Please inform a member of staff if your child has an accident or illness or is upset by something that has happened at home or within the family.

If staff are worried about your child and there is no obvious explanation, their training will lead them to think about possible child abuse.

If a member of staff thinks a parent or carer will hurt a child because they are behaving badly, it will make it difficult to talk to the parent or carer about any behavioural concerns.

Children's behaviour tends to improve when they understand that staff, parents and carers are working together.

Staff in education settings must not physically punish children or display other abusive behaviour and/or language towards children and must have effective ways of encouraging good behaviour that can also be followed by parents and carers at home. If you have any concerns about any member of staff in any school, please discuss it with the headteacher. If your concern is about the headteacher, it needs to be shared with the chair of governors.

### **When children are behaving badly, are parents and carers allowed to smack them?**

The law entitles only the parents to use reasonable punishment. Any physical punishment is not reasonable if it involves:

- shaking the child
- hitting the child on the head or face
- making the child stand on one leg for long period



- locking the child up
- hitting the child with an object such as a stick, cane or belt
- putting items like ginger or chilli in the mouth, eyes or other parts of the child's body
- causing a mark or injury to the child.

These and any other physical punishment or threats that cause emotional harm to a child or any neglect is likely to be reported to children's social care as possible child abuse.

### **Are parents or carers informed before children's social care services are contacted?**

Where possible, staff will contact parents or carers before a child is referred to children's social care services. However, if they think this might put the child in more danger or that the police may need to be involved, staff may contact children's social care services first and discuss how to inform the parents or carers.

### **What happens after a referral is made?**

Children's social care services will find out more information from the family, the child and other services. Referrals can sometimes be upsetting for parents and carers, but please remember that if a child is referred to children's social care services, staff are not accusing anyone. By sharing our concerns and acting quickly, we may prevent children from being seriously harmed and help families going through stressful times. Referrals may not always lead to further investigation, but staff must put the needs of children and young people first and not take any risks with the safety or welfare of your children, even if this means upsetting parents or carers.

### **Does a referral mean that the child will be removed from home?**

No. It is very unusual for a child to be removed from their home. The law says that everything possible should be done to help parents look after their children in their own homes. Children should only be removed if there is no other way of ensuring they can be protected from harm.

If the children's social care services' assessment shows serious concerns about possible abuse or neglect, a child protection conference will be held to agree a child protection plan. Family members, the school and other relevant agencies are invited to attend.



## What can parents and carers do if they feel they have gone too far in punishing a child or are afraid they may harm their child?

Support is available, and asking for help is often the first step to solving the problem. Talk to a teacher, centre manager, a health visitor or your family doctor. They can provide more information on safeguarding your child. Children's services provide support to families, children and young people who are in need.

### Some other specific safeguarding issues:

#### Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

CSE is a form of sexual abuse in which children are sexually exploited for money, power or status. Children or young people may be tricked into believing they are in a loving, consensual relationship. They may be invited to parties and given drugs and alcohol. They may also be groomed online.

Some indicators of children being sexually exploited are: going missing for periods of time or regularly coming home late, regularly missing school or education or not taking part in education, appearing with unexplained gifts or new possessions, associating with other young people involved in exploitation, having older boyfriends or girlfriends, suffering from sexually transmitted infections, mood swings or changes in emotional wellbeing, drug and alcohol misuse and displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour.

A child under the age of 13 is not legally capable of consenting to sex (it is statutory rape) or any other type of sexual touching. Sexual activity with a child under 16 is also an offence. It is an offence for a person to have a sexual relationship with a 16 or 17 year old if that person holds a position of trust or authority in relation to the young person.

Non consensual sex is rape, whatever the age of the victim. If the victim is incapacitated through drink or drugs, or the victim or his or her family has been subject to violence or the threat of it, they can not be considered to have given true consent and therefore offences may have been committed. Child sexual exploitation is therefore potentially a child protection issue for all children under the age of 18.



### **‘Sexting’**

Creating and sharing sexual photos and videos of under-18s is illegal. Schools follow up any incidents of sharing youth produced sexual imagery, which is commonly known as ‘sexting’, which comes to their attention with a view to referring to appropriate agencies.

### **Peer on peer abuse**

Children are capable of abusing other children. Schools do not tolerate these or pass them off as “banter”, “just having a laugh” or “part of growing up”. Although it is more likely that girls will be victims and boys perpetrators, all peer on peer abuse is unacceptable and will be taken seriously. This can take different forms, such as sexual violence and sexual harassment; physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm; sexting; initiation/hazing type violence and rituals.

### **Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children**

Sexual violence and sexual harassment can occur between two children of any age and sex. It can also occur through a group of children sexually assaulting or sexually harassing a single child or group of children. It can occur online and offline (both physically and verbally). It is more likely that girls will be the victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment and more likely it will be perpetrated by boys. Children who are victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment will find the experience stressful and distressing. This will affect their educational attainment. Schools take these incidents seriously and ensure that victims are protected, offered appropriate support and every effort is made to ensure their education is not disrupted. This may include working with or referral to other agencies.

### **So-called ‘honour-based’ violence (HBV)**

HBV includes incidents or crimes which have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or the community, including female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, and practices such as breast ironing. Abuse committed in the context of preserving “honour” often involves a wider network of family or community pressure and can include multiple perpetrators. All forms of HBV are abuse (regardless of the motivation) and



should be handled and escalated as such. If staff have a concern regarding a child that might be at risk of HBV or who has suffered from HBV, they follow it up with a view to referring to appropriate agencies.

### **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)**

Female genital mutilation (sometimes referred to as female circumcision) refers to procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It has no health benefits and harms girls and women in many ways. It involves removing and damaging healthy and normal female genital tissue and hence interferes with the natural function of girls' and women's bodies. FGM causes severe pain and has several immediate and long term health consequences, including difficulties in childbirth also causing dangers to the child.

It is practised by families for a variety of complex reasons but often in the belief that it is beneficial for the girl or woman. FGM is a deeply rooted practice, widely carried out mainly among specific ethnic populations in Africa and parts of the Middle East and Asia. These are concentrated in countries around the Atlantic coast to the Horn of Africa, in areas of the Middle East like Iraq and Yemen. It has also been documented in communities in Colombia, Iran, Israel, Oman, The United Arab Emirates, The Occupied Palestinian Territories, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. It has also been identified in parts of Europe, North America and Australia.

It is estimated that approximately 60,000 girls aged 0-14 were born in England and Wales to mothers who had undergone FGM and approximately 103,000 women aged 15-49 and approximately 24,000 women aged 50 and over who have migrated to England and Wales are living with the consequences of FGM. In addition, approximately 10,000 girls aged under 15 who have migrated to England and Wales are likely to have undergone FGM.

FGM is child abuse and a form of violence against women and girls.

### **Forced marriage**

Forcing a person into a marriage is a crime in England and Wales. A forced marriage is one entered into without the full and free consent of one or both parties and where violence, threats or any other form of coercion is used to





cause a person to enter into a marriage. Threats can be physical or emotional and psychological. A lack of full and free consent can be where a person does not consent or where they cannot consent (if they have learning disabilities, for example). Nevertheless, some communities use religion and culture as a way to coerce a person into marriage. Schools and colleges can play an important role in safeguarding children from forced marriage.

### **Preventing radicalisation**

Local authorities have a legal duty to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism (“the Prevent duty”). Young people can be exposed to extremist influences or prejudiced views, in particular those via the internet and other social media. Schools can help to protect children from extremist and violent views in the same ways that they help to safeguard children from drugs, gang violence or alcohol.

### **Private fostering**

Private fostering is when a child under the age of 16 (under 18 if disabled) is cared for by someone who is not their parent or a ‘close relative’. This is a private arrangement made between a parent and a carer, for 28 days or more. Close relatives are defined as step-parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles or aunts (whether of full blood, half blood or by marriage). Great grandparents, great aunts, great uncles and cousins are not regarded as close relatives.

The law requires that Wandsworth Council should be notified if anyone is looking after someone else’s child for 28 days or more. The purpose of the council’s involvement is to support the child and private foster family (and wherever possible the biological parent/s) with any issues arising. These may be practical issues such as benefits, housing, immigration or emotional issues such as keeping contact with biological family, maintaining cultural identity.



## Other helpful agencies

### **NSPCC Child Protection Helpline**

24 hour confidential freephone service for adults, children or young people to speak with someone anonymously (without giving your name).

Tel: 0808 800 5000

Email: [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)

Website: [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

### **Childline**

24 hour confidential freephone service for children and young people offering information and support.

Tel: 0800 1111

### **Family Lives**

For information, advice, guidance and support on any aspect of parenting and family life, including bullying.

Parentline: 0808 800 2222

Email: [parentsupport@familylives.org.uk](mailto:parentsupport@familylives.org.uk)

Website: [www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk)

### **The Family Rights Group**

Advice for families whose children are involved with or need children's services because of welfare needs or concerns.

Tel: 0808 801 0366

Website: [www.frg.org.uk](http://www.frg.org.uk)



