

Safeguarding Children and Young People

Guidance for staff in homelessness services

Let's end homelessness together

Homeless Link, Minories House, 2 - 5 Minories, London EC3N 1BJ | 020 7840 4430

www.homeless.org.uk | Twitter: @Homelesslink | Facebook: www.facebook.com/homelesslink

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Safeguarding Children and Young People

Guidance for frontline staff

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Introduction

Staff in some homelessness services may work with children and young people who are at risk of abuse (young people for the purposes of this briefing are defined as individuals who are 16-17 years old). It is the responsibility of all staff to recognise and respond to the signs of abuse.

Organisations should have policies and procedures about Safeguarding of Children and Young People. This guidance sets out the principles and what staff can expect if they raise a safeguarding alert.

Legislation

The Government guidance is contained within Working Together to Safeguard Children July 2018. The guidance covers legislative requirements, defines safeguarding processes and partners.

Each Local Authority must have a Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) that includes the local authority, NHS and police. LSCBs must meet regularly, develop shared safeguarding plans and publish an annual review of progress. LSCBs will carry out Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews in some circumstances relating to safeguarding failures.

See Department of Education: www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2

Defining a child

A child is defined as any person under the age of 18. Homeless Link members may work with children of all ages, particularly when delivering services to families. In addition, some members may deliver services to young people aged 16 and 17 who are covered by Child Safeguarding legislation and procedures.

The information in this briefing will be useful for staff working with children of all ages, but the primary focus is safeguarding young people aged 16 and 17. Readers with concerns relating to children from birth to 15 years old are urged to check their Local Authority's website for further information.

Please note:

- That a child or young person cannot consent to abuse as they lack the legal capacity to do so. However, where possible they should be involved in the process and their wishes respected.
- There is a requirement to protect a child or young person, irrespective of whether the child or young person is a client or not. A disclosure about, for example, a friend or sibling who is a child or young person might need to be acted upon.
- Child protection is an overarching requirement within an organisational policy and procedural framework – no policies or procedures can get in the way of an organisation discharging their responsibility to safeguard children or young people.

Issues affecting young people aged 16 and 17

There are a range of issue that have an impact on effective safeguarding for 16 and 17 year olds

Some difficulties that arise for young people:

- Perceptions
 - Young people are more resilient
 - Young person perceived as competent
 - The young person has a lack of awareness of risky behaviour
- Not listened to
 - At all
 - The young person's wishes in the safeguarding process
- Information available is not clear or relevant
- Unrealistic expectations
- A lack of trust of adults 'in authority'

Some difficulties that arise for professional staff:

- Perceptions
 - Young people are more resilient
 - Young person perceived as competent Lack of awareness of risky behaviour
- Young person's behaviour appears to exacerbate the situation
- Professional quandary e.g. a young person dating an older man
- Lack of knowledge of thresholds and process
- Concerns about the negative impact of a referral
- Safeguarding processes not seen as effective
- Limitations on resources and systems
- Lack of relevant services

These difficulties have a negative impact on young people where a safeguarding process is not initiated or has a poor outcome.

Correcting the balance

Safeguarding decisions and processes are potentially difficult and challenging for all involved. Given the difficulties outlined above, it is important to develop and promote sustainable responses.

Potential responses to support and develop safeguarding with young people

- Ensure you build a trusting relationship
- Consistency of support worker as far as possible
- Acknowledge the barriers and difficulties
- Provide relevant accessible information
- Young people often disclose to peers – write a young person’s guide ‘How to help a friend’
- Establish a young person’s advocate
- Look to other ways of helping
 - Common Assessment Framework
 - MARAC (multi-agency risk assessment conference)
 - Enhanced in house support
 - A sideways move
- Be non-judgmental

What is child abuse?

All local authorities have a duty to protect people at risk from abuse. Types of abuse listed in ‘Working together’ include:

An indicative list of child safeguarding risks	
Sexual	Physical
Emotional	Exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime
Trafficking and Modern Slavery	Online exploitation
Sexual exploitation	Influences of extremism leading to radicalisation
Neglect	Organisational abuse

A summary definition is: ‘Doing something to a child that should not be done or failing to do something that should be done for the sake of their safety or wellbeing’.

Abuse can happen anywhere and can consist of single or repeated acts. An abuser can be anyone that comes into contact with a child or young person and is often someone well known or close to them, or someone who is employed to care for them.

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Young people who are experiencing homelessness can be vulnerable to a range of risks factors which increases the risk of abuse. Indicative examples are:

Interpersonal and Personal	External
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mental health problems• Dependent on alcohol or drugs• Brain damage• Lack of purposeful activity• Shows odd or embarrassing behaviour• Has difficulty in communicating	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poor or non-existent staff supervision• Poor or non-existent training• Staff working in isolation• Community disengagement, fear and resentment• Lack of access to safe and adequate housing• Victim of gatekeeping and inflexible policies

Whatever the form of abuse or neglect, staff should put the needs of the child or young person first when determining what action to take.

Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB)

Safeguarding of children falls under the remit of Local Authority Social Services departments. Most Social Services Departments' LSCB consists of experts from various fields such as health, police, social care services, the probation service, youth offending team, CAFCASS (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service), education and the voluntary sector. The Boards are responsible for investigating incidents, monitoring the performance of agencies and services, raising awareness, providing training, sharing good practice and suggesting improvements.

Each Local Authority will have mechanisms in place to respond to child safeguarding concerns. These should be communicated to all local statutory, voluntary and community agencies and include clear policies and procedures for agencies to refer to. You can find them on the Local Authority's website.

Confidentiality and sharing information

All organisations should follow clear principles of confidentiality in relation to their service users. However, there will be occasions when it is appropriate to share information about your clients in order to protect their best interests – or where there is a risk of significant harm to that person or to others – and, therefore, you should never give assurance of absolute confidentiality. It is a legal requirement that agencies and professionals work together around safeguarding issues.

- Ensure you have contact details for all other professionals in your service users' support networks.
- Make sure your organisation has clear policies on information sharing and that you have procedures in place around working with other agencies.
- Assess each occasion on a case-by-case basis.
- Only share information on a 'need to know' basis and when it is in the best interests of your service users.
- Always try to obtain informed consent from your service users before sharing information, however if this is not possible it may be necessary to override this requirement – especially if other children or adults are at risk. Staff should seek management support to decide whether to share information without consent.

The Editorial Board of the London Child Protection Procedures has considered what changes are required to the Procedures to ensure compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) implemented

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through the Data Protection Act 2018. As a result, the Board recommends that 'legal obligation' and 'public task' (as defined in the GDPR) are relied on as the primary basis for processing information to establish whether or not there is a need to safeguard the welfare of a child. This means that, while families or individuals will be informed when personal data is being shared or processed, their consent is not required.

The significance of this change is that it is not necessary to seek consent to share information for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of a child. It does continue to be good practice to inform parents, carers, the child or young person that you are sharing information for these purposes and to seek to work cooperatively with them.

Organisational operational safeguarding leads should ensure they are familiar with the GDPR. Further information can be found at:

- Information Commissioners Office: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/>
- Caldicott Principles: www.igt.hscic.gov.uk/Caldicott2Principles.aspx

Safeguarding alerts

As well as following Local Authority procedures, your organisation should have its own internal policies and procedures relating to safeguarding children and young people. These policies and procedures should go hand in hand with guidance from your Local Authority.

While safeguarding procedures may vary slightly between agencies and local authorities, they should all follow the same fundamental process:

1. Make sure the child or young person is not in immediate danger. If necessary, seek urgent medical treatment.
2. Contact the police if you think a crime has been committed or if someone is in immediate danger.
3. Raise a safeguarding alert by informing your line manager or another manager within your organisation.
4. Make a written report recording your concerns and detailing anything you have seen including dates, times, people involved and any observed injuries.

Once a safeguarding alert has been raised, service managers will decide how to proceed with the concern. While an incident may fall within internal safeguarding procedures, it will not necessarily fall within Local Authority procedures. It is usually a managerial decision whether to report to local authority safeguarding teams or not.

Action must be taken as soon as possible to minimise any risk of harm or exploitation to individuals concerned. In the absence of management support, raise an alert to the Local Authority rather than doing nothing. In the first instance this will often be via the local Social Services website, helpline or emergency duty team.

- Make sure you know where your safeguarding policies and procedures are saved and that they are accessible.
- Ensure that you have an up-to-date list of relevant local contact details to be used if necessary.

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- Make sure you know where to find your organisation's whistleblowing policies and procedures, to be followed when reporting any safeguarding concern involving a colleague.

What happens next?

All safeguarding concerns should be fully investigated by the appropriate person i.e. Social Services and/or the responsible manager within your organisation. Where it is suspected that a criminal act has taken place, the Police should be involved immediately as they may conduct their own investigations. If the suspected abuser is another member of staff, suspension or disciplinary proceedings may ensue.

Referrals to the Local Authority are assessed against the published safeguarding thresholds normally rated from 1 (not a protection issue) to 4 (child protection team enquiry is necessary). Referrals assessed as levels 2 and 3 could involve enquiries being made by the homeless service, adult patch or cluster social workers or other relevant professional.

Both internal and external enquiries should be as broad as necessary, drawing on evidence from all relevant sources.

Staff should be mindful of client confidentiality during the investigation. Support plans and risk assessments should be revised. Staff should look out for any consequences of the investigation on other clients in the service, and take action as a team to manage emerging risks or support needs. The investigation should result in an action plan to stop the abuse and/or to manage the risks that have been identified. For example, the client concerned might be supported to move to more appropriate accommodation; allocated a Social Worker or Youth Worker; or the project could introduce different ways of working to remove or reduce the risks. The 'Working Together' statutory guidance requires staff to listen to and take account of the wishes of a child or young person.

Training and continuing professional development

All staff and volunteers must be trained in safeguarding, at either an 'awareness' level for frontline staff, through to organisational strategic and operational leads who will write policies and make decisions about safeguarding alerts.

Some local authorities require safeguarding training to be delivered by approved training contractors. We advise our members to ensure that any training is delivered by experienced training professionals and takes account of the context of your work. Safeguarding training should be updated and refreshed regularly for all staff. Current guidance suggests updated training is given every three years for frontline staff and two years for safeguarding leads and designated managers.

Organisations should consider including safeguarding training as part of continuing professional development (CPD) of staff and managers. CPD may include training but could also include many other development activities, for example: personal research, writing briefings, policies and advice notes, keeping a reflective journal or facilitating a discussion group or activity. A useful starting point for CPD activity is an organisations appraisal or supervision process.

We have provided a short range of potential resources below for information.

Resources

Safeguarding

Working Together 2018 – Statutory Guidance on Inter-Agency Working to Safeguard and Promote the Welfare of Children: www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2

Homeless Link resources, covering a range of relevant safeguarding issues directly or indirectly, including resources on: Women, Mental Health, Trafficking and Labour Exploitation, Hate Crime, LGBTQ+ people
www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources

NSPCC research and resources, a constantly updated and influential resource on child safeguarding:
www.nspcc.org.uk/services-and-resources/research-and-resources/

London Child Protection Procedures – the guidance on thresholds may be of particular use:
www.londoncp.co.uk/

HM Government resource and guidance listing:
www.gov.uk/topic/schools-colleges-childrens-services/safeguarding-children

Continuing Professional Development – example resources

Manchester Safeguarding Boards has an excellent range of links to many free training and development resources: www.manchestersafeguardingboards.co.uk/resource/online-learning-providers-free/

NSPCC has a useful resource on female genital mutilation:
www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/female-genital-mutilation-fgm/

Virtual College on course on awareness of forced marriage:
www.virtual-college.co.uk/resources/free-courses/awareness-of-forced-marriage

MOOC List – a clunky but comprehensive search engine for free or pay for certificate on-line learning through world universities: www.mooc-list.com/

Coursera – MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) platform course on Psychological First Aid from John Hopkins University: www.coursera.org/learn/psychological-first-aid

Coursera – MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) platform course on Children's Human Rights - An Interdisciplinary Introduction: www.coursera.org/learn/childrens-rights

Future Learn – Open University MOOC platform course on Caring for Vulnerable Children:
www.futurelearn.com/courses/vulnerable-children

IRISS – includes an online course on developing reflective practice:
www.iriss.org.uk/resources/multimedia-learning-materials/reflective-practice



What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless in England. We work to make services better and campaign for policy change that will help end homelessness.

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