



Safeguarding Children

A guide for professionals working with
children and young people

This leaflet by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) explains the role of the professional in safeguarding children and young people up to the age of 18 in Bedfordshire. Useful addresses, telephone numbers and weblinks are listed on page 23.



Introduction

In response to requests from various agencies, this leaflet has been produced to help people working with children and young people understand more about:

- Safeguarding children
- Your role as a professional working with children
- Identifying concerns
- Child abuse and neglect
- Deciding whether to refer
- How to make a referral
- Child Protection (Section 47) enquiries
- Investigations
- Child protection conferences

The language used in this booklet may appear basic to some, however this is intentional so that there are no misunderstandings or delays in action to safeguard children and young people as a result of misinterpretation of the wording within the booklet.

This leaflet explains the role of the professional in safeguarding children and young people up to the age of 18 in Bedfordshire. Useful addresses, telephone numbers and weblinks are listed on page 23.



What is safeguarding?

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children means:

- Protecting children from mistreatment;
- preventing impairment of children's health or development;
- ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and
- undertaking that role so as to enable those children to have optimum life chances and to enter adulthood successfully.

What to do if you're worried a child is being abused (2006).

At all times professionals must follow guidelines and procedures given by the Department of Health, the Department for Children Schools and Families and the Bedfordshire Local Safeguarding Children Board and the employing agency. Your first priority is to ensure the safety of the children, young people and yourself.

Your role as a professional working with children

All practitioners working with children and families have a responsibility to become familiar with the local procedures for safeguarding children and young people both within their own organisations and those of the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

It is also important that you are aware of the Government publications, Working Together to Safeguard Children (2006) and What to do if you're worried a child is being abused? (2006).

What is child abuse and neglect?

Every child has the right to be kept safe from all forms of abuse that hurt them either physically or emotionally. Abuse and neglect are forms of mistreatment of a child or young person.

Somebody may abuse or neglect a child or young person by hurting them, or by failing to act to prevent someone or something from hurting them. Children and young people may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting, by those known to them or, more rarely, by a stranger. They may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child, children or young people.

Concerns may be because of one or more of the following areas:-

Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child or young person's basic physical and/or psychological needs over a period of time which is likely to result in serious effects on their health or development.

Neglect can also occur during pregnancy for example as a result of substance misuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent failing to:

- Provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment);
- protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger;
- ensure adequate supervision; (including the use of inadequate care-givers); and
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

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It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child or young person's basic emotional needs.

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is when children and young people are not given love or affection, or constantly threatened or humiliated. Sarcasm, degrading punishments and ignoring a child or young person are also forms of emotional abuse and undermine a child or young person's confidence and sense of self-worth.

It may happen when an adult constantly behaves in an uncaring or hostile way towards a child or a young person, perhaps by bullying, rejecting, frightening, criticising or scape-goating them. An adult may behave in an inconsistent way all of the time so the child or young person never knows what reaction to expect. Some adult carers can be very possessive or over protective towards a child or young person. A child or young person may be constantly blamed unfairly for things that go wrong. Children and young people are made to carry out tasks inappropriate to their age and/or not allowed to do normal childhood activities.

It may also involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another for example domestic abuse, bullying, causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children and young people. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of mistreatment of a child or young person, though it may occur alone.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child or young person. Physical harm may also

be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces illness in a child or young person.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, including prostitution, whether or not the child or young person is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving them in looking at, or in the production of, sexual online images, watching sexual activities, or encouraging children and young people to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

Identifying concerns – procedures to be followed by practitioners working with children and their families

Concerns about the welfare of a child or young person may occur:

- in situations where there have been no previous concerns and the child has not previously received any services, other than those universal services accessed by all children;
- where an assessment has taken place by agencies other than Children's Social Care under the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and a plan has been put in place in order to improve the wellbeing of the child;
- where the child is already allocated to a worker in Children's Social Care; and
- where there is no current involvement by Children's Social Care but there have been previous referrals.

Deciding whether to refer

The criteria set out in the LSCB Safeguarding Inter-Agency Procedures 2006 must be followed when deciding whether or not to refer to children's Social Care. A referral to Children's Social Care should always be made in the following circumstances:

- Any allegation of sexual abuse;
- physical injury caused by assault or neglect which may or may not require medical attention;
- incidents of physical abuse that alone are unlikely to constitute significant harm but taken into consideration with other factors may do so;
- children who suffer from persistent neglect;
- children who live in an environment which is likely to have an adverse impact on their emotional development;
- where parents' own emotional impoverishment affects their ability to meet their child's emotional and/or physical needs regardless of material/financial circumstances and assistance;
- where parents' circumstances are affecting their capacity to meet the child's needs because of domestic abuse, drug and/or alcohol misuse, mental health problems, previous convictions for offences against children;
- a child living in a household with, or having significant contact with, a person at risk of sexual offending;
- a child under 13 who is sexually active;
- an abandoned child;
- bruising to an immobile baby;
- pregnancy where children have been previously removed; and
- suspicion of fabricated or induced illness.

There are other circumstances under which a referral should be considered. Details and specific guidance is available within the Safeguarding Inter-Agency Procedures to help professionals to decide whether to refer.

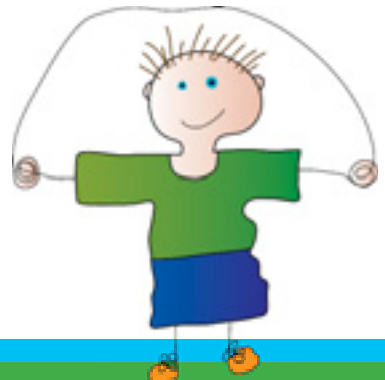
Significant harm

Under s31(10) of the Children Act, the question of whether harm suffered by a child is significant relates specifically to the child's health and development. Their health or development should be compared with that which could reasonably be expected of a similar child.

To understand and identify significant harm, it is necessary to consider:

- The nature of harm, in terms of mistreatment or failure to provide adequate care;
- the impact on the child's health and development;
- the child's development within the context of their family and wider environment;
- any special needs, such as a medical condition, communication impairment or disability, that may affect the child's development and care within the family;
- the capacity of parents to meet adequately the child's needs; and
- the wider and environmental family context.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2006)



How do I make a referral?

The general public, Children's Social Care, Health, Education, Police and the Voluntary Sector must all work together in partnership with parents to keep children and young people safe. If you see a child or young person has been injured or harmed, or if you are concerned or unsure, contact any of the agencies listed at the end of this leaflet.

The concern may need to be discussed with a senior member of staff within your agency in order to clarify the seriousness and urgency of the situation and then decide the next course of action. The senior member of staff may be:

- A manager
- a designated member of staff with responsibility for safeguarding children, for example: designated nurse/named nurse doctor;
- designated person in an education setting; and
- in a health organisation where there is no named doctor e.g. a GP should discuss with designated doctor.

If, following this discussion, there are still concerns about the welfare of the child or young person, consideration should be given to consulting the duty officer at the local social care office for advice. This can be done by presenting a 'what if' scenario without necessarily naming the child in question. This discussion should be recorded by both parties in a retrievable form.

If the practitioner with the concerns believes that a child or young person's health or development is being impaired without the provision of services by the Local Authority (i.e. the child or young person is a child in need - see Glossary Section 17), consideration

should be given to making a referral to Children's Social Care. In this circumstance, a CAF should be completed (if this has not already been done) and used as a basis for deciding whether a referral is appropriate.

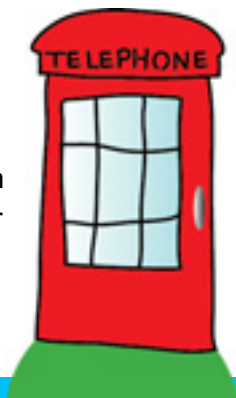
In most situations, concerns should be discussed with the child or young person (as appropriate to their age and understanding) and with their parents, whose agreement should be sought prior to a referral being made. **However, agreement should not be sought if doing so would place the child or young person at risk of significant harm.**

If there are immediate concerns about the safety of a child or young person, a referral should be made by telephone to Children's Social Care. At the end of any discussion or dialogue about a child or young person, the referrer (if a professional from another service or agency) and Children's Social Care must record the decision in their records.

Telephone referrals should be followed up in writing within 48 hours by the referrer.

If concerns are not immediate, but it is believed that a child or young person is a child in need, who may also be in need of protection, a referral should be made in writing. Where a CAF has been completed by the referring agency this will form the basis of the referral. Where necessary, the assessment should be updated in order to ensure that the most recent information is passed to Children's Social Care.

If concerns arise within Children's Social Care about an open case, a decision should be taken as to whether or not a strategy discussion should be initiated.



The child protection enquiry (Section 47 enquiry)

When someone makes a referral to Children's Social Care that they are worried about a child or young person, Children's Social Care have a duty under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 to make enquiries and if appropriate, undertake an investigation. This could be carried out by Children's Social Care alone, or with the Police following a Strategy Discussion.

An enquiry means talking to people known to the family (such as health visitor, teachers, GP) about the child and their family and it might be necessary for a social worker and/or a police officer from the Child Abuse Investigation Unit (CAIU) to visit the parents/carers at home. They must:

- Provide identification;
- explain why they are visiting;
- discuss concerns with the parents/carers and ask their views;
- arrange to see the child or young person alone and to talk to them about their wishes and feelings and
- assess any immediate risk to the child or young person.



The child protection investigation

If initial enquiries confirm concerns that the child or young person is at risk, a more formal investigation will take place. This could include some or all of the following:-

Information gathering

A social worker will talk to professionals working with the family, such as school, GP or health visitor for example.

Information sharing

Agencies involved with the family will share certain relevant information with the agencies involved about the family and their circumstances (see the leaflet 'Information Sharing: a guide for practitioners' and www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/informationsharing for more information)

It is essential that staff do not give false reassurances that information will be kept confidential when information will need to be shared if a child or young person is at risk of harm.



Parental permission

Permission would be sought from the parent/carer and where appropriate from the child or young person too, for any medical examination or interview to take place. In the majority of cases, the parent/carer would be invited to attend any medical examination with the child or young person. Children's Social Care and the Police have a duty to think about the immediate safety of the child or young person. If neither parent gives consent a legal order may be sought giving permission to interview or medically examine the child or young person without parental consent.

Interviewing a child

A child or young person would usually be interviewed in special areas set aside for talking to children or young people in the Police Station, or alternatively at home or at school with permission. The social workers and police officers who talk to children and young people are skilled in both listening and reducing the anxiety that is sometimes attached to an interview. Where criminal offences are suspected, an interview with a child or young person may be recorded so that they do not have to repeat their experiences in the event that the case reaches Court. If other children or young people in the family are thought to be at risk, they may also be interviewed.

Medical examination

During some investigations it is necessary for the child or young person to be examined for medical signs of abuse and neglect including sexual abuse and to ascertain medical, health and developmental needs that may have been overlooked. This will only be done where it is thought to be in the child or young person's best interests. This examination is normally undertaken by a Paediatrician who has been specially trained in child protection. This may



mean looking into their growth, weight, physical and emotional needs. In some cases further investigation such as x-ray, blood tests etc. may be needed.

Criminal offences

Where criminal offences are suspected, the Police may arrest and interview people suspected of causing the injury to the child or young person.

At the end of the enquiry

Children's Social Care and Police will, with assistance from the parents/carers if appropriate whether the child or young person is at risk and in need of protection. If this is so, they will consider what support might be required to keep the child or young person safe from harm. It may be felt that a clear plan to protect the child or young person is required. If this is the case, a Child Protection Conference will be arranged.

There are a number of different outcomes to the enquiry. It may be decided that there is no need for any further action; the family may be sign-posted to other agencies who can offer support; a Child in Need plan may be drawn up and assistance given to support the family, or a Child Protection Plan may be established to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child or young person.

Whatever the outcome of the enquiry, the parent/carer will need to be told and will receive a letter confirming any decisions and copies of any assessments.

The Child Protection Conference

A Child Protection Conference is a meeting to discuss concerns about a child, children, young person or people. Its aims are:

- To consider whether a child or young person has been harmed or is at risk of being harmed, and the nature of the concern about the child or young person;
- to assess the degree of risk to the child or young person's health and well-being and whether the child is in need of protection;
- to decide whether the child or young person should be subject to a child protection plan; and
- to make recommendations about any further action necessary to help protect the child or young person.

The first Child Protection Conference is called an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) and further meetings are referred to as Review Child Protection Conferences (RCPC). If you are invited to attend a Child Protection Conference, it is very important that you attend to give a complete picture of what involvement you or your agency have with the family in the form of a report. You may have vital information which will inform any Child Protection Plan that is drawn up. Without your input, it is possible that the child or young person may continue to be at risk, or remain subject to a Child Protection Plan longer than is necessary. If you are unable to attend you will be expected to provide a written report prior to the conference of your involvement with the family. Professionals should be ready to talk at the meeting and this may include giving their views in front of the parents.

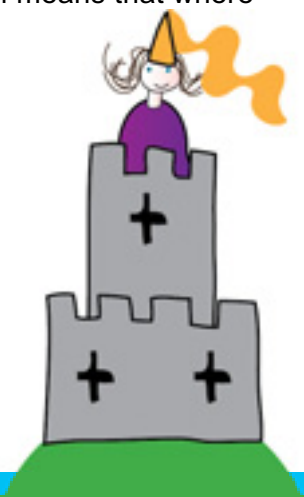
Child Protection Plans

Child Protection Plans set out what changes need to happen to make sure that the child or young person is safe and that their needs are met. It will list the support and help to be given to the family by the different agencies and what the family is expected to do to make the changes happen. The plan should be agreed by the family as well as the agencies.

The Child Protection Plan will be reviewed regularly and a core group of professionals will work with the child or young person and family to achieve the outcomes set out in the plan. A review meeting will be held within 3 months of the ICPC and Review CPCs at least every 6 months after that, to look again at whether the child is still in need of protection and whether they should remain subject to a Child Protection Plan. If it is agreed that the risk to the child or young person has been removed, they may receive support services or have a new plan drawn up called a Child In Need Plan.

If there is no progress and it is felt that the child or young person is still at risk, extra help and support may be given or the local authority may have to apply to the courts for an Interim Care Order to keep the child or young person safe which means that where necessary the Local Authority will seek to obtain parental responsibility.

This may not be a permanent arrangement and in circumstances where it can be demonstrated that the child or young person is no longer at risk it may be decided by the courts that the children and young people can return to their family.



How long will it take?

- Initial Assessments can take up to 7 working days from the referral to complete;
- the Child Protection Conference will be held within 15 working days of the last Strategy Meeting;
- Core Assessments will take up to 35 working days following the Initial Assessment; and
- if a child is subject to a Child Protection Plan, that plan will continue until it is considered that the child is no longer in need of protection, or sometimes it is felt that there is no alternative and the local authority may have to apply for parental responsibility through the courts.



Equalities

Throughout the process of ensuring the safety and welfare of a child, professionals should be aware of differing family patterns and lifestyles, not only due to different racial, ethnic and cultural groups but also issues of age, disability, gender, religion and sexual orientation. There will also be occasions where interpreters should be offered in order to ensure that the family can fully participate in the assessment process. This should be identified at an early stage in the process. Interpreters should not be family members.

“ Although the assessment focus is on the individual needs of the child it should be in the context of how religious and cultural beliefs and different lifestyles may influence values, attitudes and behaviours. Careful assessment, based on evidence, of a child’s needs and a family’s strengths and difficulties, understood in the context of the wider social environment will help to avoid any distorting effect of these influences on professional judgement.

Whatever their religious or cultural background, all children must receive the same care and safeguards with regards to abuse and neglect.”

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2006)



Glossary

Care proceedings

There may be circumstances where the Local Authority has no other choice but to apply to the Court for parental responsibility in order to safeguard the child/ren from risk of harm. This is known as Care proceedings.

Child Protection Enquiry

See 'Section 47 enquiry' for more details

Child in Need

Section 17 (10) of The Children Act 1989 states that a child shall be taken to be in need if:

- a) he is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him of services by a local authority under this Part
- b) his health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision of such services, or
- c) he is disabled.

Child in Need Plan

A Plan which is set out to identify support for the family in promoting the welfare of the child or young person from a range of different agencies.

Child Protection Plan

A Plan which is set out to safeguard and protect the welfare of the child or young person and identify what specifically needs to happen to keep the child or young person safe.

Common Assessment Framework (CAF)

All referrals that are made to Children's Social Care should use the format of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). Template forms are available on www.bedfordshirelscb.org.uk. If you require training on the CAF please refer to the LSCB website or to your agency's learning and development team for details of training.

Core Assessment

A Core Assessment is an in-depth look at the family circumstances which helps professionals and the family to decide whether support is necessary and if so what type of support (See leaflet on Guide to Parents and Carers to Assessments in Children's Social Care for more details).

Core Group

A group comprising the parent(s)/carer(s), children or young person as appropriate and a small number of professionals who will work closely together to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child or young person.

Multi-agency responsibility

All statutory and voluntary professionals working together to ensure the child or young person's safety.

Recommendations

Work that needs to be done to reduce levels of risk to the child or young person.

Section 17

The Children Act 1989 states that:

It shall be the general duty of every local authority –

- To safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need; and

- So far as is consistent with that duty, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families, by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's needs.

Section 47 enquiry

Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 sets out duties for the Local Authority around making enquiries in certain circumstances to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard or promote the welfare of a child or young person. They will consider the information collected within the Core Assessment and discuss what needs to happen to keep the child or young person safe.

Strategy discussion

If professionals suspect that a child or young person is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, Children's Social Care will hold a Strategy Discussion. This is a discussion between professionals to decide whether or not to start a Child Protection Enquiry and to undertake a Core Assessment. It may take the form of a meeting or be a series of telephone conversations (this was formerly referred to as a 'Professionals' meeting').

Strategy meeting

Sometimes, when there is a lot of information to discuss, or it is suspected that the mistreatment or neglect of one or more children or young people is complex a meeting may be the most appropriate way to have the discussion between professionals. This is likely to be where the circumstances are very complex and a number of discussions are needed to consider whether and when to initiate Section 47 enquiries.



For more information

If you would like more information about safeguarding children in Bedfordshire, or if there is anything you do not understand, listed below are some useful telephone numbers and addresses.

Bedfordshire Children's Social Care Intake
and Assessment Duty Desks:

Bedford: 01234 223599

Dunstable: 01582 818499

Mon-Thurs: 8.45am - 5.20pm Friday: 8.45 - 4.20pm

Social Care Emergency Duty Team

(Open 5pm – 9am Monday to Thursday, Weekends 4pm on Friday
to 9am on Monday): 0870 238 5465

Police Child Abuse Investigation Unit:

Luton: 01582 394101

Bedford: 01234 275207

Bedfordshire Designated Office for Safeguarding Children:

Bedford: 01234 292952 Fax: 01234 292956

National Society for the Prevention of

Cruelty to Children: 0808 800 5000

Further information is available at:

www.bedfordshirelscb.org.uk

www.bedscg.gov.uk

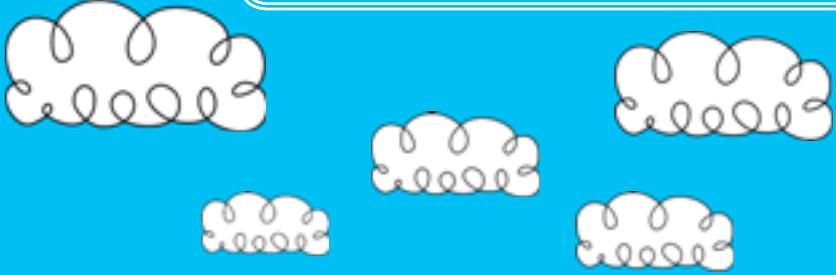
www.dcsf.gov.uk

www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

www.nspcc.org.uk



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with children and young people**



Finding out more

If you would like further copies, a large-print copy or information about us and our services, please telephone or write to us at our address below.



Për Informacion

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برای اطلاع

Per Informazione

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Informacja

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01234 276797

Customer Service Team

Bedfordshire Local Safeguarding Children Board March 2008



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