

Part five: Child-on-child sexual harassment and sexual violence

526. This part of the statutory guidance outlines how schools and colleges **should respond to all signs, reports and concerns** of harmful sexual behaviour (HSB), child-on-child sexual harassment and sexual violence. This includes incidents occurring outside of the school or college premises, and/or online (what to look out for and indicators of abuse are set out in Part one of this guidance). As set out in Part one of this guidance, all staff working with children are advised to maintain an attitude of **‘it could happen here’**, and this is especially important when considering child-on-child abuse.

Understanding harmful sexual behaviour (HSB), sexual harassment and sexual violence

527. HSB can occur between two or more children of any age and sex, from primary through to secondary stage and into college. It can occur also through a group of children towards a single child or towards another group of children. HSB exists on a continuum¹³⁷ and may escalate into sexual harassment or sexual violence, it can occur online or face-to-face (both physically and verbally) and is never acceptable. Schools and colleges should be aware of the importance of:

- making clear that there is a **zero-tolerance** approach to sexual harassment and sexual violence; that it is never acceptable, and it will not be tolerated. It should **never** be passed off as “banter”, “just having a laugh”, “a part of growing up” or “boys being boys”. Failure to do so can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviour, misogyny, an unsafe environment and in worst case scenarios, a culture that normalises abuse, leading to children accepting it as normal and not coming forward to report it,
- recognising, acknowledging, and understanding the scale of HSB, sexual harassment and sexual violence and that even if there are no reports it does not mean it is not happening, it may be the case that it is just not being reported,
- recognising the escalatory nature of misogyny and the benefits of early identification to support their approach to minimising the risk of HSB, sexual harassment and sexual violence,
- challenging behaviours, potentially criminal in nature, such as grabbing bottoms, breasts and genitalia, pulling down trousers, flicking bras and lifting

¹³⁷ [Understanding sexualised behaviour in children | NSPCC Learning](#)

up skirts. Dismissing or tolerating such behaviours risks normalising them, and

- taking a safeguarding approach in response to all incidents involving the sharing of nude or semi-nude images, regardless of whether they are consensual or non-consensual. All such incidents require a safeguarding response, with a proportionate approach that considers the age, development, and circumstances of the children involved, as well as any elements of coercion, exploitation or vulnerability.

528. Children who are victims of HSB, sexual harassment or sexual violence wherever it happens, may find the experience stressful and distressing. This will, in all likelihood, adversely affect their educational attainment and will be exacerbated if the alleged perpetrator(s) attends the same school or college.

529. Whilst any report of HSB, sexual harassment or sexual violence should be taken seriously, staff should be aware it is more likely girls will be the victims of sexual harassment and sexual violence and more likely it will be perpetrated by boys. Children with disabilities are also three times more likely to be abused than their peers.¹³⁸

530. Ultimately, it is essential that all victims are reassured that they are being taken seriously and that they will be supported and kept safe.

Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB)

531. The umbrella term 'harmful sexual behaviour' (HSB) is widely used in child protection and applies **to behaviour occurring online, face-to-face, or both**. HSB should always be considered within a child protection context.

532. Children's sexual behaviour exists on a wide continuum¹³⁹, ranging from normal and developmentally expected to inappropriate, problematic, abusive or violent. Behaviour that is problematic, abusive or violent is developmentally inappropriate and may cause developmental damage. Advice on stages of typical sexual development and behaviour for different age groups can be found in [Sexual development and behaviour in children | NSPCC Learning](#).

533. When assessing HSB, the ages and developmental stage of the children involved is critical. Sexual behaviour between children may be considered harmful if there is a significant age difference, typically more than two years' difference or if one is pre-pubescent and the other is not. However, a younger child may also abuse an older child, especially if they hold power over them, e.g., due to a

¹³⁸ Jones, L et al. (2012) Prevalence and risk of violence against children with disabilities: a systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies. The Lancet July 2012.

¹³⁹ [Understanding sexualised behaviour in children | NSPCC Learning](#)

disability or physical size. Advice on responding to children who display sexualised behaviour is available in [Responding to children who display sexualised behaviour](#). Links to confidential specialist support are listed in Annex A.

534. It is effective safeguarding practice for the designated safeguarding lead (and their deputies) to have a good understanding of HSB. This knowledge could form part of their safeguarding training and support preventative education, help implement effective safeguarding policies including a child protection policy and embed a whole school or college approach to safeguarding.

535. HSB can, in some cases, progress on a continuum.¹⁴⁰ Early intervention in inappropriate behaviour such as misogyny can help to prevent escalation to more serious abuse such as sexual harassment and sexual violence. Children who display HSB have often experienced their own abuse and trauma.¹⁴¹ It is important that they are offered appropriate support.

Sexual harassment

536. Sexual harassment refers to ‘unwanted conduct of a sexual nature’ which can occur both online and offline and inside and outside of school or college. In this context it specifically relates to child-on-child sexual harassment. Such behaviour can:

- violate a child’s dignity,
- make them feel intimidated, degraded or humiliated, and
- create a hostile, offensive or sexualised environment.

537. Whilst not intended to be an exhaustive list, examples of sexual harassment can include:

- sexual comments, such as telling sexual stories, making lewd comments, making sexual remarks about clothing or appearance and using sexualised names,
- sexual “jokes” or taunting,
- physical behaviour, such as deliberately brushing against someone, or interfering with someone’s clothes. Schools and colleges should assess when such behaviour crosses into sexual violence – it is important to talk to and consider the experience of the victim,

¹⁴⁰ [HSB framework and audit | NSPCC Learning](#) discusses the continuum harmful behaviour can progress on (Hackett 2019 continuum model).

¹⁴¹ [Hackett et al 2013](#) study of children and young people with harmful sexual behaviour suggests that two-thirds had experienced some kind of abuse or trauma.

- displaying pictures, photos or drawings of a sexual nature,
- upskirting (this is a criminal offence¹⁴²), and
- online sexual harassment, which may occur independently, or as a broader pattern of sexual harassment and/or sexual violence.¹⁴³ This may include:
 - consensual and non-consensual making or sharing of nudes or semi-nudes.¹⁴⁴ [UKCIS Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people](#) provides detailed advice for schools and colleges,
 - sharing of unwanted explicit content,
 - sexualised online bullying,
 - unwanted sexual comments and messages, including, on social media,
 - sexual exploitation; coercion and threats, and
 - coercing others into sharing images of themselves or performing acts they're not comfortable with online.

538. It is important that schools and colleges consider sexual harassment in broad terms. If left unchallenged, it can foster a culture that normalises inappropriate behaviour and increases the risk of leading to sexual violence.

Sexual violence

539. Schools and colleges should be aware that child-on-child sexual violence can and does occur, **both inside and outside of school/college**.

540. In this guidance, sexual violence refers to specific sexual offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003¹⁴⁵ as described below:

Rape: A person (A) commits an offence of rape if: he intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of another person (B) with his penis, B does not consent to the penetration, and A does not reasonably believe that B consents.

Assault by penetration: A person (A) commits an offence if: s/he intentionally penetrates the vagina or anus of another person (B) with a part of her/his body or anything else, the penetration is sexual, B does not consent to the penetration and A does not reasonably believe that B consents.

¹⁴² [The Voyeurism \(Offences\) Act 2019](#) which amends the Sexual Offences Act 2003 to make upskirting a specific offence of voyeurism. The Act came into force on 12 April 2019.

¹⁴³ [Project deSHAME](#) from Childnet provides useful research, advice and resources regarding online sexual harassment.

¹⁴⁴ Taking and sharing nude photographs including those generated using AI of those aged under 18 is a criminal offence. UKCIS Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people provides detailed advice for schools and colleges.

¹⁴⁵ [Sexual Offences Act 2003 \(Legislation.gov.uk\)](#).

Sexual assault: A person (A) commits an offence of sexual assault if: s/he intentionally touches another person (B), the touching is sexual, B does not consent to the touching, and A does not reasonably believe that B consents. (NOTE - Schools and colleges should be aware that sexual assault covers a very wide range of behaviour so a single act of kissing someone without consent or touching someone's bottom/breasts/genitalia without consent, can still constitute sexual assault).

Causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent: A person (A) commits an offence if: s/he intentionally causes another person (B) to engage in an activity, the activity is sexual, B does not consent to engaging in the activity, and A does not reasonably believe that B consents. (NOTE – this could include forcing someone to strip, touch themselves sexually, or to engage in sexual activity with a third party).

What consent is:¹⁴⁶ Consent is about having the freedom and capacity to choose. Consent to sexual activity may be given to one sort of sexual activity but not another, e.g. to vaginal but not anal sex or penetration with conditions, such as wearing a condom. Consent can be withdrawn at any time during sexual activity, and each time activity occurs. Someone consents to vaginal, anal or oral penetration only if s/he agrees by choice to that penetration and has the freedom and capacity to make that choice:¹⁴⁷

- a child under the age of 13 can never consent to any sexual activity,
- the age of consent is 16¹⁴⁸, and
- sexual intercourse without consent is rape.

For further guidance refer to [Rape Crisis England & Wales - Sexual consent](#)

Preventing abuse

541. Effective safeguarding is demonstrated when schools and colleges are clear, in advance, about what local processes are in place and available support for incidents involving HSB, sexual harassment or sexual violence. It is important

¹⁴⁶ It is important that school and college staff (and especially designated safeguarding leads and their deputies) understand consent. This will be especially important if a child is reporting they have been raped or sexually assaulted in any way. Further information can be found at [Rape Crisis](#)

¹⁴⁷ [PSHE Teaching about consent](#) from the PSHE association provides advice and lesson plans to teach consent at Key stage 3 and 4.

¹⁴⁸ It is important to differentiate between consensual sexual activity between children of a similar age and that which involves any power imbalance, coercion or exploitation. Due to their additional training, the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) should be involved and generally speaking leading the school or college response. If in any doubt, they should seek expert advice.

to review this information on a regular basis to ensure it is up to date. As such:

- if required, the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) should discuss the local response with police and local authority children's social care to inform the school or college's policies (particularly the child protection policy) and response, and
- the designated safeguarding lead (and their deputies) should be familiar with local specialist support services for all children involved (including victims and alleged perpetrators) and know how to access them when needed.

Further details on specialist support and interventions can be found in Annex A.

What schools and colleges need to know in advance of responding to reports of HSB, sexual harassment and/or sexual violence

542. Schools and colleges should have clear, well-promoted, and accessible systems that enable children to confidently report abuse, knowing their concerns will be taken seriously (as outlined in Part two of this guidance).
543. Reports of HSB, sexual harassment and sexual violence are likely to be complex and may require swift, difficult professional decisions to be made. To respond to reports effectively, schools and colleges should invest in pre-planning, effective staff training and robust safeguarding policies, which will provide schools and colleges with the foundation for a calm, and considered approach when incidents arise.
544. Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure that the school or college contributes to multi-agency working in line with the statutory guidance [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) (and as summarised in Part two of this guidance).
545. This part of the guidance does not attempt to provide (nor would it be possible to provide) detailed guidance on what to do in any or every case. Instead, it provides principles of effective safeguarding practice and principles for schools and colleges to consider in their decision-making process.
546. Ultimately, any decisions are for the school or college to make on a case-by-case basis, led by the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) using their professional judgement, supported by external agencies, such as local authority children's social care and the police as needed.
547. The case studies included illustrate possible responses to incidents. These are not prescriptive but offer an insight into the range of options that are available to schools and colleges to respond to these reports.

Support for schools and colleges

548. Schools and colleges should not feel isolated when addressing incidents of HSB, sexual harassment and sexual violence. Support is available from a range of agencies and organisations.

549. Local authority children's social care and the police are key partners, especially where a crime may have been committed. Referrals to the police often follow a referral to local authority children's social care.

550. The designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) should lead the school or college's response and should be familiar with the local referral process. For more on police referrals, see the section 'Reporting to the police' in paragraphs 593-603. Schools and colleges may also find the following resources helpful:

- **National Crime Agency's** [CEOP Safety Centre](#) offers support and reporting mechanisms for online sexual abuse.
- **NSPCC** helpline provides expert advice for professionals via 0808 800 5000 or help@nspcc.org.uk.
- [Rape Crisis](#) and [The Survivors Trust](#) provide specialist support for victims of sexual violence.
- **The Anti-Bullying Alliance** provides guidance for schools on [Sexual and sexist bullying](#).

551. Online incidents of HSB, sexual harassment and sexual violence can be complex, often involving widespread abuse or harm on multiple social media platforms and repeated victimisation. Support is available from:

- **UK Safer Internet Centre** provides an online safety helpline for professionals at 0344 381 4772 or helpline@saferinternet.org.uk.
- **Childline/IWF** provides a free tool, [Report Remove](#), for children to report nude or sexual images and/or videos of themselves that they think might have been shared online.
- **UKCIS provides** : [Advice for education settings working with children and young people](#) on handling reports of children sharing non-consensual self-generated intimate images and/or videos.
- **National Crime Agency's** [CEOP Education Programme](#) provides resources for professional's and parents and carers on protecting children and young people from online child sexual abuse.
- **LGfL** provide education materials via ['Undressed'](#) on how to teach

young children about being tricked into getting undressed online in a fun way without scaring them or explaining the motives of sex offenders.

Additional sources of support are listed in Annex A.

Responding to a report of HSB, sexual harassment and/or sexual violence

The immediate response to a report

552. Children may struggle to verbally disclose abuse. Instead, they may show signs or behave in ways that signal distress, hoping that adults will notice and react. Disclosures may come indirectly, for example, through a friend, an overheard conversation that suggests a child has been harmed, or noticeable changes to a child's own behaviour which may indicate that something is wrong. As outlined in Part one of this guidance, staff should act immediately on any concerns about a child's welfare, rather than wait to be told.

553. The way a school or college initially responds to a report from a child is incredibly important. A supportive and respectful response can empower victims to come forward, whilst a poor response may discourage further disclosures.

554. It is essential that all victims are reassured that they are being taken seriously, regardless of how long it has taken them to come forward, and that they will be supported and kept safe. Abuse that occurs online or outside the school or college environment should be treated with equal seriousness. Victims should never be made to feel that they are causing a problem by reporting or ever be made to feel ashamed for coming forward. Staff should explain that the law exists to protect children and young people, not criminalise them, and should do so in such a way that is reassuring and avoids alarming or distressing them.

555. As per Part one of this guidance, all staff should be trained to manage reports appropriately. While local policies (and training) will guide specific procedures, best practice includes:

- if possible, managing reports with two members of staff present (preferably one of them being the designated safeguarding lead or a deputy)
- careful handling and management of reports that include an online element, including an awareness of guidance on [searching screening](#)

[and confiscation](#) and [UKCIS Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people](#). **Staff should not view or forward illegal images of a child.** The above advice provides more details on what to do when viewing an image is unavoidable. In some cases, it may be more appropriate to confiscate any devices to preserve any evidence and hand them to the police for inspection,

- not promising confidentiality at this initial stage as it is very likely a concern will have to be shared further (for example, with the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) or local authority children's social care) to discuss next steps. Staff should only share the report with those people who are necessary in order to progress it. It is important that the victim understands what the next steps will be and who the report will be passed to,
- recognising that a child is likely to disclose to someone they trust, this could be **anyone** within the school or college staff. Staff should recognise the significance of being chosen as a confidant and respond with empathy,
- recognising that an initial disclosure may not reflect the full extent of abuse, and that trauma can impact memory meaning details may be affected,
- keeping in mind that certain children may face additional barriers to disclosure especially for children with vulnerabilities related to disability, sex, ethnicity, or sexual orientation,
- listening carefully to the child, reflecting back, using the child's language, avoiding judgement, being clear about boundaries and how the report will be progressed, and asking only open-ended questions - such as where, when, what, etc. It is important to note that whilst leading questions should be avoided, staff can ask children if they have been harmed and what the nature of that harm was,
- considering the best way to record the report. Ideally, staff should wait until the end of the conversation to write a detailed summary, allowing the staff member to give the child their full attention. If notes are taken during the report, especially when a second staff member is present, care must be taken to remain engaged and not appear distracted. **It is essential a written record is made,**
- record only what the child says, without interpretation or personal opinion. These notes may be used in statutory assessments and/or criminal investigations, and

- if the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy), is not present during the report, they must be informed as soon as practically possible.

Considering confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality

556. Staff should never promise confidentiality when receiving a report, as it is highly likely that it will be in the best interests of the victim to seek advice from others in order to provide support and engage appropriate agencies.
557. Only essential staff and agencies should be involved – those directly supporting the child/ren or participating in any investigation.
558. If a victim requests confidentiality, there are no easy or definitive answers. Even without consent to share, staff may share information if a legal basis under UK GDPR applies, such as the public task basis which allows sharing to fulfil a legal duty. Advice should be sought from the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy), who should consider:
- informing parents or carers, unless doing so increases the risk to the victim,
 - referring to local authority children's social care if the child is at risk of harm, in immediate danger, or has been harmed, and
 - reporting crimes such as rape, assault by penetration or sexual assault to the police. Even if the alleged perpetrator is under ten, the starting principle of referring to the police remains. The police will take a welfare, rather than a criminal justice approach, in these cases.
559. Ultimately, the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) should balance the victim's wishes with the duty to protect them and other children.
560. If the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) does make a referral to local authority children's social care and/or a report to the police against the victim's wishes, it should be handled with care. The decision should be explained to the victim and appropriate specialist support offered.
561. Further guidance on confidentiality and information sharing is available from [Safeguarding Practitioners Information Sharing Advice](#) and [NSPCC: Information sharing and confidentiality for practitioners](#).

Anonymity

562. Where an allegation of sexual harassment or sexual violence is progressing through the criminal justice system, schools and colleges should understand

the importance of anonymity, witness support, and the criminal process in general so they can offer support and act appropriately.¹⁴⁹ Relevant information can be found in: [CPS: Safeguarding Children as Victims and Witnesses](#).

563. As part of good safeguarding practice, schools and colleges should take reasonable steps to protect the anonymity of all children involved. Amongst other things, this includes carefully deciding, based on the nature of the report, which staff need to know about the report and what support that will be provided for the children involved.

564. Schools and colleges should also consider the potential impact of social media, which can spread rumours and compromise victims' identities. Guidance on managing these risks is available in paragraph 551 and in [Childnet's cyberbullying guidance](#).

Risk and needs assessment

565. Following a report of sexual violence, the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) should carry out an immediate risk and needs assessment. For a report of sexual harassment, the need for a risk assessment should be considered on a case-by-case basis. The risk and needs assessment for a report of sexual violence should consider:

- the victim's safety and support needs,
- potential other victims,
- the alleged perpetrator(s),
- the wider school or college community, including staff and students, and any actions that are appropriate to protect them from the alleged perpetrator(s), or from future harms, and
- the location and time of the incident, with steps to improve safety in that area.

566. Risk and needs assessments should be recorded (paper or digital), regularly reviewed and used to inform ongoing safeguarding decisions. At all times, the school or college should be actively considering the risks posed to all their pupils and students and put adequate measures in place to protect them and keep them safe.

567. The designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) should engage with local

¹⁴⁹ It is not the role of schools and colleges to provide legal advice or support to victims, alleged perpetrators or parents in respect of a criminal justice process. Rather, schools and colleges should be aware of their own position and responsibilities.

authority children's social care and specialist services as needed. In cases of sexual violence, professional risk assessments by social workers or sexual violence specialists are likely to be required. The school or college's risk assessment is not intended to replace the detailed assessments of expert professionals. Professional assessments should be used to inform the school or college approach to supporting and protecting their pupils and students and updating their own risk assessment.

Action following a report of HSB, sexual harassment and/or sexual violence

What to consider

568. HSB, sexual harassment and sexual violence can happen anywhere. All staff working with children should maintain an attitude of **'it could happen here'** and respond appropriately to **all** reports and concerns whether they occur online, offline, or outside of the school/college. The designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) is likely to have a complete safeguarding picture and should lead the initial response by the school or college considering:

- the victim's wishes regarding how they want to proceed. Victims should be given as much control as reasonably possible regarding how an investigation will be progressed and what support they are offered, balanced against the school or college's duty to protect others,
- the nature of the alleged incident(s), including whether a crime may have been committed and/or whether HSB was displayed,
- the ages and developmental stages of the children involved,
- any power imbalance between the children such as differences in age, maturity, or social status. Consider if the victim has a disability or learning difficulty,
- whether the alleged incident was isolated or part of a sustained pattern of abuse (sexual abuse can be accompanied by other forms of abuse and a sustained pattern may not just be of a sexual nature),
- that sexual violence and sexual harassment can take place within intimate relationships between children,
- importance of understanding intrafamilial harm and support for siblings if needed,
- any ongoing risks to the victim, other children, adult students or school or college staff, and
- wider contextual concerns, including links to child sexual exploitation (CSE) or

child criminal exploitation (CCE).

569. All staff should always act in the best interests of the child and follow general safeguarding principles. **Immediate** steps should be taken to support and protect the victim, the alleged perpetrator(s) and any other affected children.

Children sharing a classroom: Initial considerations when the report is made

Any report of sexual harassment or sexual violence is likely to be traumatic for the victim. Victims should be taken seriously, supported, and kept safe. They should never feel blamed, ashamed, or made to feel that they are causing a problem by making a report.

Reports of rape or assault by penetration are especially serious, and likely to be especially difficult for the victim, and close proximity to the alleged perpetrator(s) is likely to be especially distressing. While the school or college establishes the facts and liaises with local authority children's social care and the police, the alleged perpetrator(s) **should** be removed from any shared classes with the victim. The school or college should also **carefully** consider how to maintain a reasonable physical separation between the victim and alleged perpetrator(s) across school or college premises including before or after school-based activities, and on transport to and from the school or college, where appropriate. These actions are in the best interests of all children involved and should not be perceived to be a judgement on the guilt of the alleged perpetrator(s).

For other reports of sexual harassment and sexual violence, decisions about shared classes, proximity on site, sharing school or college premises and school or college transport, should be considered immediately.

All initial responses should be carefully evaluated and reflect the considerations outlined in paragraphs 568-569 including the victim's wishes, the nature of the allegations and the need to protect all children involved.

Options to manage the report

570. It is important that schools and colleges consider every report of HSB, sexual harassment and sexual violence on a case-by-case basis as outlined in paragraph 568. When to inform the alleged perpetrator(s) should be carefully considered. If a referral to local authority children's social care and/or the police is being made, then, as a general rule, the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) should consult with those agencies to determine next steps, including how and when to inform the alleged perpetrator(s) of the allegations. However, as per general safeguarding principles, schools and colleges should not delay taking immediate action to safeguard children.

571. There are four common scenarios for schools and colleges to consider when managing such reports:

1. Manage internally

572. In some cases, such as one-off incidents of HSB or sexual harassment, it may be appropriate for the school or college to manage the situation internally, using the behaviour policy and providing pastoral support, without involving statutory services.

573. Regardless of the response, schools and colleges should make clear that there is a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment and sexual violence, that it is never acceptable, and will not be tolerated.

574. All concerns, discussions, decisions and their rationale should be clearly recorded in writing.

Case study

A 12-year-old girl reported to the head of year that five boys in her friendship group were playing a game, which involved daring each other to use increasingly graphic sexually explicit language, describing what they would like to do to her. She was very upset but did not want to get anyone into trouble or everyone to know about it. She just wanted them to stop. She explained this to her head of year. The head of year explained to her that what she had experienced was extremely serious and reassured her that her reaction was completely understandable. He also explained that he would pass the report to the designated safeguarding lead to ensure records were updated. He explained he would be following the school's behaviour policy and would speak to the boys involved and their parents, making it clear that what they were doing was sexual bullying and harassment and taken extremely seriously. The girl's parents were contacted and given the opportunity to discuss the action the school planned to take.

Result: the boys were removed from the classroom and reprimanded with their parents present. It was made clear that the behaviour was unacceptable, and they received a punishment in line with the school's behaviour policy. They were also warned about the more severe consequences that would arise if the harassment continued.

2. Universal services and community based Early Help assessment

575. In line with managing internally, the school or college may decide that the children involved do not require referral to statutory services but may benefit from other support. Universal services and community based Early Help play a crucial role in identifying emerging problems and providing support at an early stage. They are not an individual service, but a system of support delivered by local authorities and their partners working together and taking collective responsibility to provide the right provision in their area. This level of Early Help is provided through universal services and other voluntary and community services. This includes universal services such as education and health services, as well as support delivered through Best Start Family Hubs, youth services, after school clubs and housing provision. It is particularly important that the designated safeguarding lead (and their deputies) know what the local Early Help process is and how and where to access support.

576. More information on community-based Early Help is set out in Part one of this guidance and in [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#).

577. Community based Early Help will work best when placed alongside strong school or college policies, preventative education and engagement with parents and carers.

578. Schools and colleges, as relevant agencies, should be part of discussions with statutory safeguarding partners to agree the levels for the different types of assessment and services to be commissioned and delivered, as part of the local arrangements. Safeguarding partners should publish a local threshold document which includes the process for the local community based Early Help assessment and the type and level of services to be provided, and designated safeguarding leads (and their deputies) will need to familiarise themselves with this document.
579. Community based Early Help and the option to manage a report internally do not need to be mutually exclusive: a school could manage internally and seek early help for both the victim and alleged perpetrator(s).
580. Whatever the response, it should be under-pinned by the principle that there is zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment and sexual violence, that it is never acceptable, and it will not be tolerated.
581. All concerns, discussions, decisions and their rationale should be clearly recorded in writing.

3. Referrals to Family Help – including targeted Early Help and local authority children's social care

582. Some children and families may require more targeted support than that offered at the universal and community based Early Help level. [The Families First Partnership \(FFP\) Programme Guide](#) provides a toolkit to assist safeguarding partners set up effective Family Help models to identify children and families who would benefit from more targeted support through Family Help. By Family Help, we mean both targeted early help and support and services delivered under s.17 of the Children Act 1989.
583. Targeted early help services delivered through Family Help are coordinated by a local authority and/or their partners to address specific concerns within a family. Examples of these include parenting support, mental health support, youth services, youth offending teams and housing and employment services. Targeted early help may be appropriate for children and families who have multiple and or complex needs. It is a voluntary approach, requiring the family's consent.
584. Practitioners who begin working with families at the targeted early help stage can continue to lead work with families if the child is later assessed to be a child in need as defined by Section 17 of the Childrens Act 1989.
585. Where a child has been harmed, is at risk of harm, or is in immediate danger, schools and colleges should make a referral to local authority children's social care.

586. At the point of referral to local authority children's social care, schools and colleges will generally inform parents or carers, unless there are compelling reasons not to (if informing a parent or carer is going to put the child at additional risk). Any such decision should be made with the support of local authority children's social care.
587. If a referral is made, local authority children's social care will then make enquiries to determine whether any of the children involved are in need of protection or other services.
588. Where statutory assessments are appropriate, the school or college (especially the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy)) should be working alongside, and cooperating with, the relevant lead social worker. Collaborative working will help ensure the best possible package of coordinated support is implemented for the victim and, where appropriate, the alleged perpetrator(s) and any other children that require support.
589. Schools and colleges should not wait for the outcome (or even the start) of a local authority children's social care investigation before protecting the victim and other children in the school or college. It will be important for the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) to work closely with local authority children's social care (and other agencies as required) to ensure any actions the school or college takes do not jeopardise a statutory investigation. The risk and needs assessment as per paragraphs 565-567 will help inform any decision. Consideration of safeguarding the victim, alleged perpetrator(s), any other children directly involved in the safeguarding report, and all children at the school or college should be immediate.
590. In some cases, local authority children's social care will review the evidence and decide that a statutory intervention is not appropriate. The school or college (generally led by the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy)) should be prepared to refer again if they believe the child remains in immediate danger or at risk of harm or if circumstances change. If a statutory assessment is not appropriate, the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) should consider other support mechanisms such as Family Help, specialist support and pastoral support.
591. Whatever the response, it should be under-pinned by the principle that there is a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment and sexual violence, that it is never acceptable, and it will not be tolerated.
592. All concerns, discussions, decisions and their rationale should be clearly recorded in writing.

4. Reporting to the police

593. Any report to the police will generally be in parallel with a referral to local authority children's social care (as above).
594. It is important that the designated safeguarding lead (and their deputies) are clear about the local process for referrals and follow that process.
595. Where a report of rape, assault by penetration or sexual assault is made, the starting point is that this should be passed on to the police. Whilst the age of criminal responsibility is ten, if the alleged perpetrator(s) is under ten, the starting principle of reporting to the police remains. The police will take a welfare, rather than a criminal justice, approach. The following advice may help schools and colleges decide when to engage the Police and what to expect of them when they do: [When to call the police](#)
596. Where a report has been made to the police, the school or college should consult the police and agree what information can be disclosed to staff, and others, in particular, the alleged perpetrator(s) and their parents or carers. They should also discuss the best way to protect the victim and their anonymity.
597. At this stage, schools and colleges will generally inform parents or carers unless there are compelling reasons not to, for example, if informing a parent or carer is likely to put a child at additional risk. In circumstances where parents or carers have not been informed, it will be especially important that the school or college is supporting the child in any decision they take. This should be with the support of local authority children's social care and any appropriate specialist agencies.
598. All police forces in England have specialist units that investigate child abuse. The names and structures of these units are matters for local forces. It will be important that the designated safeguarding lead (and their deputies) are aware of their local arrangements.
599. In some cases, it may become clear very quickly that the police (for whatever reason) will not take further action. In such circumstances, it is important that the school or college continues to engage with specialist support for the victim and alleged perpetrator(s), as required.
600. Whilst protecting children and/or taking any disciplinary measures against the alleged perpetrator(s), it will be important for the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) to work closely with the police (and other agencies as required), to ensure any actions the school or college take do not jeopardise the police investigation.

601. If a school or college has questions about the investigation, they should ask the police. The police will help and support the school or college as much as they can (within the constraints of any legal restrictions).
602. Whatever the response, it should be underpinned by the principle that there is a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment and sexual violence, that it is never acceptable, and it will not be tolerated.
603. All concerns, discussions, decisions and their rationale should be clearly recorded in writing.

Considering bail conditions

604. The police will consider what action to take to manage the assessed risk of harm. This could involve the use of police bail with conditions, prior to a suspect appearing in court, or court bail with or without conditions after the first appearance.
605. Alternatively, the person suspected of an offence could be 'released under investigation' (RUI). People released under RUI will not necessarily have conditions attached to their release from custody and it is possible for a person on bail also to have no conditions.
606. Whatever arrangements are in place, the school or college will need to consider what additional measures may be necessary to manage any assessed risk of harm that may arise within their institution.
607. Particular regard should be given to the additional stress and trauma that might be caused to a victim within the institution; the potential for the suspected person to intimidate the victim or a witness; the need to ensure that any risk management measures strike a balance between management of risk and the rights of an un-convicted person (e.g. rights to privacy, family life, etc.).
608. Careful liaison with the police investigators should help to develop a balanced set of arrangements.

Managing any delays in the criminal process

609. There may be delays in any case that is being progressed through the criminal justice system. Schools and colleges should not wait for the outcome (or even the start) of a police investigation before protecting the victim, alleged perpetrator(s) and other children in the school or college. The risk and needs assessment as per paragraphs 565-567 will help inform any decision.
610. Considering any disciplinary action against the alleged perpetrator(s) whilst an investigation is ongoing is discussed below in the alleged perpetrator(s)

section.

611. Whilst protecting children and/or taking any disciplinary measures against the alleged perpetrator(s), it will be important for the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) to work closely with the police (and other agencies as required), to ensure any actions the school or college take do not jeopardise the police investigation.
612. If schools or colleges have questions about the investigation, they should ask the police. The police will help and support the school or college as much as they can (within the constraints of any legal restrictions).

The end of the criminal process

613. If a child is convicted or cautioned for a sexual offence, the school or college should update its risk and needs assessment, ensure relevant protections are in place for all the children at the school or college and consider any suitable action in line with their behaviour policy. This process should include a review of the necessary actions to keep all parties safe and meet their needs. If the perpetrator(s) remains in the same school or college as the victim, the school or college should be very clear as to their expectations regarding the perpetrator(s) now they have been convicted or cautioned. This could include expectations regarding their behaviour and any restrictions the school or college thinks are reasonable and proportionate with regard to the lesson timetable of the perpetrator(s).
614. Any conviction (even with legal anonymity reporting restrictions) is potentially going to generate interest among other pupils or students in the school or college. It will be important that the school or college ensures both the victim and perpetrator(s) remain protected, especially from any bullying or harassment (including online).
615. If a case results in “no further action” by the police or Crown Prosecution Service, or a not guilty verdict, the school or college should continue supporting both the victim and the alleged perpetrator(s) for as long as is necessary. These outcomes will likely be traumatic for the victim. The fact that an allegation cannot be substantiated or was withdrawn does not necessarily mean that it was unfounded. Schools and colleges should discuss any decisions with the victim in this light and continue to offer support. The alleged perpetrator(s) is/are also likely to require ongoing support for what will have likely been a difficult experience.

Case study

A 15-year-old girl disclosed to a pastoral lead that she had been sexually touched by a 15-year-old boy, on public transport on the way to school. The school made a referral to local authority children's social care on the same day, submitting a MARF (Multi Agency Referral Form) for both children. The MARF led to immediate police involvement. The school arranged for the boy to have an amended timetable so that he was not in any class with the girl. Specific teaching staff were briefed on the need to ensure the children were not together. The girl was given a trusted adult she could go to at any time. This staff member agreed she would meet with the girl every day and she supported her with break and lunchtime arrangements. The girl was able to suggest how she would feel safest at lunchtime.

At the end of the second day, another girl went to the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and made a report about the same boy. She reported that he had sexually assaulted her in school three weeks before. The school submitted a MARF for the girl and a second MARF for the boy. The school knew the police were involved and that a MERLIN (a crime report involving a child) had been submitted, but they knew the police would not have the ongoing and detailed information held by the school about the boy. The school did not want either girl further distressed by possibly seeing the boy around school. The option choices and group sizes for the three children meant it was very difficult to educate separately. The school contacted another secondary school. The school links had been established as part of the In Year Fair Access Process (IYFAP) and made immediate arrangements for the boy to move to the other school so that his education was not disrupted. The boy remained at the new school for the duration of the investigation. The DSLs from both schools worked together with police and the children and ensured appropriate child protection information was shared so the receiving school was fully aware of the allegations. The boy received a caution, and the decision was made for him to remain at his new school where he engaged with a personalised RSHE plan. Parents were involved throughout. The children were at the centre of decision-making, often suggesting how they could be supported.

Unsubstantiated, unfounded, false or malicious reports

616. As set out in paragraphs 72-73 of this guidance, all concerns, discussions, decisions, and their rationale, should be clearly recorded in either writing or digitally. Records should be reviewed so that potential patterns of concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour can be identified, and addressed.
617. If a report is found to be unsubstantiated, unfounded, false or malicious, the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) should consider whether the child

and/or the person making the allegation needs support or may have been abused by someone else, and this was a cry for help. If so, a referral to local authority children's social care may be appropriate.

618. If a report is proven to be deliberately false or malicious, the school or college should consider any disciplinary action against the individual, in line with their own behaviour policy.

Ongoing response

Safeguarding and supporting the victim

619. The following principles are based on effective safeguarding practice and should guide any decisions regarding safeguarding and supporting the victim:

- the needs and wishes of the victim should be paramount (along with protecting the child) in any response. It is important they feel in as much control of the process as is reasonably possible. Wherever possible, the victim, if they wish, should be able to continue in their normal routine. Overall, the priority should be to make the victim's daily experience as normal as possible, so that the school or college is a safe space for them,
- consider the age and the developmental stage of the victim, the nature of the allegation(s) and the potential risk of further abuse. Schools and colleges should be aware that, by the very nature of sexual harassment and sexual violence, a power imbalance is likely to have been created between the victim and alleged perpetrator(s),
- the victim should never be made to feel they are the problem for making a report or made to feel ashamed for making a report,
- consider the proportionality of the response. Support should be tailored on a case-by-case basis. The support required regarding a one-off incident of sexualised name-calling is likely to be vastly different from that for a report of rape,
- schools and colleges should be aware that sexual assault can result in a range of health needs, including physical, mental, and sexual health problems and unwanted pregnancy. Children and young people that have a health need arising from sexual assault or abuse can access specialist NHS support from a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC). SARCs offer confidential and non-judgemental support to victims and survivors of sexual assault and abuse. They provide medical, practical, and emotional care and advice to all children and adults, regardless of when the incident occurred, and
- it will be important in all scenarios that decisions and actions are regularly

reviewed and that relevant policies are updated to reflect lessons learnt. It is particularly important to look out for potential patterns of concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour. Where a pattern is identified, the school or college should decide on a course of action. Consideration should be given as to whether there are wider cultural issues within the school or college that enabled the inappropriate behaviour to occur and where appropriate extra teaching time and/or staff training could be delivered to minimise the risk of it happening again.

620. Support can include:

- Family help and local authority children's social care as set out in Part one.
- Children and Young People's Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ChISVAs) provide emotional and practical support for victims of sexual violence. They are based within the specialist sexual violence sector and will help the victim understand what their options are and how the criminal justice process works if they have reported or are considering reporting to the police. ChISVAs will work in partnership with schools and colleges to ensure the best possible outcomes for the victim.
- Police and social care agencies can signpost to ChISVA services (where available), or referrals can be made directly to the ChISVA service by the young person or school or college. Contact details for ChISVAs can be found at [Rape Crisis](#) and [The Survivors Trust](#).
- [Children and young people's mental health services \(CYPMHS\)](#) is used as a term for all services that work with children who have difficulties with their emotional or behavioural wellbeing. Services vary depending on local authority. Most CYPMHS have their own website, which will have information about access, referrals and contact numbers.
- The specialist sexual violence sector can provide therapeutic support for children who have experienced sexual violence. Contact [Rape Crisis](#) (England & Wales) or [The Survivors Trust](#) for details of local specialist organisations. The [Male Survivors Partnership](#) can provide details of services which specialise in supporting men and boys.
- The NHS – [Help after rape and sexual assault - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#) provides a range of advice, help and support including advice about the risk of pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STI), reporting to the police and forensics.
- Rape and sexual assault referral centres services can be found at: [Find a rape and sexual assault referral centre](#) . Sexual assault referral centres (SARCs) offer medical, practical and emotional support. They have specially trained doctors, nurses and support workers. If children, young people, or their families are unsure which service to access, they should contact their GP or call the NHS on 111.

- [Childline](#) provides free and confidential advice for children and young people.
- [Internet Watch Foundation](#) works internationally to remove child sexual abuse online images and videos and offers a place for the public to report them anonymously.
- [Childline / IWF: Remove a nude image shared online](#) Report Remove is a free tool that allows children to report nude or sexual images and videos of themselves that they think might have been shared online, to see if they can be removed from the internet.

Case study

A 15-year-old boy and girl who go to the same school had sex at a party and, without them knowing, other people at the party filmed it. The video was then uploaded to a site and shared around their school and other schools in the area.

Following this, the girl was sexually harassed at school being called a 'slag and a slut' during lessons. Other boys in the school began propositioning her in school and trying to touch her aggressively and inappropriately. A teacher who saw the sexual harassment in his class talked to the girl about how she was feeling and suggested she spoke to the designated safeguarding lead (DSL). The DSL spoke to the girl and recorded the report, discussed her options about trying to get the video deleted from people's devices and the website it was on, and how to talk to her parents about what happened. The teachers and parents did not view the video, and this was communicated to the girl and boy.

Whilst in this case the boy was not harassed in the same way as the girl, the school recognised he was also a victim and spoke to him about his feelings and what could be done to support him.

The teacher arranged a workshop as part of the RSHE curriculum for all Year 10s about respect, shame, consent, and their collective responsibility to challenge inappropriate sexual behaviour.

The parents of the girl and boy worked with the school and the police to get the content removed via the IWF and identify who recorded and distributed the video. Both the girl and boy were supported through the investigation with counselling.

Those responsible for harassing the girl and sharing the video received sanctions in line with the school behaviour policy.

621. Victims may not share everything at once and might disclose information gradually. It's important to keep communication open and supported. When it is clear that ongoing support is needed, schools and colleges should ask the victim whether they would like a designated trusted adult (for example, their form tutor or designated safeguarding lead or a deputy) to talk to about their needs. The choice of this adult should be the victim's (wherever reasonably possible) and should be respected and supported.
622. Children who have experienced sexual violence display a very wide range of responses to their experience, including in some cases clear signs of trauma, physical and emotional responses, or no overt signs at all. Schools and colleges should remain alert to the possible challenges of detecting those signs and show sensitivity to the needs of the child (e.g. about attendance in lessons) irrespective of how overt the child's distress is.
623. Schools and colleges should avoid any actions that would isolate the victim, in particular from supportive peer groups. However, some victims may find it difficult to follow a full-time timetable and may wish to withdraw from certain lessons and activities. This should be based on the victim's needs, not for the convenience of managing the situation. If required, schools and colleges should provide a physical space for victims to withdraw to.
624. Schools and colleges may need to maintain protective and supportive measures for victims over an extended period. Schools and colleges should be prepared for this and should work with local authority children's social care and other agencies as required.
625. It is therefore important that the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) knows how, when, and where to seek support.
626. It is important that the school or college take all reasonable steps to protect the victim from bullying or harassment as a result of any report they have made.
627. Whilst they should be given all the necessary support to remain in their school or college, if trauma prevents the victim being unable to do this, alternative provision or a move to another school or college should be considered to enable them to continue to receive suitable education. This should only be at the request of the victim and following discussion with their parents or carers.
628. It is important that if the victim does move to another educational institution (for any reason), that the new educational institution is made aware of any ongoing support needs. The designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) should take responsibility to ensure this happens (and should discuss with the

victim and, where appropriate their parents or carers as to the most suitable way of doing this) as well as transferring the child protection file. Information sharing advice referenced at paragraphs 138-150 will help support this process.

Ongoing considerations: victim and alleged perpetrator(s) sharing classes

Paragraphs 552-555 consider the immediate response to a report. Once the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) has decided what the next steps will be in terms of progressing the report, they should **carefully consider** again the question of the victim and alleged perpetrator(s) sharing classes and sharing space at school or college. This will inevitably involve complex and difficult professional decisions, including considering their duty to safeguard children and their duty to educate them.

It is important each report is considered on a case-by-case basis and risk and needs assessments are updated as appropriate. As always when concerned about the welfare of a child, the best interests of the child should come first. In all cases, schools and colleges should follow general safeguarding principles as per this guidance.

Where there is a criminal investigation into a rape, assault by penetration or sexual assault, the alleged perpetrator(s) should be removed from any classes they share with the victim. The school or college should also consider how best to keep the victim and alleged perpetrator(s) a reasonable distance apart on school or college premises (including during before and after school-based activities) and on transport to and from school or college where appropriate. This is in the best interests of both children and should not be perceived to be a judgement on the guilt of the alleged perpetrator(s). As per paragraphs 593-603, close liaison with the police is essential.

Where a criminal investigation into a rape or assault by penetration leads to a conviction or caution, the school or college should take suitable action, if they have not already done so. In all but the most exceptional of circumstances, the rape or assault is likely to constitute a serious breach of discipline and lead to the view that allowing the perpetrator(s) to remain in the same school or college would seriously harm the education or welfare of the victim (and potentially other pupils or students).

Where a criminal investigation into sexual assault leads to a conviction or caution, the school or college should, if it has not already, consider any suitable sanctions in light of their behaviour policy, including consideration of permanent exclusion.¹⁵⁰ Where the perpetrator(s) is going to remain at the school or college, the principle would be to continue keeping the victim and perpetrator(s) in separate classes and continue to consider the most appropriate way to manage potential contact on school and college premises and transport. The nature of the conviction or caution and wishes of the victim will be especially important in determining how to proceed in such cases.

¹⁵⁰ Maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units should follow the statutory guidance [here](#). Independent schools and colleges should consider excluding as per their own policies.

In all cases, schools and colleges should record and be able to justify their decision-making.

Reports of sexual assault and sexual harassment will, in some cases, not lead to a report to the police (for a variety of reasons). In some cases, rape, assault by penetration, sexual assault or sexual harassment are reported to the police and the case is not progressed or are reported to the police and ultimately result in a not guilty verdict. None of this means the offence did not happen or that the victim lied. The process will have affected both victim and alleged perpetrator(s). Appropriate support should be provided to both as required and consideration given to sharing classes and potential contact as required on a case-by-case basis. In all cases, schools and colleges should record and be able to justify their decision-making.

All of the above should be considered with the needs and wishes of the victim at the heart of the process (supported by parents and carers as required). Any arrangements should be kept under review.

Safeguarding and supporting the alleged perpetrator(s) and children and young people who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour (HSB)

629. The following principles are based on effective safeguarding practice and should help shape any decisions regarding safeguarding and supporting the alleged perpetrator(s):

- The school or college will have a difficult balancing act to consider. On one hand, they need to safeguard the victim (and the wider pupil/student body) and on the other hand provide the alleged perpetrator(s) with an education, safeguarding support as appropriate and implement any disciplinary sanctions. Taking disciplinary action and still providing appropriate support are not mutually exclusive actions. They can, and should, occur at the same time if necessary.
- Consider the age and the developmental stage of the alleged perpetrator(s), the nature of the allegations and frequency of allegations. Any child will likely experience stress as a result of being the subject of allegations and/or negative reactions by their peers to the allegations against them.
- Consider the proportionality of the response. Support (and sanctions) should be considered on a case-by-case basis. The alleged perpetrator(s) may potentially have unmet needs (in some cases these may be considerable) as well as potentially posing a risk of harm to other children. HSB in young children may be (and often is¹⁵¹) a symptom of either their own abuse or

¹⁵¹ [Hackett et al 2013](#) study of children and young people with harmful sexual behaviour suggests that two-thirds had experienced some kind of abuse or trauma.

exposure to abusive practices and or materials. More information on HSB can be found at paragraphs 531-535. Advice should be taken, as appropriate, from local authority children's social care, specialist sexual violence services and the police.

- The Lucy Faithfull Foundation has developed a [HSB toolkit](#), which amongst other things, provides support, advice and information on how to prevent it, links to organisations and helplines, resources about HSB by children, internet safety, sexual development and preventing child sexual abuse.
- The Lucy Faithfull Foundation in collaboration with the Home Office, has developed '[Shore Space](#)', an online resource which works to prevent harmful sexual behaviour. Shore Space offers a confidential chat service supporting young people who are concerned about their own or someone else's sexual thoughts and behaviour.
- The NSPCC provides free and independent advice about HSB: [NSPCC Learning: Protecting children from harmful sexual behaviour](#) and [NSPCC - Harmful sexual behaviour framework](#).
- [Beyond Referrals | Contextual Safeguarding](#) provides a school self-assessment toolkit and guidance for addressing HSB in schools.
- Stop It Now – [Preventing harmful sexual behaviour in children - Stop It Now](#) provides a guide for parents, carers and professionals to help everyone do their part in keeping children safe, they also run a free confidential helpline.

630. It is important that the perpetrator(s) is/are also given the correct support to try to stop them re-offending and to address any underlying trauma that may be causing this behaviour. Addressing inappropriate behaviour, including sexism and misogyny, can be an important intervention that helps prevent problematic, abusive and/or violent behaviour in the future. Advice on behaviour in schools is clear that teachers can sanction pupils whose conduct falls below the standard which could be reasonably expected of them. If the perpetrator(s) is to be excluded the decision must be lawful, reasonable and fair. Further information about exclusions can be found in statutory guidance for schools: [Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England](#).

631. School can be a significant protective factor for children who have displayed HSB, and continued access to school, with a comprehensive safeguarding management plan in place, is an important factor to consider before final decisions are made. It is important that if an alleged perpetrator does move to another educational institution (for any reason), that the new educational institution is made aware of any ongoing support needs and where appropriate, potential risks to other children and staff. The designated

safeguarding lead (or a deputy) should take responsibility to ensure this happens as well as transferring the child protection file. Information sharing advice referenced at paragraphs 138-150 will help support this process.

Sanctions and the alleged perpetrator(s)

Schools

632. With regard to the alleged perpetrator(s), advice on [Behaviour in schools](#) is clear that teachers can sanction pupils whose conduct falls below the standard which could be reasonably expected of them. Statutory guidance for maintained schools, academies and PRUs on exclusions can be found [here](#).

633. Disciplinary action can be taken whilst other investigations by the police and/or local authority children's social care are ongoing. The fact that another body is investigating or has investigated an incident does not in itself prevent a school from coming to its own conclusion, on the balance of probabilities, about what happened, and imposing a penalty accordingly. This is a matter for the school and should be carefully considered on a case-by-case basis. The designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) should take a leading role. The school should consider if, by taking any action, it would prejudice an investigation and/or any subsequent prosecution. Careful liaison with the police and/or local authority children's social care should help the school make a determination. It will also be important to consider whether there are circumstances that make it unreasonable or irrational for the school to reach its own view about what happened while an independent investigation is considering the same facts.

Colleges

634. Whilst colleges are not under the same legal obligations as schools with regard to behaviour, the principles set out in paragraph 635 will still be relevant and should be applied to their decision-making process.

Discipline and support

635. Taking disciplinary action and still providing appropriate support are not mutually exclusive actions. They can, and should, occur at the same time if necessary. The school or college should be very clear as to what its approach is. On the one hand there is preventative or forward-looking action to safeguard the victim and/or the perpetrator(s), especially where there are concerns that a perpetrator themselves may have been a victim of abuse; and, on the other, there is disciplinary action to punish a perpetrator for their past

conduct. The school or college should be very clear as to which category any action they are taking falls or whether it is really both and should ensure that the action complies with the law relating to each relevant category.

Working with parents and carers

636. The school or college will, in most instances, engage with both the victim's and the parents or carers of the alleged perpetrator(s) when there has been a report of sexual violence (this might not be necessary or proportionate in the case of sexual harassment and should be considered on a case-by-case basis). The exception to this rule is if there is a reason to believe informing a parent or carer will put a child at additional risk. Schools and colleges should carefully consider what information they provide to the respective parents or carers about the other child involved and when they do so. In some cases, local authority children's social care and/or the police will have a very clear view, and it will be important for the school or college to work with relevant agencies to ensure a consistent approach is taken to information sharing.
637. It is good practice for the school or college to meet the victim's parents or carers with the victim present to discuss what arrangements are being put in place to safeguard the victim and understand their wishes in terms of support they may need and how the report will be progressed.
638. It is also good practice for the school or college to meet the parents or carers of the alleged perpetrator(s) to discuss any arrangements that are being put into place that impact an alleged perpetrator(s), such as, for example, moving them out of classes with the victim and what this means for their education. The reason behind any decisions should be explained. Support for the alleged perpetrator(s) should be discussed.
639. The designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) would generally attend any such meetings. Consideration of the attendance of other agencies should be considered on a case-by-case basis.
640. Clear behaviour policies and child protection policies, especially policies that set out the principles of how reports of sexual violence will be managed and how victims and alleged perpetrators are likely to be supported, that parents and carers have access to, will, in some cases, help manage what are inevitably very difficult conversations.
641. Parents and carers may well struggle to cope with a report that their child has been the victim of a sexual assault or is alleged to have sexually assaulted another child. Details of organisations that support parents are provided in Annex A. Schools and colleges should consider signposting parents and

carers to this support.

Safeguarding other children

642. Consideration should be given to supporting children (and adult students) who have witnessed sexual violence, especially rape and assault by penetration. Witnessing such an event is likely to be traumatic and support may be required.
643. Following any report of sexual harassment or sexual violence, it is likely that some children will take “sides”. The school or college should be doing all they can to ensure both the victim and alleged perpetrator(s), and any witnesses, are not being bullied or harassed.
644. Social media is very likely to play a central role in the fall out from any incident or alleged incident. There is the potential for contact between victim and alleged perpetrator(s) and a very high likelihood that friends from either side could harass the victim or alleged perpetrator(s) online and/or become victims of harassment themselves. Specialist online safety support is discussed at paragraph 551.
645. School transport is a potentially vulnerable place for a victim or alleged perpetrator(s) following any incident or alleged incident. The school or college, as part of its risk and needs assessment, should consider any additional potential support needs to keep all of their children safe.
646. A whole-school or college approach to safeguarding, that makes clear that there is a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment and sexual violence, that it is never acceptable, and it will be not tolerated. A robust preventative education programme will help to create an environment where all children at the school or college feel safe, supported, and respectful of their peers, especially when reports of sexual harassment or sexual violence are made.
647. It is important that schools and colleges keep their policies, processes, and curriculum under constant review to protect all their children. Reports of HSB, sexual harassment and sexual violence (especially where there is evidence of patterns of behaviour) may point to environmental and or systemic problems that could and should be addressed by updating relevant policies, processes, or relevant parts of the curriculum. Alongside this, patterns identified in schools may also be reflective of the wider issues within a local area and it is good practice to share emerging trends with safeguarding partners.

Annex A: Further information

Annex A contains important additional information about specific forms of abuse and safeguarding issues. School and college leaders and those staff who work directly with children should read this Annex.

As per Part one of this guidance, if staff have any concerns about a child's welfare, they should act on them immediately. They should follow their own organisation's child protection policy and speak to the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy).

Where a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer from harm, it is important that a referral to local authority children's social care (and if appropriate, the police) is made immediately.

Contents

Child abduction and community safety incidents	160
Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)	161
County lines	162
Children and the court system	164
Children missing from education	164
Children with family members in prison	164
Cybercrime	165
Domestic abuse	166
Homelessness	169
Modern Slavery and the National Referral Mechanism	170
Preventing radicalisation	171
The Prevent duty	171
Channel	172
Serious Violence	173
Honour based abuse (including Female Genital Mutilation and Forced Marriage)	175
FGM	175
FGM mandatory reporting duty for teachers	175
Forced marriage	176
Additional advice and support	177

Child abduction and community safety incidents

Child abduction is the unauthorised removal or retention of a minor from a parent or anyone with legal responsibility for the child. Child abduction can be committed by

parents or other family members; by people known but not related to the victim (such as neighbours, friends and acquaintances); and by strangers.

Other community safety incidents in the vicinity of a school can raise concerns amongst children and parents, for example, people loitering nearby or unknown adults engaging children in conversation.

As children get older and are granted more independence (for example, as they start walking to school on their own) it is important they are given practical advice on how to keep themselves safe. All schools are required to teach about personal safety through the RSHE curriculum. Many schools provide outdoor-safety lessons run by teachers or by local police staff.

It is important that lessons focus on building children's confidence and abilities rather than simply warning them about all strangers. Further information is available at: www.actionagainstabduction.org and www.clevernevergoes.org.

Child criminal exploitation (CCE) and child sexual exploitation (CSE)

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is the UK's framework for identifying and supporting victims of exploitation and modern slavery. Whatever form it takes, exploitation and modern slavery is child abuse and relevant child protection procedures must be followed if modern slavery or trafficking is suspected, as per the [Modern Slavery: statutory guidance for England and Wales \(under s49 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015\) and non-statutory guidance for Scotland and Northern Ireland \(accessible version\) - GOV.UK](#)

Some children will also have access to an Independent Child Trafficking Guardian. Independent child trafficking guardians provide advocacy for children and help to promote and support their recovery.

We know that different forms of harm often overlap, and that perpetrators may subject children and young people to multiple forms of abuse, such as criminal exploitation (including county lines) and sexual exploitation.

In some cases, the exploitation or abuse will be in exchange for something the victim needs or wants (for example, money, gifts or affection), and/or will be to the financial benefit or other advantage, such as increased status, of the perpetrator or facilitator.

Children can be exploited by adult males or females, as individuals or groups. They may also be exploited by other children, who themselves may be experiencing exploitation – where this is the case, it is important that the child perpetrator is also recognised as a victim.

Whilst the age of the child may be a contributing factor for an imbalance of power, there are a range of other factors that could make a child more vulnerable to exploitation, including, sexual identity, cognitive ability, having a physical or learning disability, or being neurodivergent, communication ability, physical strength, status, and access to economic or other resources.

Some of the following can be indicators of both child criminal and sexual exploitation where children:

- appear with unexplained gifts, money or new possessions which could also indicate that children have been approached by, or are involved with, individuals associated with criminal networks or gangs and may be at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation,
- associate with other children involved in exploitation,
- suffer from changes in emotional well-being,
- misuse alcohol and other drugs,
- go missing for periods of time or regularly come home late, and
- regularly miss school or education or do not take part in education.

Children who have been exploited will need additional support to help keep them in education.

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) can be a one-off occurrence or a series of incidents over time and range from opportunistic to complex organised abuse. It can involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and may, or may not, be accompanied by violence or threats of violence.

Some additional specific indicators that may be present in CSE are children who:

- have older boyfriends or girlfriends; and
- suffer from sexually transmitted infections, display sexual behaviours beyond expected sexual development or become pregnant.

Further information on signs of a child's involvement in sexual exploitation is available in the DfE guidance: [Child sexual exploitation: guide for practitioners](#).

County lines

As county lines is a form of criminal exploitation, a First Responder who identifies any potential victim of county lines exploitation should complete the relevant child protection and modern slavery referrals as detailed in the Modern Slavery statutory guidance.

County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of “deal line”. This activity can happen locally as well as across the UK - no specified distance of travel is required. Children and vulnerable adults are exploited to move, store and sell drugs and money. Offenders will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons to ensure compliance of victims.

Children can be targeted and recruited into county lines in a number of locations including any type of schools (including special schools), further and higher educational institutions, pupil referral units, children’s homes and care homes.

Children are also increasingly being targeted and recruited online using social media. Children can easily become trapped by this type of exploitation as county lines gangs can manufacture drug debts which need to be worked off or threaten serious violence and kidnap towards victims (and their families) if they attempt to leave the county lines network.

A number of the indicators for CCE and CSE as detailed above may be applicable to where children are involved in county lines. Some additional specific indicators that may be present where a child is criminally exploited through involvement in county lines are children who:

- go missing (from school or home) and are subsequently found in areas away from their home,
- have been the victim, perpetrator or alleged perpetrator of serious violence (e.g. knife crime),
- are involved in receiving requests for drugs via a phone line, moving drugs, handing over and collecting money for drugs,
- are exposed to techniques such as ‘plugging’, where drugs are concealed internally to avoid detection,
- are found in accommodation that they have no connection with, often called a ‘trap house’ or ‘cuckooing’ or hotel room where there is drug activity,
- owe a ‘debt bond’ to their exploiters, and
- have their bank accounts used to facilitate drug dealing.

Further information on the signs of a child’s involvement in county lines is available in guidance published by the Home Office [Child exploitation disruption toolkit \(accessible\) - GOV.UK](#) and The Children’s Society [County Lines Toolkit For Professionals | The Children's Society](#).

Children and the court system

Children are sometimes required to give evidence in criminal courts, either for crimes committed against them or for crimes they have witnessed. There are two age-appropriate guides to support children [5-11-year olds](#) and [12-17 year olds](#).

The guides explain each step of the process, support and special measures that are available. There are diagrams illustrating the courtroom structure and the use of video links is explained.

Making child arrangements via the family courts following separation can be stressful and entrench conflict in families. This can be stressful for children. The Ministry of Justice has launched an online [child arrangements information tool](#) with clear and concise information on the dispute resolution service. This may be useful for some parents and carers.

Children who are absent from education

All staff should be aware that children being absent from school or college, particularly repeatedly and/or for prolonged periods, and children missing education can act as a vital warning sign of a range of safeguarding possibilities. This may include abuse and neglect such as sexual abuse or exploitation and can also be a sign of child criminal exploitation including involvement in county lines. It may indicate mental health problems, risk of substance abuse, risk of travelling to conflict zones, risk of female genital mutilation, honour or faith-based abuse or risk of forced marriage. Early intervention is essential to identify the existence of any underlying safeguarding risk and to help prevent the risks of a child going missing in future. It is important that staff are aware of their school or college's unauthorised absence procedures and children missing education procedures.

Children with family members in prison

Approximately 193,000 children in England and Wales have a parent in prison each year. They are at risk of poor outcomes as a result of poverty, stigma, isolation and poor mental health. The [Prisoners' Families Helpline](#) offers free, confidential support and advice for families in England and Wales who are in contact with the criminal justice system.

School and college staff should be aware that children who have experienced parental imprisonment are more likely to be absent (or excluded) than their peers, to experience mental ill health and drug and alcohol misuse; they are also less likely to be in education, training or employment in later life. Staff should understand the need for tailored, trauma-informed and sensitive support that can help mitigate potential harm and help encourage stability.

Cybercrime

Cybercrime is criminal activity committed using computers and/or the internet. It is broadly categorised as either 'cyber-enabled' (crimes that can happen off-line but are enabled at scale and at speed on-line) or 'cyber dependent' (crimes that can be committed only by using a computer).

Cyber-dependent crime continues to represent one of the most significant and rapidly evolving threats within the United Kingdom's (UK) crime landscape. Offences under the Computer Misuse Act 1990 (CMA) have risen substantially.

Young people across the UK experiment with illegal online activity, often without understanding the legal or ethical implications. The impact of cybercrime extends well beyond immediate financial losses, with scope to cause disruption to national infrastructure.

Cyber-dependent crimes include:

- unauthorised access to computers (illegal 'hacking'), for example accessing a school's computer network to look for test paper answers or change grades awarded,
- 'Denial of Service' (Dos or DDoS) attacks or 'booting'. These are attempts to make a computer, network or website unavailable by overwhelming it with internet traffic from multiple sources, and,
- making, supplying or obtaining malware (malicious software) such as viruses, spyware, ransomware, botnets and Remote Access Trojans with the intent to commit further offence, including those above.

Children with particular skills and interest in computing and technology may inadvertently or deliberately stray into cyber-dependent crime.

If there are concerns about a child in this area, the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy), should consider referring into the **Cyber Choices** programme. This is a nationwide preventative police programme supported by the Home Office and led by the National Crime Agency, working with regional and local policing. It aims to intervene where young people are at risk of committing, or being drawn into, low-level cyber-dependent offences and divert them to a more positive use of their skills and interests.

Note that **Cyber Choices** does not currently cover 'cyber-enabled' crime such as fraud, purchasing of illegal drugs on-line and child sexual abuse and exploitation, nor other areas of concern such as on-line bullying or general on-line safety.

Additional advice can be found at: [Cyber Choices](#), ['NPCC- When to call the Police'](#) and [National Cyber Security Centre - NCSC.GOV.UK](#).

Domestic abuse

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 received Royal Assent on 29 April 2021. The Act introduced the first ever statutory definition of domestic abuse and recognises the impact of domestic abuse on children, as victims in their own right, if they see, hear or experience the effects of abuse. The statutory definition of domestic abuse, based on the previous cross-government definition, ensures that different types of relationships are captured, including ex-partners and family members. The definition captures a range of different abusive behaviours, including physical, emotional and economic abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour. Under the statutory definition, both the person who is carrying out the behaviour and the person to whom the behaviour is directed towards must be aged 16 or over and they must be “personally connected” (as defined in section 2 of the 2021 Act).

Types of domestic abuse include intimate partner violence, abuse by family members, teenage relationship abuse and child to parent or care giver abuse. Anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse, regardless of sexual identity, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexuality or background and domestic abuse can take place inside or outside of the home. The government has issued statutory guidance to provide further information for those working with domestic abuse victims and perpetrators, including the impact on children.

Domestic abuse is one of the most prevalent forms of abuse, with Women’s Aid estimating that 160,000 children are currently living in households where domestic abuse is taking place. This is likely to be an underestimate, however, with much abuse remaining hidden and not coming to the attention of services. All children can witness and be adversely affected by domestic abuse in the context of their home life where domestic abuse occurs between family members. Experiencing domestic abuse can have a serious, long-lasting emotional and psychological impact on children. In some cases, a child may blame themselves for the abuse or may have had to leave the family home as a result.

Young people can also experience domestic abuse within their own intimate relationships. This form of child-on-child abuse is sometimes referred to as ‘teenage relationship abuse’. Depending on the age of the young people, this may not be recognised in law under the statutory definition of ‘domestic abuse’ (if one or both parties are under 16). However, as with any child under 18, where there are concerns about safety or welfare, child safeguarding procedures as set out in paragraphs 55-61 should be followed and both young victims and young perpetrators should be offered support.

Operation Encompass

Operation Encompass is an information-sharing scheme between the police and relevant

education settings operating in all police forces across England and Wales. In November 2025, a new statutory duty was placed on the police to notify a child's education setting, and where relevant, local authorities, if they have reasonable grounds to believe a child may be a victim of domestic abuse. This includes all children connected to a household where they have attended a domestic abuse incident; children who are physically present at the incident, children not physically present during the incident, and situations where a child might reside in another household temporarily or permanently. Operation Encompass report over 2,000 notifications are made to settings every day.

Educational settings are often the only consistent support available to some children, especially for those who live in isolated or rural communities. The aim of the duty is to support education settings to provide timely, informed support to children affected by domestic abuse, to ensure the school has up to date information about the child's circumstances and enable immediate support to be put in place according to the child's needs. This places no new responsibilities on education settings.

Operation Encompass does not replace statutory safeguarding procedures or referrals and applies solely to domestic abuse incidents. Where appropriate, the police and/or schools should make a referral to local authority children's social care if they are concerned about a child's welfare.

Forces and educational settings should have an open communication process to determine where a safeguarding referral should be made in accordance with local thresholds. If an officer makes a referral alongside issuing an Operation Encompass notification, they should tell the child's education setting.

The duty applies to all children in education from reception (typically aged 4/5) up to the age of 17, and who are enrolled in registered primary and secondary schools, including independent schools, private schools, alternative provision settings (e.g., Pupil Referral Units), as well as further education colleges or 16 to 19 academies in England or Wales. Police forces must notify the local authority if the child is electively home educated or missing from education. Forces may also make notifications to other settings, for example early years settings or further education provision for young people with SEND, although these are not covered under the duty.

More information about the scheme can be found in the statutory guidance for police: [Duty on police forces in England and Wales to notify education establishments of domestic abuse incidents: Operation Encompass](#). This guidance intends to recognise and respond to children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right. It does not replace existing statutory guidance, including [Keeping children safe in education](#) and [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) in England.

Additional resources for education settings, including [Online National Key Adult Training: Operation Encompass](#) can be found on the charity's website [Home: Operation Encompass](#).

Operation Encompass notifications

Operation Encompass involves the sharing of personal and sensitive information about children and families. It is vital that all participants comply with the data protection laws.

Police forces and educational settings are responsible for deciding how and where information about incidents and notifications are made. They must ensure it remains confidential, is held securely, and adheres to the requirements of the data protection laws.

The designated safeguarding lead is responsible for leading on all safeguarding and child protection matters within an educational setting. They are likely to be the Key Adult for Operation Encompass notifications and are responsible for making safeguarding referrals to appropriate agencies, maintaining up-to-date safeguarding policies and training, overseeing record-keeping, and liaising with families where appropriate. DSLs may wish to use a central safeguarding inbox to ensure they have oversight over all Operation Encompass notifications.

The notification should include:

- the name, date of birth and protected characteristics (e.g., disability, race, religion etc.) of any child from that education setting who is related to any adult involved in the incident, whether the adult is the alleged perpetrator or non-abusive relative
- the relationship of the child to the victim and to the perpetrator,
- the police reference number,
- the location, time and date of the incident,
- if the child was present, and if so, where they were (notifications should be shared even if the child was not present at the particular incident),
- the voice of the child, such as what they are saying and how they are behaving, and
- the context and the circumstances of the incident, including whether an arrest was made, whether the incident was attended in person or via Rapid Video Response, and where possible, information on previous domestic abuse incidents.

The notification should not include:

- information or reference to sexual offences disclosed at the domestic abuse incident. This must not be disclosed in the notification. Under the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1992, anonymity for victims of sexual offences must be preserved.

The Operation Encompass charity provides an advice and helpline service for all staff members from education settings who may be concerned about children who have experienced domestic abuse. The helpline is available from 8:00 to 13:00, Monday to Friday on 0204 513 9990 (charged at local rate).¹⁵²

National Domestic Abuse Helpline

Refuge runs the National Domestic Abuse Helpline, which can be called free of charge and in confidence, 24 hours a day on 0808 2000 247. Its website provides guidance and support for potential victims, as well as those who are worried about friends and loved ones. It also has a form through which a safe time from the team for a call can be booked.

Additional advice on identifying children who are affected by domestic abuse and how they can be helped is available at:

- [NSPCC- UK domestic-abuse Signs Symptoms Effects](#)
- [Refuge what is domestic violence/effects of domestic violence on children](#)
- [Safe Young Lives: Young people and domestic abuse | Safelives](#)
- [Domestic abuse: specialist sources of support](#) (includes information for adult victims, young people facing abuse in their own relationships and parents experiencing child to parent violence/abuse)
- [Operation Encompass](#) (includes information for schools on the impact of domestic abuse on children)
- The Home Office publish guidance on [Controlling or coercive behaviour](#) which provides clear information on what constitutes controlling or coercive behaviour and how to identify the offence.

Homelessness

Being homeless or being at risk of becoming homeless presents a real risk to a child's welfare. The designated safeguarding lead (and any deputies) should be aware of contact details and referral routes into the Local Housing Authority so they can raise/progress concerns at the earliest opportunity. Indicators that a family may be at risk

¹⁵² Section 20 of the Victim and Prisoners Act 2024 introduced a new provision into Part 3 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 under Section 49A. [[Victims and Prisoners Act 2024](#)]

of homelessness include household debt, rent arrears, domestic abuse and anti-social behaviour, as well as the family being asked to leave a property. Whilst referrals and/or discussion with the Local Housing Authority should be progressed as appropriate, and in accordance with local procedures, this does not, and should not, replace a referral into local authority children's social care where a child has been harmed or is at risk of harm.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 places a new legal duty on English councils so that everyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness will have access to meaningful help including an assessment of their needs and circumstances, the development of a personalised housing plan, and work to help them retain their accommodation or find a new place to live. The following factsheets usefully summarise the new duties: [Homeless Reduction Act Factsheets](#). The new duties shift the focus to early intervention and encourages those at risk to seek support as soon as possible, before they are facing a homelessness crisis.

In most cases school and college staff will be considering homelessness in the context of children who live with their families, and intervention will be on that basis. However, it should also be recognised in some cases 16- and 17-year-olds could be living independently from their parents or guardians, for example through their exclusion from the family home, and will require a different level of intervention and support. Local authority children's social care will be the lead agency for these children, and the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) should ensure appropriate referrals are made based on the child's circumstances. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government have published joint statutory guidance on the provision of accommodation for 16- and 17-year-olds who may be homeless and/or require accommodation: [here](#).

Temporary accommodation notification duty

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act places a new duty on local housing authorities in England to notify educational institutions, health visiting services and general medical practices, when a child is placed in temporary accommodation. This notification should be made when consent has been given from the parent, those with parental responsibility or care of the child, or the child themselves in cases of 16–17-year-olds living independently from their parents.

The notification will enable school and college staff to safeguard and promote the welfare of these children at the earliest opportunity and support them to improve their outcomes. Whilst any discussion with the local housing authority should be progressed as appropriate, this notification does not, and should not, replace existing safeguarding and welfare duties nor a referral into local authority children's social care where a child has been harmed or is at risk of harm.

Specific statutory guidance for local authorities on the temporary accommodation duty will be provided in due course.

Modern slavery and the National Referral Mechanism

Modern slavery encompasses exploitation, including sexual exploitation, criminal financial exploitation, human trafficking and slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour. Exploitation can take many forms, including forced labour, slavery, servitude, forced criminality and the removal of organs. Further information and training for professionals on exploitation and modern slavery is available here - [Modern slavery training: resource page - GOV.UK](#)

The National Referral Mechanism is the system used within the UK to support potential victims of exploitation and modern slavery. Further information on the signs that someone may be a victim of exploitation and modern slavery, the support available to victims and how to refer them to the NRM is available in statutory guidance [Modern slavery: how to identify and support victims - GOV.UK](#).

Children who are referred into the NRM in England and Wales may also have access to an Independent Child Trafficking Guardian (ICTG)¹. ICTGs provide advocacy for children and help to promote and support their recovery.

Preventing radicalisation

Children may be susceptible to radicalisation into terrorism. Similar to protecting children from other forms of harms and abuse, protecting children from this risk should be a part of a schools or colleges safeguarding approach.

Extremism is the vocal or active opposition to our fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs

Radicalisation¹⁵³ is the process of a person legitimising support for, or use of, terrorist violence.

Terrorism¹⁵⁴ is an action that endangers or causes serious violence to a person/people; causes serious damage to property; or seriously interferes or disrupts an electronic system. The use or threat must be designed to influence the government or to intimidate the public and is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause.

Although there is no single way of identifying whether a child is likely to be susceptible to radicalisation into terrorism, there are [factors that may indicate concern](#).

¹⁵³ As defined in the [Government's Prevent Duty Guidance for England and Wales](#).

¹⁵⁴ As defined in the [Terrorism Act 2000 \(TACT 2000\)](#)

It is possible to protect people from extremist ideology and intervene to prevent those at risk of radicalisation being drawn into terrorism. As with other safeguarding risks, staff should be alert to changes in children's behaviour, which could indicate that they may be in need of help or protection. Staff should use their judgement in identifying children who might be at risk of radicalisation and act proportionately which may include the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) [Making a Prevent referral](#).

The Prevent duty

All schools and colleges are subject to a duty under section 26 of the Counter- Terrorism and Security Act 2015, in the exercise of their functions, to have "due regard"¹⁵⁵ to the need to prevent people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism".¹⁵⁶ This duty is known as the Prevent duty.

The Prevent duty should be seen as part of schools' and colleges' wider safeguarding obligations. Designated safeguarding leads (and deputies) and other senior leaders in education settings should familiarise themselves with the revised [Prevent duty guidance: for England and Wales](#), especially paragraphs 141-210, which are specifically concerned with education (and also covers childcare). The guidance is set out in terms of three general themes: leadership and partnership, capabilities and reducing permissive environments.

The school or college's designated safeguarding lead (and any deputies) should be aware of local procedures for making a Prevent referral.

Channel

Channel is a voluntary, confidential support programme which focuses on providing support at an early stage to people who are identified as being susceptible to being drawn into terrorism. Prevent referrals are first assessed by police and may be passed to a multi-agency Channel panel, which will discuss the individual referred to determine whether they are at risk of being drawn into terrorism and consider the appropriate support required. Whilst the referral is being assessed, should any further or new information come to light, this should also be passed to police. A representative from the school or college may be asked to attend the Channel panel to help with this assessment. An individual will be required to provide their consent before any support delivered through the programme is provided.

The designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) should consider if it would be appropriate to share any information with the new school or college in advance of a child leaving. For example, information that would allow the new school or college to continue supporting

¹⁵⁵ [Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁵⁶ "Terrorism" for these purposes has the same meaning as for the Terrorism Act 2000 (section 1(1) to (4) of that Act).

victims of abuse, incidents that may indicate concerns about serious violence or harmful behaviours and/or details of those who are currently receiving support through the 'Channel' programme and have that support in place for when the child arrives.

Statutory guidance on Channel is available at: [Channel guidance](#) and [Channel training from the Home Office](#).

Additional support

[The Department has published further advice for those working in education settings with safeguarding responsibilities on the Prevent duty](#). The advice is intended to complement the Prevent guidance and signposts to other sources of advice and support.

The Home Office has developed three e-learning modules:

- [Prevent awareness e-learning](#) offers an introduction to the Prevent duty.
- [Prevent referrals e-learning](#) supports staff to make Prevent referrals that are **robust, informed** and with **good intention**.
- [Channel awareness e-learning](#) is aimed at staff who may be asked to contribute to or sit on a multi-agency Channel panel.

[Educate Against Hate](#) is a government website designed to support school and college teachers and leaders to help them safeguard their students from radicalisation and extremism. The platform provides free information and resources to help staff identify and address the risks, as well as build resilience to radicalisation. These resources are regularly updated to ensure they remain relevant and practical. Resources have been developed working closely with education professionals and civil society groups to identify and produce high-quality materials that assist teachers in building pupils' critical thinking skills and resilience to extremist ideologies.

For advice specific to further education, Educate Against Hate hosts a suite of [teaching packs](#) and accompanying guidance to meet the specific needs of students and practitioners in further education and training settings. The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) hosts the [Prevent for FE and Training](#). This hosts a range of free, sector specific resources to support further education settings to comply with the Prevent duty. This includes the Prevent Awareness e-learning, which offers an introduction to the duty, and the Prevent Referral e-learning, which is designed to support staff to make robust, informed and proportionate referrals. The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) provides [online training modules](#) for practitioners, leaders and managers, to support staff and governors/Board members in outlining their roles and responsibilities under the duty.

London Grid for Learning has also produced useful resources on Prevent ([Online Safety Resource Centre - London Grid for Learning \(lgfl.net\)](#)).

Serious violence

There are a number of indicators, which may signal children are at risk from, or are involved in committing serious violence. These may include:

- increased absence from school or college,
- a change in friendships or relationships with older individuals or groups,
- a significant decline in educational performance,
- signs of self-harm or a significant change in wellbeing, or signs of assault or unexplained injuries, and
- unexplained gifts or new possessions could also indicate that children have been approached by, or are involved with, individuals associated with criminal networks or gangs and may be at risk of criminal exploitation.

The likelihood of involvement in serious violence may be increased by factors such as:

- being male,
- having been suspended, spent time in Alternative Provision or permanently excluded from school,
- having experienced child maltreatment,
- having been involved in offending, such as theft or robbery,
- having used drugs or alcohol in early adolescence, and
- having previously been a victim or previously perpetrated violence

A fuller list of risk factors can be found in the Home Office's [Serious Violence Strategy](#).

Professionals should also be aware that violence can often peak in the hours just before or just after school, when pupils are travelling to and from school and can concentrate in particular places. These times can be particularly risky for young people involved in serious violence. It is important that schools and colleges try to understand where these places are, with a view to working with partners to promote safety for children. Listening to children and consulting with staff can help establish when and where they feel unsafe. Working with wider partners can also help build understanding of the local context beyond the school or college and help co-ordinate a collective safeguarding response around the school day.

Advice for schools and colleges is provided in the Home Office's [Criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: county lines](#) guidance. The Youth Endowment Fund

(YEF) (the “what works” centre for preventing violence) has produced [practical guidance](#) for schools and colleges and an accompanying [self-assessment tool](#) to help introduce evidenced practice for preventing children becoming involved in violence.

Home Office funded Violence Reduction Units (VRU) operate in the 20 police force areas across England and Wales that have the highest volumes of serious violence, as measured by hospital admissions for injury with a sharp object. A list of these locations can be found [here](#). As the strategic co-ordinators for local violence prevention, each VRU is mandated to include at least one local education representative within their Core Membership group, which is responsible for setting the direction for VRU activity. Schools and educational partners within these areas are encouraged to reach out to their local VRU, either directly or via their education Core Member, to better ingrain partnership working to tackle serious violence across local areas and ensure a joined-up approach to young people across the risk spectrum.

[Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022](#) introduced a new [Serious Violence Duty \(Statutory Guidance\)](#) on a range of specified authorities, such as the police, local government, youth offending teams, health and probation services, to work collaboratively, share data and information, and put in place plans to prevent and reduce serious violence within their local communities. Educational authorities and prisons/youth custody authorities are under a separate duty to co-operate with core duty holders when asked, and there is a requirement for the partnership to consult with all such institutions in their area.

The Duty **does not** replace or duplicate existing safeguarding duties.

Honour or faith-based abuse (including female genital mutilation and forced marriage)

Honour or faith-based abuse (HBA) encompasses 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. It is important to be aware of this dynamic and additional risk factors when deciding what form of safeguarding action to take. All forms of HBA are abuse (regardless of the motivation) and should be handled and escalated as such. Professionals in all agencies, and individuals and groups in relevant communities, need to be alert to the possibility of a child being at risk of HBA, or already having suffered HBA.

Actions

If staff have a concern regarding a child who might be at risk of HBA or who has suffered from HBA, they should speak to the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy). As

appropriate, the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) will activate local safeguarding procedures, using existing national and local protocols for multi-agency liaison with the police and local authority children's social care. Where FGM has taken place, since 31 October 2015 there has been a mandatory reporting duty placed on **teachers**¹⁵⁷ that requires a different approach (see below).

FGM comprises all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs. It is illegal in the UK and a form of child abuse with long-lasting harmful consequences.

FGM mandatory reporting duty for teachers

Section 5B of the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 (as inserted by section 74 of the Serious Crime Act 2015) places a statutory duty upon **teachers**, along with regulated health and social care professionals in England and Wales, to report to the police where they discover (either through disclosure by the victim or visual evidence) that FGM appears to have been carried out on a girl under 18. Those failing to report such cases may face disciplinary sanctions. It will be rare for teachers to see visual evidence, and they should **not** be examining pupils or students, but the same definition of what is meant by "to discover that an act of FGM appears to have been carried out" is used for all professionals to whom this mandatory reporting duty applies. Information on when and how to make a report can be found at: [Mandatory reporting of female genital mutilation procedural information](#).

Teachers **must** personally report to the police cases where they discover that an act of FGM appears to have been carried out.¹⁵⁸ Unless the teacher has good reason not to, they should still consider and discuss any such case with the school or college's designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) and involve local authority children's social care as appropriate. The duty does not apply in relation to at risk or suspected cases (i.e. where the teacher does not discover that an act of FGM appears to have been carried out, either through disclosure by the victim or visual evidence) or in cases where the woman is 18 or over. In these cases, teachers should follow local safeguarding procedures. The following is a useful summary of the FGM mandatory reporting duty: [FGM Fact Sheet](#).

Further information can be found in the [Multi-agency statutory guidance on female genital mutilation](#) and the [FGM resource pack](#) particularly section 13.

Forced marriage

¹⁵⁷ Under Section 5B(11)(a) of the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003, "teacher" means, in relation to England, a person within section 141A(1) of the Education Act 2002 (persons employed or engaged to carry out teaching work at schools and other institutions in England).

¹⁵⁸ Section 5B(6) of the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 states teachers need not report a case to the police if they have reason to believe that another teacher has already reported the case.

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 perpetrators use perceived cultural practices to coerce a person into marriage. Schools and colleges can play an important role in safeguarding children from forced marriage.

The Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) has created: Multi-agency practice guidelines: handling cases of forced marriage (chapter 8 provides guidance on the role of schools and colleges) and, Multi-agency statutory guidance for dealing with forced marriage, which can both be found at [The right to choose: government guidance on forced marriage - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/the-right-to-choose-government-guidance-on-forced-marriage) School and college staff can contact the Forced Marriage Unit if they need advice or information: Contact: 020 7008 0151 or email fmf@fcdo.gov.uk.

In addition, since February 2023 it has also been a crime to carry out any conduct whose purpose is to cause a child to marry before their eighteenth birthday, even if violence, threats or another form of coercion are not used. As with the existing forced marriage law, this applies to non-binding, unofficial 'marriages' as well as legal marriages.

Additional advice and support

There is a wealth of information available to support schools and colleges. The following list is not exhaustive but should provide a useful starting point:

Abuse

Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse has introduced new resources to help education professionals identify and respond to [concerns of child sexual abuse and abusive behaviours](#).

[Signs and indicators of child sexual abuse | CSA Centre](#)

[What to do if you're worried a child is being abused](#) – DfE advice

[Domestic abuse: Various Information/Guidance](#) – Home Office advice

[Faith based abuse: National Action Plan](#) – DfE advice

[Forced marriage resource pack](#)

[Disrespect NoBody campaign – GOV.UK](#) – Home Office website

[Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy](#) – Home Office policy paper

[Together we can stop child sexual abuse](#) – HM Government campaign

Bullying

[Preventing bullying including cyberbullying](#) – DfE advice

Children missing from education, home or care

[Children missing education](#) – DfE statutory guidance

[Children who run away or go missing from home or care](#) – DfE statutory guidance

[Missing Children and Adults strategy](#) – Home Office strategy

Children with family members in prison

The [Prisoners' Families Helpline](#) offers free, confidential support and advice for families in England and Wales who are in contact with the criminal justice system.

Child exploitation

[Modern Slavery: statutory guidance for England and Wales \(under s49 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015\) and non-statutory guidance for Scotland and Northern Ireland \(accessible version\) - GOV.UK](#) – Modern Slavery Statutory Guidance.

[Interim guidance for ICTGs](#) - Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship Service guidance

[Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked](#) – DfE and Home Office guidance

[Care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery](#) – DfE statutory guidance

[Modern slavery: how to identify and support victims](#) – Home Office statutory guidance

[Child exploitation disruption toolkit](#) – Home Office guidance

[Preventing Child Sexual Exploitation](#) – The Children's Society and Home Office

[County Lines Toolkit For Professionals](#) – The Children's Society in partnership with Victim Support and National Police Chiefs' Council

[Multi-agency practice principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm](#) – non-statutory guidance for local areas, developed by the Tackling Child Exploitation (TCE) Support Programme, funded by the Department for Education and supported by the Home Office, the Department for Health and Social Care and the Ministry of Justice

[What is county lines and child criminal exploitation? - Missing People](#) advice

[SafeCall - Missing People](#) - SafeCall is a national free, confidential and anonymous helpline and support service for young people and family members that are affected by missing, county lines and criminal exploitation. Confidential support and webinars are also available to professionals.

[County Lines Support and Rescue | Catch22](#) - A specialist support and rescue service for young people and their families who are criminally exploited through county lines. (The service currently operates from London, Merseyside, the West Midlands, West Yorkshire and Greater Manchester.)

Confidentiality

[Gillick competency Fraser guidelines](#) – Guidelines to help with balancing children's rights along with safeguarding responsibilities.

Drugs

[From harm to hope: A 10-year drugs plan to cut crime and save lives](#) – Home Office strategy

[Honest information about drugs](#) – Talk to Frank website

[Drug and Alcohol education – teacher guidance & evidence review](#) – PSHE Association

Honour or faith-based abuse, including FGM and forced marriage

[Female genital mutilation: information and resources](#) – Home Office guidance

[Female genital mutilation: multi agency statutory guidance](#) – DfE, Department for Health, and Home Office

[Forced marriage](#) – Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) resources

[Forced marriage](#) – Government multi-agency practice guidelines and multi-agency statutory guidance

[FGM resource pack](#) – HM Government guidance

Health and well-being

[Rise Above: Free PSHE resources on health, wellbeing and resilience](#) – Public Health England

[Supporting pupils at schools with medical conditions](#) – DfE statutory guidance

[Mental health and behaviour in schools](#) – DfE advice

[Overview - Fabricated or induced illness](#) – NHS advice

Homelessness

[Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities](#) - Ministry of Housing, Communities

and Local Government guidance

Information sharing

[Government information sharing advice](#) – Guidance on information sharing for people who provide safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers.

[Information Commissioner's Office: Data sharing information hub](#) – Information to help schools and colleges comply with UK data protection legislation including UK GDPR.

Online safety advice

[Childnet](#) – Provides guidance for schools on cyberbullying

[Educateagainsthate](#) – Provides practical advice and support on protecting children from extremism and radicalisation

[London Grid for Learning](#) – Provides advice on all aspects of a school or college's online safety arrangements

[NSPCC E-safety for schools](#) – Provides advice, templates, and tools on all aspects of a school or college's online safety arrangements

[Safer recruitment consortium](#) – 'Guidance for safe working practice', which may help ensure staff behaviour policies are robust and effective

[Searching screening and confiscation](#) – Departmental advice for schools on searching children and confiscating items such as mobile phones

[South West Grid for Learning](#) – Provides advice on all aspects of a school or college's online safety arrangements

[Online Safety Audit Tool](#) – From UK Council for Internet Safety to help mentors of trainee teachers and newly qualified teachers induct mentees and provide ongoing support, development and monitoring

[Online safety guidance if you own or manage an online platform](#) – DCMS advice

[A business guide for protecting children on your online platform](#) – DCMS advice

[UK Safer Internet Centre](#) – Provides tips, advice, guides and other resources to help keep children safe online

[Understanding and responding to AI-generated child sexual abuse material](#): guidance from the National Crime Agency's CEOP Education programme in collaboration with the Internet Watch Foundation.

[Financially motivated sexual extortion \(FMSE\)](#): guidance for education settings on FMSE from the National Crime Agency's CEOP Education programme.

Online safety relating to remote education, virtual lessons and live streaming

[Guidance Get help with remote education](#) – Resources and support for teachers and school leaders on educating pupils and students

[Departmental guidance on safeguarding and remote education](#) – Including planning remote education strategies and teaching remotely

[London Grid for Learning](#) – Guidance, including platform-specific advice

[National Cyber Security Centre](#) – Guidance on choosing, configuring and deploying video conferencing

[UK Safer Internet Centre](#) – Guidance on safe remote learning

Online safety – support for children

[Childline](#) – For free and confidential advice

[UK Safer Internet Centre](#) – To report and remove harmful online content

[CEOP Safety Centre](#) – to report online child sexual abuse

Online safety - parental support

[Childnet](#) – Offers a toolkit to support parents and carers of children of any age to start discussions about their online life, and to find out where to get more help and support

[Commonsensemedia](#) – Provides independent reviews, age ratings, & other information about all types of media for children and their parents

[Government advice](#) – About protecting children from specific online harms such as child sexual abuse, sexting, and cyberbullying

[Help your child stay safe online - Kids Online Safety](#) – includes practical information from trusted places to help parents feel more confident on the steps they can take to protect their child online.

[Internet Matters](#) – Provides age-specific online safety checklists, guides on how to set parental controls, and practical tips to help children get the most out of their digital world

[How Can I Help My Child?](#) – Marie Collins Foundation – Sexual abuse online

[London Grid for Learning](#) – Provides support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online, including tips to keep primary aged children safe online

[Stopitnow](#) resource from [The Lucy Faithfull Foundation](#) – Can be used by parents and carers who are concerned about someone's behaviour, including children who may be displaying concerning sexual behaviour (not just about online)

[CEOP Education](#) – Provides information, guidance and resources for support for parents and carers, helping them to protect their child(ren) from online sexual abuse

[Parentzone](#) – Provides help for parents and carers on how to keep their children safe online

[Talking to your child about online sexual harassment: A guide for parents](#) – This is the Children's Commissioner's parental guide on talking to their children about online sexual harassment

2019 UK CMOSs' advice - [UK CMO commentary on screen time and social media map of reviews - GOV.UK](#)

Private fostering

[Private fostering: local authorities](#) – DfE statutory guidance

Radicalisation

[Prevent duty guidance](#) – Home Office guidance

[The Prevent duty: safeguarding learners vulnerable to radicalisation](#) - DfE advice

[Educate Against Hate website](#) – DfE and Home Office guidance

[Prevent for FE and Training](#) – Education and Training Foundation (ETF)

[Extremism and Radicalisation Safeguarding Resources](#) – Resources by London Grid for Learning

[Managing risk of radicalisation in your education setting](#) – DfE advice

Serious violence

[Serious violence strategy](#) – Home Office strategy

[Factors linked to serious violence and how these factors can be used to identify individuals for intervention](#) – Home Office

[Youth Endowment Fund](#) – Home Office

[Gangs and youth violence: for schools and colleges](#) – Home Office advice

[Tackling and girls strategy](#) – Home Office strategy

[Violence against women and girls: national statement of expectations for victims](#) – Home Office guidance

Sexual harassment and sexual violence

Specialist organisations

[Barnardo's](#) – UK charity caring for and supporting some of the most vulnerable children and young people through their range of services.

[Lucy Faithfull Foundation](#) – UK-wide child protection charity dedicated to preventing child sexual abuse. They work with families affected by sexual abuse and also run the confidential Stop it Now! Helpline.

[Marie Collins Foundation](#) – Charity that, amongst other things, works directly with

children, young people, and families to enable their recovery following sexual abuse.

[NSPCC](#) – Children's charity specialising in child protection with statutory powers enabling them to take action and safeguard children at risk of abuse.

[Rape Crisis](#) – National charity and the umbrella body for their network of independent member Rape Crisis Centres.

[UK Safer Internet Centre](#) – Provides <https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-and-resources> to children, young people, parents, carers and schools about staying safe online.

Harmful sexual behaviour

[Rape Crisis \(England & Wales\)](#) or [The Survivors Trust](#) – For information, advice, and details of local specialist sexual violence organisations.

[NICE guidance](#) – Contains information on, amongst other things: developing interventions; working with families and carers; and multi-agency working.

[HSB toolkit](#) – The Lucy Faithfull Foundation – designed for parents, carers, family members and professionals, to help everyone play their part in keeping children safe. It has links to useful information, resources, and support as well as practical tips to prevent harmful sexual behaviour and provide safe environments for families.

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation also run shorespace.org.uk which provides a safe and anonymous place for young people to get help and support to prevent harmful sexual behaviours.

[NSPCC Learning: Protecting children from harmful sexual behaviour](#) and [NSPCC - Harmful sexual behaviour framework](#) – Free and independent advice about HSB.

[Contextual Safeguarding Network – Beyond Referrals \(Schools\)](#) – Provides a school self-assessment toolkit and guidance for addressing HSB in schools.

[Preventing harmful sexual behaviour in children - Stop It Now](#) – Provides a guide for parents, carers and professionals to help everyone do their part in keeping children safe, they also run a free confidential helpline.

Support for victims

[Anti-Bullying Alliance](#) – Detailed information for anyone being bullied, along with advice for parents and schools. Signposts to various helplines and websites for further support.

[Rape Crisis](#) – Provides and signposts to a range of services to support people who have experienced rape, child abuse or any kind of sexual violence.

[The Survivors Trust](#) – UK-wide national umbrella agency with resources and support dedicated to survivors of rape, sexual violence and child sex abuse.

[Victim Support](#) – Supporting children and young people who have been affected by

crime. Also provides support to parents and professionals who work with children and young people – regardless of whether a crime has been reported or how long ago it was.

[Childline](#) – Provides free and confidential advice for children and young people.

Toolkits

[NSPCC](#) – Online Self-assessment tool to ensure organisations are doing everything they can to safeguard children.

[NSPCC](#) – Resources which help adults respond to children disclosing abuse.

NSPCC also provide free and independent advice about HSB: [NSPCC - Harmful sexual behaviour framework](#)

[Safeguarding Unit, Farrer and Co. and Carlene Firmin, MBE, University of Bedfordshire](#)

– Peer-on-Peer Abuse toolkit provides practical guidance for schools on how to prevent, identify early and respond appropriately to peer-on-peer abuse.

[Contextual Safeguarding Network](#) – Self-assessment toolkit for schools to assess their own response to HSB and levers for addressing HSB in schools.

[Childnet - STAR SEND Toolkit](#) – Equips, enables and empowers educators with the knowledge to support young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

[Childnet - Just a joke?](#) – Provides lesson plans, activities, a quiz and teaching guide designed to explore problematic online sexual behaviour with 9–12-year-olds.

[Childnet - Step Up, Speak Up](#) – A practical campaign toolkit that addresses the issue of online sexual harassment amongst young people aged 13-17 years old.

[NSPCC - Harmful sexual behaviour framework](#) – An evidence-informed framework for children and young people displaying HSB.

Farrer & Co: [Addressing child on child abuse: a resource for schools and colleges](#) – This resource provides practical guidance for schools and colleges on how to prevent, identify early and respond appropriately to child-on-child abuse.

Sharing nudes and semi-nudes

[London Grid for Learning-collection of advice](#) – Various information and resources dealing with the sharing of nudes and semi-nudes.

[UKCIS Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people](#) – Advice for schools and colleges on responding to incidents of non-consensual making or sharing of nudes or semi-nudes.

Support for parents/carers

National Crime Agency's [CEOP Education Programme](#) – Provides information for

parents and carers to help protect their child from online child sexual abuse, including [#AskTheAwkward - help to talk with your children about online relationships](#) – Guidance on how to talk to their children about online relationships

Annex B: Role of the designated safeguarding lead

Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure an appropriate **senior member** of staff, from the school or college **leadership team**, is appointed to the role of designated safeguarding lead. The designated safeguarding lead should take **lead responsibility** for safeguarding and child protection (including online safety and understanding the filtering and monitoring systems and processes in place). This should be explicit in the role holder's job description.

The designated safeguarding lead should have the appropriate status and authority within the school or college to carry out the duties of the post. The role of the designated safeguarding lead carries a significant level of responsibility, and they should be given the additional time, funding, training, resources and support they need to carry out the role effectively. Their additional responsibilities include providing advice and support to other staff on child welfare, safeguarding and child protection matters, taking part in strategy discussions and inter-agency meetings, and/or supporting other staff to do so, and contributing to the assessment of children.

Deputy designated safeguarding leads

It is a matter for individual schools and colleges as to whether they choose to have one or more deputy designated safeguarding leads. Any deputies should be trained to the same standard as the designated safeguarding lead and the role should be explicit in their job description. Whilst the activities of the designated safeguarding lead can be delegated to appropriately trained deputies, the ultimate lead responsibility for child protection, as set out above, remains with the designated safeguarding lead, this lead responsibility should not be delegated.

Availability

During term time the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) should always be available (during school or college hours) for staff in the school or college to discuss any safeguarding concerns. Whilst generally speaking the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) would be expected to be available in person, it is a matter for individual schools and colleges, working with the designated safeguarding lead, to define what "available" means and whether in exceptional circumstances availability via phone and or Microsoft Teams or other such media is acceptable. It is a matter for individual schools and colleges and the designated safeguarding lead to arrange adequate and appropriate cover arrangements for any out-of-hour/out of term activities.

To ensure continuity of safeguarding responsibilities, schools should implement robust cover arrangements for periods when the DSL is unavailable due to illness, leave, or

other circumstances. Schools and colleges have the flexibility and discretion in how these arrangements operate, provided safeguarding responsibilities remain appropriately covered. It would be good practice that, whenever the DSL is unavailable, there is a clear, reliable, and known arrangement in place so that concerns can be raised. This could, for example, include a confidential shared mailbox or equivalent system to ensure that safeguarding concerns are received, monitored, and acted upon without delay.

Manage referrals

The designated safeguarding lead is expected to refer cases:

- of suspected abuse and neglect to the local authority children's social care as required and support staff who make referrals to local authority children's social care,
- to the Channel programme where there is a radicalisation concern as required and support staff who make referrals to the Channel programme,
- where a person is dismissed or left due to risk/harm to a child to the Disclosure and Barring Service as required, and
- where a crime may have been committed to the Police as required. [NPCC - When to call the police](#) should help understand when to consider calling the police and what to expect when working with the police.

Working with others

The designated safeguarding lead is expected to:

- act as a source of support, advice and expertise for all staff,
- act as a point of contact with the safeguarding partners,
- liaise with the headteacher or principal to inform him or her of issues- especially ongoing enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 and police investigations. This should include being aware of the requirement for children to have an Appropriate Adult. Further information can be found in the Statutory guidance - [PACE Code C 2019](#),
- as required, liaise with the "case manager" (as per Part four) and the local authority designated officer(s) (LADO) for child protection concerns in cases which concern a staff member,
- liaise with staff (especially teachers, pastoral support staff, school nurses, IT technicians, senior mental health leads and special educational needs co-

ordinators (SENCOs), or the named person with oversight for SEND in a college and senior mental health leads) on matters of safety and safeguarding and welfare (including online and digital safety) and when deciding whether to make a referral by liaising with relevant agencies so that children's needs are considered holistically,

- liaise with the senior mental health lead and, where available, the mental health support team, where safeguarding concerns are linked to mental health,
- promote supportive engagement with parents and/or carers in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, including where families may be facing challenging circumstances, and
- work with the headteacher and relevant strategic leads, taking lead responsibility for promoting educational outcomes by knowing the welfare, safeguarding and child protection issues that children in need are experiencing, or have experienced, and identifying the impact that these issues might be having on children's attendance, engagement and achievement at school or college.¹⁵⁹ This includes:
 - ensuring that the school or college knows who its cohort of children who have or have had a social worker are, understanding their academic progress and attainment, and maintaining a culture of high aspirations for this cohort, and
 - supporting teaching staff to provide additional academic support or reasonable adjustments to help children who have or have had a social worker reach their potential, recognising that even when statutory social care intervention has ended, there is still a lasting impact on children's educational outcomes.

Information sharing and managing the child protection file

The designated safeguarding lead is responsible for ensuring that child protection files are kept up to date.

Information should be kept confidential and stored securely. It is good practice to keep concerns and referrals in a separate child protection file for each child. Safeguarding records should be clear, factual, and distinguish between observed concerns, professional opinion, and historic information.

Records should include:

¹⁵⁹ We recognise that in some settings there may be a different strategic lead for promoting the educational outcomes of children who have or have had a social worker, particularly in larger schools or colleges. Where this is the case, it is important that the DSL works closely with the lead to provide strategic oversight for the outcomes of these children and young people.

- a clear and comprehensive summary of the concern,
- details of how the concern was followed up and resolved, and
- a note of any action taken, decisions reached and the outcome.

They should ensure the file is only accessed by those who need to see it and where the file or content within is shared, this happens in line with information sharing advice set out in Parts one and two of this guidance.

Appropriate arrangements should be in place to ensure that safeguarding information is transferred, reviewed and actioned promptly at all transition points, including in-year moves.

Where children leave the school or college (including in year transfers) the designated safeguarding lead should ensure their child protection file is transferred to the new school or college as soon as possible, and within 5 days for an in-year transfer or within the first 5 days of the start of a new term.

This should be transferred separately from the main pupil file, ensuring secure transit, and confirmation of receipt should be obtained. Where child protection files are transferred, the exporting school or college should include a clear, structured summary identifying current safeguarding concerns, relevant context, and any ongoing support needs.

Particular care should be taken to distinguish between current safeguarding concerns and historic information, ensuring that past issues are presented with appropriate context. For example, where a file contains extensive historical information, a concise summary of current risk and relevant context is likely to support more effective safeguarding than the transfer of unstructured records alone.

Receiving schools and colleges should ensure that safeguarding information is reviewed by an appropriately trained member of staff so that key risks and needs are clearly understood. Safeguarding information should be used to support, not disadvantage, the child.

Where the receiving school or college considers that safeguarding information is unclear or incomplete, it should seek clarification where necessary to support effective safeguarding.

They should also ensure key staff such as designated safeguarding leads and special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) or the named person with oversight for SEND in colleges, are aware as required. It will then be for the DSL to consider what other information should be shared with other relevant staff and when this should be shared.

Lack of information about their circumstances can impact on the child's safety, welfare and educational outcomes. In addition to the child protection file, the designated safeguarding lead should also consider if it would be appropriate to share any additional information with the new school or college in advance of a child leaving particularly where the information would support an assessment of risk to others in the school as well as the individual pupil to help them put in place the right support to safeguard this child and to help the child thrive in the school or college. For example, information that would allow the new school or college to continue supporting children who have had a social worker and been victims of abuse, incidents that may indicate concerns about serious violence or harmful behaviours and/or details of those who are currently receiving support through the 'Channel' programme and have that support in place for when the child arrives. It would be good practice for a conversation to take place at the appropriate and relevant points between the designated safeguarding leads at both settings, where there are issues or concerns to ensure information is being actively considered and acted upon.

Raising awareness

The designated safeguarding lead should:

- ensure each member of staff has access to, and understands, the school or college's child protection policy and procedures, especially new and part-time staff,
- ensure the school or college's child protection policy is reviewed annually (as a minimum) and the procedures and implementation are updated and reviewed regularly, and work with governing bodies or proprietors regarding this,
- ensure the child protection policy is available publicly and parents know that referrals about suspected abuse or neglect may be made and the role of the school or college in this,
- link with the safeguarding partner arrangements to make sure staff are aware of any training opportunities and the latest local policies on local safeguarding arrangements, and
- help promote educational outcomes by sharing information about welfare, safeguarding and child protection issues that children who have or have had a social worker are experiencing with teachers and school and college leadership staff.

Training, knowledge and skills

The designated safeguarding lead (and any deputies) should undergo training to provide them with the knowledge and skills required to carry out the role. This training should be updated at least every two years. The designated safeguarding lead (and any deputies) should also undertake Prevent awareness training. Training should provide designated

safeguarding leads (and any deputies) with a good understanding of their own role, how to identify, understand and respond to specific needs that can increase the vulnerability of children, as well as specific harms that can put children at risk, and the processes, procedures and responsibilities of other agencies, particularly local authority children's social care, so they:

- understand the assessment process for providing family help and statutory intervention, including local criteria for action and local authority children's social care referral arrangements¹⁶⁰,
- have a working knowledge of how local authorities conduct a child protection case conference and a child protection review conference and be able to attend and contribute to these effectively when required to do so,
- understand the importance of the role the designated safeguarding lead has in providing information and support to local authority children social care in order to safeguard and promote the welfare of children,
- understand the lasting impact that adversity and trauma can have, including on children's behaviour, mental health and wellbeing, and what is needed in responding to this in promoting educational outcomes,
- are alert to the specific needs of children in need, those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), those with relevant health conditions and young carers¹⁶¹,
- understand the importance of information sharing, both within the school and college, and with the safeguarding partners, other agencies, organisations and practitioners,
- understand and support the school or college with regards to the requirements of the Prevent duty and are able to provide advice and support to staff on protecting children from the risk of radicalisation,
- are able to understand the unique risks associated with online safety and be confident that they have the relevant knowledge and up to date capability required to keep children safe whilst they are online at school or college,
- can recognise the additional risks that children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) face online, for example, from bullying, grooming and radicalisation and are confident they have the capability to support children with SEND to stay safe online,
- obtain access to resources and attend any relevant or refresher training courses,

¹⁶⁰ Full details in Chapter one of [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#).

¹⁶¹Section 17(10) Children Act 1989: those unlikely to achieve a reasonable standard of health and development without local authority services, those whose health and development is likely to be significantly impaired without the provision of such services, or disabled children.

and

- encourage a culture of listening to children and taking account of their wishes and feelings, among all staff, and in any measures the school or college may put in place to protect them.

In addition to the formal training set out above, their knowledge and skills should be refreshed (this might be via e-bulletins, meeting other designated safeguarding leads, or simply taking time to read and digest safeguarding developments) at regular intervals, as required, and at least annually, to allow them to understand and keep up with any developments relevant to their role.

Providing support to staff

Training should support the designated safeguarding lead (and deputies) in developing expertise, so they can support and advise staff and help them feel confident on welfare, safeguarding and child protection matters. This includes specifically to:

- ensure that staff are supported during the referrals processes, and
- support staff to consider how safeguarding, welfare and educational outcomes are linked, including to inform the provision of academic and pastoral support.

Understanding the views of children

It is important that all children feel heard and understood. Therefore, designated safeguarding leads (and deputies) should be supported in developing knowledge and skills to:

- encourage a culture of listening to children and taking account of their wishes and feelings, among all staff, and in any measures the school or college may put in place to protect them, and
- understand the difficulties that children may have in approaching staff about their circumstances and consider how to build trusted relationships which facilitate communication.

Holding and sharing information

The critical importance of recording, holding, using and sharing information effectively is set out in Parts one, two and five of this document, and therefore the designated safeguarding lead (and deputies) should be equipped to:

- understand the importance of information sharing, both within the school and

college, and with other schools and colleges on transfer including in-year and between primary and secondary education, and with the safeguarding partners, other agencies, organisations and practitioners,

- understand relevant data protection laws, and
- be able to keep detailed, accurate, secure written records of all concerns, discussions and decisions made including the rationale for those decisions. This should include instances where referrals were or were not made to another agency such as LA children's social care or the Prevent program etc.

Annex C: KCSIE 2026: Summary of changes

This summary explains where we have made changes to KCSIE 2025 and our rationale for doing so. We will publish KCSIE (final version) 2026 on 1 September 2026.

KCSIE has been revised regularly for many years, and we intend that it will continue to be revised and improved on a regular basis. This update reflects substantive changes that strengthen or clarify existing content, changes to multi agency working ahead of any legislation changes in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, where appropriate the recent Casey Audit, and adds content in relation to Violence Against Women and Girls.

This Government is clear that there are and will continue to be further learnings about how we can better protect children in the future as we come to understand more clearly what has gone wrong in the past and schools and colleges will continue to need to play an incredibly important role in this.

Summary: About the guidance

About this guidance

Section 3 of the *Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework* should be read alongside KCSIE where children aged 0 to 5 attend school-based nurseries or reception classes.

Added a section regarding the use of “*nudes and semi-nudes*” throughout KCSIE with an explainer.

Throughout the guidance

References to the withdrawn Annex A (condensed Part one) have been removed, as all staff are expected to read Part one in full.

Updated terminology to include “*universal services and community-based early help*” and “*the targeted early help level of Family Help*.”

Replaced “*indecent*”, “*nude, semi-nude*” and “*also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery*” with “*making or sharing of nudes or semi-nudes*”.

Updated the definition of “*assault by penetration*.”

Updated the definition of “*sexual assault*.”

Added further references to “*misogyny*.”

Retitled “*Child-on-child abuse*” to “*Child-on-child abuse (including harassment and violence)*.”

Summary: Part one – Safeguarding information for all staff

Paragraph 13: Updated to distinguish between community-based early help and targeted early help delivered through Family Help.

Paragraph 17: Expanded examples of issues staff should remain alert to.

Paragraph 18: Added “*modern slavery*.”

Paragraph 20: Added “*including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, stalking*” and “*financial exploitation*.”

Paragraph 24: Added additional sentence about child to parent or care giver abuse.

Paragraph 26: Clarified that emotional abuse may include verbal abuse (e.g., criticism, belittling, name-calling).

Paragraph 27: Expanded section on sexual abuse to provide clear examples of physical contact

Paragraph 29: Clarified that safeguarding issues often overlap.

Expanded child-on-child abuse content to emphasise that: it is a safeguarding issue for both victim and alleged perpetrator, it is preventable and it may involve serious physical harm or threats involving weapons.

Expanded Child Criminal Exploitation and Child Sexual Exploitation content: “*This can be committed or facilitated by an organised network or gang, and victims may identify as part of this group.*”, “*This may constitute modern slavery...*” and a reference to Modern Slavery statutory guidance, including referral expectations. Added a new footnote defining county lines and linking to Home Office guidance.

Paragraph 42: Added “This can be committed by an individual or an organised network...” and “Most sexual abuse is committed by individuals known to the victim.” Added clarification that victims may be criminalised for actions taken under coercion. Added a footnote defining “*organised network*” (from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse).

Mental Health section: substantially updated.

Serious Violence section: substantially updated.

Paragraph 58: Added additional info to bullet about managing any support for the child

internally.

Paragraph 62: Updated header and clarified when non-social-worker practitioners may lead assessments.

Paragraph 66: Added expectations regarding local assessment protocols.

Paragraphs 75-77: Added references to *“trainee teachers”*.

Paragraph 76: Added requirement to consider referral to the LADO.

Summary: Part two – The management of safeguarding

Data Protection: Updated to reflect the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025, effective from January 2026.

Paragraphs 95-98: Added new section on *“Sport”*.

Paragraphs 105-116: Added new section on *“Regulations and safeguarding requirements relating to school premises”*.

Paragraph 127: Added expectations for robust DSL cover arrangements (e.g., confidential shared mailbox).

Paragraphs 138-150: Added more detailed information about sharing information.

Paragraphs 138-150: Expanded guidance on information sharing, including risk assessment.

Paragraph 158: Added *“racism”* and *“derogatory behaviour or other forms of physical violence and conflict.”*

Paragraph 160: Added details on PSHE Association approved resources.

Paragraph 163: Updated definitions of online risk categories.

Paragraphs 165-166: Added guidance and resources on safe and effective use of Generative AI in education.

Paragraph 168: Added new section on *“Mobile phone policy”*.

Paragraph 171: Updated wording “...ensure that a review of their effectiveness is carried out at least once every academic year. Reviews should be carried out by the SLT member responsible for filtering and monitoring, with the support of the school’s DSL and IT support. They should include checks that filtering is working appropriately on all internet-connected devices in all relevant locations, and a record should be kept of these

checks...”

Paragraphs 176-178: Redrafted to improve clarity on information security.

Paragraphs 186-189: Added references to *“trainee teachers”*.

Paragraph 191: Updated the list of factors that a school’s child protection policy should include.

Paragraph 191: Added reference to *“misandry”*.

Paragraphs 197-202: Added new section on *“Boarding and residential accommodation”*.

Paragraphs 203-205: Updated section on reasonable force to reflect new restrictive intervention guidance.

Paragraphs 208-213: Updated content relating to alternative provision.

Paragraphs 224-232: Updated section on *“Children requiring mental health support”*.

Paragraph 242: Highlighted the role of Virtual School Heads in improving attendance.

Paragraph 246: Added new section on *“Young carers”* and their specific needs.

Paragraphs 247-249: Added further additional barriers that children with SEND may face.

Paragraph 250: Added new section on safeguarding children with medical conditions.

Paragraphs 252-282: Updated content on children who are LGB or gender-questioning.

Summary: Part three – Safer recruitment

Paragraph 315: Regulated activity section rewritten for clarity and to include volunteers. Regulated activity table updated to remove the ‘supervision exemption’ from regulated activity. This change has been made by the Crime and Policing Act 2026. Removed “DBS check types” section to avoid duplication.

Paragraph 325: Added new bullet on DBS checks for volunteers in regulated activity
Updated references from TRA Employer Access Service to DfE’s Check a teacher’s record.

Paragraph 326: Added *“or within 30 calendar days of the issue date on the certificate.”*

Removed the DBS Criminal Record Checks and Barred List Checks flowchart as it was no longer factually accurate following the removal of ‘supervision exemption’ from regulated activity under

the Crime and Policing Act 2026.

Paragraph 370: Clarifies the type of DBS check a self-employed person is now eligible for.

Paragraph 375: Clarified categories of visitors to schools.

Paragraphs 381-387: Volunteer Section rewritten to remove the 'supervision exemption' from regulated activity. This change has been made by the Crime and Policing Act 2026.

Paragraphs 403-407: Work experience supervision section rewritten for clarity and in response to the Crime and Policing Act 2026 change to the definition of regulated activity.

Paragraphs 408-410: Moved former Annex D (homestay) into main body.

Paragraph 422: Existing staff paragraph updated to include volunteers.

Paragraphs 424-428: Duty to refer section rewritten to include referrals about volunteers.

Paragraph 429: Added reference to schools' duties under the PSED.

Summary: Part four – Safeguarding concerns or allegations made about staff, including supply teachers, trainee teachers, volunteers, and contractors

Reference to "*Trainee teachers*" added throughout.

Paragraphs 452-456: Updated supply teachers, trainee teachers and all contracted staff section to make it clearer that schools and colleges share safeguarding responsibilities with third party organisations.

Paragraphs 452-456: New content setting expectations for handling concerns about trainee teachers.

Summary: Part five – Child-on-child sexual harassment and sexual violence

Part five substantially rewritten to highlight the progressive continuum from harmful sexual behaviour through to sexual violence.

Paragraph 527: Updated to clarify that all incidents involving the sharing of nude or semi-nude images require a safeguarding response, whether they are consensual or non-consensual.

Paragraph 531: Additional paragraph added on HSB (previously part of para 525)

Paragraph 532: Added link to NSPCC resource providing advice on stages of typical

sexual development and behaviour for different age groups.

Paragraph 533: Added link to resource for advice on responding to children who display sexualized behaviour.

Paragraph 540: Added further information on consent

Paragraph 575-581: Updated header and expanded description of universal services and community-based early help.

Paragraphs 582-592: Added new section on “*Referrals to Family Help*”.

Summary: Annex A – Further information (previously Annex B in KCSIE 2025)

Annex A (condensed Part one) removed, and replaced with previous Annex B.

Cybercrime section expanded with detail on CMA offences and national risks.

Domestic Violence content updated.

Operation Encompass content updated.

Online safety (parental support) now includes link to screentime guidance.

Additional section added on “*Temporary accommodation notification duty*.”

Additional info added to paragraph on Channel to include clarification that information should be shared with the police.

Serious violence content update

Links added to examples of support for DSLs.

Summary: Annex B – Role of the Designated Safeguarding Lead (previously Annex C in KCSIE 2025)

Added expectations around DSL cover arrangements when the DSL is unavailable.

Added further information to information sharing guidance.

Updates on CCE/CSE indicators and Operation Encompass duties.

Summary: Annex C – Regulated activity (children) – Supervision of activity which is regulated activity when unsupervised (previously Annex E in KCSIE 2025)

Removed, Crime and Policing Bill Act 2026 made changes to regulated activity to remove the 'supervision exemption'. This means that any person volunteering in a school or college in a role that involves teaching, training, instructing or supervising children on more than 3 days in a month or overnight is now in regulated activity.



Department
for Education

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