



Department
for Education

Statutory guidance

Working together to safeguard children 2026: summary of changes

Updated 18 March 2026

Applies to England

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Introduction

We have clarified that the guidance applies to all children, including:

- those living with their birth or extended family
- those in kinship care, including special guardianship
- adopted and looked-after children in foster or residential settings

It also makes clear that practitioners should consider help, support and protection for unborn children where there are concerns.

Chapter 1: a shared responsibility

We have reinforced expectations on leaders to create inclusive, anti-discriminatory cultures and that practitioners are expected to challenge racism and discrimination.

We have strengthened guidance on certain types of harm such as:

- abusive behaviour in intimate relationships
- coercive control
- more hidden harms such as child sexual abuse (CSA) and teenage relationship abuse

Chapter 2: multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASA)

We have clarified that MASA responsibilities include children who are looked after. We have provided clearer detail on accountability structures and how safeguarding partners are inspected.

We have set clearer expectations on analysing information to identify disproportionality and racism and strengthened requirements for data sharing.

The chapter makes explicit that annual reports must evidence their impact on children and families.

Chapter 3: providing help, support and protection

The chapter explains that family help combines targeted early help and section 17 support to create a more seamless offer for families, with consistent practitioner relationships and a family help plan led by a multi-disciplinary team.

We have strengthened expectations for anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practice, recognising how racism and past experiences influence relationships.

Additional content covers domestic abuse, child sexual abuse, infants abuse and honour or faith or belief-based abuse, with strengthened child sexual abuse procedures and the use of family group decision-making.

New references address online harms and group-based exploitation. This section reinforces that children may face multiple harms simultaneously.

We have strengthened section 47 expectations for robust multi-agency assessments, direct work with the child and strategy discussions for child sexual abuse.

We have strengthened guidance to emphasise that safeguarding and child protection apply to all children, and any assessments and planning should link to existing family help plans or care planning where appropriate.

Chapter 4: organisational responsibilities

This chapter clarifies the vulnerability of looked after children in certain settings and reinforces the link between care planning and child protection planning.

We have emphasised the local authority's duty to ensure support and protection through the care plan and highlighted risks such as sexual exploitation. A new paragraph addresses risks in residential settings.

Chapter 5: learning from serious child safeguarding incidents

This section has been re-structured and strengthened to ensure safeguarding partners better understand how and when to make timely, accurate and comprehensive notifications and engage in the learning process.

It sets out that notifications must be made, even if the names of child victims are not yet known. It states that all children should be included in the notification and the wider context should also be considered.

It also clarifies how to notify the death of a care leaver up to and including the age of 24 and provides guidance on notifying adults aged 18 or over where harm, abuse or neglect occurred in childhood but not reported or known at that time.

The revised text confirms that only the [Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/child-safeguarding-practice-review-panel) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/child-safeguarding-practice-review-panel>) decides on National Reviews and outlines the sequence from serious incident notification (SIN) to rapid review to local child safeguarding practice review.

It also sets expectations for learning from incidents that do not meet notification criteria and notes that rapid reviews may be shared with government in exceptional cases.

The rapid review timeline has been updated to require submission within 15 working days of the SIN.

Factual changes

Introduction

Changed order of the Children's Social Care National Framework outcomes.

Chapter 1

Includes reference to police or the Crown Prosecution Service sharing information with other agencies involved in providing support and services to a child and their family, where appropriate.

Added a reference to the [Information sharing advice for safeguarding practitioners](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-practitioners-information-sharing-advice) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-practitioners-information-sharing-advice>) providing safeguarding services for children, young people, parents and carers.

Chapter 2

Added Combatting Drugs Partnership to list of public boards supporting partnership work.

Included the inspectorates who inspect safeguarding partners.

Updated email address for the Multi-agency Safeguarding Arrangements Unit.

Chapter 3

Added a reference to [Families First Partnership programme](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/families-first-partnership-programme) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/families-first-partnership-programme>)

Included a reference to operational details on the lead practitioner role which can be found in the Families First Partnership Programme guide.

Added a reference to further guidance on Operation Encompass.

Clarified the term 'family group decision-making'.

Chapter 4

Amended 'named practitioner' to 'named professional' or 'named health professional' for health provider organisations and agencies.

Removed the link to National Information Centre on Children of Offenders (NICCO) website.

Added a reference and link to [Prisoners' Families Helpline](https://www.prisonersfamilies.org/) (<https://www.prisonersfamilies.org/>).

Appendix A: glossary

Added new definitions and policies for family group decision making (FGDM), group-based child sexual exploitation, honour-based abuse and kinship care arrangements.

Appendix B

Added links to resources on the information sharing duty:

- Operation Encompass
- interim guidance for independent child trafficking guardians (ICTGs)
- child knife possession offences
- CSA centre guidance on communicating with children
- Prisoners' Families Helpline

